

## Voices from within: Students' lived experiences on English language anxiety

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### ABSTRACT

Recent developments in language studies showed a great need for effective communication in a globalized world. The participants' language anxiety data was collected using a qualitative research design with phenomenology as the topic of inquiry. To acquire information, focus group discussion was utilized to investigate the factors influencing the anxiety of students in learning the English language. Additionally, the study involved 24 students from Quirino State University in the Philippines' Colleges of Education, Arts & Sciences, Criminology, Engineering, Hospitality Management, Business Administration, Computing Sciences, and Midwifery. The participants were selected using purposive sampling. Findings of the study showed that teacher factor, inability to express ideas, lack of confidence, fear of committing mistakes and negative comments, family factor, fear of English classes, and lack of vocabulary/ideas were the factors that greatly influenced the anxiety of students in learning the English language. Owing to the results of the study, it is recommended that instructors/professors should be aware of the presence of these anxiety-inducing factors in the classrooms and create an environment in which students can feel more at ease in English classes by employing a variety of strategies that allow learners to express themselves and maintain motivation in English language learning.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

English is one of the world's most frequently spoken languages [1]. It has a significant impact on people's professional and academic lives. It serves as the global corporate “*lingua franca*” for economic growth and international development, influencing operations and transactions both directly and indirectly. As a result, the English language has an impact on a country's economy as well as its educational system [2]. Furthermore, speaking is a productive talent. The primary goal of acquiring a speaking skill is to be able to engage successfully in that language, which requires both comprehension and production [3].

In the past, the Philippines was known as one of the world's leading English-speaking countries, with most of the population speaking the language fluently. It even surpassed India as the most popular destination for voice outsourcing [4]. However, numerous investigations have discovered that the Philippines' educational quality is declining. In 2018, the Philippines took part in programme for international student assessment (PISA) for the first time and found the lowest in reading among 79 countries and economies [5]. Graduates from colleges, as well as those from primary and secondary schools, are affected. According to the professional regulatory commission (PRC), board examination pass rates are dropping across the board. One

of the main causes of this problem is low academic success at the elementary and secondary levels. Academic success is tied to the learner's grasp of the English language [6].

Various studies have been conducted to determine the factors that influence English competency, particularly the language learning of non-native English speakers. Language anxiety is one of the most important predictors of language learning performance, and it has incapacitating effects on language learners. In a general sense, anxiety is defined as a state characterized by the feeling of nervousness, fear, discomfort, and apprehension that is not related to a specific cause or situation [7], [8]. According to Gregersen and Horwitz [9], learners that are anxious sit unresponsively in the classroom, avoid tasks that could improve their language abilities, and may even prevent class entirely. This concept implies that students with language anxiety avoid being called upon to engage in class discussions and never volunteer to do so [10]. Horwitz and Cope [11] claimed that anxiety is a universal phenomenon that affects both language and educational outcomes for most L2 learners. It is a subset of the larger concept of language phobia. Furthermore, there are three components to language anxiety: i) Communication apprehension; ii) Exam anxiety; and iii) Dread of poor evaluation. Learners who exhibit communication fear are perceived to be uncomfortable speaking orally in the target language in front of others.

Moreover, several studies have indicated that language anxiety jeopardizes the communicative ability of learners [1]. For example, Ahmed [10] who conducted a study among on speaking language anxiety the Kurdish students discovered that Kurdish students were worried and sit unresponsively in class, do not participate in classroom activities that could help them develop their language abilities, and may even skip class entirely. Furthermore, Halder [12] who explored the relationship between English language anxiety and academic achievement of the students found out that the learners' fear for the English language is one of the critical elements affecting their academic accomplishment. Further, it was proven to be negatively connected with the learners' academic achievement. According to Khan [13], speech anxiety or the fear of having to speak in a language other than their native tongue, makes language learners anxious and shakes their confidence, forcing them to avoid communicative activities. Khan also mentioned that learners are uncomfortable and concerned about others' destructive perceptions, leading to avoidance and limiting their opportunities to enhance their oral skills.

On the other hand, many studies have shown a variety of characteristics that contribute to language anxiety among English language learners. For example, in Turkey, Büyükkarc [14] investigated the factors contributing foreign language learning anxiety in predicting academic performance and discovered that learned helplessness, previous experiences, and teacher-student or student-student relationships as elements that can assist students in developing positive attitudes and lower their foreign language anxiety levels. Similarly, Khasawneh [15] investigated the sources of English language learning anxiety experienced by Saudi students and he identified communication phobia, anxiety in English classes, fear of unfavorable evaluation, and exam anxiety were all common reasons for language anxiety among the students. In addition, Nguyen and Tran [16] conducted a study among 211 students and 10 teachers using a survey questionnaire and classroom observations and they noted that the speaking performance of students could be influenced by factors (such as anxiety and confidence, listening ability, and feedback during speaking activities).

In Bangladesh, Nimat [17] conducted a survey study to identify the effects, sources, and factors that provoke second language anxiety and stressed that making mistakes, inability to express, losing face, test anxiety, fear of failure, inability to comprehend, incomprehensible input, poor pronunciation, remembering target rules and grammar, lack of vocabulary, and insufficient knowledge of English language are all sources of anxiety in the classroom. In China, Meihua [18] investigated the factors that influence the behavior of students in English oral class and found that low English competence, fear of losing face, previous learning experiences, personality, cultural beliefs, fear of making mistakes and being laughed, and incomprehensible information all contributed to anxiety and shyness during oral English discussions and assessments.

Conversely, Akpur [19] used the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) among 211 participants to determine the predictive and explanatory relationship model between anxiety and academic achievement of university students. The research discovered that anxiety does not affect students' academic performance. Hayasaki [20] conducted a qualitative study investigating emic views among Japanese learners of English in Japan. It revealed that students in English classes had high levels of worry and delight but that anxiety-provoking situations tended to work more positively than adversely. She also suggested that anxiety contributes to a positive L2 learning experience. Furthermore, Aguila and Harjanto [21] asserted that a sense of pressure motivates students to learn. According to Zaman [22], students' academic success in English does not reduce their anxiety levels. Furthermore, Brown, Robson, and Rosenkjar [23] discovered that students who have high anxiety levels got higher scores on test FLCAS [11], contrary to what would be expected. Finally, Razak, Yassin, and Maasum [24] investigated the correlation between the academic achievement and level of anxiety of the students and they found out that there are no significant relationships between the academic achievement of the learners and the level of anxiety.

While there is sufficient literature on English language learning anxiety, there are limited available and published written materials exploring the state of English language learning anxiety in the Philippines, particularly in the Northern Cagayan Valley. As a result, the current study aims to fill a research gap by adding information on how language anxiety affects Filipino students' English competency and language learning. Through this study, the researcher created a framework for constructing a language intervention program to increase and improve students' English proficiency, reduce anxiety, and inspire them to learn English. By exploring the students' actual experiences in English classes, the study set out to determine the specific factors that bring about their anxiety and its implications on their class performance.

The study employs Krashen's monitor model [25] to understand the interrelated series of hypotheses and claims about how people acquire proficiency in second language. It is made up of five hypotheses: i) The acquisition-learning hypothesis-which proposes a distinction between acquisition and learning, with the former being a subconscious method of building L2 ability, similar to how children learn their first language, and the latter being a conscious method of learning about language; ii) The natural order hypothesis asserts that linguistic rules are discovered in a predictable order that may differ from how they are presented in class; iii) The monitor hypothesis, which states that the ability to produce L2 utterances is derived from the learner's acquired competence (subconscious knowledge) while his/her knowledge in making corrections or changing output (conscious learning); iv) The input hypothesis-according to which language is learned by receiving "comprehensible input" that is slightly above one's current level of competence ( $i+1$ ); and v) The affective filter hypothesis, which states that affective filter, like a mental block, can control the access of comprehensible input, and their to the language acquisition device (LAD).

The five hypotheses can be summarized in a single claim: people acquire second languages only when they receive comprehensible input, and their affective filters are low enough to allow the input "in". Acquisition is unavoidable when the filter is "down" and appropriate comprehensible input is presented (and comprehended). Hence, Krashen's monitor model is the most notable theory that attempts to provide a comprehensive explanation for SLA. Since the 1980s, this theory has had a significant impact on all aspects of second language study and education, as evidenced by the professional literature [26].

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a phenomenological approach. It aimed to explore the lived experiences of Filipino students in English language learning as it is both a method and a philosophy for understanding life experiences. In the context of this study, this entails examining a limited number of subjects over a certain period of time to discover patterns and relationships of meaning [27].

The researchers investigated 24 Filipino students from the Quirino State University Cabarroguis' Colleges of Education, Arts & Sciences, Criminology, Engineering, Hospitality Management, Business Administration, Computing Sciences, and Midwifery. The participants were purposely chosen based on Horwitz's English language anxiety scale (ELAS) results and their grades on the English proficiency test. Prior to the study, the students have completed their basic English courses (Communication Arts 1 and Communication Arts 2). There were three students chosen as representatives for the three levels of classification in English anxiety: highest, medium, and lowest. They were in charge of the focused group discussion.

A letter of request was sent to the campus administrator, deans, program chairs, and specifically to the selected participants informing them of the nature of the research, the topic to be discussed, and the extent of their involvement in order to obtain the essence of the phenomenon under investigation to gain their consent. This is to ensure that the participants are willing to share information to meet the study's goals. The researcher enlisted the services of a research assistant, a student leader to conduct the focus group discussions on obtaining trustworthy information. This was done to make them feel at ease to discuss their experiences. The research assistant's inclusion/exclusion criteria were as: i) They are a university student leader; ii) They have excellent communication abilities in English, Ilocano, and Tagalog; iii) They were trained in conducting interviews and focus groups; iv) They were available for the interview and focus group discussions; v) They were at least in their third year of studies.

To confirm the accuracy of the data, they were also interviewed utilizing in-depth and semi-structured conversations in Ilocano, their native language, and Filipino, their school's "*lingua franca*." The researchers prepared the interview guide for the focus group discussion and it was validated by a researcher whose credibility is beyond compare. The interview focused on students' English class experiences and what made them concerned about learning the language. Participants in the focus group discussion, on the other hand, were separated into three groups. The categories were based on the same teachers who taught the participants English topics (English 1 and English 2). The focus group discussion was scheduled to last around one hour and 30 minutes.

Nonetheless, because multiple comments were produced from the participants, the time limit was extended to guarantee that enough data was gathered from the discussion and reached the saturation point. A second focus group session was held to confirm the synthesis reached the saturation point that all participants' contributions were captured. The participants were given time to get to know one another to feel at ease, and participate fully in the discussion. To stimulate responses, they were also asked open-ended questions. Furthermore, as part of identity development, the participants recounted their experiences, including a configurable manner of comprehending the principles-the meanings of their stories and experiences [28]. Essentially, the conversation centered on the central subject, "What made you worried about learning English?"

The audio-recorded focus group discussions were transcribed in verbatim, and the statements were translated, interpreted and checked to preserve the original meaning of the articulations. In addition, data was evaluated thematically to conclude the research objectives. Themes were created based on the repeated claims of the participants, which served as the framework for an inquiry-based investigation of the study problem. Research analyses were carried out correctly by familiarizing, arranging, coding, recording, summarizing, and interpreting [29].

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Factors influencing the anxiety of students in English language learning

##### 3.1.1. Teacher factor

Dörnyei [30] stated that "the classroom climate is essential as a motivating tool that learners need to be less concerned about communicating with the foreign language." As such, it is the teachers' responsibility to create a conducive learning environment to facilitate interaction and engagement among their students. This also confirms the assertion made by Rindu and Ariyanti [31] that solid classroom management can assist students in reducing their stress levels. The study's findings reveal that teacher's behavior impacts the entire language learning process, depending on the demands of the students. It also establishes a link between positive teacher behavior and student language and academic improvement [32]. In this study, the majority of the participants are nervous about learning English because of their teachers. Students' anxiety about their teachers can be divided into negative feedback, facial expression, and speech rate. It shows that teachers who frequently provide negative criticisms cause students to become anxious and shocked. The following are some examples of teacher comments to students expressing negative feedback.

*"You're all idiots! I can decide for you; you may now leave the department; you are no longer needed!" (F1T1)*

*"Damn all of you!" (F1T16)*

*"Don't try to fool me!" (F1T17)*

*"Could you please say the words correctly. You're a college student, yet you have no idea how to say the word?" (F1T25)*

As articulated, teachers' harsh criticism hinders the learner's ability to speak. Furthermore, the participants revealed that some professors demand their students to remain standing during recitation and classroom discussions if they cannot respond. Moreover, the students mentioned that they feel embarrassed when their instructors insult them during class discussions. The findings of the study support Mohtasham and Farnia [33], that teachers' behavior is a significant factor in reducing students' fear of speaking. Yamat and Bidabadi [34] also highlight the importance of teachers assisting students in their learning and creating a positive learning environment.

The participants in this study stated that most English instructors are strict and have terrible facial expressions, making it difficult for them to participate actively in class. This is in line with Sutiayatno [35], who posited that nonverbal communication improves students' English academic achievement. Further, students look up to teachers as role models for positive behavior since they are professionals. The following are direct statements of students describing their instructors' facial expressions.

*"She has the appearance of a tiger!" (F1T4)*

*"While she speaks, her eyes continue to move." (F1T34)*

*"She always frowns." "She is always angry." (F1T97)*

According to previous study [33], instructors play a crucial role in assisting English as a foreign language (EFL) students in overcoming their fear of speaking. The transcripts show how the participants described their instructors' speaking rates.

*"Our instructor speaks too slowly."* (F1T13)

*"Her speech is so sluggish that it makes us sleepy."* (F1T10)

*"It's disappointing...in her subject, we didn't learn anything."* (F1T34)

The nonverbal conduct of teachers had a significant impact on students' interest in learning English. The students in the study expressed that their capacity to comprehend and internalize the meaning of the lesson being addressed by their instructors is influenced by the way they speak, particularly the pace or speed. This is congruent with the arguments of Lababidi [36] that teachers' rapid speech rates were cited as a barrier to understanding what was being said in the classroom. Furthermore, to properly transfer the lesson to the students, teachers must maintain and improve good communication skills. Finally, ideal teachers deliver good and exciting lectures, do not discriminate among students, communicate with students in a kind and calm manner, and maintain discipline and democracy in the classroom [37].

### 3.1.2. Inability to express ideas

Communication apprehension is defined by Xie and Huanqi [38] as the shyness felt by language students when attempting or in the middle of interacting with others. Furthermore, people who have trouble speaking in groups are more likely to have difficulty communicating in a foreign language class where they have little control over the oral activity [11]. Their performance is continually monitored because learners afraid to talk or engage in front of their classmates are likely to have considerably more difficulties communicating in a foreign language where they have only a rudimentary command of the communicative situation. In this study, the participants had trouble expressing their ideas due to a restricted vocabulary, psychological block, indifference, and failure to practice or speak English. The following transcripts from the participants highlighted their fear of learning English because of their limited vocabulary.

*"I have a hard time expressing myself."* (F2T6)

*"I'm having trouble coming up with the right words"* (F2T21)

*"I have so many thoughts in my head, but the challenge is...how to communicate them."*

*Sometimes I'm at a loss for words..."* (F2T14)

Vocabulary represents one of the most essential skills needed by the learners necessary for learning. The participants' statements indicate that they have trouble speaking the English language during classroom discussions, because they have limited vocabulary. The result of this study affirms that English learners have difficulty learning vocabularies including their meaning, usage, pronunciation, and spelling [39]. Learner's level of vocabulary knowledge is one of the factors that influence reading comprehension performance in that language [40]. Meanwhile, the following comments summarize the participants' experiences with psychological blockage.

*"I was taken aback at the time."* (F2T7)

*"I constantly have a mental block."* (F2T8)

*"I usually get a mental block, especially during on-the-spot recitation,"* (F2T12)

*"I have difficulty answering during recitation. I can't conceive of a feasible solution to such a question."* (F2T24)

The statements that follow exemplify the experiences of students who are categorized as indifferent.

*"Even if I know the answer, I don't recite. I don't deliberately raise my hands to recite."* (F2T2)

*"I'll just wait for my teacher to call my name to recite."* (F2T15)

Because of their fear of communicating, most of the participants in this study could not share their opinions and ideas during recitation and classroom discussions. They claim that their fear of speaking stems from a lack of language proficiency, particularly grammar and vocabulary. They also acknowledged that when their instructors ask them to recite, they get a mental block. In addition, many stated that they did not participate in classroom discussions. This is congruent to the arguments of Saidi [41] that communication anxiety is a significant element in language acquisition and impacts the learners' oral performance.

Similarly, Nakhlah [42] pointed out that shyness is one of the issues students have when it comes to speaking. Additionally, according to Separa, Generales, and Medina [43], emerging problems in speaking English include psychosocial worries about speaking in a variety of contexts as well as a lack of linguistic competence. Furthermore, Rumiya and Seftika [44] identified communication apprehension as a significant factor of language anxiety among EFL students. The following extracts illustrate the participants' experience who failed to practice or speak the English language.

- "I prefer to be silent."* (F2T1)  
*"I prefer to stay in the corner ... just quiet."* (F2T4)  
*"It affects the way I expressed my ideas."* (F2T3)  
*"I could not explain what I wanted to ask."* (F2T32)

The participants' utterances show that they are unable to communicate in their English classes. They are incapable of articulating themselves when asked to recite, which affects their acquisition, production, and learning of the lesson. This is consistent with a study of Saidi [41], who found that communication apprehension (CA) is an essential element in language acquisition and impacts learner motivation. Similarly, Xie and Huanqi [38] indicated that the fear of not expressing oneself in the target language is the most common source of anxiety among learners. This fear of speaking naturally affects their performance in class, and does not elicit any improvement in their language use as a result.

### 3.1.3. Lack of confidence

The dynamic domain is one of the most critical aspects of learning to speak. Maryansyah and Wadison [45] defined this category as "feeling or emotion." One of the elements of anxiety reported by the participants in this study is a lack of confidence. According to Khan [13], speech anxiety makes students anxious and weakens their confidence, making it difficult for them to participate in communicative tasks in class. In this study, the participants expressed their fear of expressing their thoughts during recitation and classroom discussions. This situation has a significant impact on learners' ability to learn English.

Moreover, previous researchers [46] stressed that a student's level of self-esteem is linked to linguistic anxiety; as a result, students who lack self-confidence are concerned about what their peers think of them; they are concerned with pleasing others. Alrabai [8] stated that self-esteem is a significant part of human conduct at all levels. A person's achievement is primarily determined by the level of self-esteem they demonstrate. According to Maryansyah and Wadison [45], it was found when EFL students applied a healthy sense of self-esteem, they are primarily determined to succeed in learning. The following are statements made by the participants which qualify the claim in this study that lack of self-confidence is one of the influential factors in students' language anxiety.

- "I'm not confident in myself."* (F3T4)  
*"I believe I am extremely slow."* (F3T1)  
*"Every time I make an error, I feel so slow, and I'm afraid to stand and recite."* (F3T13)  
*"I'd be more depressed and ashamed."* (F3T16)  
*"I prefer to be silent."* (F2T1)  
*"I prefer to stay in the corner ... just quiet."* (F2T4)

According to the preceding remarks, participants lack confidence in themselves and do not participate actively in classroom discussions. They often wait for the teachers to call for them rather than volunteering themselves to recite. This scenario would significantly affect their success in learning. This supports the findings of Leong and Ahmadi [47], who discovered that many language students struggled to express themselves verbally. Additionally, they stopped speaking due to a psychological barrier or an inability to grasp the necessary meaning of words.

However, the previous results contradict the findings of Sadighi and Dastpak [48], which revealed that Nigerians, in general, do not exhibit anxiety when speaking. They are not shy, are not afraid of speaking in public, and are not concerned about speaking incorrectly. They generally have a high level of English proficiency, which may be one of the factors that reduce their anxiety.

### 3.1.4. Fear of committing mistakes and negative comments

"Anxiety about others' evaluations, assumption that others will negatively judge oneself and avoidance of analyzing situations" are all characteristics of fear of negative evaluation [41]. Participants in this study reported being scared of being teased by their classmates, especially when they committed grammatical errors. They are also afraid of negative feedback or reactions from their peers, making it harder for them to express themselves. The fear of negative comments from others, particularly their classmates, is a substantial source of worry for the participants. They even mentioned that their classmates mocked them when they gave inadequate responses. They are also hesitant to speak since they believe they are incompetent learners. Similarly, the participants readily confessed that they had poor self-esteem because they are afraid of making mistakes. The following statements qualify the claim of this study that fear of committing errors and negative comments is one of the causes of anxiety among English language learners.

*"I'm nervous... "I'm worried that my peers will mock me." (F4T1)*  
*"Whenever I made a mistake, my classmates teased me. My classmates taunted me about my errors, especially the way I speak." (F4T2)*

The preceding statements imply that participants are hesitant to commit mistakes in speaking the language. The students are reluctant to speak because they are afraid to commit grammatical errors. They think of themselves as incompetent and unskilled learners. Fear of negative comments by teachers and peers was mentioned by interviewees as another source of anxiety in class. They feared being corrected in public, especially if it was accompanied by disparaging remarks from the teacher. They were also overly concerned with other people's opinions and were fearful of being judged by others. This negative attitude could block the process of students' ability in oral communication. This supports Mohamad's [49] results that the majority of students had English language learning anxiety, with fear of unfavorable evaluation being the primary cause.

Further, Ahmed *et al.* [50] revealed that the majority of language learners are uncomfortable and frightened when they have to speak in English in front of a class. Hence, the students were afraid of receiving a negative evaluation because they were afraid of being judged negatively by others. Similarly, Sadighi and Dastpak [48] found that the leading causes of anxiety among students were "fear of making mistakes and fear of bad evaluation."

### 3.1.5. Family factor

The family is seen to be a strong foundation for the cognitive and social development of the students. It is here that the learners' attitudes and values are shaped. On the other hand, the family serves as a source of motivation for the students to succeed in school. On the other hand, they can also be one of the factors that cause their anxiousness. They were apprehensive about studying English because their parents did not support them. They also stated that they come from broken families, with some of them living with relatives. This supports previous study [49] that students from broken families have different relationships with their teachers and perform worse academically. Furthermore, the hardships they have faced from their families have caused them psychological and emotional problems. As a result, this condition would have a considerable impact on their academic progress. The following transcripts from the participants qualify the claim that the family factor is an influential factor in learning the English language.

*"I can't concentrate in school since my parents are constantly fighting at home." (F5T4)*  
*"I'm constantly nervous in class, which is why I can't concentrate because of a family problem." (F5T5)*  
*"It has had a significant impact on my studies because I am unable to concentrate." (F5T7)*  
*"My family's condition was one thing that made me nervous." (F5T3)*  
*"I have little time to review my lesson or complete my homework because I do a lot of housework at night." (F5T6)*  
*"Unfortunately, my mother then left the house due to a quarrel with my father." (F5T9)*

The participants' lack of support from their families is emphasized in the preceding statements. It implies that students cannot concentrate on their studies due to family issues and parental assistance. This supports the findings of Lara and Saracostti [51], who found that parental involvement in school is a crucial influence on students' academic success.

### 3.1.6. Fear of English classes

Khan [13] emphasized that speech anxiety or the fear of having to speaking language other than their native tongue, makes language learners fearful and weakens their confidence, resulting in avoidance of communicative activities in class. The participants in this study experienced emotional setbacks as a result of their nervousness in English classes. They claimed that going to English classes made them feel fearful and insecure. They openly acknowledged that they despised their English classes, even though English is neither their major nor field of interest. The following statements from the participants qualify the claim of this study that fear of English classes is one of the influential factors of anxiety in learning the English language.

*"The worst thing that made me anxious was my English subject." (F6T1)*  
*"I say this because this topic made me nervous all the time." (F6T2)*  
*"I despise my English subject because it isn't my major." (F6T6)*  
*"It makes me uncomfortable every time I attend this class." (F6T4)*

The previous statements are manifestations that students feel nervous about attending their English classes. One of the concerns shared by Filipino students in the classroom as a source of anxiety is their bad feeling of speaking the language incorrectly with mistakes and not finding exact words. Their dislike for speaking incorrectly stems less from teachers' and classmates' fear of negative evaluation and more from a desire to make correct sentences. This is in line with the study of Weda and Sakti [52] that students' anxiety comes from their English classes. Chou [53] further stated that only limited English medium instruction students had speech anxiety and unfavorable attitudes about English learning. Additionally, Maute and Abadiano [54] found that anxiety is linked to learners' negative attitudes toward the English language. Finally, Suleimenova [55] concluded that when students are compelled to converse in a foreign language, they feel uneasy and nervous.

### 3.1.7. Lack of vocabulary/ideas

Vocabulary represents one of the students' most important skills in learning the English language. The participants revealed that they lack vocabulary that is why they are incompetent of speaking the English language. They said that speaking could be easy if only they have a vast vocabulary. They further said that they could not explain nor control their feelings. They often experience pounding heart, butterflies in the stomach, stammering, cold fingers, profuse perspiration, trembling of knees, and even tears—all manifestations of anxiety during recitation and class discussions, leading them to panic. This supports the previous research [46] that "panic disorder is associated with recurring panic attacks or brief periods of intense fear or discomfort." Students often experience fear or panic when they are engaged in oral activities that expose their difficulties/weaknesses. Further, this affirms the study of Akkakoson [56], who found out that a limited vocabulary repertoire was their primary source of speaking anxiety. The following statements are manifestations of the students who lack vocabulary in English.

*"I couldn't manage to organize a coherent statement together."* (F7T1)

*"I'm having trouble coming up with the right word/s to explain myself."* (F7T2)

*"It was my time first to meet those words."* (F7T3)

Notably, the participants' remarks indicate that they are unable to create sentences due to a lack of vocabulary. Mukminin *et al.* [57] confirmed this finding. They were emphasizing that a lack of vocabulary and grammar is one of the causes of speaking anxiety among EFL learners.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The current study revealed that the participants had negative experiences in their English classes. When they were asked to narrate and describe their feelings/experiences in their English classes, many of them provided examples of how anxiety impeded their learning and often led them to frustration. The study's findings could be helpful to language instructors and professors, curriculum designers, and administrators.

Language teachers should be aware of students' speaking anxiety and create an environment where they can feel more at ease in English classes by employing various strategies to express themselves while also maintaining students' motivation freely. They should also provide enough activities and tasks to utilize the English language to help them build confidence in speaking. They should address students' inadequacies by exposing them to various communicative activities to increase their English competence. Counseling sessions should also be provided by university guidance counselors to identify people who are having difficulty. Additionally, the administration can consider sending English instructors and professors to counseling seminars and supervise students with anxiety problems and expand learning facilities. Finally, proper dissemination of the study's findings and presentation of the proposed intervention program for evaluation and implementation to the administration, deans, program chairs, and English instructors and professors could help students feel less anxious and motivated to improve their English language skills.

However, this study has certain limitations. Given the study site, the findings may not reflect the experiences of all students locally and internationally. This study even suggests further investigation that includes qualitative instruments such as diary writing, instructor comments, or classroom observations to understand further and deepen our knowledge of English anxiety. Different association between English speaking anxiety and other affective variables like motivation and self-esteem is also worth investigating.

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