

# English Anxiety in post graduate health education students: Phenomenological Study

**Ejan Rajbhandari**

MPhil Scholar, Graduate School of Education, TU

Faculty Member, Kathmandu Shiksha Campus

Email: [ejanrajbhandari@gmail.com](mailto:ejanrajbhandari@gmail.com)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/sss.v23i1.51935>

## *Abstract*

*This article explores the causes of English anxiety and its consequence in postgraduate health education students in Nepal. This study depends on a phenomenological study where knowledge comes from health education experience. Its reality is multiple. This study's belief system is Interpretivism. The sampling procedure is purposive, and In-depth interviews were done over the telephone with two health education students. The thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data. This study shows that English anxiety poses an enemy to health education students and it emotionally paralyzes the students as a consequence. The main cause of anxiety of this kind is government schooling and less practice of the English language. Policymakers should implement the English language compulsory to fulfill this gap.*

*Keywords* : English, anxiety, phemenology, anxiety causes

## **Introduction**

Anxiety is an uncomfortable condition. It is generally defined as “a state of apprehension, a vague fear” (Ohata, 2005). Academic anxiousness can be emerged as harmful over time. Since the anxiousness stage is associated with educational achievement, a student's overall educational performance suffers (Huberty, 2012). Learning anxiety has been widely recognized for its significant impact on learners (Ohata, 2005). Moreover, a foreign language is a barrier for beginners (Aichhorn, & Puck, 2017).

Kondo and Ling (2004) argue that classroom climate, instructional condition, target language competence, learning motivation, desire to engage in conversations, confidence, and personality affects foreign language learning anxiety and students' willingness to communicate. Learners of English language as a foreign language

have a basic requirement of communicating through English. However, it can be a challenge. Speaking a foreign language needs linguistic competence, speaking skills, and strategy use showing a complex process. (Chou, 2018b) states speaking strategies have been viewed as first-aid devices used for interaction and communication to address problems or breakdowns and to remain active in communication. Anxiety may also occur if students are exposed to past negative experiences regarding English (Sparks & Ganschow, 2007).

The English language is essential in teaching-learning in Nepal. English plays a key role in the academic field (Zainuddin et al., 2019). On the other hand, postgraduation in health education programs still peruse in the Nepali language, and academic materials are rarely found in the Devnagari script. This may hinder them from acquiring adequate knowledge. Thus, there is no alternative other than the English language to obtain knowledge. Previous studies have focused on the problems of foreign language anxiety and classroom learning anxiety in lower-class students only. In the context of Nepal, very limited studies found regarding English anxiety. Moreover, I do not have evidence to cite what consequences and what are the primary sources of English anxiety in health education students therefore, there is a need to explore the primary and secondary sources of English anxiety and its consequence. The above-mentioned problems and research gaps encouraged me to conduct this study. This study would be beneficial for those who suffer from English anxiety and policymakers assigned to make higher education policies.

## Methodology

This study depends on a phenomenological study where knowledge comes from individual experiences, and reality is multiple. This study's belief system is interpretivism. Interpretative aims to understand other cultures from the inside (Taylor & Medina, 2011). The data for this study come from interviews with two postgraduate health education students (Reema and Ramita, pseudo name) in the online method because of the corona pandemic. All the interviews were audiorecorded and after transcribing the data, I also followed the respondents through telephone interviews. All interviews were conducted in the Nepali language. The method of data analysis was thematic analysis because it is an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Familiarizing is the key work in the thematic analysis that has been done after data is transcribed. The initial code searched and again rifled the theme from the code. Them were revised as necessary and data found to be lacking was compensated for by follow-up with the participants through an online method to update the data and revised it. After revision, themes were drawn.

## Results and Discussion

### English Anxiety as an Enemy

The English Language is found to be an enemy to postgraduate health education students because they feel anxious dealing with the English language. They are habituated to the Nepali language till graduation level but in post-graduation, since they must study through English medium, they feel emotionally uncomfortable and anxious. This leads them to perceive English as an enemy. One of my respondents, Ramita (pseudo name) used to study in Nepali medium. After graduation, she had to study English. She felt discomfort because she did not understand the English language and she got nervous and anxious about it. She perceived English as her enemy, as she said, “I feel always nervous while writing and speaking English, and I feel anxious because I don’t have the confidence to speak and write correctly, I feel that English is my enemy”. Similar as Kondo & Ling (2004) also said Language anxiety is conceptualized as a situation specific personality trait having two psychological components: emotional arousal and negative self-related cognition. Another of my respondents Reema (pseudo name) also feels nervous and anxious while dealing with the English language. one of the studies showed that a considerable number of foreign language learners experience a feeling of anxiety in the language learning process. English can cause a significant barrier (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017). In health education, English is being a cause of emotional arousal (anxiety).

Education should have open-door, not barriers, however, English is one of the barriers for students having other languages as a primary language. At the postgraduation level, one of the participants was in pain during her learning. She could not express her ideas because she could not speak English. Gradually, she lost her confidence and self-esteem. She always felt backward because of her low self-confidence. She was affected even in academic performance along with professional life (Ramita) said, “It is really difficult speaking and writing in English, so I cannot do it properly. But I am trying. One thing always comes into my head, why all subjects are not in my native language?” Moreover, she added, “Why should we study others’ language? If it is all in our language could do better”.

Halder (2018) analyses the relationship between English language anxiety and academic achievement, and he found that there is a negative correlation between the academic achievement of students and English anxiety. Some research has directly indicated that “test anxiety routinely causes poor performance” (Hancock, 2001). Ramita has low scores on the examination because of her poor English and she feels hesitation. She feels paralyzed because she could not express her knowledge properly. She thinks that English is her barrier and enemy too.

Embarrassment also played a vital role to paralyze people. When my participant went to practice teaching, she could not pronounce the word “representation” and she got embarrassed in her class. She felt very bad and lost her self-confidence. In her voice, “In the initial phase of my teaching practice, I used to stick while I spoke. I wanted to cry at home alone”. When she completed her master’s examination, she had the challenge to write the thesis in English. One day, one of her friends suggested she make a fake relationship with a boy who is competent in English to complete the thesis. After the suggestion, she got embarrassed again, she felt bad and depressed. On the other hand, she was anxious about the completion of her thesis. In her words, “I want to share one of my stories, one of my friends had a boyfriend to accomplish the assignment but I did not have anyone who would help me to complete my assignment. One of my friends suggested me to make fake a boyfriend to complete the thesis. After that incident, I felt so embarrassed and anxious about my career”. This statement clearly shows that students make fake relationships to complete their assignments which is malpractice. Even now, she feels bad when she remembers that incident. Embarrassment is also one of the consequences of English anxiety.

Anxiety also makes suffering. Both of my respondents lost their opportunities, and they had unpleasant experiences in their learning phase. They could not understand the questions during the exam because the question was in the English language. One of my respondents Reema used to memorize all the questions and book headings, and it took a long time to memorize rather than understand. As she said “It was very difficult and painful while I was in bachelor because I was only skilled in writing in Nepali and questions were in English. I could not understand the questions. So, I used to waste time understanding questions rather than the content. As Ramita said, “I wish there were no language called English”. As a student, understanding and execution is the prime work but the students are not being able to understand the content so how could they change society? As we know that students are the foundation of a nation. If they are just trying to memorize the content because of the English barrier, how could they progress? In the teaching-learning process, memorizing is not the solution. It kills the essence of education. Creative, analytical lessons are a great way to learn (Hoque, 2018). I am also the victim of English anxiety, which paralyzed me several times.

## **Government School is the Main Source of English Anxiety**

Everything has its root cause. Similarly, both participants have their root cause of English anxiety. Government schools are found to be the main sources of English anxiety. Both participants have a common cause which is a government school. The environment is the foundation of learning activities. They both did not have an environment to learn English because they belong to Government schools. Government schools do not teach in English medium. In the primary, secondary, and even at the bachelor’s level, they studied in Nepali medium. So, they argue that Government schools are the main cause

of English anxiety. Both the participants started learning English in class four, so they did not get the opportunity to learn English at a basic level. As both Reema and Ramita said that “I belong to a government school and I pursued a bachelor’s degree in Nepali, but examination questions were in English, so I used to focus only on questions to understand not on the content. I still feel anxious about English, and I think English anxiety always exists in people, who have come from government school backgrounds. I started English in class four. “According to Ramita and Reema, the environment and the government system is the main cause of English anxiety and its suffering. The next is to give priority to Nepali. Nepali script is mandatory in government schools except for compulsory English. One of my participants Reema said that teachers themselves are incompetent in English in government schools except for English as a subject. The socio-cultural and environmental factors can cause language anxiety (Mulyani, 2018). One of my participants mentioned that social stigma is also a barrier to learning English. She said that “I visited several institutes and I used to lie to other friends because of my embarrassment otherwise they would bully me” This discourse shows that the social stigma ‘Those who haven’t done masters don’t know English’ is also the secondary cause of English anxiety. The respondent agreed that if the government school would have taught in English medium from primary-level English anxiety related suffering would not exist. I faced the same problems when I was at the bachelor’s level. I also think that government schooling is the primary cause to develop English anxiety because government schools had no provision to teach in English medium in primary, secondary, and even the higher level of education”. One study suggests found that Exposure to center-based care in the year before school was related with a higher likelihood of English proficiency by admission as compared to children who were not fluent in English by the spring of first grade (Halle et al., 2012). Vygotsky claimed that children's cognitive development and language are inextricably linked to their culture and the communities in which they live at the same time Jean Piaget, argued that Children's development in general, and early language development in particular, is intimately tied to a range of children's activities, attractions, and events; and touch, hear, see, feel, and smell (Indrayani, 2016). So be informed about the importance of learning English early in their schooling, so that they can develop and maintain strong motivation to study English, and that it is useful to reconfirm students’ awareness of the importance of English in their tertiary studies.

## Exposure is the Remedy

There is a slogan “if there is a will there is a way “there is a problem there is a solution. “similarly, one of my participants Reema got English anxiety. When she got hurt by her friend’s suggestion of making a temporary boyfriend to complete the assignment. She changed her attitude. She is determined that “*I have to show her I can.*” Reema started to go English institute for learning English. She visited almost all the language institutions and wasted her money. She got fed up with language institutes, suddenly she remembers one incident as Reema said: “*I never forget that one of the colleagues suggested not to go away from it, rather counter it, and think like a friend, not enemy*”. After realization, she countered with it. She did not go

away from English. She went to one institute and they got her exposed in speaking English in the front. Later on, she improved and she realized that practice makes a man perfect. During her practice, she used different means and media to improve her English like English movies, books, and novels. She knew that English is just a language, not knowledge. It is just a means to express knowledge and idea. She still remembers that friend who hurt her by suggesting malpractice like making a boyfriend for completing her thesis. Reema would like to thank people for their comments on her if they would not comment on her she could not start working hard to learn English. On her voice. *Now, I would like to thank them for suggesting the wrong which encouraged me to fight with English and I beat my English anxiety through exposure. Now, I came to realize that we should not comment on people because it is painful. Anyway, I am happy with them because they are still unemployed because of dependency.* Now, Reema is a lecturer in two different colleges and her friends are still unemployed. So, this could be the lesson that dependency may paralyze. A supportive environment can minimize English anxiety (Nagahashi, 2007). These are the remedy for minimizing the English anxiety that Ramita had applied on her learning journey and she got the victory over English anxiety. But during the interview, she said that “*English anxiety is always existing for those who come from government school*”. This statement clearly shows that she has still some sort of anxiety existing. One of the studies suggests that “studying hard, trying to obtain well of lecture notes and, trying to enjoy the tension, Peer Seeking, looking for others who are having difficulty help in controlling their anxiety” (Kondo & Ling, 2004).

## Conclusion and Implication

English anxiety is emotionally destructive in nature for a health education student. It is being a barrier even for academic performance in health education students. The main consequence is emotional paralyze and the main cause is government school background and less exposure to English. Practice and exposure are the remedial way to get rid of anxiety.

This study suggests that the concerned authority should make English a compulsory subject even at the primary level to a higher level in a government school to minimize English anxiety.

## References

- Aichhom, M., & Puck, J. (2017). I just don't feel comfortable speaking: Foreign language anxiety as a catalyst for speaking language barriers in MNCs. Elsevier. WU Vienna, welthandelsplatz 1, 1020 vienna, Austria. <https://doi.10.1016/J.IBUSREV.2017.01.004>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). Using thematic analysis in psychology. 3(2), 77-101, <https://doi.10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

- Halder, K. U. (2018). English language anxiety and academic achievement. *North Asian International Research Journal of Social Science & Humanities*, 4(3). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327237823>
- Halle, T., Hair, E., Wandner, L., McNamara, M., & Chien, N. (2012). Predictors and Outcomes of Early vs. Later English Language Proficiency Among English Language Learners. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 27(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2011.07.004>
- Hancock, D. R. (2001). Effects of test anxiety and evaluative threat on students' achievement and motivation. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94(5), 284–290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220670109598764>
- Hoque, M. E. (2018). Memorization: A proven method of learning. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 22, 142-150. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330825027\\_Memorization\\_A\\_Proven\\_Method\\_of\\_Learning](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330825027_Memorization_A_Proven_Method_of_Learning).
- Huberty, T.J. (2012). Test and performance anxiety. *Principal Leadership*, 10, 12-16. Retrieved from [http:// www. Nasponline. Org/](http://www.Nasponline.Org/)
- Indrayani, N. (2016). Language development at early childhood. *International Conference on Education*, 1, July 2016, P. 279-289. Reterived from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/229218143.pdf>
- Kondo, D. S., & Ying-Ling, Y. (2004). Strategies for coping with language anxiety: The case of students of English in Japan. *Elt Journal*, 58(3), 258-265. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ727624>
- Mulyani, S. (2018). Investigating factors causing students' anxiety in speaking english. *International Journal in Applied Linguistics of Parahikma*, 1(1), 85-99. <https://journal.parahikma.ac.id/ijalparahikma/article/view/7>
- Nagahashi, T. L. (2007). Techniques for reducing foreign language anxiety: Results of a successful intervention study. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/144186582.pdf>
- Ohata, K. (2005). Potential sources of anxiety for Japanese learners of English: Preliminary case interviews with five Japanese college students in the US. *TESL-EJ*, 9(3). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1065859.pdf>
- Sparks R. L., Ganschow, L. (2007). Is the foreign language classroom anxiety scale measuring anxiety or languages kills? *Foreign Lang. Ann.*40(3), 260-287. <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Richard-Sparks-6/publication>
- Taylor, P.C. and Medina, M. (2011) Educational research paradigms: From positivism to pluralism. *College Research Journal*, 1(1), 1-16. <http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/36978/>
- Zainuddin, S. Z. B., Pillai, S., Dumanig, F. P., & Phillip, A. (2019). English language and graduate employability. *Education + Training*, 61(1), 79–93. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-06-2017-0089>