

WHY ENGLISH FEELS FOREIGN: UNVEILING THE INVISIBLE BARRIER IN PAKISTANI HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In Pakistan, despite English being an official language, many students are less proficient in it compared to their native language. This lack of proficiency often causes anxiety among students, negatively impacting their performance in English language classrooms. This anxiety is observed in both private and semi-government universities. The study aimed to compare the impact of anxiety in these two types of institutions and also investigated the reasons behind this anxiety and potential solutions. The research included 50 students from each sector private and semi-government universities. The findings revealed that anxiety had a stronger impact in semi-government universities across most aspects, except for writing, where private sector students experienced more anxiety. To understand the causes of this anxiety, students were asked to share their reasons. The results indicated that a highly competitive classroom atmosphere, a judgmental environment, uncooperative teachers, and insufficient practice in English were the main factors contributing to anxiety in English classrooms. To help reduce this anxiety, several recommendations were made: students should increase their practice of the language, and teachers should create a friendly and supportive environment that reduces stress and encourages students to engage more willingly in learning.

Keywords: Effect, state anxiety, English classroom, causes, overcoming anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is characterized by feelings of uncertainty, fear, frustration, uneasiness, and tension, as defined by several scholars (Brown, 2000; Sarason, 1988; Scovel, 1978; Spielberger, 1972). It is a fundamental human emotion that affects people universally, regardless of age, gender, or any other factor. Many different factors can lead to anxiety. For English language learners and students studying a second language, anxiety may stem from activities such as speaking in class, engaging in conversations in the target language, or taking exams in a language that is not their native tongue. Anxiety has been identified in two primary forms: debilitating, which has a negative impact on learning and performance, and facilitating, which can have a positive impact (Alpert & Haber, 1960). This study aims to investigate the impact of anxiety on English language learning among bachelor's

students. It will provide a comparative analysis to determine whether anxiety has a greater effect on students in public or semi-government institutions. The research specifically focuses on examining the anxiety levels among students from semi-government and private universities and comparing the effects across these two types of institutions.

1. Analysing the level of anxiety levels of the target population.
2. Examining and exploring the extent of the effect of anxiety on English language learning
3. Facilitating students in overcoming anxiety in the classrooms
4. Suggesting strategies to deal with and overcome state anxiety in the educational setting.

5. Exploring where the greater effect of anxiety is; semi-govt universities or private sector universities, or are both ends same

Questions

- Q1. Is there an effect of state anxiety on English language at bachelors' level?
- Q2. Is there a greater effect of anxiety among students of semi-govt universities or among students at private universities? Or is the effect same at both ends?
- Q3. What are the reasons for state anxiety faced by students?
- Q4. How can this anxiety be reduced in the classroom?

Literature Review

Using the Horwitz and Cope examination of language anxiety, Aida (1994) conducted an examination of the second language anxiety faced by Japanese language American students. A research has shown that language anxiety can affect listening comprehension negatively, reduce speaking and word production, impair learning of vocabulary, and lower student's grades in standardized tests and language courses (Horwitz & Young, 1991; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991c). This anxiety is said to have developed from not one, but many negative experiences in the context of second language learning. With such anxiety arousing experiences, students may eventually associate anxiety and apprehension with second language learning (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). An exploration of the effect of second language anxiety on the performance of second language English speakers showed the debilitating effects. The relationship between anxiety and second language performance was explored. Second language speaking anxiety scale was made for the research investigation, and the results were analysed. The results through this instrument showed that the dual concept of anxiety was reflected in the language learning outside the classroom as well as in oral communication. The results pointed out that second language speaking anxiety does predict the oral achievement of children. Interviews were conducted to find the reasons of this anxiety, and the most evident was interaction with native speakers. (Woodrow, 2006)

Von Worde (2003) took note that myriad researchers have focused on the effect of anxiety have found that anxiety does impede the production of foreign language and its achievement. Through interviews, Von Worde found that when asked to describe their feelings, students illustrated that anxiety affected their performance as it leads to feelings of frustration, more so anger. An investigation on 115 second-year students by Na (2007) found, using an achievement test and a questionnaire that students do face a high level of anxiety in terms of negative evaluation, and this anxiety is also closely associated with the learning of English language, effecting their achievement and performance.

The effect of anxiety on second language acquisition was closely explored in a study in 2011 that aimed to find the relationship between the two ends. The students were requested to fill a scale for foreign language classroom anxiety, and an oral survey was also conducted. The research findings amongst the ESL/foreign language learners group opposed the initial idea and showed that anxiety was not a major factor leading to student's lack in learning a second language. The findings showed that for many of the participants, anxiety did not affect their ability to learn a second language. Nevertheless, this effect can vary based on the classroom environment and the teacher teaching the language, as the research suggests. (Snyder III, 2011)

Foreign language anxiety has been studied in a recent research in 2019 that noted the impact of foreign language anxiety on learner's proficiency in Saudi EFL classroom. FLCAS, foreign language anxiety scale, and IELTS test were used as the instrument to measure the proficiency of learners. Data analyzed through t-tests, correlation, oneway Anova, and regression analysis revealed that the learner's level of anxiety in the classroom differed based on the course level, but this anxiety did have a negative relation with the English proficiency of the students. The study, through examining the results, concluded that anxiety is among the most significant factors that impact language learning. (Alqahtani, Saleh, 2019).

Methodology

The sample of the study included female students of semi-government and private universities. The participants were students of bachelors from these

universities aged between 16 to 25 years. Snowball sampling was used to gather information from the respective respondents. Two semi-government and two private universities were selected for the sampling process. LUMS and UMT were the private universities and KCW and LCWU were chosen as the semi-government universities. A sample of 100 female students were selected through random sampling, 50 students from each sector and were asked to take part in the research. A quantitative methodology was used for this study. A questionnaire was designed with 15 closed-ended questions and 2 open ended short questions

at the end. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale with values; strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree, respectively. At the end two short questions were used to address the reasons of anxiety and ways to overcome it. Google document was used to form the online questionnaire.

The questionnaire was distributed to the respective samples through google documents and they were asked to fill in their responses. The questionnaire responses were then analyzed using excel sheet graphs, and the results were used to make conclusions and recommendations accordingly.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Results for semi-government universities.

Sr.	Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I feel stressed when I am required to communicate in English.	0	18	10	15	7
2	I do not feel confident in myself when I'm asked to speak in English.	1	18	10	14	7
3	I do not like studying English because it makes me lose confidence in myself.	0	3	3	26	18
4	I feel nervous when I am asked to speak in English class, and it hinders my ability to speak.	3	9	13	17	8
5	During English class, I feel so anxious that I forget what I already know.	0	7	11	22	10
6	English classes make me more tensed and nervous than other classes do.	0	5	5	25	15
7	I feel anxious in English classes because I think the other English speakers may laugh at me as I speak.	4	11	6	15	14
8	I am usually at ease in my English classes.	9	26	11	4	0
9	I feel that I am not very competent in English and this hinders my progress in English classes.	1	8	14	18	9
10	I get nervous while conversing in English even when I am prepared.	1	15	8	19	7
11	I feel anxious when taking English tests because I feel my writing speed is not up to the mark.	1	4	5	25	15
12	I feel anxious in English classes because I was not given the chance to practice my writing and speaking skills earlier on.	2	11	8	20	9

13	I get anxious when I am not able to understand what the teacher says in English classes and that hinders my performance.	0	6	10	22	12
14	I feel that I lack confidence in myself when writing in English.	0	6	4	27	13
15	I feel anxious about learning the rules of English, making it difficult to learn the language.	1	6	12	20	11

Table 2: Results for private universities.

Sr.	Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I feel stressed when I am required to communicate in English.	2	9	19	15	5
2	I do not feel confident in myself when I'm asked to speak in English.	4	11	13	19	3
3	I do not like studying English because it makes me lose confidence in myself.	0	5	6	26	13
4	I feel nervous when I am asked to speak in English class, and it hinders my ability to speak.	3	6	12	24	5
5	During English class, I feel so anxious that I forget what I already know.	2	6	13	22	7
6	English classes make me more tensed and nervous than other classes do.	2	4	8	27	9
7	I feel anxious in English classes because I think the other English speakers may laugh at me as I speak.	3	7	13	18	9
8	I am usually at ease in my English classes.	8	25	9	7	1
9	I feel that I am not very competent in English and this hinders my progress in English classes.	0	7	15	20	8
10	I get nervous while conversing in English even when I am prepared.	3	12	9	20	6
11	I feel anxious when taking English tests because I feel my writing speed is not up to the mark.	1	12	4	20	13
12	I feel anxious in English classes because I was not given the chance to practice my writing and speaking skills earlier on.	1	5	8	28	8

13	I get anxious when I am not able to understand what the teacher says in English classes and that hinders my performance.	1	6	5	27	11
14	I feel that I lack confidence in myself when writing in English.	1	8	6	24	11
15	I feel anxious about learning the rules of English, making it difficult to learn the language.	3	4	11	22	10

Descriptive analysis

Q1. What do you think are the reasons for the anxiety that you experience?

The question addressed the reasons of anxiety experienced in the English language classroom, and the respondents were asked to respond according to what they believed were the reasons. Some respondents pointed out that the reason for anxiety was the lack of confidence on oneself about vocabulary and grammar of the language, low self-esteem, and reduced confidence in one’s skills of speaking the language. Social anxiety was highlighted as a major factor contributing to anxiety in English classroom as students had a constant fear of being judged by the teacher and by their fellows. This also included the fear associated with speaking something wrong, feeling embarrassed, and being laughed at. Others pointed out that the pressure of work and immediate deadlines made them feel anxious. The belief held by teachers and students that those who can speak and perform better in English are better and more educated, also arose anxiety among students who were less competitive in the language. Some of the respondents figured that the lacked opportunities to practice English earlier made them feel less competent in the language and affected their performance in the class. Amongst other reasons that many respondents pointed out, was the lack of a friendly and cooperative environment where students could feel at ease. Peer pressure, competitive classroom, combined with an ineffective relation between the teacher and the student was a major reason leading to anxiety associated with English language learning.

Q2. How do you think this anxiety can be reduced?

With the reasons known, respondents discussed the ways this anxiety could be tackled. Most students

pointed out that more opportunities of practicing in English, spoken and written will help them overcome this anxiety as they will feel confident when they have a strong command over the language. More practice with the language on an individual level, like conversing in the language, taking risks, not being afraid to make mistakes, and gaining confidence can greatly help reduce the anxiety that student’s experience in the classroom. Greater opportunities of socialization in English in the classroom may also reduce anxiety associated with speaking in the language. One major way to overcome anxiety, as pointed out by respondents, was creating a friendly and welcoming environment in the classroom, free of the fear of being judged, and where everyone feels easy in conversing in English. Moreover, the students and teachers should be encouraging and uplift one another instead of putting them down. Teachers should focus on making the classrooms interactive where there are more opportunities to practice. Students believed that a positive environment in the classroom where they are encouraged by teachers and peers, opportunities for interaction and practice are greater, teachers are friendly and cooperative, there is reduced competition and judgement, and a respectful environment is created, they will feel less anxious and learn in a better and engaging manner.

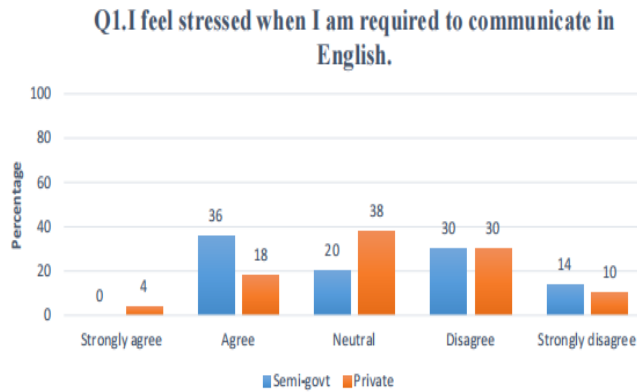


Figure 1. I feel stressed when I am required to communicate in English.

The results showed that a greater percentage of semi-government university students (less than half) agreed with the statement than the private sector students (less than a quarter percent). In both cases, some students chose to remain neutral. The percentage of disagreement was greater in the semi-government university sector in contrast to the private sector. This was perhaps because more students stayed neutral in the private sector while answering the question.

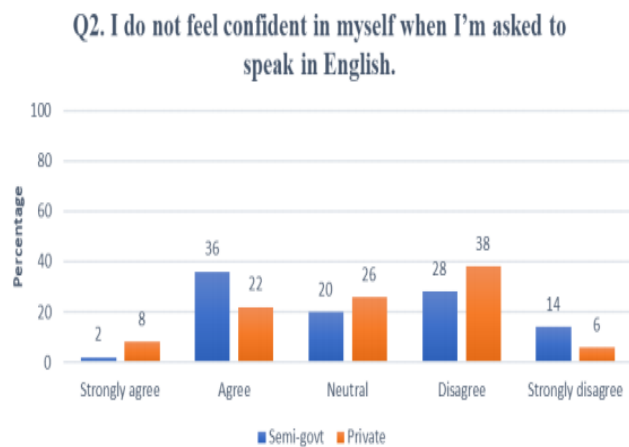


Figure 2. I do not feel confident in myself when I'm asked to speak in English.

The results showed that semi-government sector had a greater percentage of students (less than half) who agreed with feeling less confident while being asked to communicate in English than private sector students where little more than a quarter percent agreed. Disagreement with the statement was also greater in the private sector than the semi-government sector but the difference between the

two ends was by a small (two percent). Some respondents from both ends remained neutral.

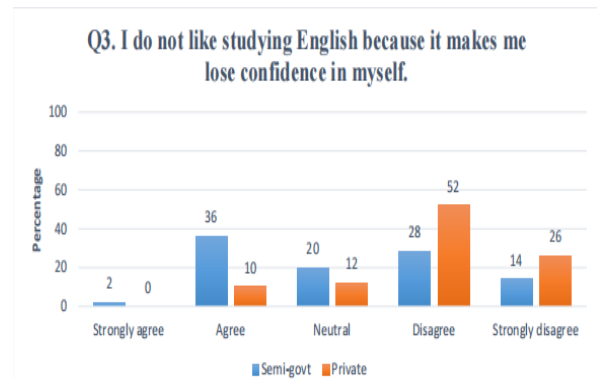


Figure 3. I do not like studying English because it makes me lose confidence in myself.

As depicted by the results, less than a half of semi-government sector students agreed with the statement whereas this percentage was only one-tenth in the private sector. At both ends, some students remained neutral about the statement. The percentage of private sector students who disagreed with the statement was more than three quarters showing strong disagreement whereas only less than a half of semi government students disagreed.

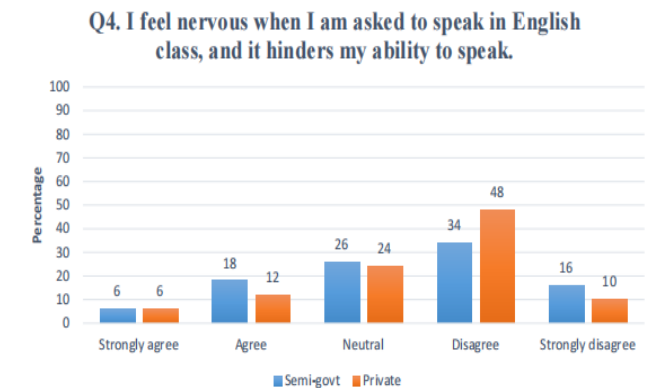


Figure 4. I feel nervous when I am asked to speak in English class, and it

hinders my ability to speak.

As seen by the results, the number of semi-government university students who agreed with the statement was a little less than quarter while this agreement was lesser in the private sector, also less than a quarter but differed by some percent. Some students from both sectors chose to remain

neutral. The disagreement with the statement was greater in the private sector, exceeding half the percent while in the semi-government sector this percentage was only half.

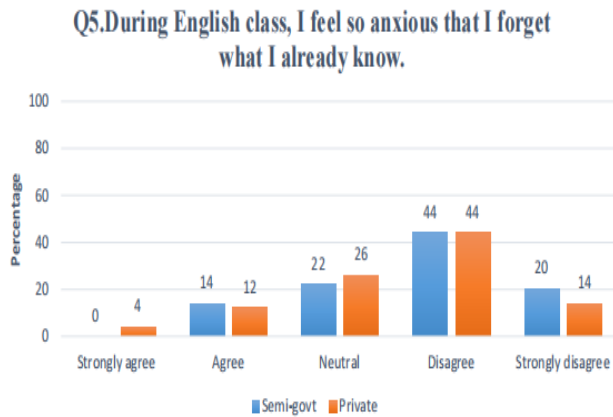


Figure 5. During English class, I feel so anxious that I forget what I already know.

The results displayed that both the sectors, private and semi-government had an equal number (much less than a quarter) of students who agreed with the given statement. Some students remained neutral at both ends. The disagreement with the statement was greater at the semi-government sector that was more than a half, and this differed by a small number in the private sector.

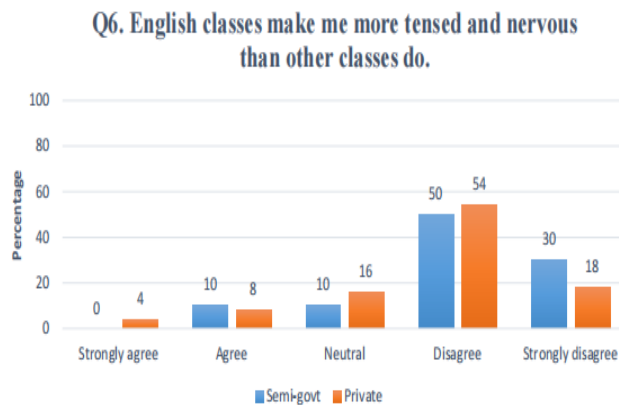


Figure 6. English classes make me more tensed and nervous than other classes do.

The results showed a very minor difference between both ends where the number of private sector students who agreed with statement was higher than the semi government sector. The difference, however, was minimal. The percentage of disagreement was also greater in the semi-

government sector that was more than three-quarters whereas less than a quarter of private sector students disagreed.

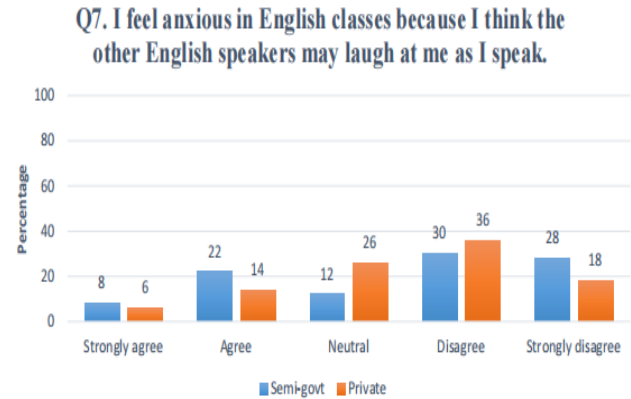


Figure 7. I feel anxious in English classes because I think the other English

speakers may laugh at me as I speak.

The results showed that this fear of others English speakers laughing at them was greater in the semi-government sector as it exceeded a quarter percent whereas less than a quarter of private sector students agreed with the statement. The disagreement was also greater in the semi government sector exceeding half and the private sector differed by only little.

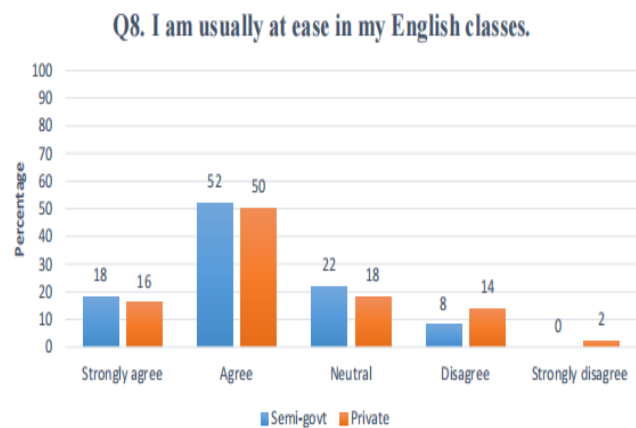


Figure 8. I am usually at ease in my English classes.

Demonstrated by the results, a greater percentage of the semi-government sector students (less than three-quarters) agreed with the statement in contrast to the private sector by only a small difference. Some students remained neutral at both ends. More students of private sector (less than

quarter) disagreed with feeling at ease in English classes, and only less than one-tenth of semi-government sector disagreed.

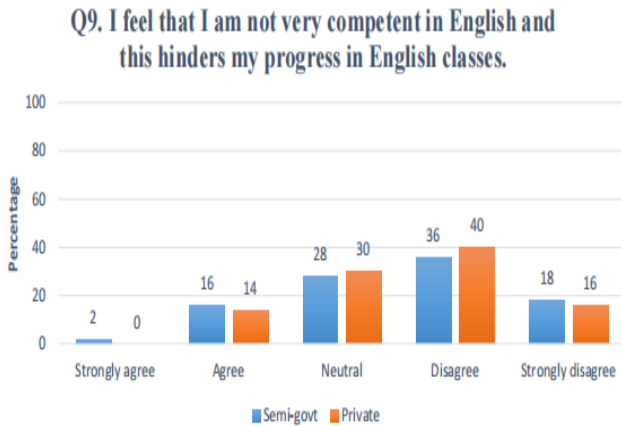


Figure 9. I feel that I am not very competent in English and this hinders my progress in English classes.

The results displayed that students from semi-government sector had a slightly higher percentage (one-fifth) of those who agreed with the statement than the private sector where more than one-tenth agreed. At both ends some students were neutral in answering showing that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. The disagreement was also greater in the private sector exceeding half the number of students, whereas the semi-government sector differed only by a small number.

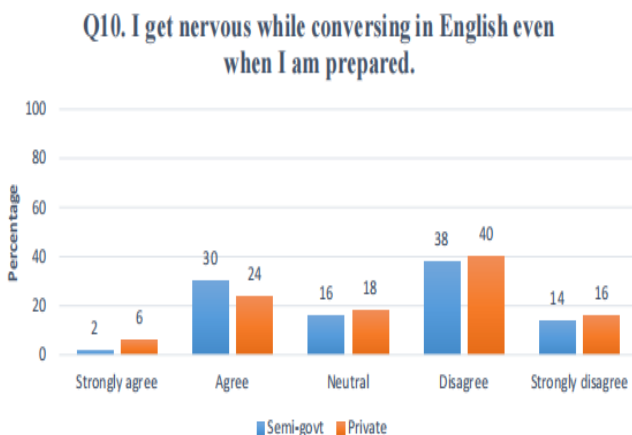


Figure 10. I get nervous while conversing in English even when I am prepared.

The results displayed that a greater number (more than a quarter) of semi-government students agreed with the statement whereas this number was lesser

by small degree in the private sector. More students of private sector disagreed with the given statement exceeding half the number, while this number was lesser by a small difference in the semi-government sector.

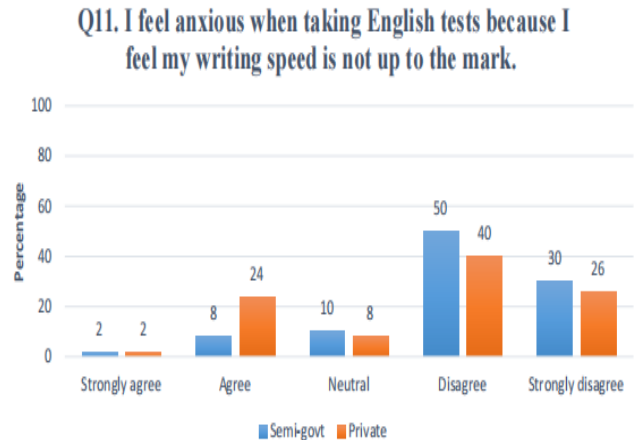


Figure 11. I feel anxious when taking English tests because I feel my writing speed is not up to the mark.

The results compiled depict that the number of private sector students agreeing with the statement was far greater (above a quarter) than those who agreed in the semi-government sector (one-tenth). In both sectors, some students neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. The number of students disagreeing with the statement was more than three quarters in the public sector whereas it remained less in the private sector where these numbers were more than a half.

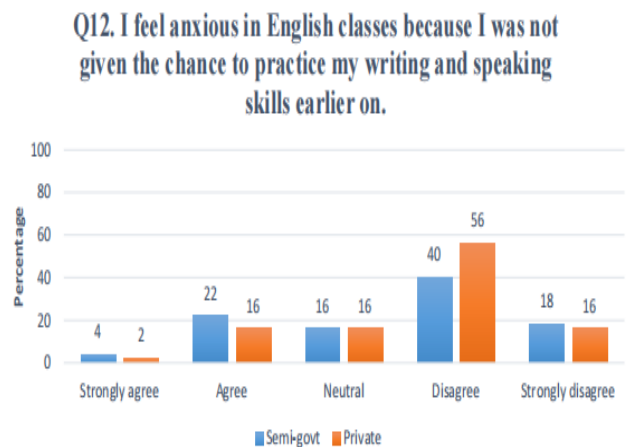


Figure 12. I feel anxious in English classes because I was not given the chance

to practice my writing and speaking skills earlier on.

The results showed that a greater number of semi-government sector (more than a quarter) agreed with the statement whereas only less than a quarter of private sector students agreed. The ratio of those who strongly agreed was also greater in semi-government sector as was that of those who agreed. In both sectors less than a quarter number of students chose to be neutral. The number of students who disagreed with the statement was greater in the private sector (less than three-quarters), than in semi-government sector where only more than a half number of students disagreed.

Q13. I feel that I lack confidence in myself when writing in English.

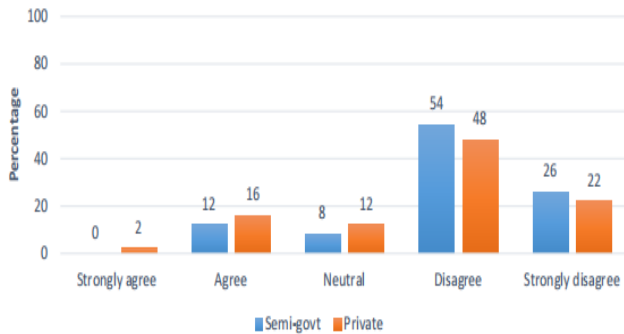


Figure 13. I feel that I lack confidence in myself when writing in English.

The results depict a greater agreement with the statement (less than a quarter) is seen at the private sector differing only by a small number in the semi-government sector. While some students were neutral regarding the statement at both ends, a greater number (more than three-quarters) disagreed from the semi-government sector whereas less than three-quarters disagreed at the other end.

Q14. I get anxious when I am not able to understand what the teacher says in English classes and that hinders my performance.

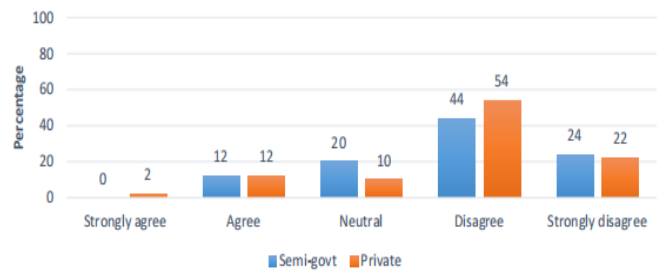


Figure 14. I get anxious when I am not able to understand what the teacher says in English classes and that hinders my performance.

As depicted by the results, the difference between both ends in terms of agreement with the statement was minimal. The private sector had a greater agreement with the statement than the semi-government, but the difference was rather negligible. The number of those who disagreed was greater in the private sector, exceeding three-quarters whereas less than three-quarters disagreed at the semi-government sector. In both the sectors, some students neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

Q15. I feel anxious about learning the rules of English, making it difficult to learn the language.

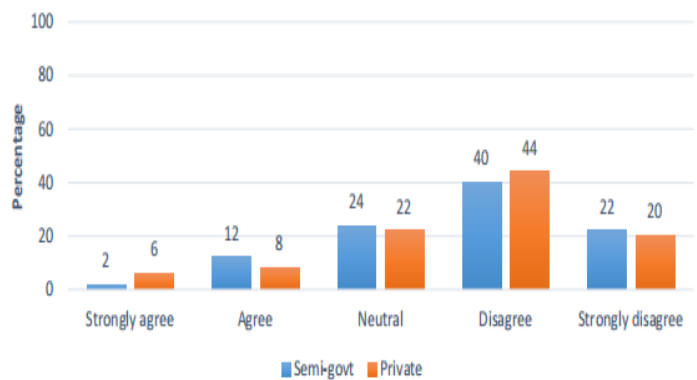


Figure 15. I feel anxious about learning the rules of English, making it difficult to learn the language.

The results showed that private and semi-government sectors had little difference in the agreement and disagreement and the results were roughly the same. The agreement at both ends was same (more than one-tenth). The disagreement

with the statement was greater in the private sector, differing only by a negligible percent.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the prevalence of anxiety at bachelor's students of private and semi-government sector universities and evaluate how it effects their performance in English classes. There are several factors that lead to state anxiety in the English language classroom. This anxiety does affect their performance in the English classroom. Von Worde (2003) discovered that anxiety in the classroom does affect the performance of students in their foreign language production and achievement. The students explained that they felt anxious in the classroom and this effected their performance as this anxiety led to frustration and anger. Effect of anxiety is the way anxiousness, fear, or feelings of uneasiness in the classroom can affect the performance of the students. Uneasiness and anxiousness were experienced by the students in English language classrooms particularly when students were asked to communicate in English language. Conversing in English language is a task that seems difficult for most students and it makes them stressed. When being asked to communicate in English, students of semi-government sector felt more anxious than those of the private sector.

The lack of confidence while conversing in the language was also greater in the same sector, showing that students of this sector felt less confident in conversing in the language. Lack of confidence was also seen as one of the major factors that lead to anxiety in English classroom. In terms of spoken English, the private sector students were more confident. Students seemed to lack interest in English because of anxiousness and lack of confidence on oneself. A small percentage of students from both sectors agreed that anxiety in English classroom affected their confidence in the language, and to some degree their interest in studying the language. Students of semi-government sector felt, to a greater degree that their dislike of studying English was because of lacked confidence and anxiety. Private sector students relatively felt less lack of confidence and dislike towards English as a result. Nervousness and anxiousness in the classroom resulting from speaking English was also a major factor affecting the spoken performance of the students. This anxiety and nervousness affecting student's

performance in English classes was greater in the semi-government sector than in the private one, showing that students from semi-government sector had more speaking anxiety in English classroom and this hindered their performance negatively.

In all this anxiousness in English classroom, students also felt that they forgot what they had known and learnt. Moreover, English classes also made students more anxious than other classes as anxiety was affecting their performance. Private sector, in contrast to the semi-government sector felt slightly more anxious to make the forget what they had known already. Also, this sector students felt more nervous in English classes than in others, which may be a result of several different factors like a competitive classroom environment. The effect of anxiety was also experienced when students felt anxious because of the fear of being laughed at by their classmates. The fear of speaking something wrong in a competitive classroom was evident as students felt anxious and this affected their performance to speak up in the class. This fear and anxiousness when speaking was greater at the semi-government sector than in the private end. But it was clear that the affect was anxiety was experienced when students felt anxious out of the fear of being laughed at. Anxiousness also made students feel less at ease in the English classroom. With a slight difference, students of semi-government sector felt at ease to a greater extent than the students of private sector end. This difference can be linked to several factors like the competitiveness in the English classroom. Ease in English classroom led to better performance and less anxiety and its effect, whereas uneasiness in English classroom affected the performance of the students.

Lack of competence in English classroom also greatly affected the performance of students in the English classrooms. Their performance in the classroom was greatly affected when students lacked competency in the language. At the same end, nervousness associated with speaking in the language affected their performance even when students were prepared from the class. Lack of competency and this nervousness were both seen to a greater extent in the semi-government sector. Students, even when prepared, felt uneasy, anxious, and nervous in the English classroom and

it affected their performance and especially their spoken language skills.

Effect of anxiety in English language classroom was also experienced in terms of the writing speed. Students of private and semi-government sector felt that their performance in English classroom was affected because of their slow writing speed. The anxiousness associated with slow writing speed was one factor that affected their performance. In terms of the writing speed, the anxiousness associated had a greater affect at the private sector end than in the semi-government sector. Anxiousness was also felt because students felt that they have not been given enough chance to practice their skills earlier. The anxiousness associated with that, surely had a lasting effect on student's performance at both ends. This lack of practice, however, was more at the semi-government sector as more students felt anxious in the classroom resulting in a negative effect in their performance. Not being able to understand what the teacher said in the classroom also had a lasting effect on the performance of the students in the English classroom. Though by little, this anxiousness and hindrance in the performance was greater in the private sector. The difference was although negligible.

Finally, anxiousness was also experienced in learning the rules of English, that made it difficult to learn the language. Students of both sectors to some extent agreed that anxiousness about learning English rules made it harder to learn the language than it normally would be. There is effect of anxiety when learning the language with the rules, was similar at both ends so no actual comparison could be drawn. This meant that in terms of rules of English, it was felt that anxiousness led to negative effects, but it was equal at both ends.

Henceforth, it can be deuced that in some areas, like in a competitive English classroom, and in written skills, private students felt a greater effect of anxiety as did the semi-government sector, but in most cases, it was the opposite. The semi-government sector seemed to have experienced a greater effect of anxiety in most dimensions in the English classroom. This study concluded that the effect of anxiety does affect the student's performance at university level, regardless of the sector. While there was a difference between the effect of anxiety experienced at both ends, there

was indeed an effect that was confirmed by the studies earlier quoted in the literature review.

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Appendix

1. I feel stressed when I am required to communicate in English.
2. I do not feel confident in myself when I'm asked to speak in English.
3. I do not like studying English because it makes me lose confidence in myself.

4. I feel nervous when I am asked to speak in English class, and it hinders my ability to speak.
5. During English class, I feel so anxious that I forget what I already know.
6. English classes make me more tensed and nervous than other classes do.
7. I feel anxious in English classes because I think the other English speakers may laugh at me as I speak.
8. I am usually at ease in my English classes.
9. I feel that I am not very competent in English and this hinders my progress in English classes.
10. I get nervous while conversing in English even when I am prepared.

11. I feel anxious when taking English tests because I feel my writing speed is not up to the mark.
12. I feel anxious in English classes because I was not given the chance to practice my writing and speaking skills earlier on.
13. I feel that I lack confidence in myself when writing in English.
14. I get anxious when I am not able to understand what the teacher says in English classes and that hinders my performance.
15. I feel anxious about learning the rules of English, making it difficult to learn the language.
16. What do you think are the reasons for the anxiety that you experience?
17. How do you think this anxiety can be reduced?

