

# “Examining Language Anxiety in Secondary Students: A comparative Study”

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## ABSTRACT

*This research paper explores the phenomenon of English Language Usage Anxiety (ELUA) among senior secondary students in Almora City, Uttarakhand. Despite the increasing importance of English language proficiency in the globalized world, a large number of students face challenges in developing fluency and confidence in English. The study aims to investigate the level of ELUA among senior secondary students, explore potential gender differences in ELUA, compare ELUA levels between English and Hindi medium students, examine the influence of family backgrounds, and analyze the relationship between ELUA and gender. The study adopts a descriptive survey method in which data was collected from 200 senior secondary students from English and Hindi medium schools. A self-designed tool was used to measure the variables under study. The findings reveal that girls and Hindi medium students tend to have higher levels of anxiety compared to boys and English medium students, respectively. However, no significant differences were observed based on family type or the educational status of family members. The results highlight the need to address anxiety among students, particularly girls and those in Hindi medium schools and develop targeted interventions to alleviate language-related anxiety.*

**Keywords:** English language usage anxiety, senior secondary students, gender differences.

## Introduction

Language serves as a fundamental aspect of human communication, enabling us to express ourselves, share ideas and emotions, and connect with others. As renowned linguist Noam Chomsky once stated, “Language is the most important thing we have as human beings.” While communication skills transcend any specific language, the English language has gained significant prominence in the Indian context, particularly in recent times. English has become an integral part of Indian life, playing a crucial role in communication, education, vocations, and business careers. However, it is important to recognize that India remains a linguistically diverse nation, setting its linguistic scenario apart from the rest of the world (Rajesh & Mukund,

2016).

Although Hindi and English are both used prominently as official languages in the Indian Constitution and English is often considered a unifying force, students in India often face challenges in developing fluency and confidence in the English language. The early acquisition of mother tongue and the subsequent introduction of English during schooling can lead to difficulties in speaking and writing English fluently. Many students experience anxiety while using the English language, resulting in a lack of confidence, particularly in oral communication. The impact of this anxiety has been identified and measured by various researchers.

English language proficiency has become

increasingly important in today's globalized world, with many individuals seeking to improve their English language skills for academic, professional, and personal reasons. However, the correct usage of the English language is essential when we talk about English language communication skills. With globalization and technological development, parents and teachers pressure students to learn and use it effectively, leading to students' anxiety.

Researchers have identified anxiety as a significant obstacle faced by students learning and using the English language in India. Despite the assumption that English poses no challenges for Indian learners, language anxiety remains prevalent. Language learning anxiety has been observed to significantly impact learners' performance. Many students undergo communication skills courses throughout their schooling, yet they struggle to effectively use the English language. In the classroom, students employ language to present ideas, convey understanding, and utilize vocabulary, concepts, and grammatical forms. Among the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—listening and speaking skills are considered foundational while reading and writing skills often receive less attention. It is commonly believed that by enhancing listening and writing skills, children gain valuable language skills necessary for success in using the English language. However, anxiety related to reading and writing is more challenging to detect compared to speaking anxiety (Saito et al., 1999).

Despite the recognition of language anxiety's detrimental effects on language learning, limited research has been conducted on English Language Usage Anxiety (ELUA) among secondary students in India, particularly in the context of Almora City located in Uttarakhand

Himalaya. Understanding the unique characteristics and factors influencing ELUA among senior secondary students can provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers in developing targeted interventions and support systems to address this issue effectively.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the level of English Language Usage Anxiety among senior secondary students in English and Hindi medium schools in Almora city. It also aims to explore potential gender differences in ELUA, differences between English and Hindi medium students, the influence of family backgrounds, and the relationship between ELUA and gender. By focusing on Almora City, the study delimits its scope to a specific geographic area while examining the linguistic challenges faced by students in a multilingual context.

This research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on English Language Usage Anxiety in India, provide practical insights for educators and policymakers, and aid in the development of strategies to alleviate language anxiety among students. By addressing this important aspect of language learning, we can foster a supportive environment that enables students to acquire proficiency in the English language effectively.

### **Review of related literature**

The research conducted by Horwitz et al. (1986), Cheng et al. (1999), Argaman and Abu-Rabia (2002), Rajesh and Mukund (2016), Chio et al. (2020), provides valuable insights into the phenomenon of English language usage anxiety among learners. The studies examined various variables and their effects on language learners, shedding light on the complex interplay between linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural factors.

The findings, as reported by Kattak et al. (2011), Lindo (2014), and Choi et al. (2019), indicate that language anxiety is influenced by factors such as contrastive analysis difficulty, classroom environment, self-confidence, gender, and socio-economic and cultural background. Additionally, the research conducted by Hakim (2019) reveals that student who perceives English as a prestigious language may experience higher levels of language anxiety. Piniel (2006), Mukminin et al. (2015) and Guo et al. (2018) found that learners with a fear of making mistakes, negative evaluation, low self-esteem and fear of negative response often exhibit higher levels of anxiety, which can hinder their language performance, particularly in areas such as writing and reading comprehension. Conversely, Scovel (1978) argues that language anxiety was helpful or facilitating in some ways, such as keeping students alert.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The major objective of the study was to assess the level of ELUA among senior secondary school students based on the following demographic variable:

- Gender
- Medium of instruction in school
- Family type
- Educational status of family

By addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide insights into the prevalence and intensity of ELUA among senior secondary school students. Furthermore, it seeks to explore potential variations in ELUA based on gender, medium of instruction of schools, type of family and educational status.

### **Method**

The research design employs a descriptive survey method using a questionnaire for the collection of data. The questionnaire was administered to more than 200 senior secondary students of different schools.

### **Participants**

Two English medium private schools along with, two government and two semi-government Hindi medium schools constitute the sample of the study by using a Simple random sampling technique. A total of 200 students comprising 100 boys (50 of English medium + 50 of Hindi medium) and 100 girls (50 of English medium + 50 of Hindi medium) of class XI formed the final sample for the study.

### **Tool Used**

The researcher developed a 3-point Likert scale, for measuring the English Language Usage Anxiety consisting of 28 items (3 items were negative and 25 items were positive). To measure the face validity, the tool was referred to the subject experts in Education and Language. The test items were modified according to the suggestions provided by the experts.

Item validity was calculated by the item test correlation method using Pearson's  $r$  by taking 27% highest score and 27% lowest scores and finally calculating the 't' value for the items of the ELUA scale. The insignificant items were dropped in the final form. Initially, there were 40 items out of which 12 items were dropped as they were not found to be valid based on item analysis. The final and the revised draft of the ELUAS consisted of 28 items. Dimension-wise distribution of the items in the final form of the *English language usage anxiety scale* is shown as follows-

**Table 1.1:** Distribution of items

Anxiety factor	Number of items in the scale	Number of items
Anxiety in performance	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24	19
Self-perception	5, 7, 10, 16, 20, 25, 26, 27, 28	9

The test-retest method was adopted to find out the reliability coefficient of the *English Language Usage Anxiety Scale (ELUAS)*. The test-retest reliability was calculated by Pearson Correlation Coefficient, at the time gap of three months on a sample of 100 students. Scores obtained by these students on the two occasions were recorded and product-

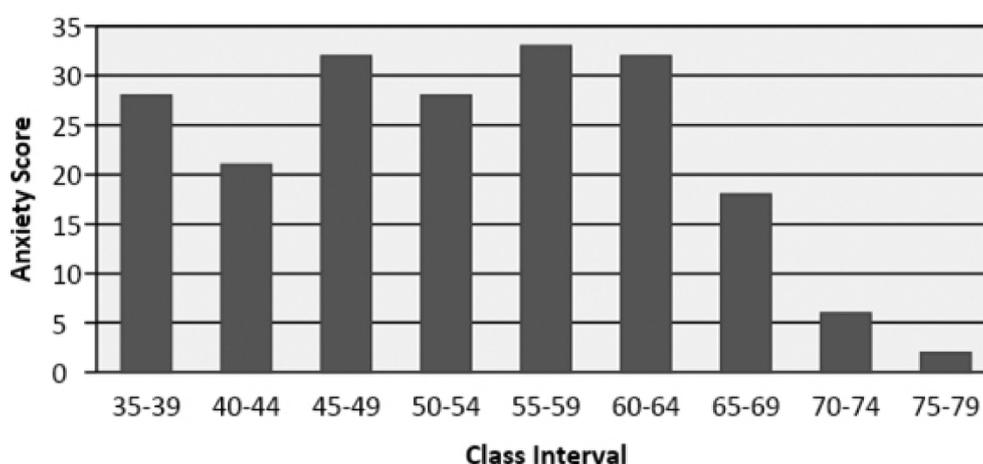
moment correlation between the two sets of scores was found to be 0.81.

### Results and discussion

The major purpose of the study was to examine the level of ELUA among senior secondary school students.

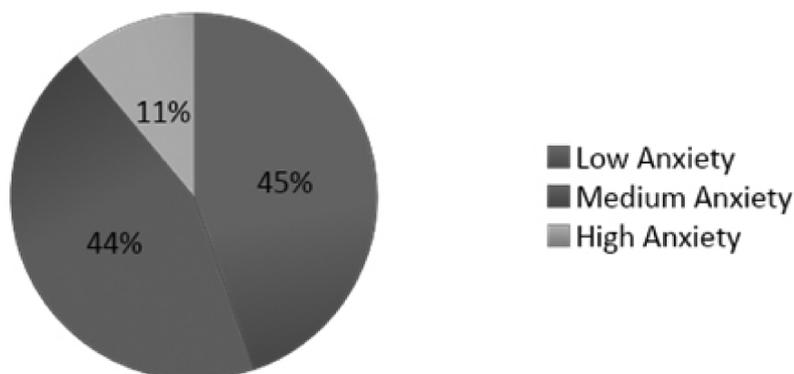
**Table 1.2:** Levels of Anxiety according to Gender

Levels	Male Students		Female Students		Total (N)	Total (%)
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)		
Low Anxiety	50	50%	39	39%	89	44.5%
Average Anxiety	43	43%	45	45%	88	44%
High Anxiety	7	7%	16	16%	22	11%



**Fig. 1.1:** Graph showing scores of English Anxiety

## Total percentage wise distribution



**Figure 1.2:** Pie chart showing the percentage of the total sample according to their anxiety levels

### Based on Gender

The data indicates that among the 200 participants, 100 were boys and 100 were girls. The mean anxiety score for boys was 51.37 with a standard deviation of 9.97, while for girls; the mean score was 54.35 with a standard deviation of 10.39. This mean difference suggests that, on average, girls tend to have slightly higher anxiety levels compared to boys. The significance testing using a t-test ( $t\text{-value} = 2.14, p < 0.05$ ) confirms that this difference is statistically significant. Therefore, a significant difference exists between the anxiety levels of boys and girls.

### Based on Medium of Instruction

The data further categorized students based on the medium of instruction, specifically English and Hindi. For Hindi medium students, the mean anxiety score was 56.52 with a standard deviation of 10.02, while for English medium students; the mean score was 49.86 with a standard deviation of 9.42. This difference in means suggests that students in Hindi medium schools tend to have higher anxiety levels compared to those in English medium schools. The significance testing using a t-test ( $t\text{-value} = 4.34, p < 0.05$ ) confirms that

this difference is statistically significant. Thus, a significant difference exists between the anxiety levels of English and Hindi medium students.

### Based on Gender and Medium of Instruction

To explore the interaction between gender and the medium of instruction, the data was further analyzed. Among Hindi medium students, the mean anxiety score for boys was 53.62 with a standard deviation of 9.96, while for girls; the mean score was 60 with a standard deviation of 9.88. Among English medium students, the mean anxiety score for boys was 49.18 with a standard deviation of 9.48, while for girls; the mean score was 50.70 with a standard deviation of 9.11. The significance testing for both Hindi medium ( $t\text{-value} = 2.31, p < 0.05$ ) and English medium ( $t\text{-value} = 0.82, p > 0.05$ ) reveals that there is a significant difference in anxiety levels between boys and girls in Hindi medium schools, but not in English medium schools.

### Based on Family Type

The data examined the anxiety levels of students based on their family type, distinguishing between nuclear and joint families. Among the participants, 139 students belonged to nuclear

families, while 61 students belonged to joint families. The mean anxiety score for students in nuclear families was 52.57 with a standard deviation of 10.25, whereas for students in joint families, the mean score was 54.69 with a standard deviation of 10.05. The significance testing using a t-test ( $t\text{-value} = 1.37, p > 0.05$ ) indicates that there is no significant difference in anxiety levels between students from nuclear and joint families.

### **Based on Educational Status of Family Members**

The data also explored the impact of the educational status of family members on students' anxiety levels. It compared students with graduate family members to those with non-graduate family members. Among the participants, 142 students had graduate family members, while 58 students had non-graduate family members. The mean anxiety score for students with graduate family members was 52.42 with a standard deviation of 11.24, whereas for students with non-graduate family members, the mean score was 55.24 with a standard deviation of 11.52. The significance testing using a t-test ( $t\text{-value} = 1.86, p > 0.05$ ) reveals that there is no significant difference in anxiety levels between students with graduate and non-graduate family members.

### **Conclusion**

This study sheds light on the levels of anxiety among senior secondary school students regarding English language usage. The findings indicate significant differences in anxiety scores based on gender and medium of instruction, with girls and Hindi medium students reporting higher anxiety levels. However, no significant differences were observed in family type or educational status of family members. The findings of the study are in line with the results

revealed by Arnaiz & Guillén (2012), and Fatima et.al. (2020) whereas at the same time, they contradict the findings of Thamnu (2017) and Chan et.al. (2024). The results emphasize the importance of addressing anxiety among students and providing targeted support to alleviate language-related anxiety. By understanding the factors associated with anxiety levels, educators and policymakers can implement interventions that promote a supportive learning environment and cater to the specific needs of students, particularly girls and those in Hindi medium schools. Further research is needed to explore additional sources of anxiety among students and to investigate the effectiveness of specific interventions in reducing anxiety levels. By continuously striving to understand and address student anxiety, educational institutions can create inclusive and supportive environments that facilitate optimal learning experiences for all students.

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