

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of The Study

In the evolving landscape of language education, understanding the role of language anxiety has become increasingly important, particularly in digital learning environments. Language anxiety, often referred to as foreign language anxiety (FLA) or second language (L2) anxiety, is a complex psychological phenomenon characterized by feelings of tension, apprehension, and nervousness specifically associated with language learning and use. It encompasses emotional reactions that can significantly impede the acquisition and performance of a new language. (Horwitz, 1986) stated that Language anxiety, often described as a form of communication apprehension specific to second language contexts, manifests as tension, fear, or apprehension during activities such as speaking, listening, and learning in a non-native language. (Xu and Xie, 2024) found out that describe language anxiety as encompassing “the feelings of worry and negative, fear-related emotions associated with learning or using a language that is not an individual’s mother tongue.”

Language anxiety, also known as foreign language anxiety (FLA), is a psychological condition where learners feel nervous, tense, or fearful when learning or using a language that is not their native tongue. This type of anxiety commonly occurs during

speaking or listening tasks and can severely affect language performance. As learners interact in real-time without the structure of a classroom or the support of a teacher, their anxiety levels may increase, particularly if they fear making mistakes, struggle to understand different accents, or experience technical issues. Language anxiety occurs when people associate negative emotional responses with using, expressing, or understanding language. (Yan and Liang, 2022) found out that Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is defined as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process.

Free4Talk is an online language-learning tool designed to connect learners for real-time conversational practice. (Marwa et al, 2025) state that it enables participants from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to engage in authentic exchanges, fostering opportunities for communication across borders. Despite its benefits, the platform presents challenges, including exposure to varying levels of proficiency and potential communication breakdowns, which can exacerbate existing anxieties. (Yadav, 2024) states that challenges highlight the need to investigate how digital learning environments, defined as interactive technology-driven systems for education, impact the emotional experiences of language learners.

The influence of language anxiety in such environments can be better understood through established psycholinguistic

frameworks. (Hajiyeva, 2024) found that for instance, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis underscores how emotional factors like anxiety can impede the process of language acquisition by creating a barrier to language input. (Javahery, 2025) found out that although traditionally applied to physical classroom settings, this theory offers insights into digital platforms, where anxiety may be influenced by unique aspects such as anonymity or the unpredictability of virtual interactions. (Martinez, 2025) explain that some learners might find these platforms less intimidating due to the absence of physical presence, while others may struggle with heightened anxiety caused by unfamiliarity or technical issues. (Di Domenico and Ryan, 2017) Complementary to this, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasizes the role of psychological needs autonomy, competence, and relatedness in driving motivation for learning. (Tobing and Damanik, 2025) states that While Free4Talk offers autonomy and flexibility, which can empower learners, it may simultaneously pose challenges to competence, especially if technical difficulties or linguistic mismatches occur.

Psycholinguistics, as a field exploring the cognitive and emotional processes underlying language use, provides a foundation for analyzing language anxiety in digital platforms. (Paramadina, et al., 2025) explain that users of Free4Talk must navigate multilingual, real-time interactions, which demand advanced cognitive processing and adaptive communication skills. (Ibrahim, et al., 2025) claims that studies have demonstrated that

digital tools like video conferencing or text chat may increase cognitive load, potentially intensifying anxiety for users with limited working memory or unfamiliarity with the platform. (Ibrahim, et al., 2025) states that according to Cognitive Load Theory, managing both the linguistic task and the digital interface can impose a significant burden, thereby affecting performance and increasing stress. (Rožman, et al., 2025) states that Conversely, features like instant feedback or access to supportive resources can mitigate anxiety by enhancing confidence and fostering a sense of achievement.

Platforms like Free4Talk bring a different kind of pressure. They are open, unmoderated spaces where anyone can join, speak, and listen. While this offers a chance to engage in authentic conversations, it also creates uncertainty. Users must quickly adapt to unfamiliar communication styles, varying levels of language proficiency, and unpredictable technical environments. For many, this unpredictability triggers stress and anxiety, which can block their ability to process and produce language effectively. Cultural dimensions also shape the experience of language anxiety on platforms like Free4Talk. (Yuan, 2022) states that learners from collectivist cultures may experience heightened anxiety due to a strong emphasis on avoiding mistakes or "losing face" in public interactions, whereas those from individualist cultures might find these platforms more liberating. (Giles, 2016) These cultural nuances are critical for understanding the diverse experiences of Free4Talk users, particularly in light of Communication

Accommodation Theory (CAT), which examines how individuals adjust their speech and behavior to align with or diverge from their interlocutors. This adaptation process, while often facilitating mutual understanding, may inadvertently increase anxiety for learners striving to match the proficiency of their peers.

Free4Talk is a free, online voice chat platform designed to facilitate language learning through real-time, peer-to-peer communication. Unlike structured language learning platforms that incorporate tutor-led sessions or text-based interactions, Free4Talk provides an open environment where users can engage in spontaneous conversations without strict moderation or lesson plans. This platform allows language learners to practice speaking in an informal setting, which closely mirrors natural communication scenarios. The unstructured nature of Free4Talk presents an opportunity to examine language anxiety in real-time interactions, making it particularly relevant for research in psycholinguistics and digital language learning.

The platform's accessibility and diverse user base contribute to its significance in studying language anxiety and communication experiences. Unlike platforms that require verification processes or structured language exchange mechanisms, Free4Talk has a low barrier to entry, enabling users from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds to interact freely. This diversity fosters a rich linguistic environment where dialectal variations, accents, and cross-cultural communication strategies

naturally emerge. Furthermore, since Free4Talk is primarily voice-based, it provides an authentic setting for analyzing spoken language anxiety, which may not be as effectively studied in text-dominant platforms. The spontaneous nature of the interactions encourages users to engage in real-time dialogue, offering valuable insights into how language learners navigate anxiety and develop communication strategies in digital language learning environments.

The rapid expansion of digital learning technologies has significantly transformed how learners acquire a foreign language. Online communicative platforms like Free4Talk present unique opportunities for learners to engage in authentic interaction with speakers around the world. However, despite the potential advantages for improving communicative competence, many learners continue to experience language anxiety, which can reduce participation, confidence, and overall communicative performance.

Recent research has shown that foreign language anxiety not only persists in online learning environments, but may also be exacerbated by the pressures of instant communication, fear of negative evaluation, and lack of non-verbal cues typical of face-to-face interaction (Wang & Zhang, 2021).

For example, empirical studies on foreign language learning in online environments report that learners frequently experience communication apprehension, particularly in speaking

and listening tasks, which may hinder active engagement in digital language learning contexts. research investigating learners' emotional experiences highlights that anxiety plays a central role in shaping learners' communication behavior and willingness to communicate in online settings (Alqarni, 2021).

Besides anxiety, communication experience itself is a critical factor influencing learners' engagement and outcomes in online language learning. Positive communication experiences characterized by supportive feedback, easier interaction flow, and successful exchanges can enhance learners' confidence and reduce anxiety, while negative experiences may reinforce apprehension and avoidance behavior.

Although broader research on emotional variables and communication outcomes has increased in recent years, but there is still limited empirical evidence specifically connecting language anxiety with communication experience in open access, user driven language exchange platforms such as Free4Talk.

This gap is important because the dynamics of user interaction on Free4Talk differ from traditional online classroom environments. Unlike structured online courses, Free4Talk interactions are informal and spontaneous, often involving real-time dialogues with native or fluent speakers without the presence of an instructor.

Therefore, it remains unclear how language anxiety interacts with communication experience within such platforms

and how these factors collectively influence learners' participation and communicative development.

Thus, exploring the relationship between language anxiety and users' communication experience on educational Free4Talk is crucial for understanding the psychological and communicative barriers in online language exchange settings. This study seeks to provide empirical evidence on this relationship and offer insights for learners, educators, and developers to create more supportive environments that promote effective communication and reduce anxiety.

This study thus aims to bridge the gap in understanding how language anxiety affects learners in digital platforms like Free4Talk. By synthesizing insights from psycholinguistic theories and recent research, the investigation explored strategies to address psychological and cognitive barriers in online language learning environments. This research contributes to the broader discourse on digital education by emphasizing the need for platforms that prioritize both linguistic development and user well-being.

B. Identification of The Problem.

Based on the background above, the identification of problems are:

1. Foreign language anxiety not only persists in online learning environments, but may also be exacerbated by the pressures

of instant communication, fear of negative evaluation, and lack of non-verbal cues typical of face-to-face interaction.

2. Many learners continue to experience language anxiety, which can reduce participation, confidence, and overall communicative performance.
3. Learners frequently experience communication apprehension, particularly in speaking and listening tasks, which may hinder active engagement in digital language learning contexts. research investigating learners' emotional experiences highlights that anxiety plays a central role in shaping learners' communication behavior and willingness to communicate in online settings
4. Research on emotional variables and communication outcomes has increased in recent years, but there is still limited empirical evidence specifically connecting language anxiety with communication experience in open access, user driven language exchange platforms such as Free4Talk.

C. Research Question.

Based on The Background of The Study and Identification of Problem above, The Researcher formulate the Research Question is :

Is there any significant relationship between users' language anxiety and their communication experiences in educational Free4Talk?

D. Objective of The Research.

To Examine the relationship between language anxiety and user communication experiences in educational Free4Talk

E. Limitation of The Research.

This research is limited to investigating the phenomenon of language anxiety experienced by users of the Free4Talk platform within the context of digital language learning. The study focuses specifically on real time spoken interactions and does not explore text-based communication or other online learning tools. Furthermore, the research is restricted to examining anxiety from a psycholinguistic perspective, emphasizing emotional and cognitive processes during language use, rather than incorporating broader sociolinguistic or pedagogical analyses.

The participants in this study consisted of voluntary users of Free4Talk, which may lead to a self-selecting sample that does not fully represent all language learners. Cultural and linguistic diversity among participants may also vary, which could influence the generalizability of the findings. In addition, this research did not evaluate the effectiveness of specific anxiety reduction interventions but instead focused on identifying and analyzing the sources and impacts of anxiety in digital speaking environments.

This study focused on user on Free4Talk Platform, that may have language anxiety when use Free4Talk website there many users there but researcher only took a sample size of 30 participants using convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method where respondents are chosen based on availability and willingness to participate.

F. Significant Of The Research.

This research is expected to provide some useful benefits :

1. The findings from this research are expected to provide valuable insights for educators seeking to create more supportive learning environments. By identifying specific triggers of language anxiety in digital platforms, educators can develop targeted strategies to alleviate these anxieties, thereby enhancing learner engagement and communication efficacy.
2. This study likely underscored the need for further empirical research into the interplay between technology use and language anxiety.

G. Definition of Key Terms.

1. Language anxiety, often referred to as foreign language anxiety (FLA), is a specific type of anxiety experienced by individuals when learning or using a second or foreign language. It encompasses feelings of unease, worry, nervousness, and apprehension that can significantly

impact language learning and communication experiences.

2. Free4Talk is an online platform designed to facilitate language learning through real-time communication.

