



Causes and coping strategies of English language learning anxiety among secondary and higher secondary students in Dharmapur Union, Noakhali, Bangladesh

Kazi Mozammel Hoqu¹ 
Rakhi Das Gupta^{2,3} 



(✉ Corresponding Author)

¹Dr. Bashir Ahmed College, Sadar, Noakhali, Bangladesh.

¹Email: Kazimozammelhoqu0512@gmail.com

²Bangladesh Army University of Science and Technology, Saidpur, Nilphamari, Bangladesh.

³Email: rakhidasgupta7000@gmail.com

Abstract

This research paper examines English language learning anxiety, causes, and healing factors among secondary and higher secondary students in selected institutions of Dharmapur Union, Sadar Noakhali, Bangladesh. Following the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety framework and recent evidence from Bangladesh, the paper analyzes patterns of classroom anxiety, perceived causes, and coping strategies. The study uses a quantitative research structure, and its findings suggest a concerning situation in the locality (unexplored before) regarding the fact that both groups experience high anxiety at many stages of education, yet secondary students report stronger agreement with the anxiety statements than higher secondary students (mean item score 4.10 versus 3.53). In both groups, lack of confidence in vocabulary and grammar, exam pressure, and limited exposure to spoken English are found to be the most common causes. As coping strategies, teacher encouragement and positive feedback are reported as most helpful. The findings suggest that low-stakes speaking practice, supportive correction, and more structured oral opportunities may help reduce learning anxiety in local English classrooms.

Keywords: Bangladesh, English language learning, Foreign language classroom anxiety, Higher secondary students, Noakhali, Secondary students.

Citation | Hoqu, K. M., & Gupta, R. D. (2026). Causes and coping strategies of English language learning anxiety among secondary and higher secondary students in Dharmapur Union, Noakhali, Bangladesh. *Global Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(1), 12–18. 10.20448/gjelt.v6i1.8715

History:

Received: 6 April 2026

Revised: 11 May 2026

Accepted: 19 May 2026

Published: 22 May 2026

Licensed: This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) 

Publisher: Asian Online Journal Publishing Group

Funding: The authors received no financial support for the research.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted with institutional permission from Dr. Bashir Ahmed College, Noakhali, Bangladesh. As the research involved minimal-risk survey data, formal IRB approval was not required. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, participation was voluntary, and all data were anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Contents

1. Introduction	13
2. Literature Review	13
3. Theoretical Framework	13
4. Methodology	14
5. Results	14
6. Discussion	16
7. Conclusion	17
8. Limitations and Recommendations	17
References	17
Appendix	17

Contribution of this paper to the literature

This study is original and different because it covers a locality (Dharmapur union, Noakhali) neglected and often overlooked in research areas. Unlike district-level studies, it highlights a specific union that brings attention to students' learning experiences in a backward rural educational setting.

1. Introduction

English language learning anxiety indicates a specific form of stress or tension that prevents students' active participation inside or beyond the classroom by restricting their ability to speak and achieve success in language learning environments. Different studies have shown that anxiety is shaped not only by individual learner characteristics but also by classroom practices, school environments, and the social expectations surrounding the use of English. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) define foreign language classroom anxiety as a distinct set of personal views, mental states, and responses that students experience during language acquisition. The published research on foreign language anxiety by Horwitz and others shows three interconnected aspects: communication apprehension, anxiety caused by tests, and fear of receiving negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986). It has been a subject of analysis how the stress level of learners appears to interfere with students' learning abilities and their ability to speak effectively in particular situations (Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff, 2020). The same can be observed regarding the academic progress of students in Bangladesh. Though it depends on English instruction, most learners continue to face challenges when they try to speak English during their school activities. The problems of Bangladeshi students in learning English can be ascertained only through practical research studies focusing on tertiary and secondary students, both city and rural. One-to-one observation may not always yield reliable results, but mass participation in a learning environment can show a drastically different view. Continuous studies have identified four main causes of anxiety: fear of negative evaluation, test pressure, low self-confidence, and limited speaking opportunities (Hera & Saha, 2023; Rahman, Fardoustany, Rashid, & Chowdhury, 2020).

Against the existing background, the present study examines particular institutions operating in the Dharmapur Union of Sadar Noakhali. Dharmapur Union, located in Noakhali Sadar Upazila, is a semi-rural administrative area with several educational institutions (Dharmapur Union Parishad, n.d). Like other administrative units of Bangladesh, Dharmapur Union also comprises the typical Bangladeshi educational infrastructure, which has limited resources, proper teacher training, and a favorable educational environment. These negative factors have contributed significantly to the challenges students face in learning a foreign language. Specifically, English language learning often encounters barriers due to insufficient exposure, lack of communicative practice, and traditional exam-oriented teaching methods. Thus, this place demands a study within its local environment because anxiety develops through the interaction between classroom environments, school environments, and social norms that people expect English learners to follow. Research shows that these trends follow different patterns across Bangladeshi districts because teaching methods, English language exposure, and examination-based teaching intensity influence their manifestation (Hera & Saha, 2023).

2. Literature Review

There are many studies that have covered foreign language learning anxiety in different contexts, but the most relevant studies for this paper are those that cover the Bangladeshi context.

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) is a tool that has been very effective in measuring these anxieties and has been used in different settings and many languages (Botes et al., 2020). This is significant for classroom studies since anxiety is not only a broad personality condition; in fact, it is present in the language learning area, especially when speaking socially in front of classmates.

Bangladeshi studies have a strong contribution to supporting the FLCAS model. Al Mamun (2021) studied students in tertiary education and found that the main issues regarding English language anxiety include speaking, fear of negative evaluation, peer pressure, anxiety for comprehension, and tests.

The rural secondary study conducted by Hera and Saha (2023) revealed that students developed anxiety because they feared receiving negative feedback while also feeling anxious about their communication abilities in English, their performance in classroom activities, and tests.

Rahman's research at a Bangla-medium high school in Chittagong showed that students' anxiety levels varied based on their school ownership, school type, and residential location because students from rural areas and private schools exhibited higher Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) in this study (Rahman et al., 2020).

Besides these anxiety-focused studies, there are other research efforts in Bangladesh exploring broader aspects of English language learning. For example, Rahman et al. (2019) examine systemic challenges in ELT, including pedagogical limitations and a lack of communicative competence.

Then, Haque (2014) emphasizes how learners' expectations shape their motivation and performance inside the classroom, according to his study.

Another research study by Begum (2025) highlights obstacles in implementing learner autonomy due to exam-oriented practices and teacher-related constraints.

Research studies indicate that English language anxiety in Bangladesh depends on specific learning situations and teachers' educational approaches. The way students interact during classroom activities also matters. The literature review shows studies in districts including Chittagong and Patuakhali, but Dharmapur Union in Sadar Noakhali remains underrepresented. The present study addresses this gap by describing anxiety patterns in a local educational setting and comparing secondary and higher secondary learners within the same union.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety framework proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986). The framework treats language anxiety as a classroom-specific construct that emerges when students feel their performance may be publicly judged. Although it does not follow all aspects of FLACS, the present data fit this model closely, as the most frequent causes reported by students involve fear of mistakes, teacher correction, exams,

vocabulary limitations, and low exposure to spoken English. These causes point to personal insecurity and contextual pressure, closely reflecting Horwitz’s model.

4. Methodology

Research design: The research employs a quantitative research design. Data collection methods involved a structured questionnaire using Likert-scale questions and multiple-choice items to generate numerical data for statistical analysis.

Participants and setting: The survey totals indicate 100 secondary students and 100 higher secondary students, totaling 200 students from selected institutions in Dharmapur Union, Sadar Noakhali. The dataset does not include institution names, so the data maintains its confidentiality.

Instrument: The questionnaire was adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) tradition. The study used four Likert items to assess student anxiety in classrooms, but two multiple-response questions revealed students' understanding of anxiety reasons and their effective handling techniques.

Data analysis: The 5-point response scale data receives quantitative analysis through frequency counts, percentage calculations, and weighted mean score determinations. The multi-response data shows student response numbers, which become percentage values based on total group size. The analysis is restricted to a thematic synthesis of selected causes and strategies used for descriptive interpretation.

Ethical note: No names of individual students or institutions are disclosed in the paper. The results are presented in aggregate form to preserve privacy.

5. Results

The core questionnaire items show a consistent pattern. Both groups report notable speaking anxiety, but the high school group is more affected across all four statements. The two groups expressed major concerns about learning English through their responses. The four anxiety statements showed an average item mean of 4.10 for secondary students, while higher secondary students reported a mean of 3.53, as shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Secondary students demonstrated greater agreement with anxiety items compared to their higher secondary peers during classroom situations. Both groups identified their highest anxiety level in noisy classrooms with many students. The item reached its peak student agreement (Figure 1), with secondary students agreeing at 93%, while higher secondary students maintained a strong agreement at 61%. The secondary group strongly agreed with the item about teachers correcting students while classmates watched.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the four anxiety items among secondary students.

Item	N	Mean	SD	Agree %	SD	D	N	A	SA
Q1	100	4.05	0.99	82%	3	7	8	46	36
Q2	100	4.03	1.06	82%	5	6	7	45	37
Q3	100	3.95	1.03	85%	5	8	2	57	28
Q4	100	4.35	0.79	93%	1	4	2	45	48

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the four anxiety items among higher secondary students.

Item	N	Mean	SD	Agree %	SD	D	N	A	SA
Q1	100	3.73	1.15	66%	5	12	17	37	29
Q2	100	3.61	1.19	65%	7	14	14	41	24
Q3	100	3.27	1.26	53%	11	20	16	37	16
Q4	100	3.53	1.31	61%	12	11	16	34	27

Q1: I get tense when I have to answer the teacher's questions in English.

Q2: I avoid volunteering to speak in English because I fear making errors.

Q3: My confidence in English decreases when the teacher corrects me in front of classmates.

Q4: I feel more anxious about speaking English when the classroom is large or noisy.

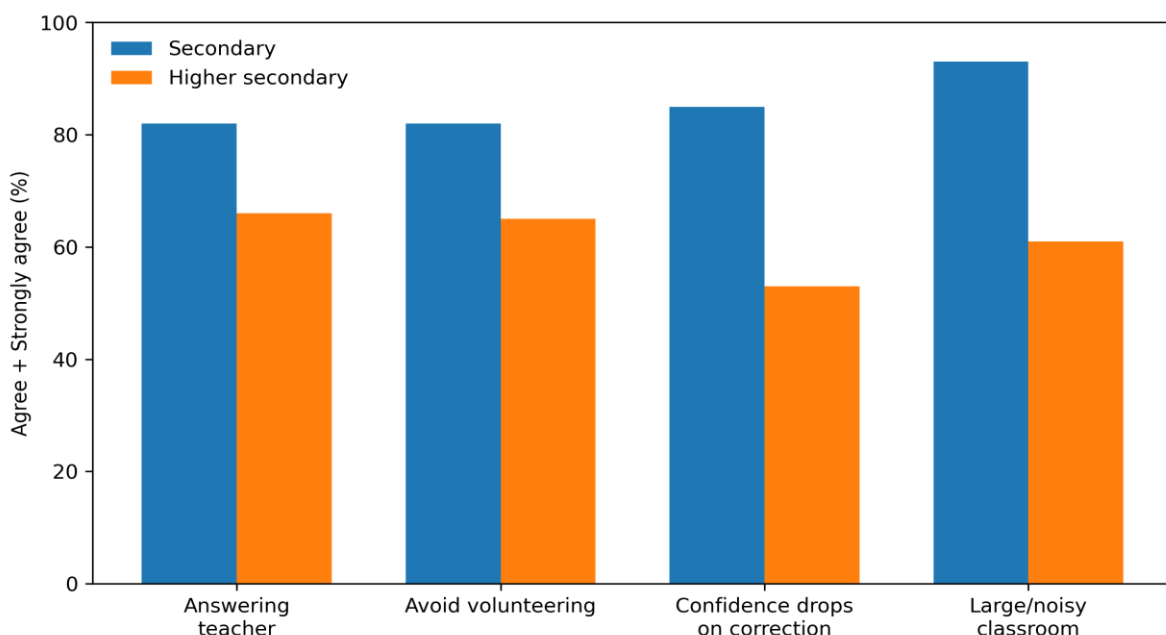


Figure 1. Agreement with classroom anxiety statements.

Figure 1 indicates that secondary students consistently report greater agreement with anxiety items, especially regarding speaking and classroom environment concerns.

5.1. Interpretative Summary

If the collected data (in Table 1, 2 and Figure 1) is interpreted in a descriptive manner, it is found that the statement about answering the teacher’s questions in English has 82% of high school students and 66% of college students answering agree or strongly agree. This clearly shows that classroom questioning remains a stressful event, even for the college going students who are at the higher secondary level of education. However, the intensity appears a bit lower than in high school.

82% and 65% of students agreed that they tend to avoid volunteering to speak because of the fear of mistakes. The high school group reported stronger reluctance, indicating that fear of error is a major barrier to oral participation.

Then, teachers correcting students' mistakes in front of classmates (85% and 53%, respectively), and large or noisy classrooms (93% and 61%, respectively), are some of the most impactful sources of tension. These findings suggest that public correction and crowded environments may heighten students' sense of their weaknesses being exposed, which they may not want.

Table 3. Perceived causes of English class anxiety.

Cause	Secondary (%)	Higher secondary (%)
Fear of making mistakes / being laughed at	46	64
Strict or very critical corrections by teachers	20	32
Large class size/lack of speaking opportunities	46	43
Pressure of exams and grades	74	59
Lack of confidence in vocabulary/grammar	78	67
Limited exposure to spoken English outside class	72	50
Family or social expectations	57	29

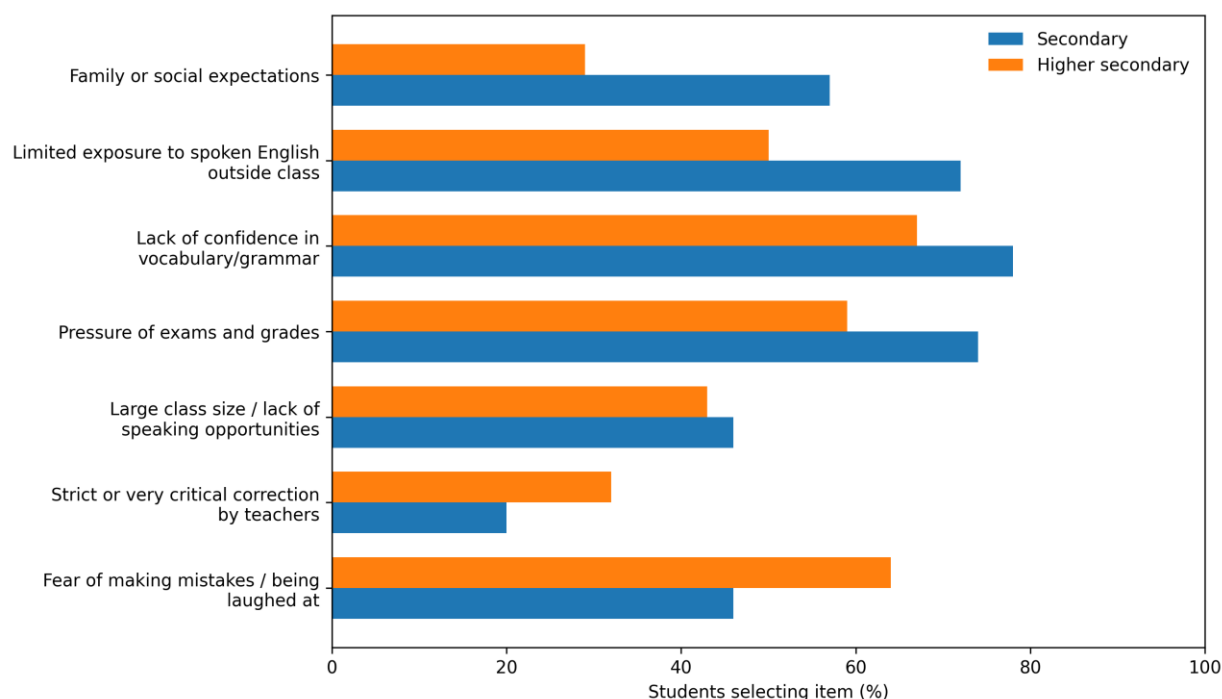


Figure 2. Perceived causes of anxiety.

Figure 2 illustrates the perceived causes of English language anxiety among secondary and higher secondary students, showing percentage differences across key factors such as exam pressure, lack of confidence, and classroom conditions.

In the next group of questions, or the multiple-response question (Table 3, Figure 2) on causes of their anxiety, both groups emphasized lack of vocabulary/grammar confidence, limited exposure to spoken English, and exam pressure. Here, the college group was more likely to report fear of mistakes and strict correction as their causes of anxiety, and the high school group more often selected exam pressure and social/family expectations as their causes of anxiety.

Table 4. Reported coping strategies.

Strategy	Secondary (%)	Higher secondary (%)
Practicing speaking with friends in a safe group	43	50
Teacher encouragement and positive feedback	85	60
Extra tutoring or remedial lessons	33	38
Listening to English media (Songs, movies) regularly	43	44
More pair/group work in class (Smaller speaking tasks)	12	39
Preparing answers before class / Rehearsing	24	30
Relaxation or breathing techniques before speaking	33	25
Nothing helps / I don't know	19	16

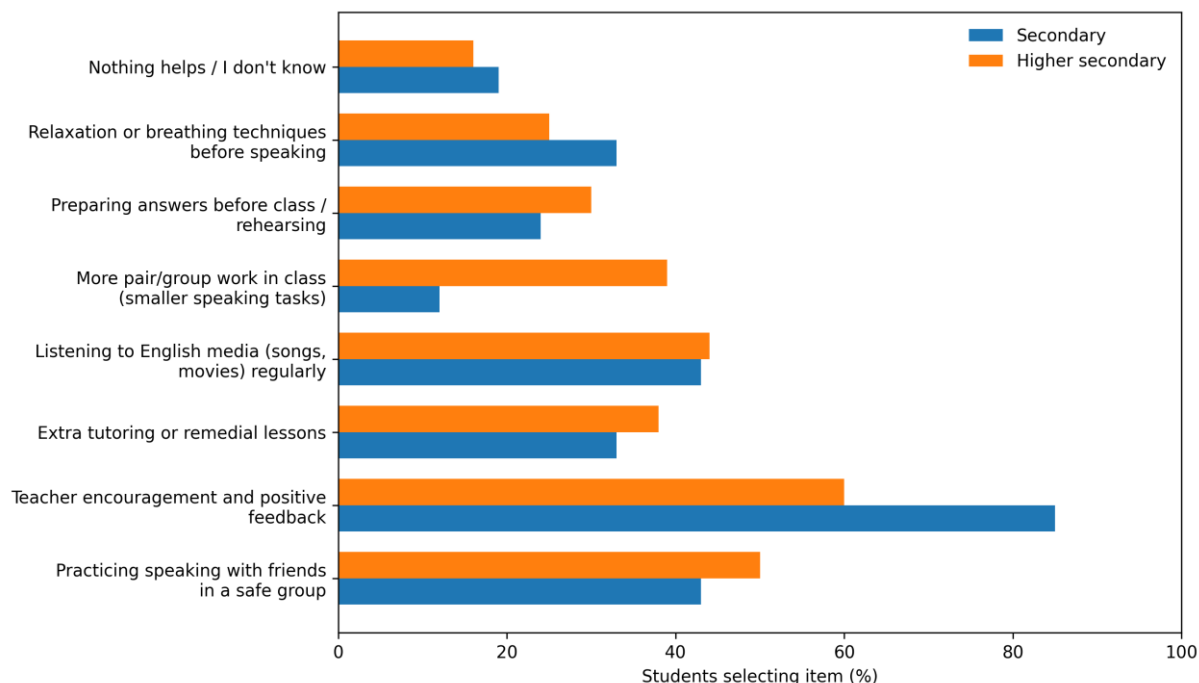


Figure 3. Reported coping strategies.

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of students' perceived coping strategies for English language anxiety at secondary and higher secondary levels, highlighting the role of teacher support, collaborative learning, and individual preparation methods.

For coping strategies, teacher encouragement and positive feedback were the strongest reported demands (Table 4, Figure 3), particularly among high school students. Speaking practice with friends, listening to English media, and remedial support were also important, but pair/group work in class was selected by a smaller proportion of high school students than college students.

6. Discussion

The overall answering pattern suggests that English-speaking anxiety is not limited to one educational stage; rather, it is present across both secondary and higher secondary levels. Their anxiety develops through a combination of classroom environment, fear of evaluation, and limited linguistic confidence. These responses reflect the concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), deriving from learners' self-perceptions, beliefs, and emotional responses in language learning environments throughout their academic journey (Horwitz et al., 1986).

In this paper, it is found that secondary-level students of Dharmapur report more anxiety, which can be due to their heavy reliance on a teacher's power and controlling position, studying only for exams, and a lack of practicing language for enough time. Previous research has also shown that test anxiety, fear of communication, and worry about being judged negatively are main parts of language anxiety, especially in classrooms with a strong structure (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Most of these aspects worsen for younger people who are not confident in speaking the foreign language yet.

Conversely, the students of the higher secondary level feel less anxiety, even though their answers also show they are not less uncomfortable. This indicates an alarming situation where, when someone from the Dharmapur region goes to a higher academic class, language anxiety does not just disappear. Studies at different universities in Bangladesh also found similar information, showing that even with an advanced student (after passing higher secondary level), problems like speaking difficulties, fear of being evaluated negatively, and worrying about social image remain strong. This indicates that language anxiety is a persistent phenomenon across educational stages rather than a temporary phase.

Students' answering pattern shows another remarkable insight, and that is the way students are afraid not only of language but also of what happens if they say something wrong in front of others. Many students care about what others will think if they get mocked because of their mistakes, if someone will fix their mistakes in public, or if classmates will judge them. These results connect a lot with the "fear of negative evaluation" in FLCA because students feel worried about people's social judgment (Horwitz et al., 1986). It is also shown in research that language anxiety results from social factors because they feel inferior when they speak in a way that is not perfect, risking their self-respect, which is reflective of some earlier studies (Wang & Li, 2022).

In addition, findings about strategies are very practical for teaching. If the encouraging words coming from teachers are not so frequent during discussions, but the correcting tendency is, the anxiety level is not likely to decrease. This aligns with earlier research, where situational anxiety lowers student participation, causing them not to talk or voluntarily participate in class (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

The necessity of rehearsal, media exposure, and remedial support demonstrates how learning environments, when extended beyond traditional classrooms, impact student development. Students build better speaking abilities through repeated practice outside the classroom, for diverse purposes, which reduces anxiety and enhances confidence levels (Amengual-Pizarro, 2018).

The research findings reveal an alarming condition among students at both secondary and higher secondary levels. Several obstacles from multiple dimensions continue to affect students due to their psychological state, social environment, and teaching methods. They need intensive care and solutions, which may require teachers to modify their teaching materials while creating a classroom environment that helps students overcome fears and learn through hands-on activities.

7. Conclusion

The research study found that English language learning anxiety is a major concern for students studying at secondary and higher secondary levels, with higher secondary students experiencing worse anxiety. The main sources of anxiety among students in Dharmapur were worries about making errors, high exam stress, limited confidence in grammar and vocabulary, and limited opportunities for practicing the language. The findings support classroom methods, such as coping strategies, which reduce student anxiety by providing more opportunities to speak in a protected environment. Finally, the findings suggest that the teaching approach should focus on offering students encouragement and positive feedback while using group speaking activities to achieve its objectives at the local level.

8. Limitations and Recommendations

The study contains some limitations that should be recognized. The research covers particular institutions that exist in the Dharmapur Union, Sadar Noakhali region, limiting its ability to be generalized. The results show a local view that does not display the complete situation across the entire Noakhali district. Research studies may have limitations because researchers often choose specific populations and geographical areas, which bring out only region-specific results and restrict reaching beyond their chosen study areas. The research area requires future investigations to include more participants from all parts of the Noakhali district because this will help researchers and readers understand English language learning anxiety better.

Teachers can reduce anxiety by using pair work and small-group tasks, delaying public correction or adapting alternative correction methods if possible, pre-teaching key vocabulary, and giving students preparation time before oral responses. School and college leaders may also reduce anxiety by balancing written testing with more communicative classroom tasks.

References

- Al Mamun, M. A. (2021). English language anxiety of tertiary level learners in Bangladesh: Level and sources. *English Language Teaching*, 14(11), 49-60. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v14n11p49>
- Amengual-Pizarro, M. (2018). Foreign language classroom anxiety among English for specific purposes (ESP) students. *International Journal of English Studies*, 18(2), 145-159.
- Begum, M. (2025). Learner autonomy at tertiary level English classrooms in Bangladesh: Teachers' beliefs and practices. *TESOL Bangladesh Journal*, 2(1), 59-92. <https://doi.org/10.69907/tbj.v2i1.86>
- Botes, E., Dewaele, J.-M., & Greiff, S. (2020). The foreign language classroom anxiety scale and academic achievement: An overview of the prevailing literature and a meta-analysis. *The Journal for the Psychology of Language Learning*, 2(1), 26-56. <https://doi.org/10.52598/jpll/2/1/3>
- Dharmapur Union Parishad. (n.d). *Dharmapur union. Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*. Retrieved from <https://dharmapurup.noakhali.gov.bd/>
- Haque, S. (2014). Expectation of tertiary students of Bangladesh from ELT classrooms. *Journal of NELTA*, 19(1-2), 56-64.
- Hera, H. T., & Saha, S. R. (2023). Exploring rural secondary students' English language learning anxiety: A study on secondary students of Bauphal, Patuakhali, Bangladesh. *Global Journal of English Language Teaching*, 3(1), 9-17. <https://doi.org/10.20448/gjelt.v3i1.4953>
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132. <https://doi.org/10.2307/327317>
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991). Methods and results in the study of anxiety and language learning: A review of the literature. *Language Learning*, 41(1), 85-117. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1991.tb00677.x>
- Rahman, A., Fardoustany, R., Rashid, U. K., & Chowdhury, U. (2020). Perceived foreign language classroom anxiety of Bangla medium high school students. *Bangladesh Journal of Psychology*, 23, 75-88.
- Rahman, M. M., Islam, M. S., Karim, A., Chowdhury, T. A., Rahman, M. M., Seraj, P. M. I., & Singh, M. K. M. (2019). English language teaching in Bangladesh today: Issues, outcomes and implications. *Language Testing in Asia*, 9(1), 9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-019-0085-8>
- Wang, X., & Li, Y. (2022). The predictive effects of foreign language enjoyment, anxiety, and boredom on general and domain-specific English achievement in online English classrooms. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1050226. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1050226>

Appendix

The appendices present the survey questionnaire (selected items from many questions used for the survey) that investigates the reasons behind English language learning anxiety among the participants.

Appendices: Survey Questions

Selected Survey Items:

- I get tense when I have to answer the teacher's questions in English.
 Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
- I avoid volunteering to speak in English because I fear making errors.
 Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
- My confidence in English decreases when the teacher corrects me in front of classmates.
 Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
- I feel more anxious about speaking English when the classroom is large or noisy.
 Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
- Which of the following do you think causes your anxiety in English class? (Tick all that apply)
 - Fear of making mistakes / being laughed at
 - Strict or very critical correction by teachers
 - Large class size/lack of speaking opportunities
 - Pressure of exams and grades
 - Lack of confidence in vocabulary/grammar

- Limited exposure to spoken English outside class
- Family or social expectations
- Other (please specify): _____

6. Which strategies help you reduce anxiety in learning English? (Choose up to three)

- Practicing speaking with friends in a safe group
- Teacher encouragement and positive feedback
- Extra tutoring or remedial lessons
- Listening to English media (songs, movies) regularly
- More pair/group work in class (smaller speaking tasks)
- Preparing answers before class/rehearsing
- Relaxation or breathing techniques before speaking
- Nothing helps / I don't know
- Other (please specify): _____