An investigation of the impact of language anxiety on the tertiary ESL undergraduate students' communicative competence in the three selected institutions in Lesotho

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Abstract

The study set out to investigate the impact of language anxiety on the tertiary ESL undergraduate students' communicative competence at the three selected universities in Lesotho. Present research point to language anxiety as a hindrance to second language learning and acquisition. This means that students who are anxious cannot learn the target language towards being communicatively competent. In exploring this impact, the study thus adopted a qualitative approach rooted in a case study. Through this design, data were collected in two ways; focus group discussions with (n=100) students from the three selected institutions and the face-to-face interviews with (n = 9) lecturers from the three institutions. Findings from the focus group discussions with students bring to surface students' fear to speak because of negative evaluation from their peers as well as constant error correction by their lecturers. The findings from face-to-face interviews with lecturers reveal amongst others that students' anxiety is manifest as a result of lack of exposure to English from high schools. The study thus recommends that high school teachers be equipped with communicative language teaching skills, so that students can be adequately exposed to language for ease of progression to tertiary level.

Keywords: Language anxiety, willingness to communicate, communicative competence, language teaching

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introduce the problem

The teaching of English as a second language according to Khajavy et al. (2018) and Han et la. (2022) requires a lot of effort and determination. This is because teachers and lecturers come across students and learners with different abilities in English as a second language classroom (ESL) (Mierzwa-Kamińska, 2021). Therefore, students who perform poorly tend to be the ones who mostly experience language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Mehdi & Kumar, 2019; Wang & McIntyre, 2021; Tosuncuoğlu, 2022). Moreover, Nkhi (2018) found that learners from rural schools did not communicate in English, and even their teachers sometimes taught them in Sesotho. I therefore believe that these kind of learners are the ones who are likely to perform poorly at tertiary because of their poor English language background. This further implies that the same students are also likely to be affected by language anxiety whenever they come to contact with English. It is for this reason that the study intends to find out the impact of language anxiety on the tertiary ESL undergraduate students' communicative competence.

A number of studies have been conducted on how anxiety impact on students' communicative competence. For instance Said and Weda (2018), Weda and Sakti (2018) and Han et al's (2022) studies revealed that language anxiety had a negative impact on students' academic performance. Moreover, Alemi, Daftarifard and Pashmforoosh (2011) found that language anxiety negatively impacted students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in the target language. Unlike the above mentioned studies, the focus of this study was not on how language anxiety impacted students' academic performance or achievement, but it was solely focused on its impact on students' communicative competence in English language. Consequently, there are no studies conducted in Lesotho on the impact of language anxiety on undergraduate tertiary students' communicative competence in English language. Therefore, this gap motivated the researcher to conduct this study.

The purpose of this study was therefore to investigate the impact of language anxiety on students' communicative competence in English language. It further aimed at finding out the causes of anxiety and ways through which the anxiety can be curbed, thus increasing students' willingness to communicate in the target

language. Moreover, the study intended to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of language anxiety on students' communicative competence in English language?
2. What are the major causes of language anxiety?
3. What can lecturers' do to curb students' language anxiety?

2. Literature review

2.1. Willingness to communicate

The study adopted MacIntyre et al's (1998) willingness to communicate (WTC) model as the structure that held this study. On the one hand, willingness to communicate is defined as an individual's inclination to communicate with a particular person or others at a particular time using second language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). On the other hand, McCroskey and Baer (1985) define willingness to communicate as a steady predilection to converse in different situations whenever one chooses to do so. This implies that students with a penchant to communicate have a propensity to express themselves freely without fear (Manipuspika, 2018; Vafadar et al, 2019). This suggests that classroom environment should be a relaxed one; for the main purpose of learning a second language is to inculcate the will to communicate in students. MacIntyre et al. (1998) developed this model because they sought to expand earlier conception of WTC by McCroskey and Baer's (1985). McCroskey and Baer's conceptualisation of WTC according to MacIntyre et al. (1998) was too narrow because their focus was mainly on speaking, so they extended the model to other production forms such as writing and understanding of both spoken and written language. They further argue that McCroskey and Baer's (1985) related attributes of WTC which are perceived communication competence, communication apprehension, introversion-extraversion and self-esteem are unequivocally gestated as a personality characteristic rather than a variable that is situation-based. Therefore, it is important to treat WTC as a situation-based variable with both ephemeral and long-term influences instead of limiting it solely to a characteristic-like variable (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

There are a number of possible influences on students' willingness to communicate. MacIntyre et al. (1998) outline what they refer to as 'layers' of their WTC model which are communication behaviour, behavioural intention, situated

antecedents, motivational propensities, affective-cognitive contexts and social and individual contexts. The above variables are believed to be situation-based rather than McCroskey and Baer's (1985) attributes which MacIntyre et al. (1998) critisise as being trait-like. This means that several factors influence students' willingness to communicate and not their personality characteristics. I therefore agree with MacIntyre et al. (1998) that situational variables influence student's willingness to communicate. For instance, a student with a high self esteem cannot willingly partake or engage in any communication if the classroom environment is not a relaxed one, but any student can freely express oneself if the classroom atmosphere is friendly. A friendly atmosphere according to Tseng (2021), Yafi et al. (2021) and Han et al. (2022) is the one that cultivates positive feelings, increases attention, motivation as well as discussions in the learning environment. Students will therefore feel free to express themselves and thus overcome their anxiety.

It is therefore of paramount importance for lecturers to enhance students' communication behaviour. This can be done through creating activities that compel students to speak so that they get used to the target language. Furthermore, lecturers can employ Di Pietro's (1987) Scenario Approach in which students are stimulated in order to engender their own strategies for organising role-playing scenarios. The lecturer should therefore act as a facilitator and a guide to individual students or groups as needed (Danesi, 2003; De Haan & Johnson, 2014; Ellis, 1998). This I believe can enhance students' willingness to communicate because of the created situation that allows them to initiate communication. In this case, students with low self esteem can be helped to overcome their anxiety because the atmosphere in the classroom fosters positive feelings.

2.2. Second language anxiety

Horwitz et al. (1986) define language anxiety as "a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviour related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process". Horwitz et al. (1986) further incorporated three interrelated anxieties in their ideation of language anxiety. The first one is communication apprehension which relates to the fear of communicating with other students or people. AlHarbi (2017) found that most college students in Saudi Arabia experienced communication

apprehension, especially during discussions with their teachers and classmates. Furthermore, Gawi (2020) found that communication apprehension is the main cause of language anxiety in students. This therefore suggests that students' communicative competence in the target language will not improve if students fear to communicate with others. I further believe that this fear might lead to second language attrition. Second language attrition is defined as a societal or individual's non pathological loss in the use of a second language (Seliger, 1991; Köpke, 2004; Montrul, 2005; Wei; 2014). The second type of anxiety is test anxiety which is the fear of formative and summative assessments. Test anxiety according to Gawi (2020) comes into view when the students performed poorly in the previous tests or exams. For that reason, students develop a downbeat feeling about tests and exams, and they also have a negative attitude when it comes to evaluative situations. However the focus of the study was not on students' performance so, text anxiety was not considered for discussion.

The last anxiety is the fear of negative evaluation, which entails the concern about how other students view the speaker especially during classroom presentations or discussions. AlHarbi (2017) and Paul Sun and Jun Zhang (2022) also found that students were scared of speaking in the classroom during debates or presentations because they did not want to be negatively evaluated or laughed at by others when committing some grammatical errors. This is where I believe that the issue of relaxed classroom ambiance comes in to place because students cannot fear to speak if lecturers create that environment in which every one of them will feel free to express themselves regardless of their background or ability. Students should also know that committing an error in the classroom is not a bad thing but a learning process that will help them to grow. I further concur with Bekalu (2017) and Gawi (2020) that lecturers ought to be friendly towards students because by so doing; they will curb students' anxiety. Language anxiety can therefore occur in any setting in relation to how acts of language are performed (Chen, 2019, Yafi et al., 2021; Paul Sun and Jun Zhang, 2022). Furthermore, language anxiety can be studied under three related approaches, which are trait anxiety, situational anxiety and state anxiety (Tran, 2012; Zheng & Cheng, 2018; Alamer & Almulhim, 2021). Trait anxiety posits that any person in this case a student; is likely to become anxious in any setting or situation (Spielberger, 1983; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Yafi et al., 2021). Further key to

the study was to find out if students in the three selected institutions experienced these anxieties and what caused such in the classroom.

3. Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach confined within a multiple case study. Qualitative research guide researchers in trying to understand people through social and cultural milieu within which they act and live (Myers, 2009; Aspers & Corte, 2021). The case in point is that the study employed this approach in order to deeply comprehend how second language anxiety impact on students' communicative competence and performance in English as a second language.

3.1. Participants

The sample of the study was purposively sampled from the institutions and they were assigned labels. Male students were assigned Sm and females Sf labels. Lecturers were also assigned Lm for males and Sf for female lecturers. Furthermore, data were collected through face- to-face interviews with lecturers (n=9), and the focus group discussions with students (n=100). The table below provides the profiles of students.

Table 1. Profiles of the students in FDGs (n=100)

Gender		No.	%
	Male	76	76
	Female	24	24
Age	17-21 Years	65	65
	Years and above	35	35
Language	Sesotho	100	100

3.2. Materials

The study used focus group discussions with students (n=100) and face-to-face interviews with lecturers (n=9) as the data gathering tools. Nyumba et al (2018) state that focus group discussions entail clustering people from akin backgrounds or abilities together in order to discuss a particular matter of interest. In this type of qualitative research, participants are asked questions about their attitudes, insights, viewpoints, and beliefs (Nyumba et al., 2018). In a focus group discussion, participants are free to talk to other group members. It usually consists of 8 to 12 participants led by an interviewer (researcher) in a supple discussion of a variety of topics of interest (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Moreover, the study employed face-to-face interviews with lecturers. An interview involves asking questions and getting answers from the selected population (Creswell, 2014). This can be telephonic, face-to-face, of a focus-group discussion, structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, data in this study were collected through face-to-face interviews which were largely conversational with nine (n=9) lecturers from the three selected institutions.

3.3. Procedure

In this study, I applied the latent thematic analysis because I went beyond the explicit or surface meaning of the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2021). My view of the participants' assumptions was subjective because I used my own words and thoughts to interpret what they told me. I also identified themes in the data inductively. That is, I analysed the responses from the participants through the inductive thematic analysis by critically reading through the data to classify meanings related to the topic of the study. Moreover, pieces of the data with similar meanings were clustered together and then assigned codes and the same pieces of text could be incorporated into many categories created from the data set (Frith & Gleeson, 2004). In ensuring the credibility of the findings, I took the study back to some participants of the study in the three institutions in order to verify if their views were captured accordingly. I also discussed the findings with some lecturers from the three institutions regarding their implications to the teaching and learning of English language towards communicative competence.

For conducting this study, it was vitally important to obtain permission from the relevant authorities. Obtaining such permission would, in turn, allow me to avoid

going to other people's workplaces without consent (Creswell, 2012). I explained the research process to the participants, and I also made it clear to them that participation in this study was voluntary and individuals partook once they signed informed consent. This meant that anyone could withdraw any time they wanted to. The researcher thus introduced himself to the participants with an ethical clearance certificate number 10260307_CREC_CHS_2021. Pseudonyms were used in order to protect the identity of the participants.

4. Findings

The following themes emerged from focus group discussions with students (n=100): lack of exposure, error correction and intimidation.

4.1. Lack of exposure

Most of the students complained about their poor background. They cited not being adequately exposed to English as the major reason for not being confident enough to communicate with others. Some students pointed out that:

"Our teachers from the schools that I attended never spoke to us in English, but they always spoke Sesotho. We were taught English in Sesotho and we always spoke Sesotho within the school campus" (SF1).

Another student added that he was not satisfied with his level of English language because of lack of exposure to other aspects of language. He expressed his dissatisfaction as follows:

"I major in English language, and the only thing that we are exposed to is how to teach grammar. We are not equipped with necessary skills that will help us to be good teachers after completing the course, so for me exposure does not only rests in us as students being able to listen to the radio or the ability to read." (SF4).

The above comment suggests that some students are disgruntled with the way English language is taught. This may further imply that most of them are communicatively incompetent in English language. The comment further implies that students are likely to be anxious to speak because of this lack of exposure.

4.2. Intimidation

Concerning intimidation, students provided different reasons why they always become anxious whenever they try to communicate. One of the reasons cited as their greatest challenge was that of classroom presentations. The students

mentioned that standing in front of others and speaking English made them sweat. They cited that one of the reasons for the fear to speak was brought about by the fact that their English was not good at all. One student expressed the following:

"Whenever I have to speak, especially during presentations, I feel so scared. One of the reasons is my English. Whenever we make grammatical mistakes, other students laugh at us, so it is really difficult to speak under such circumstances" (SM20).

Another student had a similar concern which was caused by his classmates. This is what he said:

"Our classmates from private schools are the ones who intimidate us because their English is so good, so much that you see some lecturers smiling whenever they roll their tongues. So, for me it becomes so difficult to speak especially after they have spoken" (SM15).

One student substantiated the above statement with the following response:

"I am easily intimidated by these students who speak like Americans because they always dominate us even in group discussions, so I cannot speak after them at all. What am I going to say and with what accent because I speak English in Sesotho accent? I wish I had gone to an English-medium school as well because I was going to show them what I am made of" (SF13).

Students further stated that it was indeed difficult to speak confidently. Some also mentioned that they were from rural areas where there was no radio to at least listen to or television to watch, so they are always behind in everything. Some cited that most people including their parents were illiterate, so they have no one to at least practise away from school. One student complained as follows:

"The fact that most of our parents from rural areas did not attend school is a major challenge because they could not help us with our English assignments, and I used to return incomplete assignments as a result. It is now very difficult here when we compare ourselves with students who are from private schools because their English is way better than ours" (SF6).

The above comments from students (SF1), (SF11) and (SF6) suggest that students are somewhat discouraged that their communicative competence skills will not be enhanced. It is likely therefore that those students do not enjoy learning English at their level considering their poor background.

Another response from (SM21) raised an important issue that needs close attention from lecturers as follows:

"When we try to speak English in class, there are those who think they know better and they always laugh at us, so it discourages us".

It is therefore probable considering the above comments that these students are the ones who hide behind others during classroom discussions because they are afraid to speak. Others might as well develop a negative attitude towards English language because of intimidation.

4.3. Error correction

Corrections of mistakes by their former teachers and their current English language lecturers seem to be another cause of anxiety. One student verified such corrections as in:

"One lecturer once stopped me while I was speaking; he corrected me and after that correction, I had forgotten everything that I had intended to speak. I just stood there tongue-tight and my presentation was gone. I wished he could have listened and then corrected me after I had finished" (SF14).

Another student added that:

"I am a shy person, so if somebody interrupts me while I am speaking, everything just vanishes. The same applies to other students who will be laughing at us even if our lecturers do not interrupt us. Kannete (really) they make us so uncomfortable, that is why I do not like to speak in class" (SM17).

Improper teaching approaches as mentioned by most students seem to be another cause of language anxiety. One student complained as follows:

"I am from an English language medium school where everything was done in English. Even ladies who were sweeping the school yard communicated with us in English. Our teachers never spoke Sesotho in class as they were expatriates. We were greatly exposed; however, I feel like my English is declining because here we are taught in Sesotho and English. Furthermore, lecturers come to class, teach and then go out or they sometimes read for us and then leave" (SF29).

This remark gives the impression that students who have been exposed to English from high school might see their level of communicative competence drop because of lack of exposure.

Accent seemed to be another issue that causes language anxiety to students. This is what one student said:

"I am from rural areas where we spoke English in such a way that people can hear clearly what I am saying; so this issue of fake American accents by other students make us appear as though we are not speaking proper English. It makes us uncomfortable and most of us decide not to speak at all" (SM32).

Another student added more to what (SM32) expressed. This is what the student added.

"This issue of accent is so ingrained in our minds that we find lecturers from other countries who speak differently from us as boring because of how they pronounce some English words. So, most students like to listen to lecturers who speak with British or American accent. This is because our teachers from high school told us that people who speak with such accents knew English" (SF40).

The above comments seem to suggest that students are not comfortable to speak English language because of what they were subjected to previously. It is therefore probable that students who have a negative attitude towards English are those from previously disadvantaged backgrounds.

4.4. Lecturers' interviews (n=9)

4.4.1. How does language anxiety impact on students' communicative competence?

Lecturers revealed that second language anxiety has a negative impact on students' ability to communicate using English, especially those from rural or poor backgrounds who have not been adequately exposed to the target language. One lecturer expressed the following:

"I have a serious problem with my students who are from public and rural schools; they do not like to speak English at all. Some would even shake whenever they have to stand before others because they are scared to speak English" (LF1).

Another lecturer substantiated the above comment by adding the following:

"Many of my students become nervous whenever they have to speak English, especially during presentations. It's they do not want to be judged by others because most of them have a very poor command of English" (LM2).

The above comments from lecturers imply that language anxiety has a negative impact on students' communicative competence because some end up not speaking at all because of the fear of negative evaluation. This further suggests

that their communicative competence in English will worsen because of their fear to communicate.

4.4.2. What causes students' second language anxiety?

Many lecturers cited lack of exposure to English language at high schools as the major cause of anxiety. They revealed that students who have not been adequately exposed to the language find it hard to communicate with others in English and they also get easily intimidated. The following comment was uttered by one lecturer:

"We receive students whose English leaves much to be desired and this makes it hard for us to employ methods that are designed to make them use English because it's like I want to kill them when I make them speak. If you can see them during presentations, you'd swear that they are being punished because some of them even cry on stage because they are afraid to stand and speak before others" (LM6).

The above comment was uttered by most lecturers from the three institutions even though they did not use similar words, but their worry was that lack of exposure to English at high schools seems to be the greater cause of language anxiety. Another cause of anxiety revealed by lecturers is the fear to stand before the class to communicate in English during presentations or debates. One lecturer reported the following:

"Our students are not confident enough to stand before us and speak English. They are so scared to communicate in English with others that I always wonder as to what causes this fear" (LF3).

4.4.3. What do you do to help them lower their fear to speak?

Lecturers outlined a number of interventive strategies that they employ to curb students' anxiety. However, some lecturers admitted that they were sometimes the causes of anxiety. One lecturer stated that:

"I try as much as possible to make them feel good about themselves. I encourage those who are weak by telling them that they should not be scared to make mistakes because that is part of their learning. This strategy seem to work even though there are still some students who fear to speak regardless" (LF4).

In contrast, another lecturer said the following:

"I realised that I was the cause of the anxiety because I always corrected their mistakes during their speeches unaware that I was making them anxious. I stopped it after some students complained that they are afraid to speak in my presence because I make them shy by always correcting their mistakes" (LM7).

It is evident based on the above comments that a relaxed atmosphere plays an important role in lowering the anxiety in the classroom. Furthermore, constant introspection on the part of lecturers can help them to revise their strategies so that students can feel free to express themselves without wondering as to what their lecturers will say if they make mistakes.

5. Discussion

The findings from students reveal that one of the challenges that they encounter in developing communicative skills is language anxiety. As explained in the review of literature, language anxiety refers to the sense of disquiet and undesirable distress-related emotions related with learning or communicating with others in a language that is not ones' mother tongue or L1 (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Boudreau et al, 2018; Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). Most students admitted to have not spoken, fearing to be laughed at by others. This feeling was expressed by students who were from either rural schools or public schools where they mostly communicated in Sesotho. This finding echoes what the lecturers reported regarding students' language anxiety. They revealed that some students are scared to speak in front of their peers, fearing to be laughed at for grammatical mistakes. Therefore, these students seem to suffer from what Horwitz et al. (1986) referred to as the "fear of negative evaluation". They also reported to have not felt comfortable with communicating with other people out of school in English, and this type of anxiety is known as "communication apprehension" (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Apparently, students do not feel comfortable communicating with other speakers of the language fearing to mispronounce some words and to be negatively evaluated by them. This observation resonates with Price's (1991), Karatas et al. (2016), Castañeda (2017) and Suchona and Shorna (2019) finding that students became anxious about making mistakes in pronunciation, especially in front of their peers, and that action alone is anxiety-provoking. Moreover, Price's (1991) and Karatas et al. (2016) affirmed that oral presentations, role-playing and defining words mostly produced anxiety in students. As such, lecturers could

lessen this practice by having no prior expectations; instead, they should inspire students before doing classroom activities and sensitise them to causes of anxiety and possibility of committing language errors or mistakes. This approach might also be advantageous for lecturers to make students aware that committing mistakes is unavoidable in learning; hence, there is no need for such apprehension in social L2 learning. This strategy is therefore likely to increase student's willingness to communicate when they are free to express themselves.

Furthermore, Horwitz et al. (1986) state that lecturers have two choices or alternatives when faced with anxious students: (1) they can assist them to manage situations that may prompt anxiety; or (2) they can ensure a stress-free learning environment. Given the vast array of affective and cognitive variables that intercede in language learning and acquisition, it is therefore not easy to put forward a definite approach to addressing the sentimental and cognitive needs of many students (Krashen, 1982; Danesh & Shahnazari, 2020; Alamer & Almulhim, 2021). This suggests that lecturers can aid students by decreasing their levels of anxiety as well as centering their attention on variables that maybe the sources or causes of the anxiety. On negative evaluation, as students reported, lecturers can strictly measure their classroom situations thus prohibiting students from making others uncomfortable, especially those who are not confident due to their background. Such measures would alley fears of the students with limited English proficiency so as to participate in classroom activities.

Moreover, Pérez Paredes (1999) advises lecturers to employ communicative strategies which include activities that can help in improving the negative emotions brought about by anxiety. This is in line with Krashen's (1982; 2013) assertions that lecturers should employ strategies that can lower the affective filter so that input can be extended to the language acquisition device (LAD). Input can only be conveyed to the LAD if the emotive determinants such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety which serve as restricting factors to second language acquisition are considered. Therefore, through communicative strategies, lecturers largely act as facilitators and interactive guides. Concurring, Ortega (2002) outlines the following guiding principles that can minimise the negative effects of anxiety. Such activities can help lecturers to curb anxiety as reported by students in this study. They can also help lecturers to minimise students' fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension.

1. Lecturers can act as facilitators instead of commanding figures, but they should act more as language counsellors. That is, they should support students in cases where they encounter stress by helping them to overcome such stress. Furthermore, they can create an environment that is less academic, but an atmosphere that is stress-free in which all students, either communicatively competent or incompetent, can feel free to communicate and thus have a real social L2 learning.

2. Students also revealed that they are sometimes scared to speak especially during oral presentations because some lecturers interrupt their presentations by correcting their mistakes, so Ortega (2002) and Bekalu (2017) advise lecturers to stop correcting students' mistakes because that makes them nervous.

3. In order to curb the fear of negative peer evaluation, lecturers should encourage interaction amongst students in the form of group discussions so that students can get to know one other better. I am of the view that communicatively incompetent students can be grouped with the more competent others so that they can help one another through scaffolding wherein competent students can lessen cognitive burden in the learning and acquisition of L2 by less competent students (Vygotsky, 1978; Turuk, 2008). It is in this way that Cash and Schumm (2006) believe that scaffolding provided to students aid in their language learning and acquisition, and such a help is contracted or stopped in order to make a student more autonomous.

4. Lecturers are also advised to conduct oral presentation activities more often for students so that they can get used to speaking which will in turn make them feel more comfortable.

5. Lecturers should not surprise students, but they can give students time to ready themselves and understand what they have to do in their own pace.

I have added another principle based on students' observations regarding a native speaker fallacy. Some students reported an element of communication apprehension deriving from their teachers at high school as well as lecturers who expected them to speak like native speakers. However, this finding surprised me because there are two dominant dialects of English at the students' disposal which are American and British English. Thus, one might wonder which accent teachers expect students to use. I would stress this point because students are often expected to write in British, not American spellings. I therefore find this confusing to students and that is why most of them would be scared to

communicate with other people. I concur with Ekanjume-Ilongo (2015) and Kiczkowiak (2018) that students should be taught English in such way that they will be communicatively competent without necessarily focusing on native-like competence, since English is an international language. Besides, my sixth guiding principle, following Ortega's (2002) outline is that lecturers should create an atmosphere in which students can express themselves freely without having to worry about accents. I do not believe that speaking with native-like accent denotes communicative competence because students can still be communicatively competent in English, using their own accents. As Banditvilai and Cullen (2018) observed, Thai students were also expected to pronounce English words like native speakers. In their view, "each nationality has its own unique English accent and that the Thai accent should be seen in that context". Such propensity, could, in my view, be achieved by students in the context of Lesotho.

Given the findings of this study on students' language anxiety, it is vital for lecturers to create a relaxed ambience for students to express themselves freely fearing no negative peer evaluation or communication apprehension in their classrooms (Westin, 2019). Lecturers should also ensure nurturing students' intellectual development through instructions that will push them towards the edge of new knowledge thus widening their ZPD. They should also expose them to scaffolding activities to help them to mediate their surroundings as suggested by Lantolf (2000). As such, the more they use the language with the help of their peers and their lecturers is the more willingly they will be to communicate, and the lesser anxious they would become.

6. Limitations

Since the results of this study cannot be generalisable to other institutions besides the ones that participated in this study, research with a different approach from the one adopted by the study is needed to further explore how second language anxiety impact on students' communicative competence in English. Additionally, the sample of the study was not comprehensive enough because data were collected during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and many students were hardly on campuses, so only a few were interviewed. Future studies can also investigate the causes of anxiety from high schools using a

different tool such as observations so as to delve deeper into this phenomenon, and how it will affect students at tertiary level.

7. Conclusion

Owing to the lack of research in Lesotho on the impact of second language anxiety on students' communicative competence, the study thus sought to find out if second language anxiety had a negative effect on students' communicative competence in English language. This is because findings from studies conducted by Alemi et al. (2011), Said and Weda (2018), Weda and Sakti (2018), Han et al. (2022) and Paul Sun and Jun Zhang (2022) revealed that language anxiety has a negative impact on students' communicative competence. Similarly, the findings of this study regarding the first question reveal that second language anxiety weakens students' willingness to communicate in the target language which leads to poor communicative competence in English language. Furthermore, findings from the second question further reveal two major types of language anxiety from which students suffer; being the fear of negative evaluation as well as communication apprehension. Regarding the third question, the study provided ways through which these anxieties can be mitigated in the classroom. It is therefore recommended that students be amply exposed to English language from high schools so that they do not encounter these challenges brought about by language anxiety. It is further recommended that there should be many workshops for teachers on how to expose students to the target language regardless of the schools' backgrounds. This is because lecturers complained that they inherit students with poor communicative competence in English from high schools, and students also confirmed that they were not amply exposed to the target language which is why they fear to communicate with others.

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