

## **Language Anxiety and Communication Experience in a Peer-to-Peer Digital Language Learning Platform: A Study of Free4Talk Users**

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**Abstract:** This study aims to investigate the correlation between language anxiety and communication experiences among users of the Free4Talk platform in a digital language learning context. A quantitative correlational approach was utilized, involving 30 people chosen through purposive selection. Data was collected using two Likert-scale surveys. Upon examination of the instruments, 22 items were determined to be genuine and utilized in the study. Due to the data's failure to satisfy the normalcy condition, Spearman's rho was employed to examine the relationship between the variables. The findings indicated a negligible negative connection between linguistic anxiety and communication experience ( $r = -0.104$ ). This indicates that elevated anxiety was marginally correlated with reduced communication experiences; however, this relationship was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.584$ ). The findings suggest that language anxiety does not substantially affect users' conversational experiences in peer-to-peer digital language learning settings, especially on the Free4Talk platform. Consequently, it may be deduced that elements beyond language anxiety may significantly influence learners' communicative results in online language learning contexts. This study contributes to the limited quantitative research on language anxiety in peer-to-peer digital language learning platforms by offering empirical evidence.

**Keywords:** Communication Experience, Digital Language Learning, Language Anxiety

### **A. Introduction**

The quick development of digital technology in recent years has changed the face of language learning, especially by allowing students to communicate online outside of traditional classroom settings. Affective elements have also received more attention in second language acquisition research as a result of this trend. Language anxiety has been identified as one of the most significant factors influencing learners' language performance and motivation to communicate (Dörnyei (2005)). Previous research has extensively examined language anxiety in formal classroom contexts, demonstrating its negative relationship with speaking performance, listening comprehension, and overall language achievement.

It encompasses emotional reactions that can significantly impede the acquisition and performance of a new language. Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope as cited in Özdemir and Seçkin (2025:1) 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. MacIntyre & Gregersen as cited in Xu and Xie (2024:2) 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. Horwitz as cited in Yan and Liang (2022:2) 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. Ahadiyyah as cited in Marwa et al (2025:1669) 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 (2024:24) 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. Although such platforms offer rich opportunities for authentic spoken interaction, empirical research examining learners’ affective experiences particularly language anxiety in these informal digital settings remains limited. This gap is particularly evident in relation to how language anxiety influences learners’ communication experiences in unstructured, voice-based platforms. While previous studies have established the impact of anxiety in classrooms and structured online learning environments, little empirical evidence is available regarding whether language anxiety plays a significant role in shaping communication experiences in spontaneous peer-to-peer digital interactions.

The influence of language anxiety in such environments can be better understood through established psycholinguistic frameworks. Hajiyeva (2024:119) 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 (2025:82) 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 (2025:40) 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. Ryan and decy as cited in Di Domenico and Ryan (2017:1) 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 (2025:1) 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. (2025:171) explain that users of Free4Talk must navigate multilingual, real-time interactions, which demand advanced cognitive processing and adaptive communication skills. Ibrahim, et al. (2025:2) 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. (2025:12) 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. (2025:121) states that conversely, features like instant feedback or access to supportive resources can mitigate anxiety by enhancing confidence and fostering a sense of achievement.

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.

This study 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.

This study is important because it explores a real world, under researched platform that many language learners use but few scholars have studied in depth. Free4Talk's spontaneous, unstructured nature makes it ideal for examining how learners navigate language anxiety in natural conversations. Considering the importance of communication in second language acquisition and the prevalence of language anxiety among learners in digital learning environments, this study attempts to look into Language Anxiety and Communication Experience in a Peer-to-Peer Digital Language Learning Platform: A Study of Free4Talk Users. Therefore, this study addresses the following research questions: 1) What is the level of language anxiety among Free4Talk users? 2) Is there a significant relationship between language anxiety and communication experience on the Free4Talk platform?

## **B. Methods**

This study used a quantitative correlational design to investigate the relationship between language anxiety and communication experience among English language learners on the Educational Free4Talk platform. The participants included 30 English language learners who had previously used Free4Talk for spoken interaction practice. Participants were chosen via purposive sampling because the study mainly targeted learners who actively used the platform for English communication.

This sample approach was deemed adequate to ensure that participants had relevant expertise in the research environment. The participants ranged in age, gender, first language background, and self-reported English proficiency levels, resulting in a diverse sample representative of Free4Talk users. Data were gathered using two structured Likert-scale questionnaires distributed via an internet survey. The first instrument, which examined language anxiety, was derived from Horwitz, Horwitz,

and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, with items updated to represent a digital, peer-to-peer communication context. The second instrument evaluated communication experience by evaluating aspects such as perceived communication efficacy, speaking confidence, interaction comfort, and involvement in online chats. Prior to data collection, the instruments were evaluated for content validity by expert review, and reliability testing was performed, yielding satisfactory Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicating internal consistency. Following the validation phase, 22 items were selected for final analysis.

Participants were recruited via announcements posted in Free4Talk-related online groups. Participation was voluntary, and respondents provided informed consent electronically before completing the questionnaire. Data was collected online to ensure participants' accessibility and convenience. Ethical considerations were respected throughout the research procedure, including participant anonymity, response confidentiality, and the freedom to withdraw at any time during the study. To begin data analysis, descriptive statistics were utilized to assess participants' levels of language anxiety and communication experience. To analyze data distribution, normality tests were performed, including the Shapiro-Wilk test. Because the data were not normally distributed, Spearman's rho correlation analysis was used to investigate the link between language anxiety and communication experience. Spearman's rho was chosen over Pearson's correlation because it is more suited to non-parametric data and ordinal-scale measurements, allowing for more accurate interpretation of the relationship between the variables.

### **C. Results and Discussion**

In this study, two research questions were addressed: the first was about the level of language anxiety among users of the Free4Talk platform, and the second was about the relationship between language anxiety and communication experience in the context of informal digital language learning. In order to answer the first research question, a descriptive statistical analysis was carried out to investigate the degree of linguistic anxiety that Free4Talk users experience. According to the findings, the majority of the participants who participated reported experiencing a moderate level of linguistic anxiety. These sensations were not found to be particularly powerful or incapacitating, despite the fact that a number of respondents reported experiencing feelings of worry, trepidation, and concern around the possibility of making linguistic errors during spoken engagement. Despite experiencing anxiety, the majority of participants reported that they were able to start and continue discussions. This suggests that language anxiety did not entirely restrict their motivation to engage with others.

After further investigation of the individual elements of the questionnaire, it was shown that anxiety was more frequently related with spontaneous speaking and interacting with discussion partners who were unfamiliar to the respondent.

Participants, on the other hand, reported feeling less anxious at times when the interactions were more casual and self-directed. Based on this pattern, it appears that although worry was there, the degree to which it manifested itself changed based on the circumstances that were present within the platform. The distribution of responses suggests that language anxiety among Free4Talk users was somewhat balanced rather than polarized toward extreme levels. This is the overall conclusion that can be drawn from the data.

A descriptive analysis was also carried out in order to investigate the participants' communication experiences on the Free4Talk platform. This was done in addition to the participants' anxiety levels. According to the findings, the majority of participants reported having experience with communication that was moderately favorable. When asked about their ability to communicate their thoughts, maintain interaction, and comprehend their interlocutors during talks, respondents responded that they were generally able to exhibit these abilities. Difficulties were occasionally observed, notably in relation to variations in accent and disparities in fluency; nevertheless, these difficulties did not dominate the participants' overall assessments of their experience with communication.

In addition, the data on participants' communication experiences suggested that there was only a little amount of variation. It was observed that the majority of replies were clustered around similar score ranges, which suggests that the participants tended to evaluate their communication encounters under identical circumstances. This relatively narrow distribution shows that users shared comparable interaction experiences within the Free4Talk environment. This may be due to the platform's consistent interaction format and informal communication conventions, which may be the cause of the interaction experiences that users shared.

A correlation analysis was carried out in order to investigate the connection between language anxiety and communication experience. This was done in order to answer the second study question. Before beginning this research, a normality test was carried out, and the results showed that the data did not follow a generally accepted distribution. As a result, the study of Spearman's rho correlation was utilized in order to determine the nature of the connection that exists between the two variables.

The findings of the Spearman's rho analysis showed that the correlation coefficient between language anxiety and communication experience was  $-0.104$ , which indicates that there is a very weak negative association between the two types of experiences. This shows that participants who reported higher levels of anxiety tended to report slightly worse communication experiences; however, the strength of this link was limited among the people who reported higher levels of anxiety. In

light of the fact that the significance value was higher than the customary threshold ( $p = 0.584 > 0.05$ ), the association was not considered to be statistically significant.

The results of the correlation analysis were examined further, and it was found that changes in language anxiety ratings were not accompanied by significant changes in communication experience scores. Participants who reported having moderate levels of anxiety reported having communication experiences that were equivalent to those of participants who reported having lower levels of anxiety respectively. Taking into consideration this conclusion, it appears that language anxiety did not play a role as a distinguishing element in determining how users evaluated the consequences of their communication on the Free4Talk platform.

In addition, the data demonstrated that the range of possible scores for both variables was quite narrow. As a result of the majority of individuals falling into comparable score categories for language anxiety and communication experience, the dataset exhibited a limited amount of variability. There is a possibility that the likelihood of discovering a stronger or statistically significant association between the two variables was diminished due to the constrained range that was used. Although language anxiety was evident among Free4Talk users, the results indicate that it did not significantly differentiate their communication experiences. This is the overall conclusion that can be drawn from the findings. Based on the findings, it appears that users were generally able to communicate effectively despite experiencing moderate anxiety. Furthermore, it is possible that other contextual or individual factors may play a more prominent role in shaping communication experiences within informal, voice-based digital language learning environments.

Building on the results, this study found that Free4Talk users generally experienced moderate language anxiety, yet this anxiety did not significantly influence their communication experience. This finding contrasts with a large body of research conducted in formal classroom contexts, which consistently reports a negative relationship between language anxiety and oral performance (Horwitz, 1986). According to the Affective Filter Hypothesis, anxiety can act as a mental barrier that impedes language input and output by limiting learners' cognitive processing capacity. However, the absence of a significant correlation in the present study suggests that this theoretical mechanism may operate differently in informal, digital learning environments.

One possible explanation lies in the informal and low-stakes nature of Free4Talk interactions. Unlike classroom settings where learners may fear negative evaluation from teachers or peers, Free4Talk offers voluntary participation, flexible interaction, and the option to disengage at any time. Such conditions may lower learners' affective filters, allowing communication to occur even when anxiety is present. This interpretation aligns with Krashen's assertion that anxiety becomes less detrimental

when learners perceive the learning environment as non-threatening (Krashen, 1985).

Another explanation can be drawn from Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes the role of autonomy and intrinsic motivation in learning engagement (Deci, E. L., & Ryan, 2000). Free4Talk allows learners to choose topics, partners, and interaction duration, which may foster a sense of autonomy and reduce the negative impact of anxiety on communication. Previous research has shown that autonomy-supportive environments can buffer the adverse effects of anxiety and promote sustained participation in language use.

Self-selection bias may also help explain the findings. Learners who choose to use a spontaneous, voice-based platform such as Free4Talk may already possess relatively higher willingness to communicate or coping strategies for managing anxiety. Conversely, learners with severe language anxiety may avoid such platforms altogether, resulting in a sample with a restricted range of anxiety levels. This phenomenon has been noted in previous studies examining online and voluntary language learning environments (Dewaele, 2017).

Methodological considerations should also be acknowledged. The small sample size may have limited the statistical power of the analysis, making it difficult to detect subtle relationships between variables. In addition, although the anxiety scale was adapted from a well-established instrument, it may not have fully captured context-specific anxiety experienced during real-time, informal digital communication. Prior studies have highlighted that language anxiety can fluctuate dynamically depending on task type, interlocutor, and medium of communication.

Despite these limitations, the findings contribute to psycholinguistic research by suggesting that language anxiety does not always function as a direct inhibitor of communication in digital, informal learning contexts. Practically, this implies that platforms such as Free4Talk may serve as supportive environments for oral practice, even for learners who experience moderate anxiety. Platform designers may further enhance this effect by incorporating optional anxiety-reducing features, such as beginner-friendly rooms, conversation scaffolds, or peer support mechanisms.

Future research is recommended to employ larger samples, mixed-methods designs, and longitudinal approaches to examine how language anxiety interacts with communication experience over time. Incorporating qualitative data, such as interviews or discourse analysis, may also provide deeper insight into how learners perceive and manage anxiety during real-time digital interactions.

## **D. Conclusions**

This study examined the level of language anxiety among Free4Talk users and investigated its relationship with their communication experiences in an informal, voice-based digital learning environment. The findings indicate that Free4Talk users generally experienced a moderate level of language anxiety; however, this anxiety did not have a significant relationship with their communication experience. The results suggest that learners were able to engage in spoken interaction and perceive their communication positively despite experiencing feelings of nervousness or apprehension. This indicates that language anxiety alone does not function as a determining factor in shaping communication experiences within informal peer-to-peer digital platforms. From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the potential of platforms like Free4Talk as supportive spaces for oral language practice, even for learners who experience moderate anxiety. Platform developers and educators may therefore consider encouraging the use of informal digital communication tools as a complement to formal language instruction, as these environments appear to reduce communicative pressure and promote learner participation. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, and the reliance on self-report questionnaires may not fully capture learners' real-time emotional experiences during interaction. In addition, the cross-sectional design does not allow for examination of changes in anxiety or communication experience over time, nor does it account for individual differences such as language proficiency or frequency of platform use. Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse participant groups, employ mixed-methods approaches to gain deeper insight into learners' experiences, and explore longitudinal designs to examine how language anxiety and communication experience evolve through sustained engagement in digital language learning environments.

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