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Language Anxiety and Language Difficulty in Speaking English as a Second Language in a Rural Community

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***Abstract*—** This study explored the relationship between language anxiety and language difficulty among Grade 9 high school learners in a rural community. Using a quantitative inferential design, data were gathered from 30 randomly selected learners through an online survey consisting of 30 items on foreign language classroom anxiety and language difficulty. Results showed that learners experienced a moderate level of language anxiety (M = 3.06, SD = 0.22) and a moderate level of language difficulty (M = 3.16, SD = 0.97). The Pearson correlation coefficient (r = 0.29, p > 0.05) revealed a weak positive relationship between the two variables, indicating that students who felt more anxious also tended to find English slightly more difficult, though the relationship was not significant. These findings suggest that factors beyond anxiety, such as classroom environment, motivation, and teaching style, affect learners' English-speaking performance. The study recommends fostering supportive learning environments to help rural learners gain confidence and improve their English communication skills.

***Keywords*—** English speaking proficiency, Grade 9 learners, Language anxiety, Language difficulty, Rural community.

I. INTRODUCTION

English was one of the most widely used languages in the world and served as a global medium for communication, education, and technological advancement. In the Philippine context, it continues to play a vital role as the primary medium of instruction in schools and as the principal language, also one of the country's strengths that has helped drive the economy (Cabigon, 2015). However, learners in rural communities often had limited opportunities to use English in real-life situations. This lack of exposure affected their confidence and perception toward speaking English. Among the four language skills, speaking seemed intuitively the most important and difficult skill for ESL and EFL learners, as Chand (2021) explained, because it required not only linguistic accuracy but also fluency and self-confidence in communication.

Learners' perceptions toward speaking English played an important role in their motivation and willingness to communicate. Many rural learners experienced anxiety and shyness when speaking English because they were more accustomed to using their native languages (Marzan, 2020). This limited exposure hindered their classroom participation and speaking performance.

A significant factor that influenced learners' perception was language anxiety, which was not a modern phenomenon according to the study of Oad et al. (2020). Learners who experienced high levels of anxiety tended to avoid oral communication or participated with low confidence. Oficial and Casingal (2025) found that Filipino learners often felt nervous during oral presentations, which negatively affected their performance. On the other hand, Tajolosa (2022) explained that a supportive and encouraging classroom environment helped reduce anxiety and increased learners' willingness to communicate.

Another factor that shaped learners' perception was language difficulty, which included problems with grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. Castro et al. (2023) also found that exposure to various English varieties increased the complexity of the speaking process, leading to negative perceptions and hesitation to use English in conversations.

The classroom environment and sociocultural background further influenced learners' perceptions of speaking English. Tajolosa (2022) emphasized that learning environments that encouraged cooperation, feedback, and motivation could build learners' confidence in speaking. Quinto and Kitani (2025) revealed that allowing code-switching between English and local languages helped learners express their thoughts more effectively. Similarly, Mendoza (2020)

pointed out that societal attitudes toward English affected learners' motivation, participation, and self-esteem, particularly in communities where English was not widely spoken outside the classroom.

This study aimed to investigate the perception toward speaking English as a second language among Grade 9 high school learners in a rural community. Grade 9 learners from rural areas were chosen as respondents because their English proficiency was still developing. Lamo (2018) found that Grade 9 learners' overall English proficiency was at a "developing" level, particularly in grammar and writing, while Garcitos et al. (2024) observed that learners' communicative performance often fell below expected standards. These findings highlight that Grade 9 represents a critical stage in language development, especially for learners in rural areas where English exposure may be limited. Thus, focusing on this group provides valuable insights into how learners continue to strengthen their English language skills during a pivotal phase of academic growth. Moreover, selecting this group provides valuable insights into how learners in non-urban settings use and understand English in their learning environment.

It focused on examining how learners experience and respond to language anxiety and language difficulty when speaking English inside and outside the classroom. The study covered the students' level of confidence, motivation, and challenges in using English as a medium of oral communication. It was conducted during the school year 2025–2026 and involved Grade 9 learners from a selected private high school in a rural community.

Specifically, it aimed to answer the research question: What is the level of language anxiety in speaking English among high school learners in the rural community? What is the level of English difficulty in speaking English among high school learners in a rural community? Is there a relationship between language anxiety and language difficulty as a second language in the rural community? What the pedagogical implications of language anxiety and language difficulty were in terms of speaking English among high school learners in a rural community?

II. METHODS

This study used an online survey method under an inferential research design to determine the language anxiety and difficulty of Grade 9 high school learners towards speaking English as a second language in a rural community. The online survey method was applied because the study not only described learners' language anxiety and language difficulty but also examined the relationship between these two variables. The respondents of the study were intentionally chosen through random sampling, consisting of 30 Grade 9 learners enrolled in a private high school located in a rural community during the school year 2025–2026. The respondents were selected through random sampling to ensure that they represented learners who were currently enrolled in English classes and actively engaged in speaking activities. This private school was chosen because it is in a rural area and easy for the researcher to reach. The school also allowed the researcher to conduct the study without interrupting classes. Other nearby schools were busy with different school events at that time, so this was the only school available for the study.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire created using Google Forms. The survey link was distributed to the respondents through their class communication platform for convenient access and completion.

The adopted questionnaire consisted of 30 items and served as the main instrument in gathering data. It was divided into two main sections: Section A, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, and Section B, Language Difficulty. Section A focused on three types of anxiety: communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, while Section B measured learners' challenges in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension when using English.

The instrument used a five-point Likert scale to determine the level of agreement of the respondents with each statement. The scale and its description are presented below:

Weight	Description	Interpretation
5	Strongly Agree	If the item experienced frequently from time to time
4	Agree	If the item experienced by the respondents usually
3	Neutral	If the responders experience confusion

2	Disagree	If the item experienced by the responders rarely
1	Strongly Disagree	If the item is never experienced by the responders

To interpret the result on the language anxiety and difficulty towards speaking English as a second language of high school learners in rural community the researchers used the scale below:

Scale	Description
1.00-1.79	Very Low
1.80-2.59	Low
2.60- 3.39	Moderate
3.40-4.19	High
4.20-5.00	Very High

The data gathered from the online survey were analyzed using inferential statistics with the help of SPSS. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to determine the relationship between the two main variables, language anxiety and language difficulty, among Grade 9 learners in the rural community. Inferential statistics were used because the study aimed not just to describe the data but to test whether the relationship between the variables was significant or occurred by chance. The correlation method helped identify how students' levels of language anxiety were associated with their levels of language difficulty and how these factors might influence their ability to speak English as a second language.

This method helped the researcher gain a clearer understanding of how anxiety and language difficulties are related to learners' confidence and performance in speaking English. The results of the correlation analysis served as the main basis for explaining and interpreting the relationships found in the study.

III. RESULTS

Table 1. *Survey results from 30 variables for Language Classroom Anxiety*

Variable	Mean	SD	Description
English Language Classroom Anxiety	3.06	0.22	Moderate

Note. This table results for 30 variables (R1-R30) show a mean of 3.06, indicating that learners experience high anxiety in English language classes. This suggests that learners generally experience a high level of anxiety in foreign language classes, as reflected by their responses.

Table 2. *Survey results from 30 variables for Language Difficulty*

Variable	Mean	SD	Description
Language Difficulty	3.16	0.97	Moderate

Note. This table results which pertain to learners' language anxiety and difficulty, reveal an overall mean score of 3.16. This score indicates that learners generally perceive a moderate level of difficulty in learning the English language.

Table 3. *Computed Pearson Correlation Coefficient relationship between Foreign Language Anxiety and Language Difficulty.*

		English Language Classroom Anxiety	Language Difficulty
English Language classroom anxiety	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 30	.288 .123 30
Language Difficulty	Pearson Correlation	.288	1

	Sig. (2-tailed) N	.123 30	 30

t- 1.6, Pearson correlation- 0.29, p-two tailed -0.12 = (p > 0.05) not significant

Note. This table shows the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) which determines the relationship between the two main variables, language anxiety and language difficulty, among Grade 9 learners in the rural community.

The computed Pearson correlation coefficient (r = 0.29) indicates a weak positive relationship between foreign language anxiety and language difficulty. This means that learners who experience higher levels of anxiety tend to report slightly higher language difficulty, but the relationship is not strong enough to suggest that anxiety alone fully explains their difficulties.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study showed that Grade 9 learners in the rural community had a moderate level of foreign language classroom anxiety, with a mean score of 3.06. This means that many learners felt a bit nervous or shy when speaking English, but their anxiety was not too strong to stop them from joining class activities. This result supports Marzan (2020), who said that rural learners often feel anxious because they have few chances to use English in real-life situations.

Likewise, Oficial and Casingal (2025) found that Filipino learners often felt nervous during oral tasks, especially when speaking in front of others. Similarly, Empuerto et al. (2023) discovered that many ESL learners in the Philippines experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety because of fear of making mistakes and being judged by others. Rahmat et al. (2022) also found that speech anxiety remained a common issue among ESL learners, especially during oral recitations and classroom discussions. These findings all show that foreign language anxiety continues to be one of the biggest challenges faced by learners learning English as a second language.

For language difficulty, the mean score of 3.16 showed that learners found learning English moderately difficult. This suggests that they faced some problems with grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, but they could still communicate using the language. This finding supports Castro et al. (2023), who mentioned that hearing different kinds of English can make learning harder, particularly for learners who mostly use their native language every day. Che Musa et al. (2023) also found that rural ESL learners faced difficulties in expressing their ideas fluently in English due to limited exposure and lack of confidence. Similarly, Tajolosa (2022) emphasized that learners from less urbanized areas often struggle with vocabulary and pronunciation, especially when they do not regularly interact in English outside the classroom. These studies agree that limited exposure and practice make English learning more challenging for rural learners.

The correlation result (r = 0.29) indicated a weak positive relationship between language anxiety and language difficulty. This means that learners who felt more anxious also tended to find English learning a bit harder. However, the link was not very strong, which means that anxiety was not the only reason students faced language difficulties. Other factors such as teaching style, classroom environment, and motivation may also affect how they learn. This result agrees with Oad et al. (2020), who explained that anxiety is just one of many factors that influence language learning performance. In addition, Zheng and Cheng (2021) found that student motivation, self-efficacy, and teacher support could help lessen the effects of anxiety and improve performance in English learning. Empuerto et al. (2023) also noted that learners who received positive feedback from teachers tended to have lower anxiety levels and better oral communication skills.

V. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that Grade 9 learners in a rural community experienced a moderate level of language anxiety and moderate language difficulty in speaking English as a second language. Although many felt nervous or shy, their anxiety did not stop them from participating in class. The weak positive correlation (r = 0.29, p > 0.05) suggested that anxious learners also tended to find English slightly more difficult, though the link was not significant. This implies that factors like teaching style, classroom environment, and motivation also influence performance. Hence, teachers should foster a supportive and engaging learning environment that builds confidence and reduces anxiety. Providing more opportunities for real-life English use and encouraging learners through feedback and positive reinforcement can help them overcome language

challenges and improve their fluency and self-assurance in using English.

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