Study Of Xenoglossophobia: Exploring The Effects Of Virtual Education On Pakistani Undergraduate ESL Learners’ English Speaking Anxiety During Covid-19 Pandemic

Anum Hanif1, Asma Kashif Shahzad2, Dr. Tahira Asgher*3

1PhD Scholar, Department of English Linguistics, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan

2Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities, COMSATS University Islamabad, Vehari Campus, Pakistan.

3Assistant Professor, Department of English Linguistics, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan.

Abstract

The global outbreak of Covid-19 brought the transition in educational system all over the world and switched from physical education to virtual education. In this newly advanced education system, the learners are provided with more opportunities to communicate with each other and teachers. The aim of this study is to investigate whether virtual education is proved fruitful for Pakistani undergraduate EFL learners to overcome Xenoglossophobia or Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) and if it is not, then what types of anxiety they face while speaking English in virtual education. Mixed method approach was employed in this study and data was collected through online closed questionnaire and semi-structured telephone interviews. The findings of the study revealed that to some extent virtual education proved fruitful for Pakistani EFL learners to minimize their Xenoglossophobia but failed to overcome it completely. Also the findings of the study showed that Pakistani EFL learners suffer mostly from social anxiety and fear of being judged and mocked by others because of lack of vocabulary, pronunciation skills and computer literacy.

Keywords: Xenoglossophobia, virtual education, Covid-19 Pandemic, Foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA)

Introduction
English language enjoys the status of global and international language. All over the world, it is used as a lingua franca that means people connect with each other by communicating in English (Warsi, 2004). In Pakistan, English got prominence since independence 1947. On the basis of official, economic and educational importance of English, Quaid-e-Azam declared it as an official language (Mehboob, 2009 as cited in Anbreen, 2015). Realizing the globalized importance of English, it is used as a medium of instruction, communication and examination at various institutions of higher education in Pakistan (Fareed, Khan and Akhtar, 2021) but still English is learned as a Foreign Language (EFL) by majority of the young and adult learners (Altarf and Soomro, 2014). It is very difficult for learners to learn a foreign language as various factors halted the learning process. It has always been a challenge for Pakistani learners to learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Awan et al., 2010) therefore Pakistani government placed much significance on English language teaching (Hussain et al., 2021). One of the major factors that impede second/foreign language learning process is language anxiety (Ali, Shakeel and Shakir, 2021). Language anxiety can be defined as the tension, apprehension faced by the learners in learning second/foreign language including speaking, listening and learning (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994).

To get expertise in English language, it is important for Pakistani EFL learners to learn four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing skills (Aronoff & Ree Miller, 2007 as cited in Ali, Shakeel & Shakir, 2021). Educational sectors across the country tried their best to facilitate Pakistani EFL learners in learning English language proficiently but failed to provide equal significance to every skill.

Out of these all skills, speaking skill is a difficult task for Pakistani EFL learners to master. It is commonly observed that EFL learners become mastered in writing, reading and listening skills but at the part of speaking skill they show incompetence. Similar is the case with Pakistani EFL learners that they masterly learn the writing skills of English but lack expertise in speaking skills. In the context of Pakistan, firstly, majority of the institutions laid emphasis on writing skills and have closed their eyes on the issue of making EFL learners proficient in speaking skills. Secondly, teachers are deprived of standard assessment scales for spoken English (Hussain, Fraeed and Akhtar, 2020) and thus EFL learners are graded on the basis of written scripts for twelve years (Hussain et al., 2021). Due to this reason, whenever they are asked to speak English in classroom, they show reluctance. Their inability of speaking English in their Language classrooms provokes anxiety in them (Bhatti, 2016). The speaking anxiety, nervousness and communication apprehension experienced by EFL learners regarding English language is known as Foreign language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) or Xenoglossophobia.

Simply, Xenoglossophobia is a fear or anxiety aroused in learning and usage of foreign languages. The learners of foreign language mostly feel anxious, nervousness in the speaking of language. It is frequently observed that EFL learners experience tension, fear or phobia when they are expected to communicate face-to-face with others in foreign language also known as “stage fright”.

http://www.webology.org
is the case with Pakistani EFL learners. Mostly they suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) or Xenoglossophobia in classrooms regarding English language.

Recently, the beginning of 2020 brought drastic changes in every field of life (Tria, 2020), especially in educational field, due to the outburst of Covid-19 pandemic across the world. Due to this alarming situation, the governments of various countries decided to discontinue the physical education in order to prevent the spread of Covid-19 on a larger scale (Asgher and Hanif, 2021). Globally the educational system transitioned from physical education to virtual education (distant education, online learning, and digital learning) for the continuation of educational system. Virtual education refers to a mode of education takes place through the use of computer-mediated communication. This new mode of learning process provides an opportunity to learners to continue their studies but it also has some drawbacks faced by learners and teachers when implemented in the situation of Covid-19 especially in developing countries and one of the obstacles found is FLSA (Pahargyan, 2021)

Various studies are conducted to investigate the factors responsible for arousal of foreign language anxiety. Hussain et al. (2021) examined the causes of English speaking anxiety among Pakistani engineering university students of Karachi and the strategies used by them to overcome it. Valizadeh (2021) compared learners’ foreign language anxiety in Turkish virtual learning during Covid-19 and traditional classroom. Pahargyan (2021) conducted a research study for the investigation of anxiety faced by learners in spoken English in online learning system at the time of Covid-19. The objectives of this study is to find out whether Pakistani undergraduate EFL learner face Xenoglossophobia, or FLSA, in virtual education at the time Covid-19 pandemic and also investigates the impact of virtual education in the process of overcoming FLSA.

Literature review

Paradigm Shift during Covid-19: Traditional to Virtual Education

The years 2020-2021 are predominated by the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic which has tremendously changed the way of living. Every walk of life has been affected by Covid-19 all over the world (Tria, 2020). Especially, the field of Education has observed a dramatic change. Covid-19 became a hindrance for the educational sectors to function normally (Maican & Cocoradă, 2021) and compelled the countries of world to shut their physical education system and shift to new mode of education that is “virtual education”. This paradigm was the need of time for the continuation of studies. For this abrupt shift of educational mode to Virtual language learning, learners experienced numerous mixed feelings. Language learners suffered from various types of anxiety in virtual classrooms, one of them is foreign language anxiety Or Xenoglossophobia.

Xenoglossophobia

The word “Xenoglossophobia”, also known as Foreign Language Anxiety, is derived from three words: in Greek, “Xeno” refers to “Foreign, “glosso” refers to “language” and “phobia” refers to
“fear” (Böttger and Költzsch, 2020; Sonali, 2020; Cortez, 2020). So, Xenoglossophobia can be described as the anxiety of foreign language people suffered from. It is considered as situation-specific anxiety because it occurs specifically in formal foreign language learning situations (Djafri and Wimbarti, 2018; Cortez, 2020). Mostly learners suffer from Xenoglossophobia when they are expected of speaking English in foreign language classrooms (Böttger and Költzsch, 2020). Similar is the case with Pakistani EFL learners. They lack expertise in speaking skill of English language. That’s why whenever they are requested to speak, they feel reluctant. Thus, Böttger and Költzsch (2020) defined Xenoglossophobia as the fear of speaking foreign languages. Horwitz (1986) divided foreign language anxiety regarding English language into three components: communication apprehension, test anxiety and Fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to anxiety the learners faced when they interact with other in English. Test anxiety refers to the anxiety related to the performance in exams (Liu and Yuan, 2021) while fear of negative evaluation means an anxiety the learners faced when they are judged negatively by others while speaking English.

Various studies have been conducted for the investigation of Xenoglossophobia occurred in EFL learners. Malik et al. (2020) analyzed Pakistani and Chinese postgraduates’ amount of anxiety faced by them in Foreign Language Learning. The study resulted that a rate of anxiety faced by Chinese postgraduates in learning foreign language is higher than Pakistani ones.

Hussain, Fareed and Akhtar (2020) studied Pakistani learners’ English language speaking anxiety and found that either Pakistani EFL learners faced same factors of anxiety as found in Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The results of the study showed that level of speaking anxiety is lower in Pakistani EFL learners and FLCAS is proved unfruitful in analysis of speaking anxiety.

Malik et al. (2020) investigated Xenoglossophobia (Foreign Language Anxiety) regarding English language faced by Chinese learners learning at postgraduate level. The results showed that Chinese postgraduates learning English as a major subject face anxiety of moderate level.

Koshy (2020) examined Xenoglossophobia among the Indian first year nursing students’ foreign language learning and the relationship of anxiety with other variables. The study findings revealed that level of anxiety faced by Indian learners lies between moderate (45%) to severe (52%) in learning foreign language.

Pahargyan (2021) conducted a research study for the investigation of anxiety faced by learners in spoken English in online learning system at the time of Covid-19 and how these learners managed this anxiety by employing qualitative research using case study descriptive design. The findings of the study conveyed that students felt English speaking anxiety in virtual classroom at the time of Covid-19 Pandemic.
Hussain et al. (2021) examined the causes of English speaking anxiety among Pakistani learners and the strategies used by them to overcome it. The findings of the study revealed that students faced English speaking anxiety because of various factors like vocabulary, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes and many more.

Valizadeh (2021) compared learners’ foreign language anxiety in Turkish virtual learning during Covid-19 and traditional classroom by using mixed methods. Findings of the study revealed that traditional classroom learners felt comparatively less stressed than learners of virtual classroom.

Sumarsono, Haryad and Bagis (2021) investigated the extent to which blended learning influenced the anxiety of Indonesian EFL learners during Covid-19 pandemic and explored the factors responsible for creating learners’ speaking anxiety in virtual class. The results of the study showed that majority of Indonesian EFL learners faced anxiety in their communication in the presence of various factors like lack of confidence, vocabulary, practice and fear of committing mistakes.

Ali, Shakeel and Shakir (2021) investigated the effects of anxiety on Pakistani Learners learning English as a Second language and the causes behind it. The results of the study showed that the test anxiety affected Pakistani ESL learners’ language learning process.

The present study focuses on the investigation of FLSA faced by Pakistani undergraduate EFL learners in online classes during Covid-19 pandemic and to what extent virtual education is proved helpful for learners to overcome FLSA.

**Research Questions:**

1. Does virtual education play a significant role for Pakistani undergraduate EFL learners to completely overcome Xenoglossophobia (FLSA) during Covid-19 pandemic?
2. If the answer is no, then what types of anxiety Pakistani undergraduate EFL learners face while speaking English in virtual classrooms?

**Methodology**

In the present study, mixed method approach was employed for the collection and analysis of data. According to Dornyei (2005), mixed method approach is an approach which refers to collect and analyze both qualitative as well as quantitative data in a single study and the integration of both the approaches at one or more stages of a research process. The instruments used to collect data using this approach were “Online Survey Questionnaire” and “Semi-structured face-to-face and telephone interviews”.

“Online Survey Questionnaire” refers to the collection of quantitative data with the help of internet. The online questionnaire was designed on Google docs and distributed among the learners by sharing link with them through social applications like Whatsapp and Gmail in order to collect data. It was comprised of two sections: the first section involved demographic information while the second one involved 20 close-ended question items using Five-Point Likert Scale ranging from
“Strongly Disagree (SDA), Disagree (DA), Neutral (N), and Agree (A) to Strongly Agree (SA)”. The data was collected from 230 Undergraduate EFL learners. The collected data then analyzed using statistical software named SPSS Version 22.0.

Interviews were also conducted to collect the data. For the present study, 11 semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with Pakistani EFL learners while 07 semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with the teachers. EFL learners’ interviewees were selected randomly from those participants who have also filled-up questionnaire. On the other hand, teachers’ interviewees were selected using convenience sampling. The data was recorded, transcribed and afterwards analyzed carefully.

Data Analysis

Analysis of Questionnaire

The statistical analysis showed that Pakistani EFL learners suffered from Xenoglossophobia during covid-19. Out of 20, Question items 6, 9, 10, 12, 13 and 18 were highly supported by EFL learners which showed that they suffer from English speaking anxiety in virtual classrooms too.

Table 1. Online classes don’t help me to overcome my anxiety of speaking English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>93.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Majority of learners agreed with this statement which shows that EFL learners don’t feel any significant improvement in their English speaking anxiety. Though, students don’t get panic in their online classes as they are teacher-friendly as they don’t have to face the audience like physical classrooms but still they have the fear of being judged on the basis of their deficiency in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation skills.
Majority of the EFL learners agreed to this statement. The reason is that they have a fear of getting negative comments from other classmates. They think that other learners will make a fun of them, tease them and crack jokes on them in future regarding pronunciation, broken English, vocabulary, grammar, etc., if they speak English in online classes.

Table 2. The fear of being teased by others in the future prevents me to speak English in online classes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>90.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table illustrates that EFL learners suffer from anxiety of being scolded by teachers when they fail to produce accurate speech. The scolding/ negative comment from teachers’ side makes EFL learners demotivated, produced inferiority complex in them and thus inclined their English speaking anxiety in online classes.
Majority of the class favors this statement. Sometimes EFL learners have enough lexical items in their mind but at the given time they are unable to utter the appropriate word that goes with the topic of discussion and somehow feel anxious and become unable to deliver their message as effectively as they want. Sometimes, it also happens that EFL learners know the appropriate word that should be uttered but they don’t know how to use it appropriately in their speech.

Table 4. I feel anxious to speak English in online classes when I am not able to produce appropriate words related to topic of discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>92.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Majority of the learners are in the favor of this statement. Unlike physical classroom, virtual classroom is teacher-centered because of which EFL learners find very few chances to speak in English and it caused them in the increase of their anxiety level. This shows that practice of spoken English is inversely proportional to anxiety level of the EFL learners.

Table 5. Online classes decreased the chances for EFL learners to practice the speaking skills of English due to which anxiety level of learners is increased.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>93.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Majority of the learners suffer from communication apprehension when the teachers asked them to answer the given question. In online classes, EFL learners do not take lectures attentively due to which when spontaneously teachers call on them then they get anxious as they don’t know what has happened during online lecture.

**Analysis of Interviews conducted with EFL learners**

The interviews are also conducted with Pakistani undergraduate EFL learners in order to find out whether virtual education helps them to overcome Xenoglossophobia completely and if the answer is in negation then what types of anxiety they suffer from in online classes.

Pakistani EFL learners found virtual classroom helpful and beneficial for them but it hasn’t helped the learners to completely overcome their Xenoglossophobia (FLSA) regarding English language. Virtual classrooms lessen/reduce/minimize their English speaking anxiety but they didn’t entirely get rid of it. As one respondent responded,

“Yes! As compared to physical classes, online classes minimize the learners’ English Speaking Anxiety.”

According to Pakistani EFL learners, 60-65% of their English speaking anxiety level decreases in online classes as compared to physical classes. Because they feel more comfortable in online classes as they are at home and don’t face the audience. They are of the view, that they speak English fluently when they are all alone at room where they are attending online classes. As one respondent responded,

“Whenver we are taking online lectures, we are rather at home or in any room. You are alone at that time, so this matters a lot. Because whenever the student is alone, he or she can speak English fluently.”
To some extent, Pakistani EFL learners feel confident to speak English in online classes as compared to physical ones because they experiences that they weren’t be questioned by others and mostly classmates were not as much attentive as they are in physical one. As one respondent is of the viewpoint,

“It does. Of course! I feel like in my own self. During online classes, there isn’t any audience for you physically. So you are more confident in your answer. It feels like you are talking to your own self.”

Though, virtual classrooms provide friendly environment to Pakistani EFL learners, but still they suffered from Xenoglossophobia (FLSA). Mostly, EFL learners suffer from social anxiety. They feel socially inferior. They are of the point that other people are much competent in English than them that’s why they feel hampered to speak English in online classes. As one of the respondent replied,

“EFL learners have inferiority complex to some extent. In online classes, I myself felt anxiety when I speak English in front of others because I think my other classmates are much good in English and they would make joke of me.”

Not only that, they also suffer from anxiety of being evaluated negatively by others. The negative appraisal and negative feedback from others makes Pakistani EFL learners reluctant to speak English in online classes. As one respondent stated,

“Sometimes when we are speaking in online classes we have fear that may be our friends will make fun of their grammar mistakes, vocabulary mistakes and pronunciation mistakes because of that students truly feel that.”

In Pakistan, EFL learners suffer from fear of negative evaluation both during online and physical classes while speaking English because of their incompetency in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, etc. As one respondent replied,

“During online classes or physical classes both I feel the anxiety of loss of vocabulary and not the pronunciation or accent. It’s all about grammatical mistakes and vocabulary.”

Thus, virtual education though minimized the anxiety level of the students approximately 60-65% but still it is not proved helpful for Pakistani EFL learners to overcome Xenoglossophobia.

**Analysis of Teacher’s Interview:**

Teachers are also interviewed in this study with an aim to find out that either they observed Xenoglossophobia in Pakistani EFL learners during the pandemic situation. Another aim was to investigate whether virtual education proved helpful for learners to overcome their Xenoglossophobia.
Almost all EFL teachers observed the presence of Xenoglossophobia in EFL learners during virtual education too. They found out that EFL were not as responsive as they are in physical classes and mostly remain passive in online classes. Even the teachers compel them to speak in online classes but they never did that. As one respondent responded,

“… and most of the time students’ mikes were off and even if the teacher actually compels anyone among them to give answer, to speak up, they never tried to do so because they feel anxiety”.

Besides this, some of the teachers found that there were group of EFL learners who were more interactive in physical classes but they were not as communicative in online classes. As one respondent stated,

“… but at the same time, there were some students who used to interact, who used to participate more in classes but we see, rather I observed they are facing some kind of anxiety and they are not very much responsive.”

EFL teachers stated that mostly EFL learners were facing the fear of being negatively evaluated by others. There were very few EFL learners who were interactive and responsive in online classes and those learners greatly influenced by the negative feedback they received from their peers. As one respondent replied,

“Moreover, if anyone among them usually give the answer in English, every other people, who were on that class, specifically Zoom class, they usually make fun of that person.”

Not only that, EFL learners also suffered from social anxiety. During virtual education, various EFL teachers observed and analyzed that EFL learners restrained to speak English because they have the fear of being inferior to others in a sense that others are much competent in spoken English than them. Due to this fear they are not able to put forward their point of view clearly and confidently. As one respondent replied,

“According to my opinion, basically students feel social phobia or social anxiety disorder. Basically, in this order or anxiety, students feel fear so to represent themselves in front of public…… Sometimes they feel embarrassment or humiliation when they perform some task because of this social phobia.”

Another reason of social anxiety in EFL learners is the lack of confidence. As EFL teachers observed that learners feel shy not only in physical classes but also in online classes because of the lack expertise in spoken English. As one respondent responded,

“Language learning, or specifically speaking skills, is similar to driving a car. No matter how much you know, you see, about driving and about different things like clutching, breaks, steering, etc., you know the traffic signals but you cannot call driver until you sit on the driving seat. So speaking is similar. They may know grammar, they may know vocabulary but they don’t have confidence
to speak. They cannot become proficient speakers, if they don’t have enough practice that’s what I experience in my class.”

Due to these, EFL teachers felt that virtual classroom doesn’t proved a significant mode for EFL learners to overcome their English speaking anxiety. Rather, majority of EFL teachers are of the viewpoint that virtual education inclined the anxiety level of spoken English in EFL learners as compared to physical classes because of the lack of digital handling, computer literacy and communication among the learners and between teachers and learners. As one respondent replied,

“For speaking aspect, virtual education is a problem.”

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that virtual education didn’t proved helpful for Pakistani undergraduate EFL learners to completely overcome Xenoglossophobia (See Table 1 mentioned above). But to some extent, or on some grounds, virtual education was proved beneficial for them to minimize their English speaking anxiety. As one of the respondent responded,

“I think yes. Because you know…..they feel safe that they are not in front of the class. So, they feel, you know, bit safe that nobody is seeing them when they are talking but for me, if you asked me as a teacher, I don’t feel comfortable when I am teaching in virtual classrooms.”

Another respondent replied,

“Yes! Online classes reduces the anxiety level of the students by giving them you know a friendly environment”.

Contrarily, Valizadeh (2021) found that virtual classrooms made EFL learners more anxious than physical classes. On the part of EFL teachers, some of them didn’t find virtual classrooms as fruitful as EFL learners. Rather they thought that English speaking anxiety of EFL learners was inclined and increased. Pahargyan(2021) also analyzed the same results. As one of the respondent stated,

“Yes, EFL learners feel great anxiety during their online lectures because the mode was new for them. They were really unaware of the handling the technology. So, as a whole, everything is jumbled up together and created a huge gap among the students. They feel uncomfortable while presenting themselves in online mode and lectures.”

Thus, the findings of the study revealed that EFL learners still undergo Xenoglossophobia or Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) regarding English language (Hussain et al., 2021) in Virtual Education during Covid-19. Malik et al., (2020) found that EFL learners suffered from moderate level of English speaking anxiety. Unlike to his studies, Pakistani EFL learners suffer from lower level of English speaking anxiety in virtual classrooms.
Various types of foreign language speaking anxiety or English language speaking anxiety have been analyzed in different studies. Hussain et al., (2021) investigated that extreme level of English language speaking anxiety is caused by negative evaluation by others. Similar results were analyzed in the present study. The findings of the study revealed that majority of Pakistani EFL learners suffered from anxiety or fear of being negatively evaluated by others. Not only that, Pakistani EFL learners also suffered from Gelotophobia and Psychological anxiety too.

Types of EFL learners’ Foreign language speaking Anxiety (FLSA)

In the present study Pakistani EFL learners suffered from various types of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) related to English in virtual education. These types of anxiety are as follows:

Fear of Negative Evaluation

Majority of Pakistani EFL learners suffered from the fear of being judged by their peers and teachers negatively during virtual classrooms (Also see Table 2 mentioned above) because of lack of vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical rules, accuracy and fluency. Actually, every individual, either a learner or a professional person, thinks about others whenever they speak. Thinking about others every time makes them much fearful and anxious. Thus, EFL learners have the fear that what other people think of them if they would not speak English accurately and fluently in online classes. Due to this fear they become reluctant to speak English and get demotivated and their confidence level and morale decreases. As one of the respondent responded:

“We people, or even students, we do always think of others first. It is basically just a part of brainin, so we usually have to think about other people. So we just think that if I failed to pronounce this specific sentence or delivered this paragraph accurately among the audience then what will be the audience saying and rather they will be teasing us or calling us with different names or saying that he/she does not know the English correctly or not know the pronunciation correctly so it matters a lot.”

2. Gelotophobia (fear of being laughed at) or Catagelophobia (fear of being ridiculed)

In the context of Pakistan, majority of EFL learners suffered from the fear of being laughed at and being mocked by other classmates while speaking English in online classes (Also see Table 3). The reason is that, till intermediate, EFL learners learn English from the examination point of view and mostly the focus is on writing skills. So with the entrance in University, they are expected to speak English fluently. When they try to speak, other starts make fun of them. For this reason, EFL learners feel hampered to speak English and mostly EFL learners remain passive, silent and irresponsible in online lectures. As one of the respondent responded,
“Sometimes when we are speaking English in online classes, we have fear that may be our friends will make fun of their grammar mistakes; vocabulary mistakes and pronunciation mistakes because of that student truly feel that.”

3. Fear of Selection of appropriate words

Some EFL learners suffer from the fear of selecting appropriate words related to topic of discussion. If you don’t use appropriate words in your speech then you might become a joke for others (Also see Table 4). As one of the respondent responded,

“I felt anxiety about my selection of words while asking questions.”

4. Psychological anxiety

Some EFL learners also suffer from psychological anxiety during online classes. They are willing to communicate in English but the correct words don’t come in their minds which provoke anxiety in them. As one respondent responded,

“The certain students, for instant, they want to say in but the words don’t come into their mind, so they feel hampered. Second, they don’t have a good grip on English.”

Some EFL learners also suffered from inferiority complex as they think that others are better in English as compared to them. Due to this reason too, EFL learners avoid to speak English in online classes. As one respondent stated,

“They feel nervous. I was so like some people have the fear of being inferior if they speak in broken English or they fear there might be laughter or some might make jokes of them.”

Another respondent responded,

“When they are in virtual class they want to speak in English but they can’t, because they feel that others make good in English than them.”

These are some of the types of anxiety which Pakistani EFL learners mostly suffer from during virtual classroom while speaking English.

Conclusion

The outbreak of Covid-19 brought a paradigm shift in teaching and learning process. Traditional mode of education shifted to advanced mode known as “Virtual education”. the present study aimed to find out whether virtual education were beneficial for EFL learners to overcome their anxiety of speaking English. It was concluded that virtual education wasn’t proved beneficial for Pakistani Undergraduate EFL learners to completely overcome Xenoglossophobia or FLSA. Though, virtual education has provided comfortable, friendly environment and confidence to EFL learners as they didn’t encountered the audience but still they suffered from English speaking
anxiety because the whole focus of online classes were on speaking and voice. They suffered from lower level of anxiety as 60-65% of FLSA has been lessened. The statistical showed that mostly EFL learners suffered from fear of being judged and being mocked by the other classmates. There are various reasons behind it. Thus, EFL teachers should focus on the speaking skills of learners and should design some strategies by which they can overcome their English speaking anxiety or Xenoglossophobia.

References


http://www.webology.org


