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"Examining English Speaking Anxiety Among Hindi-Medium Female Students in Dehradun"

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Abstract

This study explores English-speaking anxiety among Hindi-medium female students in secondary and senior secondary schools in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, an area which is relatively under-researched when it comes to English language teaching research in India. Using a mixed-method approach, quantitative data were gathered using a 31-item survey based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale from 93 participants, while qualitative data came through open-ended questions and interviews. Results showed a high level of English-speaking anxiety, with the shame from making mistakes in English the most prominent feature. It was found that the Ridicule Cycle was the main driving force behind English-speaking anxiety, where public ridicule creates ongoing fear of speaking English. Despite a positive attitude towards English language, it is also seen that there is widespread behavior of avoiding to speak English, thus resulting in a contradiction, which can be accounted to structural shortcomings in oral classroom practice.

Keywords; English speaking anxiety, Hindi-medium students, foreign language classroom anxiety, mixed-methods, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, female learners

INTRODUCTION

English-Speaking anxiety is recognized as a serious obstacle among learners whose mode of instruction in the classroom is not English. In India, many students study in Hindi-medium schools. Despite significant institutional motivation to acquire English proficiency, Hindi-medium learners frequently exhibit avoidance behaviour, reduced participation, and self-doubt in English-speaking contexts. As gender differences in English language anxiety remain underexplored in India, this study focuses specifically on female Hindi-medium learners.

Dehradun, capital of Uttarakhand, provides a significant context for study. Since English proficiency is increasingly becoming the key to economic and social success in the city, Hindi-medium schools train many students who view English language competence as an avenue to career and academic success, but face obstacles in using the language. This contradiction between motivation and avoidance forms the primary concern of the study.

The literature on English-speaking anxiety in Uttarakhand is limited. While some studies examined this in specific regions such as Almora, limited attention has been provided to Hindi-medium female secondary and senior secondary school students in Dehradun. The study addresses a gap in the literature on Indian ELT.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical base of the study comes from Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986), who have defined foreign language classroom anxiety as a unique set of self-perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors associated with classroom language learning. These researchers' scale – Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) – includes three key dimensions – communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation – on which the survey used in this study is based. Krashen (1982), through the concept of Affective Filter Hypothesis, argues that higher

anxiety inhibits comprehensible input and suppresses speech production independently of any linguistic competence. MacIntyre & Gardner (1991) indicate it negatively influences cognitive processes, leading to poor performance. Additionally, Young (1991) suggests anxiety in language classes arises from classroom environment and teachers' behavior, which can be directly linked to Hindi-medium institutional context.

The literature suggests that Indian students show the same contradictory characteristics of instrumental motivation in acquiring English and avoidance in speaking (Dornyei, 2001). In the Hindi-medium institutional setting, learners' attitudes towards English are formed by the influence of family, peers and perception of language usefulness, and they influence English-speaking performance in the case of either facilitating or inhibiting anxiety. This problem seems to be particularly salient for female learners who value English speaking despite experiencing anxiety in such situations.

Regarding classroom practices, limited speaking activities contribute to anxiety; students feel discouraged from speaking, making each speaking attempt stressful. Also, female secondary and senior secondary students are a relevant group for further study.

In India, Kackar (2014), mode of language instruction is associated with student self-efficacy; those who have studied in Hindi have lower self-confidence while using English. A study conducted in 2024 in Rajasthan among university students revealed that students faced speaking anxiety fear of negative evaluation was the main issue. Similarly, a study on female ESL learners in the Mewat region of Haryana (2024) stated that institutional and demographic factors significantly affect student anxiety. The study in Uttarakhand remains limited, while some studies examined language anxiety in specific regions such as Almora; the Dehradun context still lacks investigation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to:

- Examine the experience of English-speaking anxiety among participants.
- Explore the attitudes towards learning and speaking English.
- Identify teaching strategies and classroom practices reported by students.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study addresses the following research questions:

- What are the students' experiences regarding English-speaking anxiety?
- What are their attitudes towards learning and using English?
- What teaching strategies and classroom activities do students report their teachers use to promote English-speaking?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study adopted a mixed-methodological framework, where quantitative data were supplemented by qualitative perspectives to analyze the problem of English-speaking anxiety among females in Hindi-medium schools.

Data Collection

Quantitative data were gathered by a structured questionnaire via Google Forms, containing 31-questions; out of which nine Likert scale-based measures of anxiety were taken from Horwitz et al. (1986) and modified to a 4-point scale (see Table 1). The other questions included yes/no questions, multiple responses, and open-ended questions. Qualitative data were gathered using 10 open-ended survey questions and interview notes conducted with 10 participants, which helped to explore experiences, perceptions, and feelings in greater depth.

Participants

A total of 93 female students studying in Hindi-medium secondary and senior secondary schools (Classes 9 to 12) in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, participated in the study. Purposive sampling was applied, selecting participants based on their suitability for study objectives; learners at this level are engaged in learning English and may show diverse levels of language anxiety.

Data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed through frequency counts and mean scores. Qualitative responses were coded using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, to analyze the prominent themes in the data.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Quantitative findings

The analysis of nine anxiety questions using Likert scale (n=93) resulted in an average anxiety endorsement rate of 68.3%, which means that six out of seven Hindi-medium girls attending Schools in Dehradun suffer from English-

language anxiety. From Table 1, one can observe that shame of incorrect English received the highest endorsement (81.7%), whereas fear of being judged and English incorrectness received endorsements of 73.1% and 76.4% respectively.

S.no	Question	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Total Anxious %
1	I feel nervous while speaking English.	52.7%	7.5%	24.7%	15.1%	60.2%
2	I avoid answering in English.	58.1%	4.3%	30.1%	7.5%	62.4%
3	I fear my English will be wrong.	62.4%	14%	20.4%	3.2%	76.4%
4	I feel ashamed of speaking wrong English.	72%	9.7%	18.3%	—	81.7%
5	Others may laugh.	68.8%	3.2%	15.1%	12.9%	72.0%
6	I want to avoid speaking English even if I know what to say.	61.3%	3.2%	29%	6.5%	64.5%
7	I fear being judged while speaking English.	65.6%	7.5%	26.9%	—	73.1%
8	I feel stressed when asked to speak suddenly.	57%	8.6%	34.4%	—	65.6%
9	I feel nervous even with simple English words.	51.6%	7.5%	40.9%	—	59.1%
Overall Anxiety: 68.3%						

This result implies that the social aspect of anxiety – especially related to shame and judgment – makes the main dimension of anxiety and not only linguistic competence.

There is a certain paradox observed. Even 82.6% of the respondents have a positive attitude towards English and consider it necessary for their future career, as many as 85.5% of respondents avoid speaking English.

Table 2

Avoidance Strategy	%	Reason for Avoidance	%
Use very short answers	46.7	Fear of being judged	54.4
Answer in Hindi	36.7	Lack of confidence	30.0
Ask friends to speak	16.7	Lack of vocabulary	27.8
Remain silent	13.3	Fear of making mistakes	26.7
Avoid speaking in front of others	10.0	Difficulty in grammar	22.2
Pretend not to know answer	7.8	Teacher use Hindi in class	22.2

Note: Percentage exceeds 100% as multiple responses are allowed

According to Table 2, the most commonly used avoidance tactic was using extremely short answers (46.7%), while switching to Hindi was the second most used tactic (36.7%). The threat of judgment appeared to be the primary factor motivating avoidance (54.4%), while 22.2% associated their avoidance with the fact that teachers teach in Hindi.

Classroom Indicator	%
No speaking Activities beyond textbook	78.9
Students never participate in activities	62.2
Students are regularly encouraged to speak in English	14.4
Regular speaking practice conducted	1.1
Daily English speaking for less than 10 minutes	71.1

According to Table 3, there is a lack of English-speaking practice in Hindi-medium classrooms. Only 1.1% of students regularly have a chance to practice English, and 71.1% spend less than 10 minutes per day speaking English. It shows that institutional conditions actively sustain rather than reduce anxiety.

Qualitative findings

Thematic analysis of open-ended survey and interview responses generated seven themes, three of which are relevant to the research questions, are presented here

Theme 1 is the Ridicule Cycle, wherein individual instance of public mockery permanently suppresses English-speaking behaviour. The phenomenon was noted by 58.7% of participants, mainly during school assembly addresses and class interactions. When asked about speaking experiences, one participant said: "I once tried to talk, but my classmates laughed at me, and now, I don't bother

anymore. I talk in English only if necessary". This process exemplifies the construct known as Fear of Negative Evaluation, according to Horwitz et al. (1986).

Theme 2, the Motivation-Action Gap, emerged from the mismatch between expressed desire and observed action. 88% of respondents want to speak English better, qualitative data points instances of motivational failure following unfavourable comparisons with English-medium peers. When asked about attitude toward English, one participant stated: "When people compare me, I get demotivated. I feel I cannot become as good as them". The theory of Dörnyei's (2001) L2 Motivational Self System explains this phenomenon.

Theme 3 is the Institutional Inadequacy that led students to resort to devising their own compensating practices for acquiring English skills due to absence of adequate institutional support. These compensatory behaviors ranged from watching YouTube videos in English, using Duolingo and talking to oneself in English. A participant shared, "I speak to myself in English at night". This finding supports Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis.

DISCUSSION

The findings are consistent and contribute to existing literature on English-speaking anxiety among Hindi-medium students, with few unique contributions coming from an analysis conducted in less-researched environment of Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

The mean endorsement rate of 68.3% for anxiety aligns with study on comparable Indian demographics. For instance, a recent 2024 study in Rajasthan showed high anxiety among participants during English speaking due to the fear of negative evaluation. Another study carried out in Haryana in 2024 revealed the role played by demographic characteristics as well as institutional factors in shaping the anxiety level of Hindi-medium learners. Therefore, the current findings indicate that English-speaking anxiety is an ongoing experience of Hindi-medium female learners throughout northern India.

Second, as a structural manifestation of Fear of Negative Evaluation introduced by Horwitz et al. (1986), the Ridicule Cycle demonstrates how peer cultures actively produce anxiety among students. The findings from interviews shows pronunciation mistakes led to mockery from classmates. Students reduced public participation, thus illustrating how fear of ridicule can lead to increased anxiety levels in Hindi-medium contexts. Importantly, these data suggest that interventions targeted at building self-confidence should address peer cultures and social norms in classrooms.

Further, the Motivation–Action Gap discovered in this study contradicts the common deficit theory of Hindi-medium students' lack of motivation to learn English. For instance, 82.6% liked English as a language, and 66.7% viewed it as a necessary tool for their future career development. As explained by Dörnyei's (2001) L2 Motivational Self System model, when the difference between the current and ideal selves becomes overwhelming for a Hindi-medium student due to social comparison with English-medium peers, motivation collapses into avoidance.

Limited English exposure, as 1.1% of students get opportunities to speak, restricts acquisition. According to Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, acquisition can only take place under low-anxiety conditions. The use of YouTube and self-talk shows efforts by respondents. Additionally, Bandura (1997) suggests that self-efficacy can be achieved institutionally, which is evident from increased confidence among students with support from the institutions.

CONCLUSION

The study was carried out on English-speaking anxiety among Hindi-medium female secondary and senior secondary school students in Dehradun, addressing three research questions. Findings reveal a mean anxiety of 68.3%. The Ridicule Cycle, which entails public ridicule that results in permanent inhibition of English-speaking skills, formed the critical mechanism in sustaining the anxiety. Despite positive attitudes toward English students show avoidance behaviour. This indicates that anxiety is structurally produced due to limited classroom speaking practice and peer ridicule culture.

Recommendations for mitigating English-speaking anxiety:

1. Hindi-medium schools should introduce regular speaking practice beyond textbook instruction.
2. Integrate listening skills and speaking activities in the curriculum so that students get exposure.
3. Schools encourage students for non-ridicule peer relations regarding English-speaking.

Limitations of the study include its focus on female students alone, future research needs to cover other gender groups as well across regions for comparative purposes. The study makes a unique empirical contribution to ELT in Uttarakhand, India.

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