
Navigating English: Language Anxiety and Oral Proficiency Among Young Tribal Men in TGTWRDC Colleges in Telangana

Dr. K.Venkanna^[1]

Dr. VENKANNA K did his Masters (M.A.) in English and M.Ed. Education with the Osmania University.

R. Balaraj^[2]

Ragi Balaraj did his Masters (M.A.) in English B.Ed. with the Osmania University. As a Degree Lecturer (Part Time), he is presently working at TTWR Degree & PG College for Men, Nagarkurnool, Telangana

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Abstract

Language anxiety is widely recognised as a significant affective barrier impeding second language acquisition, particularly among learners from socio-linguistically marginalised backgrounds. The paper aims at exploring the nature and the level of English language anxiety, and the connection between oral proficiency and English language anxiety among the young men of the tribal group in the Telangana Tribal Welfare Residential Degree Colleges (TGTWRDC) in Telangana. The study, based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), and a modified oral proficiency rubric guided by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), surveyed 100 male tribal undergraduate students on four TGTWRDC campuses. The level of anxiety in the quantitative data showed a considerably high degree of anxiety scores, especially in such areas as communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation, as well as a low level of oral proficiency, with 45% of the respondents rated in the range of lower than average. A strong negative correlation ($r = -0.74$, $p < .01$) was found between overall language anxiety and composite oral proficiency. Thematic findings from structured interviews identified mother-tongue interference, limited English exposure, and fear of ridicule in peer settings as the dominant anxiety triggers. The paper ends with context-sensitive pedagogical interventions that will promote supportive learning environments among tribal learners in residential degree colleges.

Keywords: language anxiety, oral proficiency, tribal education, TGTWRDC, Nagarkurnool, FLCAS, English as a Second Language, Telangana

1. Introduction

Fluency In English Is Now A Valuable Currency In The Fast-Changing Education And Employment Sector In India. To Students Who Belong To Scheduled Tribe (St) Communities (Which Are About 9.4% Of The Indian Population, Office Of The Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2013), The Learning Of The English Language Is Not Only An Academic Activity But An Element Of Social Mobility, Working Capability, And Political Involvement. However, The Journey Towards English Proficiency Among Tribal Students Is Full Of Socio-Linguistic, Cultural, And Psychological Peculiarities, Which Mainstream Instruction Seldom Tackles.

Nagarkurnool District In Telangana Is Home To A Significant Tribal Population, Including Communities Such As The Lambada, Gond, Kolam, And Chenchu, Who Are Formally Recognised As Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (Pvtgs) And Scheduled Tribes Under The Indian Constitution (Ministry Of Tribal Affairs, 2022). The Telangana Tribal Welfare Residential Degree Colleges (Tgtwrdc), Operating Under The Telangana Tribal Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (Ttwreis), Serve As Residential Higher Education Institutions That Provide Free Accommodation, Meals, And Education Exclusively To Tribal Students, Thereby Removing Structural Barriers To Access (Ttwreis, 2023).

Nevertheless, The Access To Education Directly At The Physical Level Does Not Necessarily Mean Linguistic Empowerment. A Growing Body Of Research Confirms That Language Anxiety—Defined As 'A Distinct Complex Of Self-Perceptions, Beliefs, Feelings, And Behaviours Related To Classroom Language Learning' (Horwitz Et Al., 1986, P. 128)—Exerts A Powerful Suppressive Effect On Learners' Willingness To Communicate And On Their Ultimate Oral Performance. For Tribal Men, Whose Mother Tongues Are Predominantly Oral-Traditional Languages Such As Gondi, Lambadi, Or Kolami, And Who Have Had Minimal Exposure To Formal English Instruction, The Affective Burden Of English Classroom Participation Is Considerable.

Although Tribal Education Is Specifically Institutionalized In Telangana, And, Despite This, Has Appeared As A Priority In Education, There Is An Apparent Dearth Of Empirical Studies That Specifically Investigate Language Anxiety And Oral Proficiency Among Undergraduate Tribal Males In Tgtwrdc Contexts. This Gap Is Significant: Gender-Differentiated Anxieties Have Been Documented In South Asian Educational Literature (Pappamihiel, 2002), And Male Learners From Conservative Tribal Settings Often

Face Cultural Expectations That Render Visible Academic Struggle—Particularly In Language—Socially Stigmatising. This Study, Therefore, Addresses The Following Research Questions:

- Rq1: What Are The Scores Of English Language Anxiety Of Tribal Male Students In Tgtwrdc Colleges, Nagarkurnool?
- Rq2: Oral English Proficiency Level Of These Students In The Major Dimensions Of Communicative Competence:
- Rq3: How Does The Language Anxiety Relate To Oral Proficiency Among This Population?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Background: The Affective Filter Hypothesis And Flcas

The Conceptualization Of This Research Is Based Largely On Two Frameworks That Are Complementary In Nature. According To The Affective Filter Hypothesis, Negative Affective States Such As Anxiety, Lack Of Motivation, And Low Self-Confidence Are Suggested To Act As A Metaphorical Filter That Blocks The Processing And Gaining Of Target Language Input (Krashen, 1982). A High Affective Filter Will Block The Entry Of Comprehensible Input Into The Language Acquisition Device, Which Will Result In Inhibited Language Development (Krashen, 1982, P. 31).

After This, Horwitz Et Al. (1986) Operationalised The Concept Of Foreign Language Anxiety As The 33-Item Flcas, Which Outlines Three Components Or Aspects That Are Interconnected: Communication Apprehension (Ca), Test Anxiety (Ta), And Fear Of Negative Evaluation (Fne). Their Classic Work At The University Of Texas Was That A Large Percentage Of The Language Learners At The University Level Had Debilitating Anxiety, And Anxiety Had A Negative Correlation With Grades In The Course. Macintyre And Gardner (1994) Also Proved That Foreign Language Anxiety Exclusively Influences The Input, Processing, And Output Of Language Learning, Unlike General Trait Anxiety.

2.2 Language Fears In India And Among The Tribes

The Area Of Linguistic Anxiety In The Context Of Higher Education In India Has Grown Significantly In The Last 20 Years. High Values Of Communication Apprehension Were Reported In A Study By Rajprasit Et Al. (2015) On Undergraduate Science Students, Whereas The Classroom Speaking Activities Were Reported By Mak (2011) As The Most Significant Source Of Anxiety In Esl Learners. Murmu (2018) Studied The Language Barrier Among Santhali-Speaking Students At The Jharkhand Tribal Education System And Established That Mother-Tongue Interference Alongside A Sense Of Perceived Prestige Difference Between Tribal Languages And English Resulted In Compounded Linguistic Insecurity. Equally, Mishra And Acharya (2019) Recorded That Even Though Adivasi Students In Odisha Had Sufficient Proficiency In Written English, They Felt Much Anxiety

When Requested To Deliver Performances In English, Which Suggests A Particular Oral Communication Anxiety Rather Than Just The General Academic Anxiety.

2.3 Oral Proficiency And Communicative Competence

This Multi-Dimensional Aspect Of Oral Proficiency Can Be Well Explained By The Model Of Communicative Competence Developed By Canale And Swain (1980), Which Involves Grammatical, Sociolinguistic, Discourse, And Strategic Competencies. Woodrow (2006) Proved That Oral Communication Anxiety Is A Construct That Cannot Be Identified As A Sub-Construct Of General Foreign Language Anxiety, And It Is Especially Acute In Performance Situations. The Cefr (Council Of Europe, 2020) Conceptualises Oral Proficiency In Such Dimensions As Fluency, Coherence, Lexical Range, Grammatical Accuracy, And Interactive Competence, Providing An International Standardised Rubric That Can Be Modified To Fit A Local Assessment Situation.

According To Bashir, Azeem, And Dogar (2011), The Following Factors Prevent The Speaking Skills Of Non-Native Speakers Of English In South Asia: Cognitive Load In Processing, Apprehension In Peer Evaluation, Patterns Of Teacher Responses, And Low Out-Of-Class English Exposure. These Are Structurally Enhanced Within Tribal Learners Of Residential Institutions, Where Peer Groups Tend To Be Co-Tribal, And English Continues To Be A Classroom Phenomenon.

3. Tribal Communities And Tgtwrdc Socio-Educational Contexts: Tribal Communities And Tgtwrdc In Nagarkurnool

The Scheduled Tribe Population In Nagarkurnool District, Which Was Created In 2016 Out Of The Previous Mahbubnagar District, Is About 1.68 Lakh, Which Is About 14.6 Per Cent Of The Total Population Of The District (Office Of The Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2013). The Most Common Tribal Groups Are The Lambada (Banjara), Gond, Kolam, And Chenchu, And The Latter Is, In Particular, The Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (Pvtg), Which Needs Special Constitutional Safeguards (Ministry Of Tribal Affairs, 2022).

The Ttwreis Is A Government Of Telangana-Based Entity That Runs Residential Educational Establishments Ranging From Class I To The Undergraduate And Post Graduate Level. By 2023, The Nagarkurnool District Tgtwrdc Campuses Will Have A Combined Enrolment Of More Than 1200 Tribal Undergraduate Students (Ttwreis, 2023). These Colleges Adhere To The Curriculum Set By The Palamuru University, And English Is Compulsory And The Medium Of Instruction Of Core Science And Commerce Subjects. Though Providing Access, The Residential Model Forms A Sociolinguistic Enclosure Where Students Would Be Dealing Only With Each Other In Either Telugu Or Their Native Languages, Whereas English Would Stay Isolated To The Formal Classroom.

Student Population Is A Multifaceted Line: The Majority Of Them Are First-Generation College Students, Lots Of Them Belong To The Families Of Subsistence Farmers Or Forest People, And A Considerable Percentage Of Them Attended Telangana Gurukul Boarding Schools At Secondary Grades, Where English Was Not Taught As A Communicative Tool But As An Examination Item (Naik, 2020; Ttwreis, 2023).

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design And Participants

The Research Design Chosen In This Study Was Mixed-Methods Research That Involved A Combination Of A Quantitative Survey Research Instrument With A Qualitative Structured Interview To Provide A Holistic View Of Patterns Of Anxiety And Proficiency. A Sample Size Of 100 Male Tribal Undergraduate Students Was Selected In Four Campuses Of Tgtwrdc In Nagarkurnool District That Included First, Second-, And Third-Year Students Pursuing Undergraduate Programmes In B.A, B.Sc, And B.Com. The Number Of Male Students Only Was Considered Because Of The Gendered Nature Of The Study; Tribal Learners Of The Female Gender Represent Another Field Of Investigation That Requires A Focused Study. Ethical Approval Was Taken, And The Anonymity Of Participants Was Also Observed.

4.2 Instruments

The 33-Item Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Flcas) Created By Horwitz Et Al. (1986) Was Used To Measure Language Anxiety On A 5-Point Likert Scale (1= Strongly Disagree To 5= Strongly Agree). The Total Scores Are Between 33 And 165, Scores Between 99-165 Exhibit High Anxiety, Scores Between 66-98 Moderate Anxiety, And 33-65 Low Anxiety. The Flcas Has Exhibited Strong Reliability (Cronbach 813). The Oral Proficiency Was Evaluated With The Help Of A Structured Speaking Task, An Individual Three-Minute Talk On A Familiar Topic Assessed By Two Trained Raters Based On A Cefr-Aligned Rubric That Included Five Dimensions: Pronunciation And Intelligibility, Fluency And Pace, Vocabulary Range, Grammatical Accuracy, And Interactive Competence (Council Of Europe, 2020). The Inter-Rater Reliability Was Set At Cohen's 81.

4.3 Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics (Means, Standard Deviations, Frequency Distributions) And Inferential Statistics Such As The Pearson Correlation Coefficient (R) Were Used To Analyse Quantitative Data, Which Was Used To Test The Relationship Between The Subscales Of Anxiety And The Components Of Oral Proficiency. Thematic Analysis Was Applied To Qualitative Interview Data Using The Six-Phase Model Suggested By Braun And Clarke (2006), Which Produced Emergent Themes On The Nature Of The Sources Of Anxiety And Coping Mechanisms.

5. Results And Discussion

In This Section, The Study Presents The Demographic Characteristics Of The Participants.

The Demographic Of The 100 Participants Has Been Given In Table 1. Most Of Them Were In The Age Group 18-20 (42%), As The First-Year Students Are The Most Common. The Largest Group Of The Community Was Lambada/Banjara Students (34%), Then Gond (22%), And Kolam (18%). An Impressive 71 Percent Had Been Educated In The Telugu Language Entirely In Primary School, And 83 Percent Were First-Generation College Students, Which The Literature Marked As A Powerful Predictor Of High Anxiety In Language (Tsai And Li, 2012).

Table 1**Demographic Profile Of Participants (N = 100)**

Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18–20 Years	42	42.0
	21–23 Years	38	38.0
	24–26 Years	20	20.0
Tribal Community	Lambada/Banjara	34	34.0
	Gond	22	22.0
	Kolam	18	18.0
	Chenchu	14	14.0
	Others	12	12.0
Medium Of Prior Schooling	Telugu Medium	71	71.0
	English Medium	18	18.0

	Telugu & English	11	11.0
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First-Generation Learner	Yes	83	83.0
	No	17	17.0

Note. Source: Primary Data Collected From Tgtwrdc Campuses, Nagarkurnool (2023–2024). 'First-Generation Learner' Refers To Students Whose Parents Have Not Attended College.

5.2 Language Anxiety Levels: Flcas Subscale Analysis

Table 2 Displays Mean Scores And Standard Deviations For The Three Flcas Subscales And The Overall Scale. The Total Mean Flcas Score Was 103.4 (Sd = 16.21), Which Lies In The Range Of High Anxiety (99165). Communication Apprehension Had The Highest Mean (M = 38.7, Sd = 6.43), And This Is Similar To The Results Of Horwitz Et Al. (1986), Who Concluded That The Oral-Communicative Dimension Causes The Greatest Anxiety To Language Learners. Fear Of Negative Evaluation (M = 34.5, Sd = 6.12) Also Fell In The High Range, Which Is Particularly Concerning In A Residential College Context Where Peer Judgement Is Constant And Unavoidable. Test Anxiety Was Comparatively Moderate (M = 30.2, Sd = 5.87), Suggesting That Written Examination Formats Provoke Somewhat Less Anxiety Than Live Performance.

Table 2

Flcas Subscale Scores Among Tribal Male Students (N = 100)

Flcas Subscale	N	Mean	Sd	Anxiety Level
Communication Apprehension	100	38.7	6.43	High
Test Anxiety	100	30.2	5.87	Moderate
Fear Of Negative Evaluation	100	34.5	6.12	High

Overall Flcas Score	100	103.4	16.21	High
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Note. Flcas = Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz Et Al., 1986). Scoring: High Anxiety = Subscale Mean In Upper Tertile. Sd = Standard Deviation. Source: Primary Data, Present Study.

Qualitative Interviews Reinforced These Quantitative Patterns. A Recurring Theme Was What Participants Described As 'The Fear Of Being Laughed At'—A Deeply Internalised Apprehension That A Grammatical Or Pronunciation Error Would Expose Them To Ridicule From Peers Or Judgement From Instructors. As One Third-Year B.Sc. Student Articulated: 'When Madam Asks Me To Speak In Class, My Mind Goes Blank. I Have The Answer In Telugu; In English, I Simply Freeze. This Feeling, Which Is Reflected Throughout The Interviews, Is Illustrative Of What Macintyre And Gardner (1994) Describe As Language Anxiety As A Situational Fear, But Different From General Performance Anxiety.

5.3 Results Of Oral Proficiency Assessment

Table 3 Shows The Oral Proficiency Rating Under Five Dimensions Based On Cefr. The Results Of The Composite Proficiency Are Shocking: 45 Percent Of The Respondents Were Lower Than The Average (Less Than 40 Percent Of Maximum Points), And Only 4 Percent Of The Participants Scored Excellent. The Lowest Mean Score (M = 3.4/10) Was The Interactive Competence, Which Represents The Lack Of Practice Among The Students In Turn-Taking, Meaning Negotiation, And Spontaneous Response In Conversations In The English Language. The Range Of Vocabulary Was Relatively Higher (M = 4.6/10), And It Is Possible To Conclude That Passive Lexical Knowledge, Which Is Acquired During Reading, Through Rote Learning, Is More Advanced Than Productive Uses.

Table 3

Oral Proficiency Assessment Results By Dimension (N = 100)

Proficiency Component	Excellent (>80%)	Good (60–79%)	Average (40–59%)	Below Average (<40%)	Mean Score (Of 10)
Pronunciation & Intelligibility	4	11	38	47	3.8
Fluency & Pace	3	14	41	42	4.1
Vocabulary Range	6	19	44	31	4.6

Grammatical Accuracy	5	16	39	40	4.2
Interactive Competence	2	9	33	56	3.4
Composite Oral Proficiency	4	12	39	45	4.0

Note. Ratings By Two Trained Assessors Using A Cefr-Aligned Rubric (Council Of Europe, 2020). Inter-Rater Reliability: Cohen's K = 0.81. Proficiency Categories: Excellent (>80%), Good (60–79%), Average (40–59%), Below Average (<40%). Source: Primary Data, Present Study.

These Findings Are In Line With The Argument Of Woodrow (2006) That Oral Communication Anxiety Impacts The Interactive And Spontaneous Aspects Of The Spoken Language Disproportionately, And More Controlled Activities (Like Prepared Presentations) Enable Learners To Partially Counter It With Practice. The Sharp Lack Of Interactive Competence In The Current Sample Is Especially Consequential, Considering That The Professional Communication Of English In India Is Becoming More And More Based On The Fluency Of The Real-Time Conversation Instead Of The Textual Performance.

5.4. Relationship Between Language Anxiety And Oral Proficiency

Table 4 Describes The Pearson Correlation Table Of Flcas Subscales And Composite Oral Proficiency. All Three Anxiety Subscales Were Significantly And Negatively Correlated With Oral Proficiency At The 1% Level Of Significance. Communication Apprehension Showed The Strongest Inverse Relationship With Oral Proficiency ($R = -0.72, P < .01$), Followed By Fear Of Negative Evaluation ($R = -0.66, P < .01$) And Test Anxiety ($R = -0.59, P < .01$). The Overall Flcas Score Yielded A Correlation Of $R = -0.74$ ($P < .01$) With Composite Proficiency, Indicating That Approximately 55% Of The Variance In Oral Proficiency Scores Is Accounted For By Language Anxiety.

Table 4

Pearson Correlation Matrix: Flcas Subscales And Oral Proficiency (N = 100)

Variable	Comm. Appr.	Test Anxiety	Fear Of Neg. Eval.	Oral Proficiency
Communication Apprehension	1.00	0.61**	0.58**	-0.72**
Test Anxiety	—	1.00	0.53**	-0.59**

Fear Of Negative Evaluation	—	—	1.00	-0.66**
Overall Flcas	—	—	—	-0.74**

Note. **P < .01 (Two-Tailed). Flcas = Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. Comm. Apr. = Communication Apprehension. Fear Of Neg. Eval. = Fear Of Negative Evaluation. Source: Primary Data, Present Study.

This Robust Negative Correlation Corroborates A Substantial Body Of Literature. Young (1991) Established That Language Anxiety Consistently Impedes Oral Performance, While Liu And Jackson (2008), Studying Chinese University Efl Learners, Reported A Correlation Of R = -0.56 Between Flcas Scores And Speaking Test Performance—A Finding That The Present Study Extends To The Underexplored Tribal Indian Context. The Stronger Effect Size Observed In The Present Sample (R = -0.74) Plausibly Reflects The Compounded Marginalisation Experienced By Tribal Learners: Linguistic Distance From English, First-Generation Learner Status, And Socio-Cultural Unfamiliarity With Formal Academic Discourse Norms All Amplify The Anxiety-Proficiency Relationship Beyond What Might Be Observed In Mainstream Urban Cohorts.

6. Pedagogical Implications

The Results Have Definite Implications For Teaching The English Language In Tgtwrdc Colleges. First, The Strategies Of Anxiety-Reduction Need To Be Strategically Incorporated Into The Classroom Practice. Young (1991) Suggests Establishing A Low-Anxiety Classroom Atmosphere By Means Of Non-Threatening Oral Activities, Pairing Students By Means Of Peers With Teacher-Centered Cold-Calling, And By Explicitly Recognizing The Challenge Of Speaking English Orally. Within The Framework Of The Tgtwrdc, This Could Be Formal Small-Group Discussions That Will Be Held In A Mixed-Code Setting And Then Converted To English-Only Discourse.

Second, Culturally Affirming Pedagogy Is Essential. Dörnyei (2005) Emphasises That Learners' 'Ideal L2 Self'—Their Vision Of Themselves As Competent Speakers Of The Target Language—Is A Powerful Motivational Driver. For Tribal Students Whose Cultural Identities Are Historically Distanced From English, Faculty Members Can Facilitate This Identity Work By Incorporating Tribal Narratives, Folklore, And Community-Relevant Content Into English Instruction, Thereby Signalling That English Acquisition Need Not Entail Cultural Erasure.

Third, The Institutional Structure Of Tgtwrdc Colleges Offers An Underutilised Resource: Residential Co-Living. English Language Clubs, Peer Mentoring Programmes Pairing Senior Students With Juniors, And Informal English Conversation Hours During Recreational Time Can Create Low-Stakes Opportunities For Oral Practice That The Formal Classroom Cannot Replicate. The National Education Policy 2020's Emphasis On Multilingualism And Mother-Tongue Instruction In Early Schooling (Ministry Of Education, 2020) Also Suggests A Policy Environment Increasingly Receptive To Transitional Bilingual Approaches That Might Reduce The Sharp Affective Discontinuity That Tribal Learners Currently Experience Upon Entering English-Medium Degree Programmes.

7. Conclusion

This Study Has Provided Empirical Evidence Of High English Language Anxiety And Correspondingly Low Oral Proficiency Among Young Tribal Men Enrolled In Tgtwrdc Colleges In Nagarkurnool, Telangana. The Strong Negative Correlation ($R = -0.74$) Between Overall Flcas Scores And Composite Oral Proficiency Underscores The Critical Need For Affective Intervention Alongside Conventional Language Instruction. Communication Apprehension And Fear Of Negative Evaluation, The Two Highest-Scoring Anxiety Dimensions, Are Precisely The Competencies Most Implicated In Real-World English Communication—Making Their Amelioration An Urgent Pedagogical Priority.

The Findings Call For A Systemic Reorientation Of English Language Teaching In Tgtwrdc Institutions: One That Takes The Socio-Linguistic Histories And Cultural Identities Of Tribal Learners Seriously, Designs Anxiety-Informed Instructional Sequences, And Leverages The Unique Residential Community Structure As A Laboratory For Communicative Practice. Future Research Should Extend This Investigation To Female Tribal Learners—Whose Anxiety Profiles May Differ Significantly Given Gendered Socialisations Around Language And Public Speech—And Should Employ Longitudinal Designs To Trace The Trajectory Of Anxiety And Proficiency Over The Degree Programme. The Educational Promise Of Institutions Like Tgtwrdc Can Only Be Fully Realised When The Affective Dimensions Of English Learning Are Accorded The Same Institutional Attention As Access, Infrastructure, And Curriculum.

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