

English Language Anxiety among Rural Learners: Reflections from an Internship Experience

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Abstract: English has become one of the essential languages for academic achievement, higher education and all the career opportunities in contemporary India. Therefore, many rural learners encounter considerable amount of anxiety while learning and using the language, which affects their involvement and overall language development. This article explores English language anxiety among rural learners in the area of Dadra Nagar Haveli & Daman Diu through observations and experiences gathered during an educational internship conducted in schools serving students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

The study adopts a qualitative and descriptive approach based on classroom observations, informal interactions with students and reflective field notes. The limited exposure to English beyond the classroom, translation-oriented teaching practices, dependence on mother tongue and concerns about peer judgment occurred as significant factors contributing to the language anxiety. These challenges often hinder student's confidence and willingness to converse in English.

The study highlights the importance of creating positive classroom environments and providing learners with meaningful opportunities to use English. It reinforces the need for learner-centered pedagogical practices that encourage participation and reduce fear of making mistakes. By addressing these factors, teachers can help rural learners develop enhanced confidence, improve their communicative competence, and enhance their overall English language proficiency.

Keywords: *English Language Anxiety, Rural Learners, Classroom Observation, Internship Experience, English Language Teaching.*

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Introduction

English has gained immense importance in the contemporary world as a language of communication, education, technology, and employment. In India, proficiency in English is often considered a key factor in achieving academic success and accessing higher education and professional opportunities. As a result, English language teaching has become an integral part of the school curriculum across the country.

Rural learners often face several obstacles in acquiring English language skills. Limited exposure to English outside the classroom, lack of access to language-rich environments, and dependence on regional languages can hinder the learning process. Consequently, many students experience fear, nervousness, hesitation and lack of confidence while speaking, reading or writing in English. These emotional responses are commonly referred to as English language anxiety.

English language anxiety has emerged as an important area of research in the field of language education because it directly affects the learner's ability to communicate effectively. Students who possess basic knowledge of English may still hesitate to use the language due to fear of making mistakes, being corrected or being judged by their peers. Such anxiety often creates barriers to active classroom participation and limits opportunities for language development.

The present study is based on observations and experiences gathered during an educational internship conducted in a rural school setting. During the internship, several students displayed reluctance to communicate in English despite understanding classroom instructions and concepts. Many learners preferred using their mother tongue, hesitated while answering questions, and demonstrated a lack of confidence in spoken English. These observations highlighted the need to understand the factors responsible for English language anxiety among rural learners and their impact on the teaching-learning process. However, the present study targets to explore the causes of English language anxiety among rural learners and examine its influence on their classroom participation and language development.

Literature Review

➤ Concept of English language Anxiety

English Language anxiety is a significant psychological factor that affects learners while acquiring or using a second language. According to Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), language anxiety is associated with feelings of fear, nervousness and apprehension experienced during language learning activities. Learners often avoid participation and demonstrate lower levels of confidence while using the target language.

➤ **Causes of English Language Anxiety**

Several researchers have identified factors contributing to language anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) highlighted communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety as major causes. Similarly, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) argued that anxiety reduces learner's willingness to communicate and participate in classroom activities. Recent studies by Ajiza et al. (2024) found that fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, peer evaluation, and classroom environment continue to be significant sources of anxiety among English language learners.

➤ **Effects of Language Anxiety on Learning**

Language anxiety can negatively affect both academic performance and language development. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) suggests that high levels of anxiety may obstruct language acquisition by limiting learner's ability to process linguistic input. Supporting this view, Zhang and Yang (2024) reported that students with higher levels of English language anxiety showed lower academic achievement and classroom participation.

➤ **English Language Learning in Rural Contexts:**

The challenges are often more pronounced in rural contexts. Latif et al. (2024) observed that limited exposure to English, inadequate learning resources, and linguistic barriers hinder English Language learning among rural learners frequently experience anxiety during speaking activities due to low confidence and fear of making mistakes.

➤ **Research Gap**

Although previous studies have explored language anxiety in various educational settings, limited research has examined English language anxiety among rural learners through direct classroom observations during educational internships. However, the present study seeks to explore this issue through observations and experiences gathered during an internship in a rural school setting.

Methodology

➤ **Research Design**

The present study shows a qualitative and descriptive research design. The study targets to explore English language anxiety among rural learners through observations and experiences collected during an educational internship. A qualitative approach was chosen as it facilitates an in-depth understanding of learner's attitudes, behaviors and challenges associated with English language learning.

➤ **Participants**

The participants of the study were students studying in a rural school where the internship was conducted. The learners came from diverse linguistic backgrounds and primarily used their mother tongue for everyday communication. Their classroom interactions and involvement during English language activities formed the basis of the study.

➤ **Data Collection**

Data were collected through classroom observations, informal interactions with students, and reflective field notes maintained during the internship period. Particular attention was given to learner's engagement in English language activities, their confidence levels, and their responses during classroom interactions.

➤ **Data Analysis**

The data collected were analyzed descriptively by identifying recurring patterns and themes. Themes such as fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, dependence on the mother tongue, limited exposure to English, and fear of peer evaluation emerged from the observations and were used for further discussion.

Findings and Discussion

➤ **Fear of Making Mistakes**

One of the most prominent factors contributing to English Language anxiety among rural learners was the fear of making mistakes. During the internship, many students appeared reluctant to answer questions in English even though they seemed to understand the topic being discussed. Instead of attempting a response, they remained silent or preferred to converse in their mother tongue. The fear of grammatical errors and incorrect pronunciation often discouraged students from engaging actively in classroom. Many learners appeared concerned about giving wrong answers in front of their classmates. These observations support the findings of Horwitz et al.(1986) and Ajiza et al.(2024) who identified fear of negative evaluation and fear of making mistakes as significant causes of language anxiety among learners.

➤ **Lack of Confidence in Speaking English**

Another significant factor observed during the internship was the lack of confidence among students while speaking English. Although many learners understood classroom instructions, basic knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, but often hesitated to express their thoughts in English. Learners frequently avoided volunteering answers and preferred remaining passive during discussions. Similar findings were reported by Sugandi et al. (2025), who found that low self-confidence is a major contributor to language anxiety among rural learners.

➤ **Dependence on Mother Tongue**

The dependence on the mother tongue was another common observation during the internship. Students frequently relied on their regional language while interacting with the classmates and teachers. Even when they understood English instructions, many learners mentally translated their responses before speaking, which often slowed down communication and increased hesitation. The extensive use of the mother tongue limited opportunities for learners to practice English in meaningful contexts. As a result, students lacked confidence in spontaneous communication. This observation supports the findings of Latif et al. (2024), who emphasized that linguistic barriers and limited exposure to English continue to affect language learning in rural areas.

➤ **Limited Exposure to English**

Limited exposure to English outside the classroom emerged as a major challenge for rural learners. English was primarily used during lessons, while most daily interactions took place in the student's native language. Consequently, learners had very few opportunities to practice English in real-life situations. This limited exposure affected fluency and confidence. Students often struggled to use English naturally because they were not accustomed to hearing or speaking the language regularly. Similar findings were reported by Sugandi et al. (2025), who identified limited exposure to English as a significant factor contributing to Language anxiety among rural students.

Recommendations

- 1. Create a Supportive Classroom Environment:** Teachers should encourage students to participate without fear of criticism or embarrassment. Positive reinforcement and constructive feedback can help build learner's confidence.
- 2. Develop Confidence Through Positive Feedback:** Regular encouragement and appreciation of student's efforts can motivate them to participate actively and improve their communication skills.
- 3. Gradually Reduce Dependence on the Mother Tongue:** While the mother tongue can be used as a supportive tool, learners should be encouraged to use English more frequently during classroom interactions and activities.
- 4. Promote Communicative Activities:** Group discussions, role-plays, storytelling and classroom conversations should be incorporated regularly to provide students with opportunities to use English in meaningful contexts.
- 5. Increase Exposure to English:** Students should be encouraged to engage with English through books, newspapers, videos, songs, and other learning materials both inside and outside of the classroom.
- 6. Encourage Participation Over Perfection:** Teachers should focus on communication rather than grammatical accuracy during initial learning stages. This can reduce learner's fear of making mistakes.

By implementing these strategies, teachers can help create a more inclusive and anxiety-free learning environment that motivates effective English language learning among the rural students.

Conclusion

English language anxiety remains a significant challenge for rural learners and can negatively affect their participation, confidence, and overall language development. The present study explored this issue through observations and experiences gathered during an educational internship in a rural school setting. The findings revealed that fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, dependence on the mother tongue, limited exposure to English, and fear of peer evaluation were among the major factors contributing to language anxiety.

The study further highlighted that language anxiety often discourages students from actively participating in classroom activities, even though they possessed basic knowledge of the language. As a result, learners may miss valuable opportunities to develop their communication skills and improve their English language proficiency. Thereafter, the observations even indicated that the learners responded positively to the supportive classroom environments and learner-centered teaching practices. Therefore it is important for the teachers to recognize the emotional challenges

associated with language learning and acquire strategies to promote confidence and involvement.

Promoting communication, providing constructive feedbacks and creating opportunities for meaningful language use can help reduce anxiety and foster a positive learning experience. By addressing these challenges, teachers can play crucial role in helping rural learners become more confident and effective users of the English language. The study contributes to the understanding of English language and anxiety among rural learners and emphasizes the importance of creating inclusive and supportive language-learning environments that facilitate both academic and personal growth.

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