Chapter 2

Foreign Language Anxiety among the L2 Users of English

2.0 Introduction

The term 'anxiety' has been defined as 'a state of apprehension, a vague fear' (Scovel, 1978) which affects the learning of a language and the contextually appropriate performance of the same (Balachandran and Skully, (2004); Tobias and Everson (1997) and Gaudy and Spielberger (1971). Anxiety also impacts negatively on each aspect of the cognitive process ranging from the input to processing and subsequent output and feedback in communication(Tobias 1979, 1980, 1986). It is primarily 'a subjective state of tension and apprehension' (Spielberger, 1983) that gets expressed symptomatically through unique traits in personality, a state of mind, or response to a situation. The most prominent form of anxiety as is evident among the students is situational which is triggered by the requirement to perform before an audience in a class in a language that is foreign with a sub-conscious fear of being publicly ridiculed and causing embarrassment.

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), on the other hand, differs from any form of trait anxiety as the latter is permanent in nature and cannot be overcome through any systemic or tailor-made intervention. Categorized as situation or context specific, FLA has been defined as 'a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the (foreign) language learning process' (Horwitz *et al*.1986). Thus, FLA implies a wholly negative emotional reaction to the process of learning a foreign language as the learners find it difficult to deal with a structure of language that is alien and new to them. Their anxiety towards learning the new language gets manifested through three attributes:

(i)   General apprehension towards communication in L2

(ii)   Apprehensive of Negative Evaluation

(iii)   Anxious about test and examination

Horwitz *et al*.*'s* position regarding FLA has been validated through numerous further studies (Hilleson (1996), Liu and Jackson (2008), Liu (2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b), Liu and Hu (2009), Sellers (2000), Yan and Horwitz (2008)).   The students whose intensity of FLA is high tended to underperform than their low anxious peers, remain silent or speak in inaudible tones, and in extreme cases, tend to get wobbly on their legs or shaking hands. FLA also bears a strong correlation with motivation, confidence, class performance and self-esteem (McIntyre and Gardner (1991), Hilleson (1996), Liu (2006, 2007), Ehrman and Oxford (1995)).

2.1 Anxiety and Foreign Language

The link between language anxiety and learning of a foreign language is seminally shaped by Scovel (1978) who had emphasized on making a distinction between facilitating and debilitating aspects of anxiety. Such a distinction, stresses Scovel, will resolve the experimental ambiguities and will help in providing customized intervention to the affected target group. Scovel's contention is based on the hypothesis that while a certain level of anxiety may prove to be beneficial, which was later validated by Bailey (1983), Liu (2006), Liu and Jackson (2008) and Oxford (1999), debilitating anxiety, on the other hand, may lead to avoidance and underperformance during the process of language learning.

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), on the other hand, approached anxiety from the purview of situation-specific traits and designed an instrument, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), to measure the impact of the same in a classroom situation. However, as anxiety is directly related to emotional, motivational, and individual personality traits, other measures as behavioural ratings and physiological tests too are used. But from an educational perspective and establish a linkage between anxiety and Foreign Language Learning, FLACS has been extensively customized and used catering to the students belonging to different language groups and cultures.

Situation-specific anxieties, such as anxiety in learning a foreign language, are not caused independently but share a relationship with many other factors, with all these

impacting one another. The distinction in personality types, such as being introvert or extrovert, play a direct role in making an individual anxious as s/he tries to deal with the situation at-hand (McIntyre and Charos, 1996). Both introverts and extroverts tend to work in mutually opposing modes. While the former is more anxious than the latter, particularly in a highly interactive classroom ambiance (Brown, Robson and Rosenkjar, 2001), the extroverts, on the other hand, underperform during individual exercises and assignments or while working on their own for longer periods. An unflinching desire to perform best, to be perfect under all situations and circumstances, learning behaviour, etc. too may trigger language anxiety. Anxious students tend to show dissatisfaction with their performance quite often compared to their less anxious or non-anxious peers; they tend to strive higher, to be perfect in everything they do over their peers (Gregersen and Horwitz, 2002).

Further, as shown by Oxford (1999), gaps between students' learning style and teachers' teaching style too may cause anxiety in a classroom situation. These may heighten the level of the same for those who are highly anxious compared to the less anxious or the non-anxious ones. Other variables which play a major role in triggering anxiety include attitude and motivation of the learner. To maintain a healthy balance between self-esteem and 'emotional equilibrium' (Ehrman, 1996), students (individuals) use various defense mechanism strategies as silence, inaudible voice, reluctance to participate in class discussions and negative body language.

While Horwitz *et.al* (1986) has cited communicative apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety as some of the causes of Foreign Language Anxiety in the classroom, Price (1991), on the other hand, has added difficulty level of the foreign language considered for learning, individual perception of the language aptitude, individual personality variables such as stage fright or the fear of public speaking, etc. to the list of possible causes. Further, Young (1991, 1994) has listed six factors deduced

from three aspects, viz., the learner, the teacher and method of instruction that trigger Foreign Language Anxiety among the students. These are:

(i)   Intra-personal and Interpersonal anxiety

(ii)   Learners' perspective and aptitude for language learning

(iii)   Teachers' perspective on language teaching and learning

(iv)   Teacher-Learner compatibility and communication

(v)   Classroom ambiance and strategies

(vi)   Suitability and appropriateness of instruments used for language learning

Sparks and Ganschow (1993) root FLA on the Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis which emphasizes only the cognitive abilities of the learner in processing the first and second language acquisition and learning. However, the scope of this hypothesis is limited in that isolating the process of language learning from its socio-cultural roots severely restricts the possibilities of contextual appropriateness that plays a major role in language learning. McIntyre (1995), on the other hand, grounds language anxiety at par with social anxiety and maintains that anxiety plays an important role in language learning as a social cognitive ability. As anxiety interferes in all three stages of language learning, viz., input, process and output, a strong link, therefore, exists between anxiety, cognition, and behaviour.

2.1.1 FLA among the target group of the students

The target group of the research includes undergraduate students of six branches of engineering at the North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST), Arunachal Pradesh. The students to the institute are admitted primarily from the eight northeastern states of the region, viz., Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Nagaland, and Sikkim. The target group is heterogeneous in that all of them belong to different linguistic and cultural groups with different customs and religious practices, different academic and financial backgrounds and have a different medium of instructions at the feeder levels. The students'

proficiency levels vis-à-vis their use of English ranges from average to good, with varying degrees of error in grammar, usage, and style.

To assess their levels of anxiety, the standard instrument Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire has been taken as a base. However, to cater to the specific composition of the target group, the FLCAS has been customized to include the English language only. The number of questions too have been reduced and reframed accordingly. For analysis of the responses, the 5-point Likert scale has been used. The questionnaire has been uploaded on to Google docs, and the URL of the same is posted on the Facebook page of a particular class and in some cases, mailed individually or to the class groups. The respondents were given a week to reply and submit the same online. Users' comfortability with the online mode of communication, combined with their active presence on the social network was the primary reasons behind the electronic uploading and distribution of the questionnaire. The targeted sample size of three hundred students responded within the stipulated time frame of one week. Following this, the information has been classified according to the following categories of the respondents: (i) Gender (ii) Age-group (iii) Medium of Instruction (iv) Community/Clan/Tribe (v) Mother Tongue.

2.2 Major reasons for anxiety in the classroom:

Some of the major reasons for anxiety among the target group include:

(i)   *Fear of exposure about the absence of knowledge of L2 grammar and usage*.
One of the major reasons for classroom anxiety is the fear of being exposed to the lack of proper grammatical rules. The fear can be traced back to the method of teaching they were exposed to at the feeder level. It has been found that grammar and language were taught primarily by making the students cram the rules and answering tailor-made questions during the examinations. There is either no or negligible attempt at relating the grammatical rules of English vis-à-vis their mother tongue. The problem is further compounded in the case of the students who belong to those communities which do not

have a script and written literature, such as the case of students belonging to different communities in Arunachal Pradesh. Due to the lack of written literature in their respective mother tongues and non-institutionalization of the dialects, the students tend to adopt and communicate in a creolized form of Hindi, which finds a marked impact on their oral mode of communication. Hence, switching from creolized Hindi to English in the classroom is a barrier for the students resulting in increased anxiety levels.

(ii)   *Anxious about falling short of the expectations of the instructor in the language class.* It has been observed that there remains a gap between the teacher and the taught in the classroom. The reasons for this gap are usually attributed to the individual teaching styles, teaching objectives and also the personality of the teacher. If the teacher is perceived to be having a dominating type of personality, the levels of anxiety are found to be higher on the part of the students resulting in silence and lack of active participation in the English language classroom. It is worth noting that for the respondents, 'dominating personality' implies anyone who is fluent in the use of language along with impeccable accent, intonation, pitch, etc.

(iii)   Anxious about committing errors in articulation.
Students belonging to certain communities, particularly whose mother tongue happens to be any of the dialects spoken in Arunachal Pradesh, have problems with the articulation of the consonant clusters resulting in faulty pronunciation.

For instance, some of the common mistakes in pronunciation heard in the classroom are:

CORRECT PRONUNCIATION	FAULTY PRONUNCIATION
Kleptomania	*Keleptomania*
Cluster	*Culuster*
School	*Iskool*

Style	*Istyle*
Furnish	*Purnish*
Rickshaw	*Riskaa*
Risk	*Riks*
Thanks	*Tanks*
Foreign	*Poren/Porain*
Fine	*Pine*
Interfere	*Intrapere*
Zero	*Jiro*

Table 2.1: Common Errors in pronunciation - I

Similarly, the students from Assam cannot properly differentiate between the sounds like */ch/, /sh/, /s/, /z/, /j/,* etc. during oral communication because of the non-existence of these sounds in their native language.

For instance, some of the common mistakes in pronunciation heard in the classroom are:

CORRECT PRONUNCIATION	FAULTY PRONUNCIATION
Chair	*Sair*
Chopper	*Sopper*
Share	*Sair*
Damage	*Damaje*
Crash	*Cras*
Shampoo	*Sampu*
Sheep	*Sip*

Quiz	*Quij*
Shrug	*Srug*
Driver	*Diver*
Drawer	*Doyer*
Arrears	*Area*
Rickshaw	*Riksaw*
Archive	*Arseev*
Achieve	*Aseev*
English	*Englis*
Language	*Languaje*
Pronunciation	*Pronounciasion*
Garage	*Garaje*
Cradle	*Kradul*

Table 2.2: Common errors in pronunciation - II

With fear of being mocked at by their peers, the students largely prefer to remain quiet during a language classroom.

(iv)   *Anxious about negotiating between the real and aspirational selves.*
Another major reason for English language anxiety among the students is the conflict between the 'real' and 'aspirational' identities. The students aspiring to follow the style and mannerisms of fluent speakers. In the process of imitation, however, the gaps emerge, and this impacts the 'actual performance.' The most common areas of imitation are accent, pitch and body language. When the students are exposed to the gaps between the real and the aspirational, they become reluctant to participate in the

classroom. The fear of exposure increases the students' levels of anxiety in the language classroom.

(v)   *Anxious about inadequate vocabulary.*

Vocabulary too is a reason for making the students anxious in the language classroom. The students of engineering can be placed in two opposing extremes regarding vocabulary: those who lack the adequate vocabulary, which forms around 73% of the total respondents and those who lack appropriate vocabulary which formed around 25% of the respondents. A mere 2% of the respondents are found to have a near perfect balance between adequate and appropriate stock and use of vocabulary. While the intensity of anxiety among the first group of students responded from medium to high, it maintained a constant medium for the latter group. The reason for vocabulary induced anxiety in the latter group owes to the exposure and pointing out of the inappropriate use of words during their oral and written discourse. While they have learned a fair amount of words over a period, including the high sounding and bombastic ones which they use liberally, a lack of knowledge of its proper usage, stylistic errors result in creating gaps between the intended and conveyed message thereby compounding their levels of anxiety.

(vi)   *Anxious about the hierarchy and physical ambiance of the classroom.*

One of the major barriers to oral communication is the physical setting in which communication takes place. A hierarchical classroom setup where a teacher speaks from a raised platform acts as a physical barrier between the teacher and the taught. The problem gets compounded as and when the students are asked to stand while answering a question. This apart, sudden exposure to gadgets and devices in a multimedia classroom where the practice classes are usually held add up to their levels of anxiety and thereby impacting performance.

(vii)   *Anxious about communicating without cohesion.*

Students are usually found to know the answer to most of the questions in the class. However, they are reluctant to participate in the discussion or provide answers orally.

But the same set of students is found to provide answers correctly regarding content in the written mode. The reason for such discrepancy is found to be the fear of making statements orally devoid of cohesion and necessary logic. A similar pattern has been observed during synchronous chats and updates online, particularly when they are aware or conscious of the presence of the instructor on the other side, who is capable of pointing out errors and exposing gaps in the process of communication.

Being the students of an engineering institution, the students have easy access to the internet and internet-enabled devices. As there is no systemic intervention and an institutional or academic strategy to address the foreign language anxiety towards the English language, the students resort to social networking sites and electronic messaging portals such as WhatsApp to share and gather information as well as for general communication at an inter and intra-branch level along with their friends, family, and followers.

The surveyed students, on an average, spend three to five hours every day on different social networking sites. It has been found that being active on these sites help them negotiate with varying range of their foreign language anxiety. Further,as the architecture of these sites provide ample scopes to communicate in a way that doesn't conform rigidly to the rules of grammar and style, with no inbuilt mechanism to show the errors (except Microsoft Office or any such customizable software), the students find it easier to communicate through these mediums as their lack of knowledge of the rules remain hidden. Inversely, it helps them in innovating the structure of the language through multiple strategies which become fashionable and gets validated through *likes* and shares by their online friends and followers. However, with inadequate knowledge of the grammatical rules of English language, the respondents use the same lingo in their formal modes of oral and written communication like semester examinations and class assignments as well.

In the professional courses like engineering, the emphasis is mostly given on developing the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) rather than on a cognitive understanding of a language. Coupled with a lack of proper learning of the

rules of English in their respective feeder levels, they remain unaware of the errors in their speaking and writing of English. In the absence of proper academic intervention, the students generally start believing their writing and speaking as the correct form and start considering them as fluent in the language. It is with this *notion of correctness* the students communicate online during which any deviation from the rule is usually perceived as a deliberate move (by the users who are aware of the rules), and the post or the update becomes a trend which gets subsequently validated as the friends and followers start *liking* and using it. Such validations reinforce their belief in their notions of correctness and on the face of the lack of knowledge to make a distinction between the formal and informal modes of writing and speaking, the two modes overlap with the informal getting emphasized more than the formal modes. This trend is most prominent in those students who have been actively engaged with the social networking sites for more than three years.

2.3 Analysis of the data:

Of the 300 respondents, 245 are male respondents, and 55 are females. 97% of the respondents (291 students) belong to the following communities of the Northeast: Garo, Nyshi, Bodo, Chokri, Khasi, Manipuri, Mizo, Lushai, Ememei, Galo, Adi, Apatani, Assamese, Tagin, Kokborok, Sangtam, Hrangkhawl, Meteilon, Sumi, Lotha, Mizotawng, Dimasa, Bhutia and Thadou-Kuki with each having their own distinctive cultural, linguistic or dialectal pattern. The break-up of their age groups are as follows:

21 – 20 years: 63.2% = 190 students

21 – 25 years: 35.1% = 105 student

26-30 years: 0.9% = 3 students.

Above 30 years: 0.8% = 2 students

3% (9 students) belong to Bengali, Nepali, Punjabi, Bhojpuri and Malayalam backgrounds. 77% (231 students)are from the English medium schools, 11% (33 students) from the Hindi medium, and 12% of the respondents (36 students) have completed their school education in their respective vernacular medium of instruction.

While testing anxiety levels in using English in the classroom situation, it has been found in the study that 80% (240 students) have major anxiety in written as well as oral modes of communication. 56% (168 students) are averagely proficient in using English as an L2 for communication, and 51% (153 students) ranged between average and poor as far as the knowledge and application of the grammatical rules of English are concerned. The study also revealed that given a choice of reading a text in either English which is L2 and their native L1s, 39% (117 students) preferred English over their respective mother tongues and 45% (135 students) preferred English to write over their respective mother tongues. For oral communication, however, 40% (120 students) prefer their L1s over English if an option is offered between English and their respective mother tongues.

The customised version of the FLCAS, renamed as the English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale has thirteen questions catering to the composition of the respondents of the target group. Apart from their name, e-mail, age, mother tongue, and gender, the questionnaire used a few common variables viz.,

(i)   the medium of instruction in school

(ii)   the State of domicile in India

(iii)   the way they learned English

The medium of instruction of the respondents varies from state to state and from school to school. The same is true in case of the affiliating boards as well. For instance, all government and private schools in Arunachal Pradesh are affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). On the other hand, in Assam and Meghalaya, there are private schools which are affiliated to the CBSE and ICSE as well as the respective state boards along with the government schools. The same holds true in case of other north-eastern states in general.

Of the total surveyed students, 77.2% (232 students) had their education in schools where the medium of instruction is English. 10.3% (31 students) had their education in schools where the medium of instruction is Hindi and 12.3% (37 students) in schools where the medium of instruction is the local vernacular (primarily Assamese and

Bengali, and in a few cases, Nepali and Manipuri). Even though a majority of the respondents across all age groups surveyed come from schools where the medium of instruction is English, it is found that the method of instruction that was followed did not contribute much to the proper imparting of English language. The example of Arunachal Pradesh highlights this issue prominently. Barring a very few schools which are privately managed (like the Vivekananda KendriyaVidyalayas and the Delhi Public School), it has been found that in the rest of the schools, no special emphasis is given towards teaching English language and grammar. Rather with the introduction of the Communicative or Functional English, the focus has shifted largely towards these areas. Further, it has been found that the teachers generally follow the translation method of teaching English in which a story, paragraph or a poem is read out in English followed by its translation given to the students in Hindi. The students are asked to read the story by themselves, cram up the answers to the questions dictated in class and are expected to write the same in the examinations. Similarly, the students are asked to cram the rules of grammar, and on the basis of it, questions are generally asked. Thus, the students are found to be ignorant about the specific rules of grammar, but they use it with their *individual* notions of correctness. As there is no script or written literature for any of the dialects spoken in Arunachal Pradesh and a resultant non-institutionalization of the same, the rules of English grammar cannot be taught with relation to the rules of their respective mother tongues. This void has been filled by Hindi, although the Hindi spoken in entire northeast India is largely a creole with a major intensity of the mother tongue influence. A lack of properly trained teachers in the feeder level, lack of proper educational tools and basic infrastructure in schools too are compounding the problem of language education in the state. Except for Mizoram and Nagaland, the case is no different in the rest of the states of the North-eastern region.

2.3.1 Analysis of the responses

The use of the common variables listed above is the first point of deviation from Horwitz and Cope's FLCAS. While age, mother tongue, and gender will help in categorizing the respondents and assess the nature of their use of social network platforms and the language they prefer, the rest of the variables will assess the impact of the pattern of education the users had at the feeder level on their learning and use of the English language. The specific question-based analysis is given below:

(i) *I am comfortable when speaking in my English language class.*

Of the total respondents, 15.8% (47 students) strongly agreed that they were comfortable when speaking English in the classroom and 48.2% (145 students) agreed to the query. While 22.8% (68 students) preferred to remain neutral, 13.2% (40 students) disagreed and stated that they weren't comfortable speaking in English during the English language class. 57% (171 students) of those who agreed to belong to 16-20 years of age and 43% (129 students) come under the 21-25 age groups. Further, 91% (175 students) of those who have responded positively to the query had their school education from schools where the medium of instruction is English. Since the combined strength of those who strongly agreed and those who agreed (64%) is higher than those who disagreed or preferred to remain neutral (36%), the respondents' level of anxiety appears to be low in respect of using English in the classroom for oral communication.
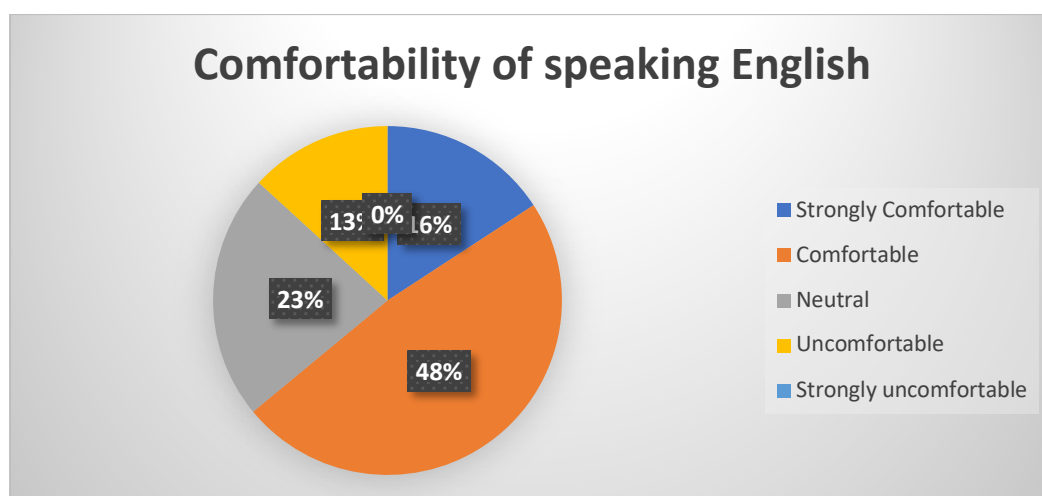

Fig.2.1: Levels of comfortability of using English in the class

(ii)   *I don't worry about making mistakes in English language class.*

32.5% (98 students) have no worries about making mistakes in the English language class, while 7% (21 students) strongly agreed with the question above. 16 of 21 students have a public school background. While 21.1% (63 students) remained neutral, 30.7% (92 students) disagreed with the position above, and 8.8% (26 students) strongly disagreed with the same. This particular question has given a fairly balanced result regarding English language anxiety in the classroom. Of the 39.5% students who disagreed, 69% (81 students) had their school education from vernacular medium schools, 24% (28 students) from government schools and the rest are from private and public schools where the special emphasis on language learning is usually given.
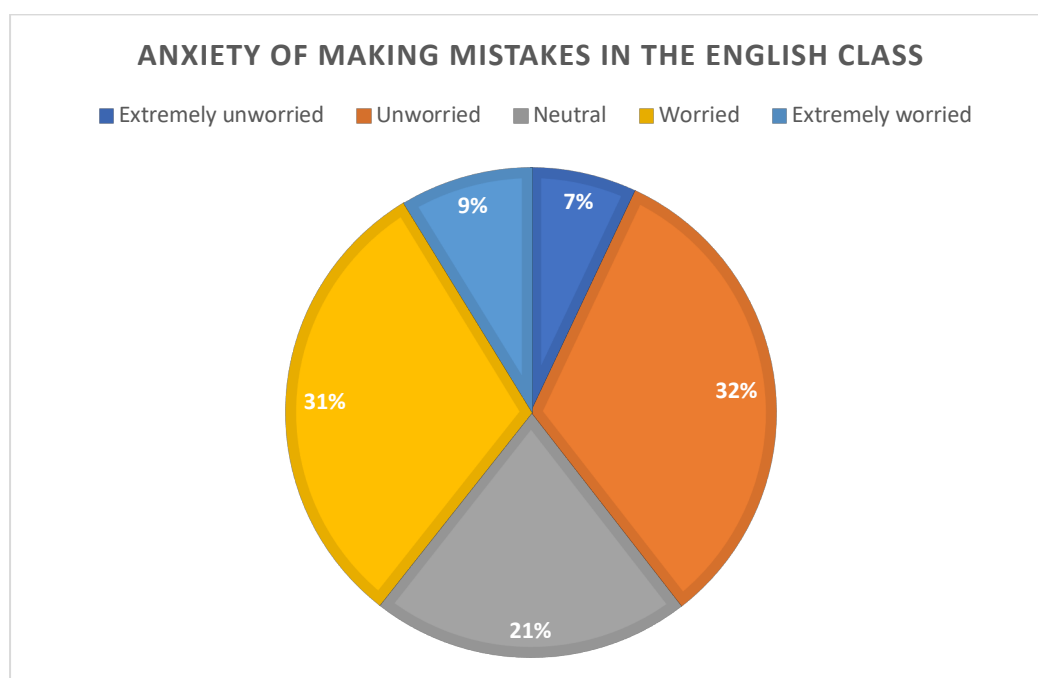

Fig.2.2: Anxiety of making mistakes in the English class

(iii)   *During the English language class, I often find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.*

The responses to this question contradict the responses given by the students to the first two questions. 36% (108 students) have affirmed that they think about things which have nothing to do with the course during the English language class, with 6.1% (18

students) strongly affirming this. 20.2% (61 students) preferred to remain neutral while 28.1% (84 students) disagreed and 9.6% (29 students) strongly disagreed with the same. The reasons for the same are attributed to the following causes:

(a)   The respondents do not understand the contents taught by the teacher due to the inability on the part of the teacher to explain the same properly.

(b)   The respondents failed to understand the content due to their weakness in understanding and use of English language and vocabulary.

(c)   The content being taught is monotonous and uninteresting.

(d)   7% of the respondents attributed this to the personality of the teacher as well.

(e)   All the factors above spiked the attention span of the students quite frequently. The factors stated above have contributed significantly towards increasing the overall levels of anxiety in the English language classroom.
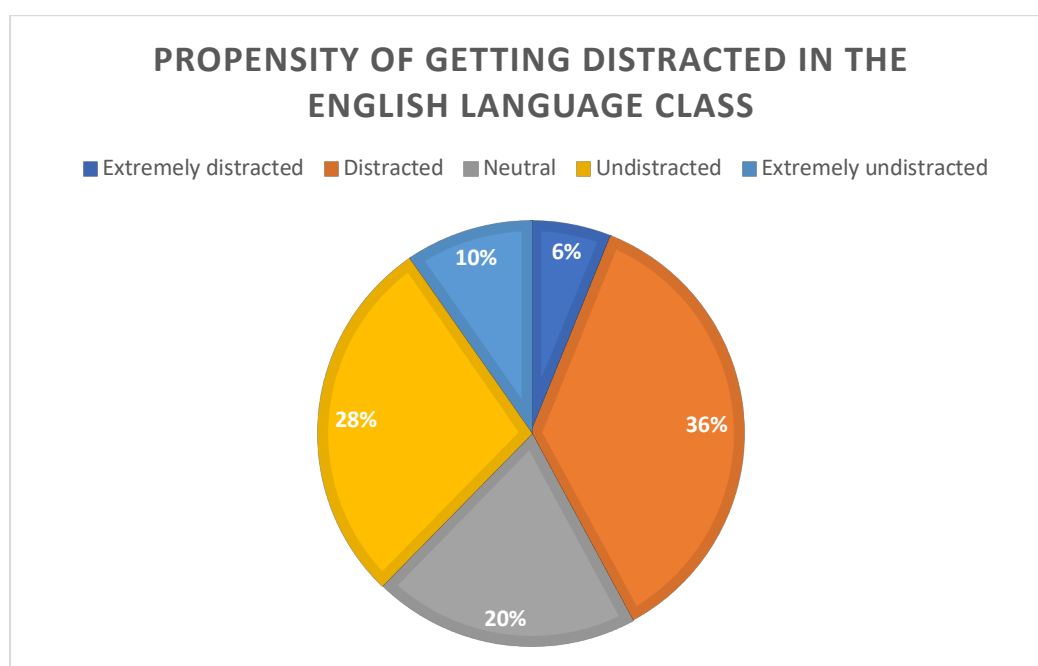

Fig. 2.3: Distractions in the English language class

(iv)   I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am.

41% (123 students) agreed that they think about other students being better in English compared to them. 24% (72 students) strongly agreed to the contention, and 15.4% (46

students) disagreed with the same. 19.6% (59 students) preferred to remain neutral. However, it has been found that this tendency has been a contributing factor in the 41% of the students above to participate and speak up during classroom activities and group discussions.
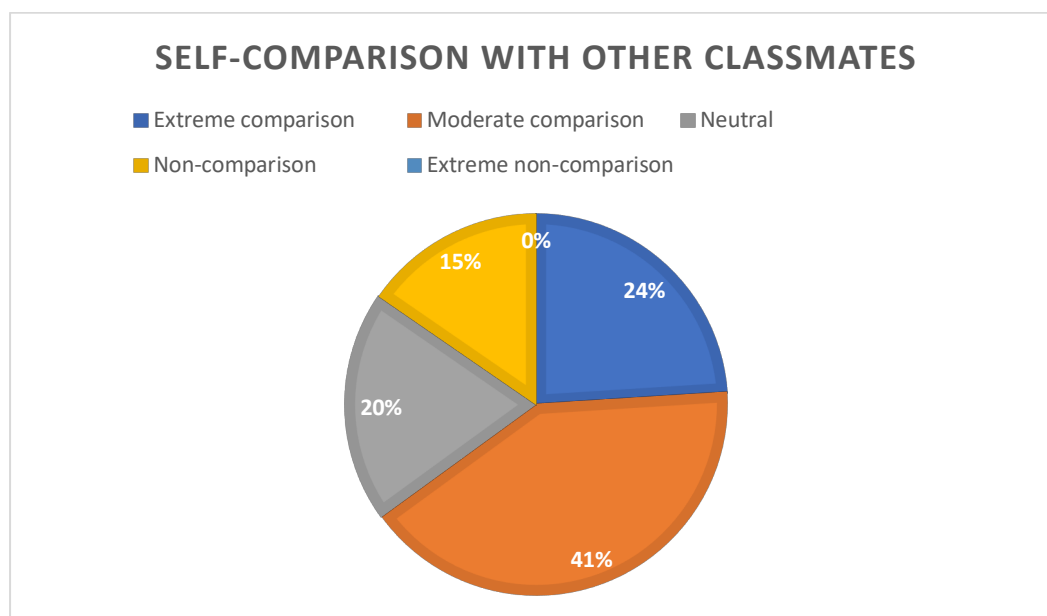
SELF-COMPARISON WITH OTHER CLASSMATES

- Extreme comparison
- Moderate comparison
- Neutral
- Non-comparison
- Extreme non-comparison

0%
15%
24%
20%
41%

Fig.2.4: Self-comparison with classmates over the use of English

(v)   In English language class, I usually get so nervous that I forget things I know. Nervousness increases the anxiety levels of the students and thereby reduces their confidence level required to interact fluently in the English language class. 59.1% (177 students) have admitted forgetting even the things they know in the English language class because of nervousness, out of which 12.3% (37 students) have strongly agreed to have this condition. 17% (51 students) have disagreed with 4.7% (14 students) strongly disagreeing with the position. 6.9% (21 students) have refrained from taking any position. The reasons for nervousness are primarily due to the following:

(a)   Lack of understanding of the content that is being taught in the classroom.

(b)   Inferiority complex is pertaining to the use of English language stemming from the feeling that the peers have a better knowledge of English.

(c)   Fear of being mocked at and embarrassed in front of the peers in the event of creating mistakes.

(d)   Fear of making errors in pronunciation and grammar.

(e)   Lack of cohesion in expression resulting in a gap between the intended and conveyed meaning.

(f)   Fear of being counter questioned by the group or the teacher in response to the answers given.
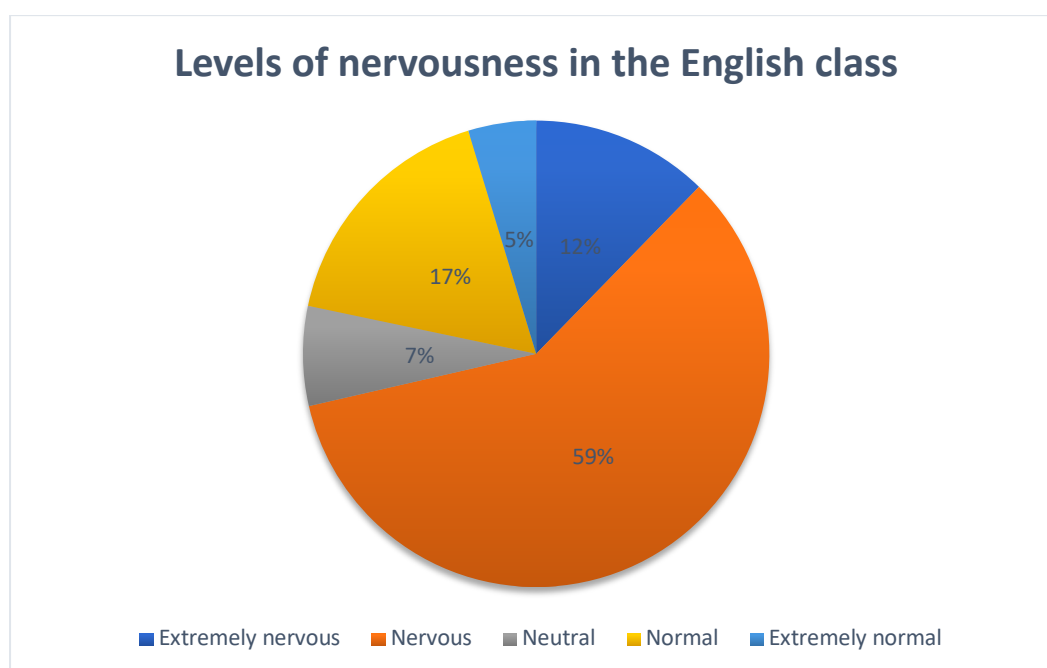

Fig.2.5: Levels of nervousness of the respondents in the English class.

(vi)   It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in English in class.

Nervousness results in fear of being embarrassed in front of the peers. The most prominent reasons for nervousness in the English language classroom are given above. Nervousness and fear of embarrassment make the student maintain silence in the classroom even if they are found to know the correct answer. Hence, very few students volunteer answers in the English language class and actively participate in the classroom discussions. Of the total surveyed students, 50.1% (150 students) have agreed that they seldom volunteer answers in the class with 7.6% (23 students) being

extremely reserved. 22.9% (69 students) have taken the opposite stand. 10% (30 students) are found to be the ones who are most active in the classroom. Only 9.4% (28 students) have chosen to remain neutral.
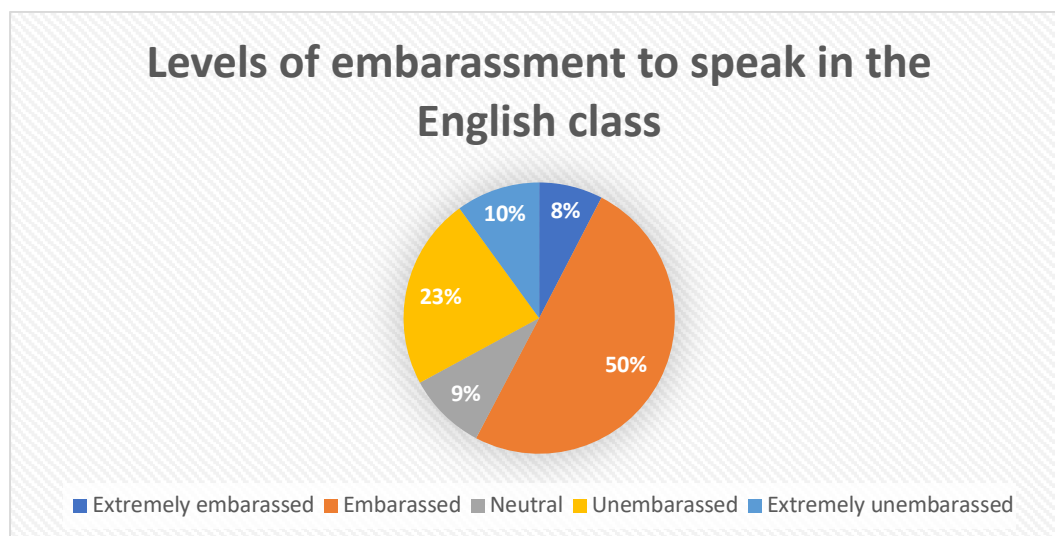
Levels of embarassment to speak in the English class

Fig.2.6: Levels of embarrassment to speak voluntarily in the English class

(vii) Even if I am well prepared for an English language class, I feel anxious about it.

Increased anxiety levels of the students make them feel nervous and vice versa about the English language class so much so that they tend to forget whatever they have prepared or know before attending the classes. This was evident most during class examinations, oral presentations, and assignments. 66.2% (199 students) are found to experience this situation out of which 15.3% (46 students) have it in the most severe form. 7.2% (22 students) are found to be the least anxious and 3.8% (11 students) are completely comfortable. 7.5% (22 students) have preferred to remain neutral. However, when the most anxious students were asked to provide their answers either in Hindi or their mother tongue, wherever possible, they could do so easily and devoid of anxiety. Another possible reason for the anxiety could be the classroom ambiance as well. The students are found to be more anxious in a crowded classroom than with

fewer students. Similarly, the levels of anxiety tend to increase in the presence of the members of the opposite sex than with students of the same gender.
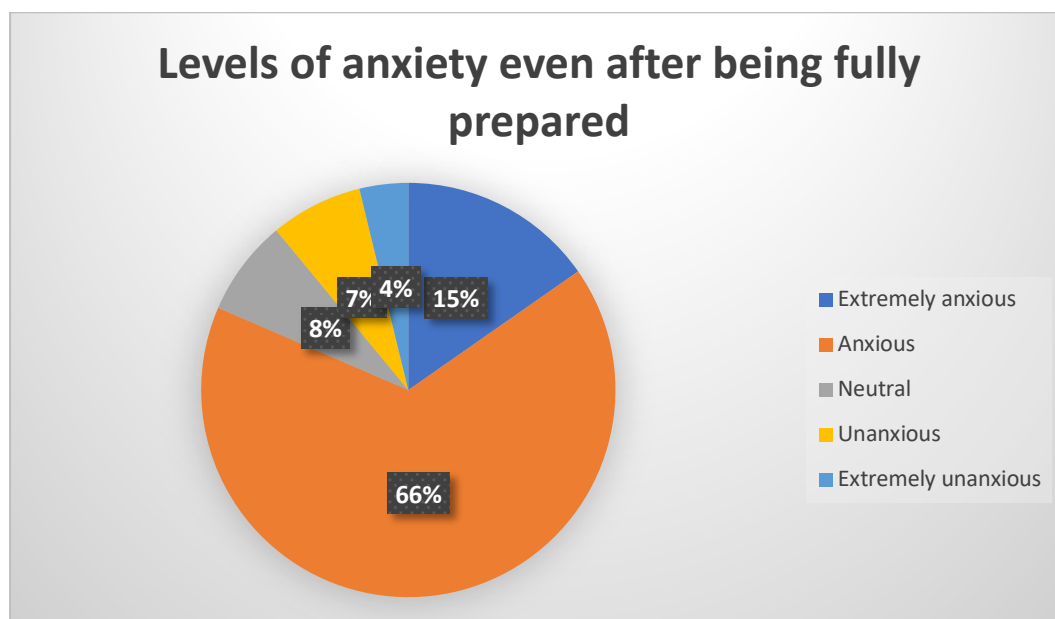
Levels of anxiety even after being fully prepared

- Extremely anxious — 15%
- Anxious — 66%
- Neutral — 8%
- Unanxious — 7%
- Extremely unanxious — 4%

Fig.2.7: Levels of anxiety in the English classroom even after being fully prepared for the class.

(viii)   I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make. One of the other reasons for the students to be anxious about the English language class is the possibility of the language teacher correcting each of their mistakes while they speak. It has been found in this research that more the number of mistakes the teacher points out while they speak, more the number of errors they commit subsequently. The range of errors, too, widen from the grammatical ones to errors in factual information. As this continues, the student chooses to remain silent subsequently in the language classroom. This is also found to be true in case of students who have earlier stated that they don't worry about making mistakes in an English language class. As their errors get highlighted, their levels of confidence decrease resulting in minimum participation in the classroom. However, this tendency is found to be acute while assessing verbal skills of English rather than written ones which are primarily due to the synchronous communication and action in case of the former as against the asynchronous action in case of the latter. 67.4% (202 students) cited this as a major factor of anxiety in the

classroom with 8.8% (26 students) rating this as the most critical factor and strongly agreeing to the position stated above. 24.2% (73 students) have, however, responded otherwise with 8.4% (25 students) remaining neutral.

(ix)   *I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in a language class.* Owing to the conditions stated in the questions stated above, anxiety is found to be high in 52.1% respondents (156 students) with 16.7% (50 students) having it in very serious proportions. 26.3% (79 students) are found to be normal and fully responsive in the English language classroom. 4.9% (15 students) neither agreed nor disagreed with the contention above.

(x)   *I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.*
43% (129 students) have agreed that they feel their peers could speak better English than them and this impacts their participation in the English language classroom. It also results in their disinclination to volunteer answers in the classroom. 22.8% (68 students) disagreed with the view. Interestingly, 34.2% (103 students) have chosen to remain neutral with neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the position. Upon further prodding, post submission of the responses, it has been found that since their *notions* of correctness have been proven wrong, they could not be sure if the same could also hold true of their peers.

(xi)   *I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.*
Nervousness often leads to confusion, and finally, it leads to anxiety in the English language classroom. The confusion during speaking in the classroom results from the accumulated fear of committing errors, getting the errors rectified continuously, the fear of making statements lacking in cohesion and proper analysis, the fear of being mocked at by the teacher and the peers, and finally the feeling that others are better speakers of the English language. All these factors result in the student getting confused

while speaking in the classroom. 56.2% of respondents (169 students) admitted to having become nervous and confused while speaking in the classroom with 13% respondents (39 students) facing severe problems because of this condition. 10.1% of respondents (30 students) have denied any problem of confusion due to nervousness. 4.1% (12 students) are confident in the language class. 16.7% (50 students) have preferred to remain neutral.
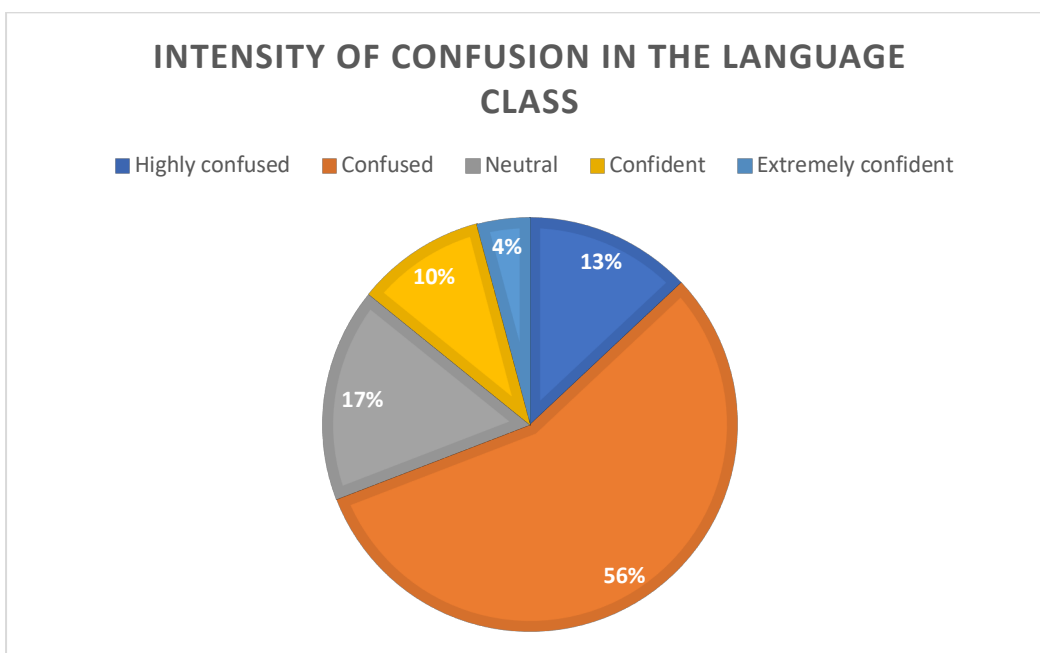
INTENSITY OF CONFUSION IN THE LANGUAGE CLASS

■ Highly confused ■ Confused ■ Neutral ■ Confident ■ Extremely confident

4% | 13% | 10% | 17% | 56%

Fig.2.8: Intensity of confusion of the respondents in the language class

(xii)   I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says. One of the factors that contribute to an increase in the anxiety levels in the classroom is the fear of missing out what the teacher explains. Given the spikes in the normal attention span, every 15 minutes into a lecture and that gets reduced with time, students are found to be under stress to be attentive to what the teacher says in the classroom. They are of the opinion that any deviation from the same will make them anxious as they might not get the full portent of what gets discussed in the language classroom. 53.9% of the respondents (162 students) are found to be stressed in the classroom trying to catch every single word the teacher says with 15.8% (47 students) finding it more

stressful. For 20.2% respondents (61 students), focusing attention in the language classroom is not stressful. 10.1% of the respondents (30 students) preferred to remain neutral.

(xiii)   I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.

For 51.1% respondents (153 students), learning English is difficult due to the number of rules in each section of grammar with 13.3% (40 students) finding it extremely difficult. Hence, they tend to give the least priority to learning grammar and rather focusing on cramming it up as and when required. Further, as they were seldom *taught* grammar in their school, having to learn the rules and using it appropriately is found to be a daunting task for them. Even during the examinations, the students facing this issue are found to leave the questions on grammar unattempted and instead work on questions about the prescribed texts, essays, letter writings, and paragraphs. 10.6% (32 students) are found to be comfortable with the number of rules with 7% (21 students) having no difficulty at all. 18% (54 students) have chosen to remain neutral.
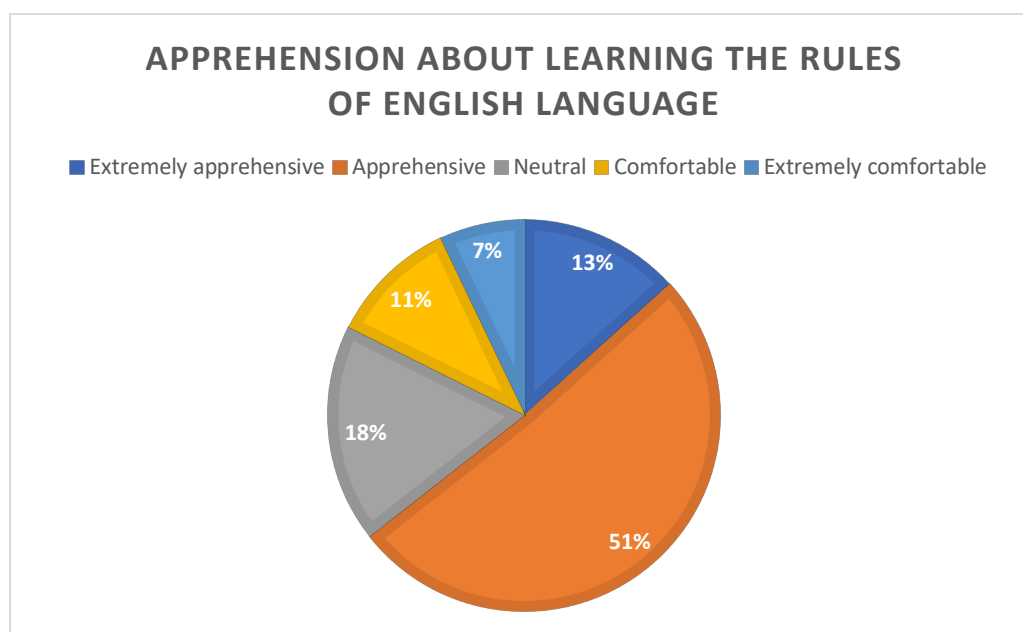

Fig.2.9: Levels of apprehension about learning the rules of English language

2.4 Findings

Thus, it is evident from the responses to the questions above that a majority of the students are highly anxious about speaking and writing in the English language class. The reasons for the same are varied. But the most prominent reasons are the lack of knowledge of the rules and a resultant lack of awareness of the areas where they commit errors. Further, the physical settings of the classroom ambiance too impact the levels of anxiety on the part of the students. Students are found to be less responsive in the Communication Skills laboratory where oral presentations, group discussions, etc. are conducted, and each session is videographed, and students' performance was displayed on the screen, analyzed thoroughly and given instant feedback. As a majority of the students are not used to the concept of the smart classroom, gadgets, and gizmos in the class or laboratory impacts negatively compared to a normal classroom.

Secondly, the number of students in a classroom also impacts the anxiety levels in an English language classroom. In a crowded classroom, the highly anxious students remain silent and rarely volunteer to answer or take part in the discussions. The reasons for the same being the fear of making mistakes and subsequent embarrassment in front of their peers. There is also an added fear of being corrected of their mistakes repeatedly which might result in confusion and disruption of the flow of communication in a logical and coherent manner. Further, coupled with these factors, the levels of anxiety also increase in the presence of the peers from the opposite sex.

Thirdly, the personality and knowledge of the teacher on the subject, the manner of expression and communication too impact the levels of anxiety on students. If the teacher cannot express the content in a manner that is lucid and easily comprehensible to the students, then the students get stressed and as a result, miss out important points in a lecture apart from thinking about things which have nothing to do with the subject that is being taught. Against such a backdrop, if they are asked to answer a question, they hesitate, and their anxiety levels get increased subsequently. All these factors,

combined with the feeling that their peers are better at understanding and use of English increases their levels of anxiety in a language classroom.

The findings of this survey have been used in the analysis of the respondents' use of English online and the way it is shaping the language in the formal modes of written and oral communication along with the strategies they adopt to negotiate with the classroom anxiety.