

# THE MEDIATION EFFECT OF FEEDBACK ON LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND MOTIVATION TO LEARN ENGLISH: THE CASE OF HIGHER SECONDARY EFL LEARNERS

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## ABSTRACT

English serves as the language of instruction in higher education and research. Learning English is affected by several psychological and social variables. The study aimed to determine the effect of English language classroom anxiety and motivation to learn English in higher secondary students to explore the mediating role of feedback. The data was collected from 284 students studying in higher secondary schools and inter-colleges of 3 districts i.e. Sargodha, Mandi Baha Uddin and Khushab. A questionnaire was adopted based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and was used to collect data regarding the classroom anxiety of language learners. The feedback scale and Motivation to learn English language scale were developed by the researchers. Data analysis was conducted using disruptive and inferential statistical tools ie mean, standard deviation, t-test, and regression analysis to identify gender differences and the impact of language anxiety on students' motivation to learn the English language. Process Macro was used to measure the mediation effect of feedback in the relationship between English language classroom anxiety and motivation to learn English. The results revealed that the students were experiencing high anxiety, though they were receiving positive feedback from their teachers and their motivation to learn English was also high. The findings also showed that females were experiencing more anxiety than males. Moreover, English class anxiety had an inverse effect on students' motivation to learn English. Finally, it was discovered that language anxiety directly affected students' motivation to learn English, but there was no mediating influence of positive feedback on the relationship between language anxiety and motivation to learn English. The analysis of the data suggests pedagogical implications regarding the importance of exploring ways of addressing anxiety issues through positive feedback and enhancing students' motivation to learn English at higher secondary school level.

**Key Words:** Motivation, Anxiety, Feedback, Language, EFL, Higher Secondary.

## INTRODUCTION

Learning English is a valuable skill that significantly expands opportunities for personal, academic, and professional development in our increasingly interconnected world. Language acquisition is a multifaceted process influenced by various factors that can differ from one individual to another (Dixon et al., 2012). These elements play a crucial role in determining the speed and success of language learning. Anxiety is a crucial element within English language classes that significantly influences students' readiness to learn the language. This aspect of anxiety, experienced by second language (L2) learners, often stems from a stressful learning environment and has adverse effects on their language acquisition and motivation (Kęłowska, 2012; Dewey et al. ,2018; MacIntyre, 2002). Language anxiety, is a substantial factor contributing to a decline in student achievement and motivation (MacIntyre, 1999). Gardner (2001, 2010) categorizes language anxiety into two primary types: language class anxiety, occurring during language learning, and language usage anxiety, which extends to social situations beyond the classroom. Considering the individual experiences of learners is essential to understanding the intricate interplay of various factors shaping their levels of language anxiety.



The anxiety experienced by language learners can negatively impact their motivation and acquisition of L2, largely because the language classroom setting is typically perceived as daunting and frustrating. Consequently, students often limit their language use to a level below their intellectual potential and frequently make grammatical errors (Dörnyei, 2008). Gardner (2010) shares a similar perspective, asserting that using L2 can induce anxiety among learners due to potential social repercussions. These circumstances can lead students to doubt their ability to effectively communicate in the target language, impeding their progress in language proficiency. The stress and anxiety associated with examinations, teacher-student interactions, and the overall learning environment further exacerbate language anxiety. Therefore, language anxiety plays a significant role in diminishing student achievement and diminishing their motivation (Alamer & Almulhim, 2021; Gregersen, 2020; MacIntyre, 1999).

Previous studies have consistently highlighted gender differences in language anxiety, with female students generally reporting higher English class anxiety levels than their male counterparts (Martinović, & Sorić, 2018). To grasp the precise causes of increased language anxiety among females within a specific setting, a detailed analysis of the cultural, social, and educational dynamics is needed, because higher levels of English class anxiety are associated with lower motivation for English language learning (Liu and Cheng, 2014). Research has also indicated that female students typically exhibit higher anxiety levels and lower motivation toward English language learning (MacIntyre & Gardner, 2012), even in higher education (Zhang, 2013).

Achieving proficiency in a second or foreign language hinges significantly on motivation, an internal process that propels individuals toward specific goals with passion or interest (Pawlak et al., 2022). Dörnyei (2003) contends that motivation plays a critical role in language learners' performance, particularly in the pursuit of English as an L2. Gardner and Lambert (1972) assert that motivation to learn L2 stands apart from motivations in other subjects, encompassing a commitment to community integration, language use, and the acquisition of skills like grammar and vocabulary. Motivation is intricate, and a nuanced understanding of its components is crucial to appreciating its influence. Moderate language anxiety can serve as a motivational catalyst, prompting individuals to invest more effort in overcoming challenges and improving language skills.

Kong (2009) asserts the pivotal role of motivation in language learning, particularly in the context of acquiring a new language. The level of a student's motivation emerges as a key determinant of their ability to grasp and master L2, influencing success in acquiring the English language (Svobodová, 2015). The prevailing belief is that learners with elevated motivation levels are more effective in mastering a second or foreign language. Consequently, a nuanced and comprehensive understanding and recognition of the diverse and intricate factors that contribute to individuals' drive and engagement in language learning. Becomes imperative to grasp the phenomenon.

Teacher feedback and fear of negative evaluation has a substantial impact on language anxiety and students' motivation to learn English (Alrabai, 2015; Liu & Cheng, 2014). Positive feedback not only diminishes language anxiety but also instills confidence in students (Subekti, 2018). When feedback emphasizes strengths and improvements, it cultivates a positive attitude toward language learning. Recognition for achievements fosters intrinsic motivation, cultivating a genuine interest and enthusiasm for mastering the English language (Wu, 2003). Tailored feedback facilitates communication, fosters active student engagement and addresses individual needs. This personalized guidance enhances motivation by providing a clear roadmap for improvement. Moreover, the positive impact of teacher feedback extends beyond the individual level to shape the classroom environment. Constructive and encouraging feedback contributes to the establishment of a supportive teacher-student relationship, creating a safe and conducive learning environment for students to explore and develop their language skills (Gabryś-Barker, 2016). The overall atmosphere in the classroom, influenced by the nature of feedback, not only alleviates anxiety but also promotes motivation, encouraging active participation in the process of acquiring proficiency in English (Liu, 2006; Tanveer, 2007). It can be concluded that the quality of teacher feedback significantly shapes language anxiety and motivation. An intentional and constructive feedback approach plays a key role in fostering a

positive learning environment, motivating students to actively engage and excel in English language acquisition.

Previous research, such as Zayed and Al-Ghamdi (2019) has emphasized the importance of addressing students' affective factors, including confidence, attitude, motivation and anxiety in language learning. The emotional aspects of students' language learning experiences are intricate and influenced by a multitude of factors (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Teachers have the ability to ease these challenges through the provision of positive feedback and support, increasing their motivation and thereby making the learning journey less arduous for students. Consequently, this research aims to explore the role of feedback in reducing student anxiety in learning English and its impact on motivation.

### OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this research were to:

- Explore English language classroom anxiety, motivation to learn English, and teacher feedback in English classes of higher secondary students.
- Measure the gender differences in students' language anxiety, motivation to learn the English language, and teacher positive feedback.
- Assess the effect of students' English language classroom anxiety and teacher feedback on their motivation to learn English.
- Measure the mediation effect of feedback on the relationship between English language classroom anxiety and motivation to learn English.

### METHODOLOGY

The data was collected from 284 students studying in higher secondary schools and inter-colleges of 3 districts i.e. Sargodha, Mandi Baha Uddin and Khushab. A questionnaire was adopted based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale by Horwitz et al.(1986) and was used to collect data regarding the classroom anxiety of language learners. The feedback scale and Motivation to learn English language scale were developed by the researchers. Reliability analysis of the research instrument shows that the alpha values of all factors range from .708 to .820, indicating acceptable internal consistency for all three variables shown in Table 1.

Data analysis was conducted using mean, standard deviation, t-test, and regression analysis to identify gender differences and the impact of language anxiety on students' motivation to learn the English language. Process Macro was used to measure the mediation effect of feedback in the relationship between English language classroom anxiety and motivation to learn English.

### RESULTS

**Table 1**

*Descriptive analysis and Cronbach alpha of English Class Anxiety, Teachers' Feedback and Motivation*

SN	Factors	Mean	SD	$\alpha$
1 1	<i>English Class Anxiety</i>	3.332	0.787	.708
3 2	<i>Motivation</i>	3.899	0.702	.820
2 3	<i>Teachers' Feedback</i>	4.401	0.465	.776

The above table shows the high mean score for all variables, indicating that students were experiencing high anxiety ( $M=3.332$ ,  $SD=.787$ ), though they were receiving positive feedback from their teachers ( $M=4.401$ ,  $SD=.465$ ), while their motivation to learn English ( $M=3.899$ ,  $SD=.702$ ) was also high. The alpha values of all factors range from 0.708 to .820, indicating acceptable internal consistency for all three variables.

Table 2

*Gender Differences for English Language Anxiety, Motivation to Learn English, and Teacher Feedback*

	Gender	N	Mean	Sd	t	Df	Sig	Mean difference	Std. Error difference	LLCI	ULCI
Anxiety	Male	15	3.33		-	296	.001	-.274	.082	-.436	-.112
		2	6	.757	3.329						
	Female	14	3.61								
		6	0	.658							
Motivation	Male	15	4.20	.628	-	296	.001	-.242	.069	-.378	-.106
		2	6		3.514						
	Female	14	4.44	.560							
		6	9								
Feedback	Male	15	4.30	.496	-	296	.000	-.228	.054	-.334	-.121
		2	6		4.215						
	Female	14	4.53	.440							
		6	5								

Table 2 shows the Gender Differences in English Language Anxiety, Motivation to Learn English, and Teacher Feedback. The independent sample *t*-test was performed to check the gender difference of English class anxiety in English language learning. The analysis revealed that there was a significant difference ( $t(296) = -3.329$ ,  $p = .001$ ) in males ( $M = 3.336$ ,  $SD = .757$ ) and females ( $M = 3.610$ ,  $SD = .658$ ) mean anxiety scores. The difference between the means (mean difference =  $-.274$ , 95% CI =  $-.436 - .112$ ) was not a chance difference, and reflects that females were experiencing more anxiety than males.

The analysis for motivation to the English Language showed that there was a significant difference ( $t(296) = -3.514$ ,  $p = .001$ ) in males ( $M = 4.206$ ,  $SD = .628$ ) and females ( $M = 4.449$ ,  $SD = .560$ ) mean scores. The difference between the means (mean difference =  $-.242$ , 95% CI =  $-.378 - .106$ ) was not a chance difference, and females possessed more motivation than males.

The analysis for the role of positive feedback to the English Language showed that there was a significant difference ( $t(296) = -4.215$ ,  $p = .000$ ) in males ( $M = 4.306$ ,  $SD = .496$ ) and females ( $M = 4.535$ ,  $SD = .440$ ) mean scores. The difference between the means (mean difference =  $-.228$ , 95% CI =  $-.334 - .121$ ) was not a chance difference, and females received more feedback than males.

Table 3

*Regression Analysis for the effect of Language Anxiety and Feedback on Motivation to Learn English Language*

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>
Anxiety and Motivation	Regression	2.211	1	2.211	6.103	.014	4.739	.171		27.655	.000	.020
	Residual	107.256	296	.362			-.119	.048	-.142	-2.470	.014	
	Total	109.468	297									
Feedback and Motivation	Regression	.855	1	.855	2.330	.128	3.801	.345		11.027	.000	.008
	Residual	108.613	296	.367			.116	.076	.088	1.527	.128	
	Total	109.468	297									

Table 3 shows the regression analyses for the effect of Language Anxiety and Feedback on Motivation to Learn English Language. The R-square value of 0.020 indicates that English class anxiety accounts for 2% of the variation in students' motivation toward English language learning. The beta value of  $-.142$  in the table signifies that a unit increase in English class anxiety will result in a 0.142-unit decrease in students' motivation toward English language learning. The negative beta value implies

a negative association between English class anxiety and students' motivation to learn English. Therefore, as English class anxiety increases by one level, students' motivation toward English language learning also decreases by 0.142 levels.

The R-square value of .008 indicates that teachers' positive feedback accounts for less than one percent of the variation in students' motivation toward English language learning. The beta value of .088 in the table signifies that a unit increase in teachers' positive feedback will result in a .088 unit increase in students' motivation toward English language learning. The positive beta value implies a positive association between teachers' positive feedback and students' motivation to learn English.

Figure 1

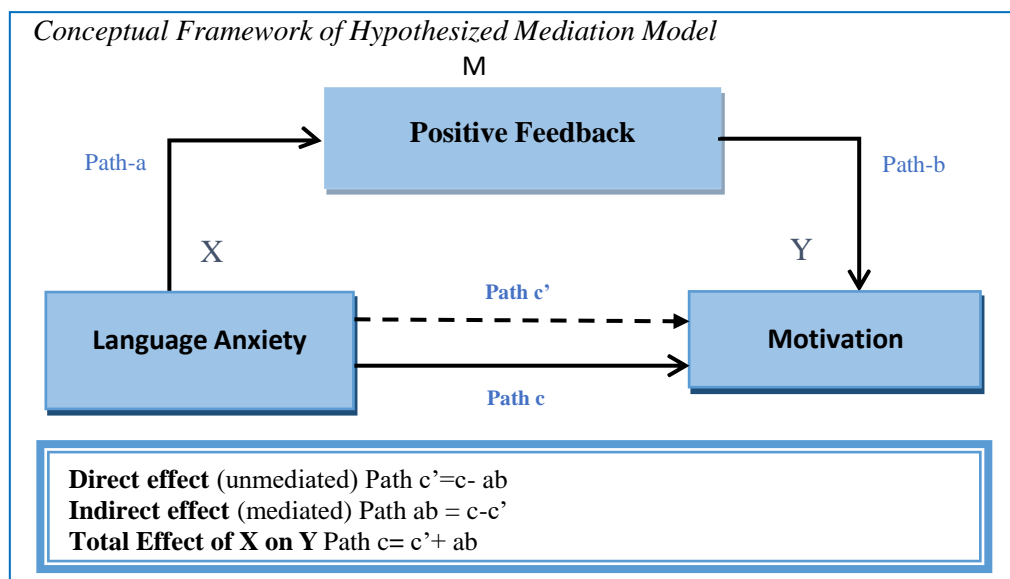
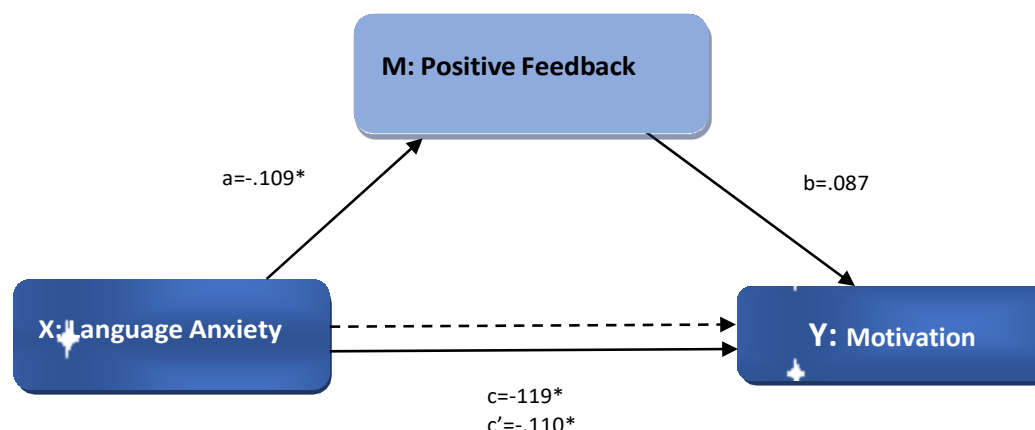


Table 4  
*Direct, Indirect and Total effects of variables of the study*

Paths	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	LLCI	ULCI	t	Conclusion
Language Anxiety → Feedback Motivation	-.119 (.026)	-.110 (.014)	-.001 (ns)	- .037	.008	-2.243	No mediation

Table 4 shows Direct, Indirect and Total effects of the variables of the study. The study assessed the mediating role of teachers' positive feedback on the relationship between language anxiety and motivation to learn English. The results revealed a negative but insignificant indirect effect of the impact of language anxiety and motivation to learn English ( $b = -.001$ ,  $t = 2.243$ ). Furthermore, the direct effect of language anxiety and motivation to learn English in the presence of the mediator was found to be negative and significant ( $b = -.110$ ,  $p < 0.014$ ). The total effect of language anxiety on motivation to learn English is also significant  $B = -.119$ ,  $p = .026$ , reflecting that positive teacher feedback does not mediate the relationship between both variables. Hence, it can be concluded that language anxiety in learning English doesn't mediate the relationship between language anxiety and motivation to learn English.

Figure 2:

*Direct, indirect and Total Effects of Study Variables*

## DISCUSSION

The results make it clear that the students were experiencing high anxiety, though they were receiving positive feedback from their teachers and their motivation to learn English was also high. A substantial number of students in English language classes experienced a significant fear of speaking English in front of their peers. This apprehension is particularly pronounced among the majority of students, with a notable emphasis on female students. Hassan (2023), Awan et al. (2009, 2010, 2023) and Liu & Wang (2021) support these findings, noting that a lack of confidence and anxiety is a common experience among students in English classes, many of whom perceive their fluency as inferior to that of their friends and peers. They also confirmed that despite feeling anxious while learning the language, the students acknowledged substantial support from their teachers in the classroom. As a result, their motivation to learn English remained high.

The findings revealed that females were experiencing more anxiety than males. Interestingly, despite experiencing heightened levels of language anxiety, female students exhibit a strong motivation to learn English. The reasons behind the higher levels of anxiety among females and their continued strong motivation to learn English may stem from their low level of confidence and social comparisons. Cultural expectations regarding communication and language proficiency for females might create additional pressure. Females might be more sensitive to perceived judgment or evaluation from peers or educators. These findings are consistent with Hassan (2023), Awan et al. (2010, 2023) and Hwa and Peck (2017) who demonstrate that female students tend to report higher levels of anxiety compared to their male counterparts. Although contrary to these findings Tandang and Arif (2019) found no significant gender difference in language anxiety. When it comes to the motivational factor to learn English Becirovic (2017) revealed that female students were more motivated and successful at learning the English language than male students at each grade level.

It was also found in this research that English class anxiety had an inverse effect on students' motivation to learn English. Moreover, there was a positive effect of teachers' positive feedback on students' motivation to learn English. Language anxiety, as MacIntyre (1999) delineates, plays a significant role in diminishing both student achievement and motivation. Students experiencing anxiety in language learning may become less inclined to participate in class, engage with language materials, or take risks in using the language. This reduced motivation can initiate a cycle where students avoid language-related activities, exacerbating the challenges they face in achieving proficiency. Yan and Horwitz (2008) reported a high level of anxiety was associated with lower motivation. Positive and constructive feedback has the power to boost motivation by acknowledging learners' efforts and achievements. Concerning how teachers' feedback and reinforcement influence the motivation to learn English, Yusuf and his colleagues (2020) affirmed that the students identified teachers as key motivators for their English learning. In their role as facilitators, teachers significantly influenced the students' perception of the importance of English in their academic pursuits and future



prospects. The teachers' motivation strategies are closely tied to encouraging positive reflective self-evaluation.


Language anxiety directly affects students' motivation to learn English, but there was no mediating influence of positive feedback on the relationship between language anxiety and motivation to learn English. These findings underscore the intricate relationship between anxiety, motivation, and feedback within the context of English language learning. The manner in which feedback is delivered can shape learners' perceptions of their progress, confidence levels, and overall engagement with the language. Positive and constructive feedback has the power to boost motivation by acknowledging learners' efforts and achievements. Feng and Rawian (2023) synthesized many germane studies and indicated many mediators affecting the anxiety and motivation of students. Dörnyei (2001) also presented that learners' language proficiency and linguistic backgrounds mediate the relationship between language learning success and motivation. Giving the students the right kind of feedback is vital for motivation to learn English and Kim (2009) advised teachers to provide students with personalized instruction and use materials that appeal to their interests, hence making them more motivated and successful in learning the language.

### CONCLUSION


This study concludes the intricate connections between language anxiety, motivation, and teacher feedback within the realm of English language learning. Despite students receiving positive encouragement from teachers and maintaining a strong motivation to learn English, a notable level of anxiety, particularly in relation to speaking in front of peers, was evident, especially among female students. This nuanced relationship between these psychological factors suggests a complex interplay. Gender disparities emerged, with females reporting higher anxiety levels compared to males. Nevertheless, female students demonstrated unwavering motivation to learn English, reinforcing previous research that highlights the resilience of female learners in language acquisition despite heightened anxiety. The study underscores the pivotal role teachers play as motivators, influencing students' perceptions of the significance of English in both academic and future contexts. Teachers' feedback was identified as a positive influence on motivation, underscoring the critical role educators play in shaping the learning environment. While the study did not find evidence of positive feedback mediating the relationship between language anxiety and motivation, it underscores the intricate dynamics at play. The importance of personalized instruction and materials tailored to individual interests remains a key takeaway, emphasizing the need to consider diverse teaching strategies to enhance motivation, collaboration and success in learning the English language. In essence, this study contributes valuable insights into the nuanced nature of motivation and anxiety in English language learning, offering implications for both educators and researchers striving to create supportive and effective language learning environments. Recognizing and addressing individual concerns, offering language support resources, and building a sense of community can contribute to mitigating language anxiety and, consequently, enhancing both student achievement and motivation. Supportive feedback that concentrates on strengths rather than weaknesses may help alleviate language anxiety. By offering guidance on improvement without overly emphasizing errors, learners may feel more at ease and less anxious about making mistakes.

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