

Fears of Language Learning: A Rapid Evidence Review and Secondary Analysis of Foreign Language Anxiety with a Focus on Pakistan

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Abstract

Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) is one of the most thoroughly researched affective variables in SLA literature; yet, the empirical evidence base is somewhat inconsistent, and its relevance for stakes-based and English-medium environments, such as Pakistan, is insufficiently understood. This rapid evidence review and secondary analysis summarize the international and Pakistani research on FLCA and related phenomena. Based on existing theoretical frameworks and several meta-analyses, this review demonstrates the existence of an established, substantial correlation (between $-.34$ and $-.39$) between language anxiety and achievement, with relevant moderators that relate to skill, developmental, and language-related aspects. In descriptive studies conducted in Pakistan, communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation were found to be the main contributors to language anxiety, especially in relation to oral performance, but inconsistently about gender and achievement. The mechanisms discussed are linked to three classroom- and policy-relevant constructs particular to Pakistan, namely corrective feedback, task design, and English-medium instruction. Further gaps in the research on measurement (construct validity and the "anxiety versus skills" discussion), research design (cross-sectional correlational studies prevail; little causal inference is offered), and interventions (lack of randomized experiments, very few interventions in Pakistan) are outlined. The conclusions suggest some evidence-informed suggestions regarding teaching, assessment, and language-in-education policy in Pakistan.

Keywords: foreign language classroom anxiety, English as a foreign language, Pakistan, medium of instruction, language assessment, second language acquisition

Introduction

The affective component of language learning has been understood to be significant for some time now. As early as 1978, in what can be regarded as a landmark synthesis, Scovel pointed out that there was a large inconsistency in the findings relating affect and achievement in the foreign language classroom and that anxiety could serve as both a facilitating and debilitating factor. Conceptually, the major advance in this field happened when Horwitz et al. (1986) suggested that the anxiety experienced by learners in the language classroom is not just a manifestation of the individual's general trait anxiety but something much more specific. Foreign language anxiety is defined as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128) and measured through the 33-item Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Today, four decades later, foreign language anxiety is possibly the most widely researched affective variable in SLA, with FLCAS being a gold standard of measurement.

In Pakistan, where English is the official language and the medium of instruction, the issue of FLCA takes on a special character. In Pakistan, English is not a peripheral subject in schools, but a mandatory one, and fluency in English is the key requirement for access to higher education, prestigious jobs, and the civil service examination system (Coleman, 2010; Rahman, 2002). Moreover, in Pakistan, for the overwhelming majority of speakers, English is a foreign language placed on top of the already existing multilingual repertoire that comprises, among other languages, the national language of Urdu and one or several regional languages like Pashto, Punjabi, Sindhi, or Balochi. The ambiguous policy regarding language of instruction, and especially its controversial status as EMI, means that learners are exposed to the language with low acquisition opportunities (Coleman & Capstick, 2012). Under these circumstances, the affective consequences of language learning cannot help but be serious.

Despite the increasing number of studies in Pakistan, the evidence has been scattered in various local and regional journals, is mostly descriptive, and has not been integrated and compared to the international meta-analytic literature. This review aims to fill in this

gap. It is designed as a rapid evidence review—an effective way to synthesize the evidence in a concise and transparent way—with a secondary analysis of the quantitative estimates available in the literature. Specifically, this paper will pursue five goals: (a) to review international and Pakistani literature on FLCA and related concepts; (b) to analyze the quantitative evidence, utilizing effect-size meta-analysis and descriptive data from Pakistan; (c) to link the processes associated with anxiety to classroom and policy factors, including teacher feedback, task design, and the language of instruction; (d) to point out gaps in measurement, research design, and interventions; (e) to translate the evidence into practical guidelines for teaching, assessment, and policy in Pakistan.

Method

Design

In this study, a rapid evidence review is used along with a secondary analysis of previous quantitative findings. Rapid evidence review maintains key components of systematic reviews, including research question, search strategy, and inclusion criteria; however, some components are simplified on purpose to produce an evidence-based conclusion in a limited time frame. It is the right method of reviewing FLCA literature since it is vast and there are credible meta-analyses available in this field, and the literature can be taken as a pooled evidence base rather than doing new pooling from scratch. Secondary analysis will involve reading and tabulation of findings of effect size and descriptive statistics found in the previous literature without using any new primary data.

Search and Selection

Identifying literature involved searching Google Scholar, ERIC, and databases of major publishers (Wiley, Taylor & Francis, Cambridge, SAGE, Springer) supplemented by manual search of reference lists from key review papers as well as targeted search of Pakistani and regional journals. The search strings involved a combination of keywords for the construct (foreign language anxiety, foreign language classroom anxiety, language learning anxiety, anxiety about speaking, reading, writing, or listening) along with keywords for the population and setting (English as a foreign or second language, EFL, ESL, Pakistan, particular provinces and universities). Relevant sources include peer-

reviewed empirical papers, meta-analyses, and theoretical/review articles relevant to the topic of FLCA or closely related constructs in an L2 or foreign language setting. Preference is given to meta-analyses in order to find the effect size of FLCA and Pakistani papers for descriptive purposes. Foundational theoretical literature has been included irrespective of date, while empirical/synthesizing literature has been sourced mainly from the period after development of the FLCAS.

Analysis

In light of existing meta-analyses on anxiety-achievement associations, no statistical synthesis was performed. Rather, the correlation coefficients and results of moderator analyses reported in the meta-analyses were extracted and tabulated (see Table 1). In relation to Pakistani results, which are mostly descriptive and methodologically diverse, thematic synthesis was performed with regard to anxiety components, skill-related trends, and demographic moderators like gender. Effect sizes are discussed in reference to the benchmarking criteria for the L2 field in general, where effect sizes of approximately .25 and .40 indicate medium and strong effects, respectively (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014).

Limitations of the Approach

Three limitations that emerge from such an approach and ought to qualify the results are: firstly, rapid reviews are not comprehensive; there might have been a few other important studies that were missed out, especially unpublished theses or unpublished Pakistani literature, and there is the very well-documented issue of “file drawer” problem, which means that effects published in the literature might actually be exaggerated a bit. Secondly, the Pakistani literature is characterized by high heterogeneity in terms of instrumentation, sampling, and reporting, making meta-analysis impossible and the estimation of the “Pakistani effect size” difficult, although this is recognized by the current review.

Conceptual Foundations of Foreign Language Anxiety

From General Anxiety to a Situation-Specific Construct

Some of the early research on the link between anxiety and language learning revealed rather inconsistent results, due in part to the different constructs measured under the same label. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) contributed to disambiguation in this area by defining three types of anxiety: trait anxiety (a general disposition to feel anxious), state anxiety (an emotion felt at a particular point in time), and situation-specific anxiety (a repetitive fear related to certain situations). One main achievement of the Horwitz et al. (1986) framework was to define foreign language anxiety as situation-specific anxiety, i.e., a stable but specific anxiety related to a specific set of circumstances: in this case, the need for using a language in which one has not yet achieved mastery. From this point of view, the foreign language class becomes a particularly stressful place for the learner, as he/she is expected to express himself/herself in a language he/she still cannot fully control; it creates an incongruity between a mature thought and an immature language.

Horwitz et al. (1986) also suggested that Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) emerges from three types of performance anxiety: communication apprehension (fear/discomfort about communicating with others), test anxiety (fear/discomfort about being academically evaluated and about failing the test), and fear of negative evaluation (fear of others' judgment of the learner and of his/her being negatively evaluated).

Anxiety and Cognition

A complementary line not only proved the connection between anxiety and lower performance but also helped explain how anxiety might have its negative effect. Expanding upon the differentiation of

input, processing, and output processes of learning, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) managed to prove through experiments that anxiety hampers cognition during each process. This results in the reduction of the number of cognitive resources just when an individual needs them the most because of having a complicated task to accomplish. In this way, it becomes clear why anxiety has a negative impact on performance even despite taking into account the level of ability and motivation of an individual, and why this phenomenon is especially evident with speaking.

The Instrument and Its Factor Structure

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) is an instrument that defines the construct using 33 Likert-type items and which has been translated into many languages. However, it has become evident that the internal structure of the scale is somewhat less stable than one would expect from such popularity. While Horwitz et al. (1986) considered the scale to be essentially unidimensional, various factor analytic studies have found differing numbers of dimensions in different samples, usually related to communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test (or general) anxiety, although not necessarily in a clear way (Aida, 1994; Toyama & Yamazaki, 2018). Attempting to address certain issues with the length and dimensionality of the instrument, Botes et al. (2022) developed a short form of the FLCAS. As can be seen further, certain doubts exist concerning the nature of the construct defined by the FLCAS.

Beyond Anxiety: Enjoyment, Willingness to Communicate, and the Positive Turn

During the last decade, the affective agenda expanded to incorporate other aspects apart from negative emotion. Inspired by positive psychology, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) proposed the idea that foreign language enjoyment is not simply the lack of anxiety but rather an independent construct which exists alongside the latter and is capable of coexisting with it; therefore, a learner can be both anxious and motivated at the same time. The findings of subsequent research showed that enjoyment and anxiety are two constructs which depend on distinct instructional and teacher-related variables (Dewaele et al., 2018) and can experience dynamic changes even during the course of one interaction (Boudreau et al., 2018). Additionally, anxiety is related to another construct – willingness to communicate, or the readiness to engage in L2 communication once given the chance, which is hindered by anxiety. Moreover, certain individual differences influence anxiety experiences of learners: Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) found that anxious students set higher standards for themselves, are afraid of making mistakes, and react to their oral performance more critically compared to non-anxious learners. This complex of factors is important in the present case because intervention aimed solely at reducing anxiety will fail to address other aspects of the affective domain.

Conceptual Uptake in Pakistan

The Pakistani studies on the issue of anxiety of English language learners in school, college, and university contexts have followed the entire Horwitz framework and FLCAS measures (Gopang et al., 2015; Waseem & Jibeen, 2013). This type of measurement brings rich descriptive information, but the issue of measurement is complicated by the inclusion of those unclarified problems that are related to the construct itself, and also raises the question about the suitability of the measure for the local cultural and linguistic context. The researchers from Pakistan argue that the modified FLCAS does not provide a complete picture of speaking anxiety and indicate that the items included in the scale, which were developed for the North American

university students learning European languages, are not easily translated into the local context.

Quantitative Evidence and Effect Sizes

Convergent Meta-Analytic Findings

Regarding the international quantitative literature, the pattern is rather consistent when the focus is on the primary relationship. There were three separate meta-analyses conducted by different authors with various inclusion criteria and measures, providing quite close estimates of the correlation between language anxiety and achievement/performance (Table 1). In the largest-scale meta-analysis of L2 anxiety and achievement, Teimouri et al. (2019) compiled 216 effect sizes across 105 samples ($N = 19,933$) in 23 countries, with the average value of the correlation being $r = -.36$. Concentrating on the relationship between anxiety and performance, Zhang (2019) used 55 samples with over 10,000 participants and got the overall correlation of $r = -.34$. Concerning the FLCAS and academic achievement, Botes et al. (2020) conducted the meta-analysis involving 99 effect sizes ($N = 14,128$) and obtained a significant negative correlation with general academic achievement of $r = -.39$, as well as with each of the four language skills.

Comparing these results with the field-specific benchmarks of Plonsky and Oswald (2014), where $r \approx .25$ means a medium effect and $r \approx .40$ a large effect in L2 research, one can state that the value of the correlation places the relationship between the variables on the upper boundary of the moderate effect, approaching the large effect category according to the field standards. From a practical point of view, the negative correlation between language anxiety and achievement is not a statistical curiosity but one of the strongest findings in SLA.

Table 1

Meta-Analytic Estimates of the Association Between Foreign Language Anxiety and Achievement or Performance

Meta-analysis	Scope (samples; participants)	Pooled r	Key moderators and notes
Teimouri et al. (2019)	105 samples; $N = 19,933$; 23 countries	-.36	State anxiety > trait anxiety; effect stronger at lower educational levels
Zhang (2019)	55 samples; $N > 10,000$	-.34	Listening anxiety strongest; stable across proficiency; moderated by language distance
Botes et al. (2020)	99 effect sizes; $N = 14,128$	-.39	FLCAS-based; general achievement; moderate and negative for all four skills

Note. r = pooled Pearson correlation between foreign language anxiety and achievement or performance; negative values indicate that higher anxiety is associated with lower achievement. Interpreted against effect-size benchmarks for second language research ($r \approx .25$ = medium, $r \approx .40$ = large; Plonsky & Oswald, 2014), the pooled effects are moderate to large.

What Moderates the Effect

Behind this seemingly consistent headline, however, meta-analyses agree on the systematic variability of the effect, with the practical significance lying in the moderation pattern. There are three main moderators. First, there is a matter of skill specificity: skill-specific anxiety seems to correlate the most with performance in the corresponding skill, with productivity-based skills being the most

affected ones. According to Zhang (2019), listening anxiety was correlated the most with listening performance, while reading anxiety and test anxiety were weaker predictors. Second, the type of anxiety is important: state anxiety has been found by Teimouri et al. (2019) to correlate better with achievement than trait anxiety due to the situational nature of the former. Third, the learner's developmental level is significant: the same synthesis indicates the highest strength of the effect in lower levels of education, suggesting that younger and less experienced students are not capable of managing their anxiety or its consequences, but Zhang (2019) shows that the effect remains constant at all proficiency levels, with one additional moderator emerging – the typological distance between the first and target languages. From the perspective of positive psychology, the effect presents an image of mirror reflection: the enjoyment of foreign language correlates with lower anxiety, higher willingness to communicate, and better results, as the affective experience is an integral process (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele et al., 2018).

The Descriptive Picture in Pakistan

Against the background of international literature, the studies carried out in Pakistan might be characterized as wide-ranging yet shallow: numerous studies using questionnaires to study the phenomenon and estimate its presence and levels, but rarely estimate the relationship of anxiety with achievement. There is, however, one consistent pattern in such studies. First, speaking anxiety and fear of evaluation in speaking have been frequently detected in Pakistan. Studies from different provinces and different types of institutions revealed that speaking anxiety was a phenomenon, and fear of the judgment of teachers and peers was a major source (Gopang et al., 2015; Waseem & Jibeen, 2013). The latter may probably be facilitated by cultures of Pakistani classrooms in which teachers exercise evaluative authority over participation in regular classroom activities.

Second, it seems possible to conclude that overall anxiety varies quite much depending on sample characteristics and the test instrument used. In some studies involving large samples from public-sector universities, speaking anxiety of most learners is estimated to be low-to-moderate; however, the same studies warn about the fact that the modified FLCAS is not a good indicator of speaking anxiety in the Pakistani context, while in other studies speaking anxiety is relatively high among university learners (Gopang et al., 2015). It is hard to give the results any substance in such a case due to variations in instruments, adaptations, and scoring systems.

Third, gender effects on language anxiety are not consistent in the case of Pakistan. Some studies do not reveal any significant differences in speaking anxiety between male and female students (Gopang et al., 2015; Waseem & Jibeen, 2013); however, some studies – usually those conducted at intermediary or school levels – do find them (Noreen et al., 2015). It is possible to suggest that gender does not play a role in language anxiety in Pakistan as a stable factor, and it is probably moderated by various factors. Instrumental versus integrative motivational orientation has also been studied: Waseem and Jibeen (2013) revealed the former being more prevalent among Pakistani learners, reflecting the fact that English functions as an instrument rather than a means of identification.

Most importantly, Pakistani studies rarely provide the figure emphasized by international syntheses – the correlation of anxiety with achievement. When achievement has been considered, it was self-reported or estimated using course grades. The result is that Pakistan contributes to the descriptive epidemiology of language anxiety more than to its science-producing effect sizes, which has important policy implications.

Anxiety in Classrooms and Policy

The significance of the empirical base is related to how the findings might affect environments in which anxiety arises and can be alleviated. The three mutually reinforcing mechanisms – correctional feedback, task design and instruction language – connect the findings with the reality of classrooms in Pakistan and the policy that creates this reality, with the examination system running through each of the mechanisms.

Teacher Feedback and Error Correction

One of the direct ways in which anxiety is influenced is the reaction of teachers to learner mistakes. The fear of negative evaluation in the case of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) becomes active with public correction of mistakes, and Young (1991), summarizing earlier research into the topic, claimed that public, harsh, and humiliating correction was one of the main reasons behind highly anxious classes, while positive and proper feedback helps to alleviate the problem. For Pakistan, where the evaluation capacity of teachers is significant and where class performance is part of assessment, the risk of feedback turning into a threat is increased. This does not mean, of course, that errors are not important, but the way, timing, and selectivity of correction matter.

Task Design

Similarly, anxiety arises from the kind of tasks set for the learner and the context in which those tasks take place. The conclusion that productive and immediate skills show the highest correlation with anxiety implies that unplanned oral performance in front of the entire class represents one of the most anxiety-inducing formats of task. Conversely, the attributes of tasks that reduce cognitive and social processing load such as planning and practice time, grouping in pairs and groups prior to performing in front of the entire class, topic familiarity and relevance, and criteria for success can protect performance from being impaired through freeing up working memory capacity normally utilized by anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

Language of Instruction

The major factor influencing the structure of education in Pakistan is the medium of instruction. The use of English-medium education is widespread and socially valued; yet, for the majority of students, it involves being taught and tested in a language that they come across mainly in the educational setting, whereas their native languages - Urdu and regional ones - are downplayed (Coleman, 2010; Rahman, 2002). If the language of instruction requires higher skills than those possessed by the learners, the normal requirements of learning the subject matter will be made more difficult by the extra challenges of comprehending and communicating in the medium. This creates favorable conditions for misunderstanding and constant fearfulness. These issues were described by Coleman and Capstick (2012), and they urged caution regarding the early and full-scale adoption of EMI. The problem of equity is evident since proficiency in English is highly correlated with economic prosperity and school type; therefore, the introduction of an EMI system without proper language provision can result in changing a problem into a means of discrimination (Coleman, 2010).

Assessment Culture and Washback

In each of the three areas, the test culture under which Pakistani English is learned retains its importance. There are board exams, university entrance and course exams, and also the exams for admission into civil service, all of which carry serious implications for the use of English. The test-anxiety aspect of FLCA reacts to these implications. If such tests value memory-based learning and one-time

performance, they may have an effect on classroom activities that creates the same conditions as the literature on anxiety considers harmful. Therefore, test reform and anxiety reduction are inseparable.

Gaps in Measurement, Design, and Intervention

Measurement

First and foremost, the most important distinction lies at a conceptual-psychometric level in relation to what, precisely, FLCAS measures. Indeed, Sparks and Ganschow (2007), in a direct and harsh criticism, noted that, to some degree, results of FLCAS could measure one's actual language abilities and individual learning of a native language rather than foreign language anxiety as such, which implies that weaker students feel "high anxiety" due to the difficulty of learning. Previously, MacIntyre (1995) had justified FLCAS's status as an actual cause rather than the effect of a learner's difficulties, but the issue was never resolved; indeed, Horwitz (2010) admitted the possibility of the claim that the differences in skills in the initial stages of foreign language acquisition may lead to anxiety. From the point of methodology in the context of the present research, it should be emphasized that FLCAS results cannot be interpreted as mere anxiety results and the study design needs to take into account the differentiation of anxiety from proficiency. Moreover, the factor structure of the instrument itself is unstable across different populations (Aida, 1994; Toyama & Yamazaki, 2018), and, as far as Pakistani context is concerned, psychometric properties of various adapted and translated versions of the scale used there are usually not reported. The concept of measurement invariance, the equal functioning of the instrument in different groups of genders, first languages, and institutions, has, according to this literature review, not been proven for Pakistani FLCAS versions.

Research Design

The second gap is related to design and methodology. Correlational and cross-sectional research based on self-report is pervasive in both literature sources. Such kind of research can reveal associations but cannot prove either the directionality or the cause-and-effect relationship. The issue of the "anxiety or skills" dilemma is directly connected with it, because without longitudinal research there is no way to understand whether anxiety influences students' performance negatively, whether poor results in achievements make people anxious, or whether another factor is responsible for both issues. In order to solve these questions, the longitudinal or experimental design should be used, but such a type of research is uncommon – especially in Pakistan, as no longitudinal cohorts or controlled trials were found in the reviewed literature. The international research recently shows how important this issue is and what results such a design brings: in an experimental study conducted by Alamer et al. (2025), the authors managed to raise language achievement and reduce anxiety, thus proving the idea that one of the directions of the causal relationship goes from competence to calmness. It is a clear implication for pedagogy that correlational studies would never give. Besides, Pakistani literature uses convenience sampling and over-represents university English majors. Moreover, the Pakistani corpus lacks classroom observations, dynamic and idiodynamic measurements (Boudreau et al., 2018).

Intervention

The third gap relates to the hardest area to fill: locating interventions that are capable of reducing language anxiety and applying them to the case of Pakistan. From the global perspective, however, the intervention literature is slowly building up and shows very promising signs. For example, in an analogous EFL environment, Alrabai (2015) showed that training teachers in techniques for decreasing anxiety

resulted in reducing anxiety among students. Furthermore, a more recent meta-analysis and systematic review found that there were several different interventions that can help in this case (Xiong et al., 2024). At the same time, the existing intervention literature focuses primarily on East Asian and Middle Eastern environments, while the presence of South Asian countries, including Pakistan, is notably underrepresented; the existing literature is mainly descriptive and does not provide much experimental or controlled data. Additionally, there is a lack of implementation and scaling research that describes how promising interventions could be implemented in the Pakistani education system and especially how the aspect of teachers' anxiety could be addressed.

Recommendations for Teaching, Assessment, and Policy in Pakistan

There is thus a robust case for a sensible though challenging set of policies. Because affect operates as a system, the suggestions to follow are meant to reinforce one another rather than function as separate interventions.

Teaching

Classroom instruction must first and foremost aim at reducing the fear that accompanies regular communication. On the basis of Young (1991), combined with the insights from task and cognition literature, teachers might turn error correction into private, selective, and deferred feedback, include planning and rehearsal periods before oral task completion, arrange for a progression from dyad and small group to whole class speaking activities, as well as opt for familiar and meaningful topics accompanied by clear criteria for success so that students allocate working memory resources to language and not to fear management (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Since enjoyment and willingness to communicate operate separately from anxiety, educators need to make sure to cultivate those aspects with positive and successful experience in particular (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). The careful use of students' stronger languages, such as Urdu and regional languages, as a means of reducing affective burden and improving comprehension is compatible with the findings discussed and does not interfere with English acquisition per se. Lastly, teachers need to be educated in the recognition of language anxiety and understanding of its causes, since a single educational action such as cold calling on a student can cause or alleviate anxiety.

Assessment

As far as assessment policy is concerned, it can be viewed as an anxiety reduction effort as well. Systems should move away from single performance tests and rely more on the formative, low-stakes, and repeated speaking opportunities that will allow the learners to develop confidence and competence. Open analytic rubrics known beforehand to the learners reduce the fear of unknown standards; process writing and portfolio approaches distribute the risk over time rather than concentrate it in one sitting, and reasonable accommodations for highly anxious individuals are justified on the grounds of evidence that anxiety lowers the learner's performance regardless of actual skills (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Communicative competence-based assessment, rather than mere memorisation of forms, would also benefit the washback of assessment onto teaching.

Policy

The key recommendation in terms of policy-making for language in education is to align the medium of instruction with the reality of learners' linguistic background. Evidence points against early and wholesale English Medium Instruction (EMI) and suggests that it should be introduced in stages, in parallel with the development of skills in mother tongues and Urdu so that English becomes an

achievement that needs to be attained rather than a barrier (Coleman, 2010; Coleman & Capstick, 2012). Given that English competence correlates with socio-economic advantage, this policy also has an equity aspect. The policy should fund the establishment of research infrastructure that was pointed out to be absent in this review: development and validation of relevant instruments for Pakistan (FLCAS in regional and Urdu languages with established measurement invariance); funding of longitudinal cohort studies and controlled intervention trials that can produce evidence about effective practices in Pakistan; and inclusion of language anxiety awareness (as part of general mental health literacy) in pre-service and in-service teacher training so that the affective dimension of language learning is seen as professional knowledge and not personal trait.

Conclusion

Over four decades and several countries, the fear of language learning is both real, measurable, and significant: there is a moderate to large association between language anxiety and lower achievement, particularly evident in speaking skills, and language anxiety responds to feedback, task, and medium of instruction treatment in classrooms. Pakistan provides a good illustration both of stakes and gaps in evidence: its learners encounter a compulsory, high-stakes and socially decisive language imposed on multilingual repertoire, and evidence of the existence of language anxiety has been collected in abundant descriptive studies, although without the quantitative, causal, and interventionist analysis needed to inform the action. The way forward is not to adopt findings wholesale, but to develop the missing evidence – valid local measurement, stronger research designs, and effective interventions – within a language-in-education policy that does not create unnecessary anxiety. Treated in this fashion, the affective dimension of language learning is not an addition to Pakistan's education reform, but rather a manageable and productive part of it.

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Credit authorship contribution statement

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