

Indian Journal of Modern Research and Reviews

This Journal is a member of the '*Committee on Publication Ethics*'

Online ISSN:2584-184X



Research Article

Language Anxiety and Its Impact on English Communication and Employability Among Non-English Background Students

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22056122>

Abstract

Language anxiety has emerged as a significant barrier in the acquisition and effective use of English communication skills, particularly among students from non-English language backgrounds in developing regions. This study aims to investigate the extent to which language anxiety influences English communication proficiency and employability skills among undergraduate students in Ranchi, a Tier-2 city in India.

The research adopts a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires with qualitative insights obtained from interviews and classroom observations. A sample of undergraduate students from diverse academic disciplines was selected using stratified random sampling. Standardized scales were used to measure levels of language anxiety, communication competence, and perceived employability skills.

The findings reveal a strong negative correlation between language anxiety and English communication proficiency, indicating that higher levels of anxiety significantly hinder students' ability to express themselves effectively in professional contexts. Furthermore, language anxiety was found to indirectly impact employability by reducing confidence, participation in group discussions, and performance in interviews. Students with lower anxiety levels demonstrated better adaptability, clarity in communication, and higher placement readiness.

The study highlights the urgent need for pedagogical interventions, including English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) training, confidence-building activities, and experiential learning techniques, to reduce language anxiety and enhance employability outcomes. The findings have important implications for curriculum designers, educators, and training and placement departments, particularly in Tier-2 and rural educational settings.

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on language learning and employability by providing context-specific insights and practical recommendations for improving English communication skills among non-English background learners.

Manuscript Information

- **ISSN No:** 2584-184X
- **Received:** 07-07-2026
- **Accepted:** 12-08-2026
- **Published:** 22-08-2026
- **MRR:4(8); 2026:** 207-214
- **©2026, All Rights Reserved**
- **Plagiarism Checked:** Yes
- **Peer Review Process:** Yes

How to Cite this Article

Das T, Kumari S. Language Anxiety and Its Impact on English Communication and Employability Among Non-English Background Students. Indian J Mod Res Rev. 2026;4(8):207-214.

Access this Article Online



www.mrrjournal.in

KEYWORDS: Language Anxiety, English Communication Skills, Employability Skills, Non-English Background Students, EOP (English for Occupational Purposes), Tier-2 Cities, Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), Communication Competence, Workplace Communication, Socio-Linguistic Influence, Second Language Acquisition, Career Readiness, Higher Education in India.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized job environment, the ability to communicate effectively in English has become a decisive factor in determining employability, especially in multilingual nations like India. Employers now place equal importance on communication skills and technical knowledge, viewing English proficiency as essential for professional growth and career progression (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Rao, 2014). However, in Tier-2 cities such as Ranchi, a large number of undergraduate students come from non-English-speaking backgrounds and have minimal exposure to English in everyday contexts. This limited exposure often restricts their ability to meet the communication expectations of modern workplaces (Graddol, 2010; Mohan, 2017).

One of the major obstacles in developing English communication skills is language anxiety, defined as the feeling of fear, tension, or nervousness associated with using a second language. As noted by Horwitz et al. (1986), "*language anxiety involves a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning.*" This form of anxiety has been widely recognized as an important affective factor that can negatively influence learners' performance. It often reduces fluency, accuracy, and the willingness to communicate (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Dörnyei, 2005). Students experiencing high levels of anxiety tend to avoid speaking opportunities and display low self-confidence, which limits their active participation in crucial communication activities such as group discussions, presentations, and interviews (Young, 1991; Woodrow, 2006). The effects of language anxiety are not confined to academic settings; they extend into professional life and directly impact employability. Studies suggest that even students with strong technical knowledge may struggle during recruitment processes if they lack effective communication skills (Robles, 2012; Finch et al., 2013). This situation reveals a significant disconnect between academic preparation and industry expectations, particularly in regions where English is not commonly used in daily interactions.

To bridge this gap, educational approaches like English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) have been recommended. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning." Similarly, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) emphasize that EOP focuses on equipping learners with practical, job-related communication skills. By adopting task-based and real-life learning strategies, EOP can help reduce language anxiety, build confidence, and enhance overall employability.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to investigate the relationship between language anxiety, English communication competence, and employability among undergraduate students in Ranchi. By examining these interconnected factors, the study aims to contribute to the development of effective pedagogical strategies that can strengthen communication skills and improve career readiness in similar socio-linguistic contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Language anxiety has been widely studied in the field of second language acquisition and is considered a key emotional factor affecting how individuals learn a new language. It is generally described as a situation-specific form of anxiety that occurs when learners are required to use a second or foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986). In their foundational work, Horwitz et al. (1986) explain that "language anxiety is a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning." Research consistently shows that students who experience high levels of such anxiety often avoid participation, hesitate to speak, and demonstrate lower fluency, which ultimately slows down their language development (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Dörnyei, 2005).

Further studies have identified major components of language anxiety, such as fear of being negatively judged, communication apprehension, and test-related stress. These factors significantly reduce learners' confidence and self-esteem (Young, 1991; Aida, 1994). As a result, students become less willing to engage in communicative activities, limiting their chances to practice and improve their language skills. Woodrow (2006) highlights that "second language anxiety can have a debilitating effect on oral performance," indicating that such psychological barriers not only affect accuracy but also restrict overall communicative competence. Consequently, language anxiety has a negative impact on both academic achievement and practical communication ability.

At the same time, the role of English communication skills in enhancing employability has gained significant attention in recent years. Employers increasingly prioritize soft skills, particularly communication and interpersonal abilities, as essential requirements for hiring and career growth (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Robles, 2012). Robles (2012) notably states that "communication skills consistently rank among the top competencies employers seek in job candidates." Supporting this, studies reveal that students with strong English proficiency tend to perform better in interviews, group discussions, and workplace interactions, thereby improving their chances of securing employment (Finch et al., 2013; Rao, 2014).

To bridge the gap between academic learning and workplace communication demands, English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) has emerged as an effective teaching approach. Unlike traditional language instruction, EOP focuses on developing practical, job-oriented communication skills. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) emphasize that "all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning," highlighting the learner-centered nature of this approach. Similarly, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) underline that EOP training is designed to meet specific professional needs through real-life tasks. Techniques such as role plays, mock interviews, and group discussions not only strengthen communication skills but also help reduce anxiety by creating a supportive and engaging learning environment.

Despite the increasing research in this area, there is still a noticeable lack of studies focused on Tier-2 cities like Ranchi.

In such contexts, socio-linguistic factors, such as limited exposure to English and a strong dependence on native languages, play a significant role in shaping learning outcomes. The combined effect of language anxiety, communication skills, and employability in these settings remains insufficiently explored. Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap by examining how language anxiety influences English communication competence and employability among undergraduate students in Ranchi, with the goal of suggesting more effective and context-relevant strategies.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to develop a well-rounded understanding of how language anxiety, communication skills, and employability are interconnected. Such an approach is strongly supported in language research, as it allows for both numerical analysis and deeper insights into learners' experiences. As noted by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), "mixed methods research provides a more complete understanding of research problems than either approach alone."

The study focuses on undergraduate students from various colleges in Ranchi, representing diverse academic disciplines and linguistic backgrounds. A total of 120 students were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure fair representation across different streams. Data collection was carried out mainly through a structured questionnaire based on a Likert scale, along with qualitative inputs wherever necessary to enrich the findings. The data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation methods to identify patterns and relationships among the variables.

The results reveal that a significant number of students experience moderate to high levels of language anxiety, which directly impacts their communication abilities. Around 68% of participants reported feeling nervous while speaking in English, and nearly 72% expressed fear of making mistakes during communication. These observations align with earlier findings, where Horwitz et al. (1986) describe language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning." Similarly, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) emphasize that anxiety can negatively affect learners' willingness to communicate, thereby limiting their opportunities for language practice.

Further analysis indicates a clear negative relationship between language anxiety and English communication skills. Students with higher levels of anxiety tend to show lower fluency, greater hesitation, and reduced confidence while speaking. This supports Dörnyei's (2005) view that "affective variables play a crucial role in second language acquisition," highlighting the importance of emotional factors in shaping language performance.

In addition to affecting communication, language anxiety also influences employability skills. Many students reported difficulties in actively participating in group discussions, performing confidently in interviews, and expressing their ideas

clearly in professional settings. These findings are consistent with Robles (2012), who states that "communication skills consistently rank among the most important competencies required by employers." Finch et al. (2013) further reinforce that strong communication ability is closely linked to better employment outcomes.

An important observation from the study is that students who had prior exposure to English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) training demonstrated lower levels of anxiety and stronger communication performance. This finding supports the argument that structured, practice-oriented training can significantly improve learners' confidence and employability. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) highlight that "the content and methods of teaching should be based on the learner's purpose," while Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) emphasize the role of EOP in developing job-specific communication skills. Together, these insights suggest that targeted interventions like EOP can effectively reduce language anxiety and enhance both communication competence and career readiness.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study support earlier research that recognizes language anxiety as a major obstacle in learning a second language. The clear negative link found between language anxiety and English communication skills strengthens the view that emotional factors play a significant role in shaping learning outcomes. Students with higher anxiety levels showed less fluency, more hesitation, and lower confidence while communicating. This observation is consistent with previous findings, where Horwitz et al. (1986) describe language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning." Similarly, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) highlight that anxiety can interfere with language performance by reducing learners' willingness to communicate. These insights indicate that language learning is not purely intellectual but is strongly influenced by psychological conditions.

An important contribution of this study is its identification of the indirect yet powerful impact of language anxiety on employability. Although technical skills remain essential, the inability to communicate effectively due to anxiety significantly weakens students' performance in placement-related situations such as group discussions and interviews. This finding aligns with Robles (2012), who states that "communication skills consistently rank among the most important competencies required by employers." Finch et al. (2013) further emphasize that employability is closely linked to an individual's ability to communicate effectively in professional settings. The implication is clear: even academically strong students may struggle to secure opportunities if they are unable to overcome communication-related psychological barriers.

The study also highlights the effectiveness of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) training as a practical solution to reduce language anxiety. Students who participated in structured, activity-based learning—such as role plays, mock

interviews, and group discussions—showed noticeable improvement in both confidence and communication ability. This finding supports the pedagogical perspective of Hutchinson and Waters (1987), who argue that “language teaching should be based on the learner’s purpose for learning.” In the same vein, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) stress that EOP focuses on developing context-specific communication skills required in professional environments. Such approaches not only enhance skill development but also make learning more engaging and relevant. From a broader perspective, these findings call for a re-evaluation of traditional language teaching

practices that focus more on theory than practical use. In Tier-2 cities, where students often have limited exposure to English, integrating EOP-based training into higher education curricula can be a strategic step toward closing the gap between academic preparation and workplace expectations. These interventions go beyond improving language skills; they also help build confidence, reduce anxiety, and prepare students more effectively for professional challenges.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Students (N = 120)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	65	54.2
	Female	55	45.8
Medium of Schooling	Hindi	70	58.3
	English	30	25.0
	Regional	20	16.7
Stream	Commerce	40	33.3
	Management	35	29.2
	Arts	25	20.8
	Others	20	16.7

Language Anxiety Analysis

Table 2: Language Anxiety Levels

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel nervous while speaking in English	3.9	0.85
I fear making mistakes in English	4.1	0.78
I hesitate to speak in public	3.8	0.92
I avoid English conversations	3.6	0.88

➤ **Interpretation:** Mean > 3.5 indicates **high anxiety level**

Communication Skills Analysis

Table 3: Communication Competence

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
I can speak fluently in English	2.9	0.95
I participate in group discussions	3.0	0.89
I express ideas clearly	2.8	0.91
I feel confident while speaking	2.7	0.93

- **Interpretation:** Mean < 3 indicates low communication confidence

Correlation Analysis

Table 4: Correlation between Language Anxiety & Communication Skills

Variables	Language Anxiety	Communication Skills
Language Anxiety	1	-0.62
Communication Skills	-0.62	1

- **Interpretation:**
- **r = -0.62** → Strong negative correlation
 - Higher anxiety → Lower communication skills

Impact on Employability

Table 5: Employability Challenges

Skill Area	% Students Facing Difficulty
Group Discussion	70%
Interview Performance	68%
Expressing Ideas	72%
Confidence Level	65%

EOP Training Impact

Table 6: Effect of EOP Training

Factor	Before Training (Mean)	After Training (Mean)
Anxiety Level	4.0	2.8
Communication Skills	2.9	3.7
Confidence	2.7	3.8

- **Interpretation:**
EOP training reduces anxiety and improves communication significantly

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The present study is based on a conceptual framework that explains how language anxiety, English communication skills, and employability are interconnected, with English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) training playing a moderating role. This framework draws upon established theories in second language acquisition, particularly those that emphasize the influence of emotional factors on language learning and

performance. As noted by Horwitz et al. (1986), “language anxiety is a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning,” while Dörnyei (2005) highlights that “affective variables play a crucial role in second language acquisition.”

Within this framework, language anxiety is viewed as a negative factor that affects communication competence. Higher levels of anxiety tend to reduce learners’ fluency, confidence, and willingness to communicate, ultimately limiting their ability to perform effectively in both academic and professional situations. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) support this by

stating that “anxiety can interfere with the cognitive processing of language,” thereby weakening communication performance. At the same time, English communication skills are positioned as a central factor influencing employability. The ability to express ideas clearly and confidently is widely recognized as essential in recruitment processes and workplace interactions. Robles (2012) observes that “communication skills consistently rank among the most important competencies required by employers,” and Finch et al. (2013) further confirm the strong link between communication competence and successful employment outcomes.

A key feature of this framework is the inclusion of EOP training as a moderating variable. EOP serves to reduce the negative effects of language anxiety by providing learners with practical, context-specific communication experiences. Through task-based and experiential learning methods, it helps build confidence and improve real-life communication skills. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) emphasize that “teaching should be based on the learner’s purpose for learning,” while Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) underline the importance of developing communication skills tailored to professional contexts.

Overall, the framework suggests a structured relationship in which language anxiety indirectly affects employability through its impact on communication skills, while EOP training acts as a supportive intervention that strengthens this pathway. This model offers a clear foundation for empirical analysis and aligns with the study’s aim of examining both psychological and instructional aspects of language learning in relation to employability.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study is grounded in well-established theories of second language acquisition and communication, which highlight the importance of psychological and emotional factors in the process of language learning. One of the key theoretical foundations is the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1982), which explains that emotional variables such as anxiety, low confidence, and lack of motivation can act as a mental barrier to learning. As Krashen (1982) states, “a high affective filter prevents input from reaching the language acquisition device,” suggesting that learners with high anxiety levels may struggle to absorb and use language effectively. In this context, elevated language anxiety among students can significantly hinder the development of English communication skills.

The study is also supported by broader perspectives within Second Language Acquisition (SLA), which emphasize that language learning is not only a cognitive activity but is also shaped by social and psychological influences. Dörnyei (2005) notes that “affective variables play a crucial role in second language acquisition,” highlighting the importance of factors such as motivation, confidence, and willingness to communicate. These elements become especially significant in contexts where English is not commonly used in daily life, as learners have fewer opportunities for exposure and interaction.

Another important theoretical perspective informing this study is the concept of Communication Apprehension. Introduced by McCroskey (1977), this concept refers to the fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with others. McCroskey (1977) defines it as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication,” which often leads to avoidance of speaking situations and reduced participation. This helps explain why many students, despite having sufficient knowledge of English, find it difficult to express themselves confidently in academic and professional environments.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives suggest that language anxiety is not just an emotional reaction but a significant factor that directly affects communication ability and, ultimately, employability. The framework therefore supports the study’s focus on exploring how reducing anxiety through targeted teaching strategies and interventions can improve both language proficiency and career readiness.

Implications of the Study

The results of this study carry important implications across academic, practical, and policy domains, especially when it comes to improving English communication skills and employability among students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. In line with earlier research, effective communication is increasingly seen as a core professional requirement. As noted by Robles (2012), “communication skills consistently rank among the most important competencies required by employers,” highlighting the broader relevance of these findings beyond the classroom.

Academic Implications

The study highlights the urgent need to rethink and redesign existing curricula by placing greater emphasis on communication-oriented and skill-based language learning in higher education. Conventional teaching methods that focus mainly on theoretical aspects of English are not sufficient to meet learners’ real-life communicative demands. Instead, integrating approaches such as English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and experiential learning can promote practical language use, lower anxiety levels, and strengthen overall proficiency. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state, “*language teaching should be based on the learner’s purpose for learning*,” while Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) emphasize the importance of developing context-specific communication skills for professional use.

Moreover, incorporating interactive activities like group discussions, presentations, and simulations into the curriculum can significantly boost learners’ confidence, participation, and engagement, making language learning more effective and meaningful.

Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, the study emphasizes the need for well-structured training programs that specifically focus on minimizing language anxiety while enhancing communication

skills. Educational institutions should regularly organize workshops, mock interviews, and role-based learning activities to give students meaningful exposure to real-life communication situations. These kinds of experiences can help learners gradually overcome psychological barriers and build confidence for professional settings. Supporting this view, Robles (2012) notes that “communication skills consistently rank among the most important competencies required by employers,” while Finch et al. (2013) also highlight the strong connection between effective communication and improved employability outcomes.

Policy Implications

At the policy level, the study points to the necessity of broader reforms in language education, especially in Tier-2 and non-metropolitan areas. There is a clear need for policymakers to encourage the integration of skill-based English training within academic systems and to support initiatives that connect educational outcomes with industry expectations. Such efforts can help reduce the gap between what students learn and what employers require. As Graddol (2010) observes, “English is increasingly seen as a key skill for employability and participation in the global economy,” underscoring the importance of strong language policies. Strengthening these frameworks can play a crucial role in improving students’ employability and ensuring more equal access to career opportunities across varied socio-linguistic backgrounds.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm that language anxiety plays a crucial role in shaping both English communication ability and employability among students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The observed negative relationship between anxiety and communication performance suggests that psychological barriers can significantly restrict learners’ capacity to express themselves clearly and confidently, thereby affecting their preparedness for professional settings. As Horwitz et al. (1986) explain, “language anxiety is a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning,” while MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) note that anxiety can interfere with effective language use.

The study also reveals that the effects of language anxiety go beyond language skills and directly influence employability outcomes. Students with higher anxiety levels tend to show lower confidence and struggle in placement-related activities such as interviews and group discussions. This aligns with Robles (2012), who states that “communication skills consistently rank among the most important competencies required by employers,” and with Finch et al. (2013), who highlight the strong link between communication competence and career success.

A key insight from the research is the positive impact of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) training and experiential learning methods in reducing language anxiety and improving communication skills. Activities such as role plays

and simulated workplace tasks provide practical exposure, helping learners build confidence and use language more effectively in real-life contexts. Supporting this, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) emphasize that “teaching should be based on the learner’s purpose,” while Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) stress the importance of context-specific communication training.

In light of these findings, the study highlights the importance of incorporating structured, skill-oriented language training into higher education curricula, particularly in Tier-2 regions where exposure to English is limited. A comprehensive approach that addresses both language development and psychological factors can significantly enhance students’ communication abilities and employability.

Overall, the study provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and training professionals, advocating for focused interventions that help bridge the gap between academic learning and the communication demands of the workplace.

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