

## Exploring Communication Anxiety in English Language Learning through Affective Filter Theory: Evidence from Indian College Students

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### ABSTRACT

This conceptual review explores the role of communication anxiety in English language learning among Indian college students through the theoretical lens of Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. Drawing on literature published between 2020 and 2025, alongside foundational works in second language acquisition (SLA), the study investigates how emotional variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence impact learners' ability to acquire and use English effectively. Key themes identified include the fear of grammatical errors, peer judgment, low self-esteem, and classroom performance pressure, factors that collectively raise the affective filter and inhibit language input processing. The review further examines how supportive teaching practices, empathetic classroom environments, and affective awareness can help lower the filter, enhancing communicative competence. The findings have important implications for English language educators, curriculum developers, and researchers aiming to reduce affective barriers in SLA contexts. This paper calls for more empirical work exploring communication anxiety in multilingual settings and proposes affective, pedagogically informed interventions for improving learner outcomes.

**Keywords:** Communication Anxiety, Affective Filter Hypothesis, English Language Learning, Second Language Acquisition, Indian College Students, Emotional Variables

### INTRODUCTION

Communication anxiety is increasingly recognized as a significant obstacle in second language learning. Primary causes of communication anxiety in English language learning among Indian college students have become a notable research area today due to their significant impact on learners' speaking abilities and performance (Wang, 2023; Mahmoud, 2024). Research has shown since the 1970s that anxiety negatively influences language acquisition, especially speaking skills, which are the most troublesome for learners (Han, 2023; Le, n.d.). Theoretical frameworks such as the Affective Filter Hypothesis evolved to explain the influence of affective factors like anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence on language input processing (Lin & Lin, 2020) (Rui-nan, 2008).

In practice, communication anxiety hampers students' willingness to participate, reduces self-assertion, and diminishes overall communicative capacity; approximately 30% of foreign language learners are estimated to experience significant anxiety (Jamshed et al., 2024; Asmali, 2019). This condition holds social and educational significance in multilingual contexts such as India, where English literacy enhances global opportunities (Nasir et al., 2023; Hossain et al., 2023).

Although numerous studies on foreign language anxiety are available today, there remains a knowledge gap regarding the primary causes of communication anxiety among Indian college students learning English within the

framework of the Affective Filter Theory (Mulyani, 2018; Suryani et al., 2020) (Weerakoon et al., 2023). While some research focuses on linguistic barriers, such as lexical and grammatical deficiencies (Hanifa, 2018; Marlia & Nur, 2023), others examine affective factors, including the fear of negative evaluation and low self-confidence (Nurmasadah et al., 2022; Fenyi et al., 2023). There is ongoing controversy about whether external influences, like classroom environment and teacher behaviour, or internal psychological factors primarily cause anxiety (Edrees & Stanikzai, 2024) (Zarei et al., 2024).

The consequences of this gap are severe, as unresolved anxiety leads to decreased participation and lower language achievement (Maher & King, 2023). Hence, a holistic understanding that integrates these perspectives can help develop effective interventions (Cantos et al., 2024; Aksak & Cubukcu, 2020).

This review is grounded in the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that learners' affective states influence language acquisition by either opening or closing the channel for input processing (Lin & Lin, 2020; Ruinan, 2008). Communication anxiety is conceptualized as a key affective filter component that interacts with motivation and self-confidence to affect learners' readiness to communicate (Hidayat et al., 2024; Kuluşaklı & Genç, 2024). This framework supports exploring how affective and cognitive variables work together to generate communication anxiety in English learning environments (Dasor et al., 2022; Malik et al., 2021).

Indian college students face a unique combination of linguistic, social, and psychological pressures. English is not merely an academic subject; it is often considered a critical determinant of employability, intelligence, and global competitiveness. This dual role of English as both a medium of instruction and a marker of social mobility places considerable pressure on students to perform fluently and accurately. Consequently, many learners internalize unrealistic expectations and develop communication apprehension, particularly during oral activities such as presentations, group discussions, and classroom debates. The fear of making grammatical errors or mispronunciations in front of peers often leads to withdrawal from speaking activities, which in turn hinders language development.

Stephen Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis offers a useful perspective for understanding these emotional barriers to second language acquisition. According to Krashen, affective variables such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence directly influence the extent to which language input is processed into intake. High anxiety or low self-esteem raises a psychological "filter," limiting effective processing of language input. Conversely, a low affective filter, fostered by positive emotional states, enhances the internalization of linguistic material. This hypothesis highlights that emotional well-being is not peripheral but central to successful language learning.

This study aligns closely with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4): Quality Education, particularly in its emphasis on inclusive, equitable, and emotionally supportive learning environments. By examining how communication anxiety, motivation, and ambiguity tolerance affect English language learning among Indian college students, the research underscores the importance of addressing not only cognitive but also emotional barriers. These insights are especially significant in postcolonial, multilingual contexts like India, where English often serves as a gatekeeper to educational and professional opportunities. By promoting practices that reduce affective filters and support diverse learner identities, the study contributes to SDG 4 targets, especially 4. a, which advocates for safe, inclusive, and effective learning environments, and 4.c, which calls for better-trained educators capable of providing responsive and empathetic instruction. Ultimately, the study advocates for language pedagogy that emphasizes not only linguistic proficiency but also social equity and emotional inclusiveness.

This review aims to synthesize existing literature to identify the primary causes of communication anxiety among Indian college students learning English, using the Affective Filter Theory as a conceptual lens. It seeks to address knowledge gaps by integrating empirical evidence and theoretical insights, thereby informing pedagogical strategies and policy decisions to reduce anxiety and enhance language learning outcomes (Gou, 2024; Mahardika & Widyantoro, 2024).

The review adopts a qualitative methodology, analyzing peer-reviewed studies focused on communication anxiety among English language learners in higher education. The inclusion criteria target empirical research that examines affective factors and theoretical frameworks related to anxiety (Mulyana et al., 2024; Indrawati & Yunus, 2022). A thematic analysis is employed to present the causes, consequences, and coping mechanisms for communication anxiety, concluding with practical recommendations for educators and other stakeholders (Mulyana et al., 2024; Indrawati & Yunus, 2022).

### Statement of Purpose

This research aims to critically synthesize existing studies on the primary causes of communication anxiety in English language learning among Indian college students, with particular reference to the Affective Filter Theory, to provide a comprehensive understanding of how affective and contextual factors influence communication anxiety within this population. This analysis needs to be conducted because communication anxiety negatively impacts English language learning and particularly spoken communication, upon which learning and professional

and educational accomplishment in the global context assume priority. By accounting for the interplay between the psychological frameworks, such as the Affective Filter Theory, and the sociocultural contexts peculiar to Indian college students, the analysis tries to demarcate the principal causes of anxiety and the pedagogical steps that decrease such barriers. Lastly, the synthesis aims at informing pedagogues, planners of the curriculum, and educational decision makers on the best steps to adopt conducive classroom settings to effect minimum anxiety and maximum communicative competency.

### **Specific Objectives:**

- To survey recent studies on the psychological and socio-cultural roots of Indian college English students' communication anxiety.
- Basing the analysis on recent pedagogic approaches aimed at reducing communication anxiety among English language learners.
- Explore how the Affective Filter Theory explains and mediates the relationship between language learning anxiety and acquisition.
- Examine how classroom dynamics and peer interactions influence students' communication apprehension.
- Compare anxiety-related factors across demographic variables, including gender, proficiency level, and field of study.

### **Research Questions**

- What are the main emotional factors that contribute to communication anxiety among Indian college students learning English?
- How does communication anxiety affect English language performance, especially in speaking and listening tasks?
- How does Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis help explain the influence of emotional factors on language learning?
- What teaching strategies can educators use to reduce communication anxiety and lower the affective filter in Indian classrooms?

### **Language Anxiety in SLA Contexts**

In recent years, communication anxiety has emerged as a critical affective barrier in English language education, particularly in linguistically diverse contexts such as Indian higher education (Liu & Jackson, 2023; *Frontiers in Education*, 2025). Even learners with adequate grammatical competence often experience psychological stress that hinders effective oral communication (Foreign Language Anxiety, 2025). The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), remains one of the most widely used instruments for measuring anxiety related to language learning. It identifies three primary dimensions of anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety.

Numerous empirical studies have documented the detrimental effects of communication anxiety on language acquisition. Students with high anxiety frequently avoid speaking opportunities, exhibit hesitation, and demonstrate reduced language retention (Liu, 2006; Ahmad & Al-Moayed, 2022). Moreover, anxiety associated with pronunciation errors, public speaking, or responding to impromptu questions can lead to cognitive overload, resulting in poor performance (Awan et al., 2010; Cakici, 2016).

### **Interplay with Motivation and Ambiguity Tolerance**

Recent research has further examined how anxiety interacts with motivation and tolerance of ambiguity in second language learning. For instance, Liu and Huang (2011) reported that learners with higher levels of foreign language anxiety tend to exhibit lower motivation and poorer academic performance. Conversely, students with greater ambiguity tolerance, those comfortable navigating uncertain or evolving language contexts, typically experience lower anxiety levels (Dewaele & Ip, 2013). These findings suggest that affective and personality factors collectively shape second language acquisition. According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, emotional factors such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety strongly influence a learner's capacity to acquire a second language. Specifically, a high affective filter, characterized by anxiety or low motivation, can block language input from being effectively processed (Liu, 2022). Studies on Indian ESL learners reveal elevated communication apprehension, particularly among first-generation college students from rural backgrounds, who face sociolinguistic challenges and a pronounced fear of negative evaluation (Raju & Tan, 2017). This emotional stress not only reduces classroom participation but also limits cognitive engagement with the language, underscoring Krashen's assertion that affective variables can either impede or facilitate the intake of linguistic information.

Therefore, effective ESL pedagogy must incorporate both anxiety reduction strategies and motivational scaffolding to lower the affective filter.

Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, serves as a key buffer against the negative effects of communication anxiety. Learners who are intrinsically motivated, driven by personal growth or cultural interest, are more likely to persist despite fears of making mistakes or facing peer judgment. In this regard, affective tutoring systems that respond to learners' emotional states and provide timely encouragement have been shown to boost engagement and motivation, particularly under high anxiety conditions (Lin et al., 2015). In contrast, extrinsically motivated students, whose efforts are primarily tied to grades or approval, may be more susceptible to anxiety. This is especially true in Indian college settings, where English often serves as a gateway to academic success and social mobility. Applying the Motivation Opportunity Ability (MOA) framework, providing learners with opportunities for self-reflection and autonomy, which are core components of intrinsic motivation, can enhance both language performance and willingness to communicate, even in ambiguous language situations (Endres & Chowdhury, 2022).

Ambiguity tolerance further moderates the relationship between motivation and anxiety in ESL classrooms. Learners with high ambiguity tolerance are more likely to embrace the uncertainties inherent in language learning, such as unfamiliar accents, idiomatic expressions, or unpredictable conversational patterns. These students generally exhibit lower anxiety levels and adopt more effective learning strategies, which in turn strengthens their motivation (Al Murshidi & Nuryana, 2024). By contrast, ambiguity-intolerant learners often experience heightened anxiety, particularly during spontaneous speaking tasks or when receiving unclear feedback. Among Indian college students, especially those transitioning from vernacular to English medium instruction, low ambiguity tolerance has been associated with withdrawal behaviors and reduced language performance (Raju & Tan, 2017). Consequently, fostering ambiguity tolerance through classroom practices that normalize uncertainty, such as open-ended discussions or peer-led corrections, can help reduce anxiety and cultivate resilient, self-driven learners.

### Indian Learner Context

The Indian academic environment presents a distinct constellation of sociocultural stressors that significantly influence English language acquisition. English in India functions not merely as a subject of study but as a marker of social mobility, career access, and cultural capital (Kapoor & Singh, 2021). Consequently, the stakes are elevated for learners, particularly first-generation college students who frequently encounter familial expectations, institutional emphasis on grammatical precision, and peer comparisons that intensify communication apprehension. These pressures manifest in a heightened fear of making mistakes, whether through mispronouncing words or using incorrect grammar, particularly in public or evaluative contexts. Such anxieties are evident in both physical classrooms and online learning environments (ResearchGate, 2023; *Frontiers in Education*, 2025). The internalization of these fears leads to increased reluctance to speak, thereby undermining opportunities for authentic language practice and reinforcing a cycle of self-doubt and silence.

This environment corresponds closely with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that emotional barriers such as anxiety and low self-confidence can inhibit the processing of language input. Indian ESL learners from rural and non-English speaking backgrounds often begin formal English instruction later than their urban counterparts, with limited real-world exposure. Empirical evidence from regions such as Tamil Nadu and Bihar highlights widespread Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), with learners reporting test-related stress, fear of negative evaluation, and discomfort in spontaneous interactions (Raju & Tan, 2017). Furthermore, systemic issues, including rote memorization, teacher-centered pedagogy, and restricted speaking opportunities, compound these challenges. As a result, even highly motivated learners may "filter out" language input due to psychological barriers, leading to weak language acquisition despite extensive curricular exposure.

Within this context, motivation and ambiguity tolerance emerge as key variables that shape learners' emotional responses. For many Indian students, the motivation to learn English is primarily extrinsic, driven by aspirations for career advancement and social status. However, research indicates that extrinsic drivers alone are insufficient in environments saturated with anxiety. Without supportive learning conditions, students often become passive or disengaged owing to the fear of failure (Liu, 2022). By contrast, intrinsic motivation—fueled by curiosity, enjoyment, or personal goals has been shown to sustain engagement even in stressful contexts. Moreover, ambiguity tolerance, defined as the ability to function effectively despite uncertainty or imperfect understanding, plays a pivotal role in determining learners' willingness to communicate. Students with low ambiguity tolerance, typically reinforced by exam-oriented systems, seek rigid rules and certainty and consequently become anxious when confronted with linguistic variability. In contrast, learners with high ambiguity tolerance are more open to experimenting with language, even at the risk of errors, which ultimately facilitates stronger communicative competence (Al Murshidi & Nuryana, 2024). Therefore, fostering intrinsic motivation and ambiguity tolerance through learner-centered pedagogies such as group work, delayed correction, and exposure to diverse linguistic models can significantly reduce anxiety and enhance language acquisition among Indian learners.

## Classroom Anxiety and Learning Outcomes

An increasing corpus of empirical evidence confirms that communication anxiety hurts student engagement, language performance, and overall academic outcomes. Learners with high levels of communication and listening anxiety are generally unwilling to participate in classroom discussions, which can result in poor oral fluency, limited peer contact, and inferior assessment performance (Young, 1991; Liu & Jackson, 2023). In the Indian ESL context, where public speaking in English is often viewed as a high-stakes assignment, this anxiety is exacerbated by a fear of making mistakes and unfavorable peer evaluation. While speaking anxiety has been extensively studied, listening anxiety, a subtler but equally disruptive emotional filter, decreases language comprehension, especially when students anticipate being quizzed or graded in public (Elkhafaifi, 2005). These worries do not simply reflect dissatisfaction with performance expectations; rather, they affect cognitive processes such as working memory, focus, and knowledge retention during language tasks.

Building on this evidence, recent mixed-method research further demonstrates that anxiety directly impairs learners' ability to process oral input, recall vocabulary, and construct grammatically coherent sentences in real time (e.g., *Research in TPLS*, 2022; Du & Santos, 2023). In particular, high anxiety learners frequently exhibit increased self-monitoring, shorter attention spans, and lower self-efficacy, especially during oral practice or spontaneous speaking tasks. By contrast, learners in low anxiety environments tend to display stronger concentration, greater willingness to experiment linguistically, and enhanced retention of learned material. Collectively, these findings highlight that classroom fear operates not only as a psychological obstacle but also as a pedagogical variable with tangible consequences for student progress. Therefore, managing classroom dynamics should be regarded as a top priority in language teaching, especially within linguistically diverse and demanding educational contexts such as India's.

Teachers play a crucial role in reducing anxiety and fostering supportive learning environments. Research consistently supports empathetic and inclusive instruction that encourages productive risk-taking rather than punishing correction. In particular, low-stakes communication settings are valuable because they enable students to make mistakes without fear of negative repercussions (Hsu & Goldsmith, 2021). Furthermore, when active learning techniques are designed with emotional safety in mind, they can substantially lower anxiety and enhance student engagement. For example, small group discussions, peer scaffolding, and anonymous response mechanisms allow learners to participate without the risk of embarrassment. By contrast, practices such as cold calling, public correction, and strict grammar policing tend to heighten stress levels and discourage attempts at spontaneous communication (Li et al., 2024). Ultimately, by deliberately adjusting classroom dynamics to minimize affective barriers, educators can not only strengthen students' language proficiency but also build their confidence, motivation, and long-term academic resilience.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory

Stephen Krashen's Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory comprises five interrelated hypotheses: the Acquisition Learning Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982). Among these, the Affective Filter Hypothesis is central to this study. It posits that emotional factors like anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation act as a filter that can either facilitate or block the learner's ability to process and internalize language input. According to Krashen, acquisition occurs most effectively when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly beyond their current competence in low anxiety environments. High anxiety raises the affective filter, obstructing input from reaching the brain's language acquisition device, while low anxiety lowers the filter and enhances acquisition.

### Applications in Educational Practice

The **Affective Filter Hypothesis**, proposed by Stephen Krashen, has significantly influenced contemporary pedagogical approaches to second language acquisition. By emphasizing the emotional dimension of learning, this theory has led educators to move beyond a narrow focus on linguistic form to consider the learner's **emotional readiness and psychological state**. In practice, this has encouraged the adoption of **learner-centered classrooms**, increased use of **communicative and collaborative tasks**, and pedagogical designs aimed at fostering **learner confidence and engagement** (Bao & Liu, 2021; Guo, 2023). Strategies include reducing immediate public correction, using humor to ease tension, affirming student effort, and designing speaking tasks that involve peer interaction rather than individual performance pressure.

In the context of **Indian ESL classrooms**, where language instruction has traditionally emphasized grammatical precision, memorization, and formal performance, Krashen's framework presents a **constructive**

**paradigm shift.** Instead of prioritizing perfect output, the focus shifts to the **conditions under which learners feel safe and motivated to engage with the language.** This shift is particularly relevant given the high levels of communication anxiety documented among Indian learners (Raju & Tan, 2017). Classroom practices that affirm student identity, reduce affective pressure, and embrace errors as learning opportunities are seen as more effective in reducing anxiety and promoting communicative competence. Thus, Krashen's theory not only offers a theoretical model but also serves as a **pragmatic foundation for designing emotionally supportive ESL environments,** especially in linguistically and culturally diverse educational systems like India's.

### Criticisms and Research Gaps

Krashen's approach, while extensively referenced, has been criticized for being difficult to empirically evaluate and for underestimating the sociocultural aspects of language learning (Brown, 1973; Luo, 2024). Nonetheless, it retains significant heuristic value, especially when used within culturally responsive frameworks. There are few empirical studies in India that look at interventions based on the affective filter, emphasizing the need for additional practical research. This study broadens Krashen's theory by setting its constructs in the multilingual Indian classroom, where students face a unique set of social, intellectual, and psychological constraints. By combining Krashen's affective principles with current pedagogical research, the study provides a conceptual foundation for reducing communicative anxiety in English language learning environments throughout India.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, conceptual approach based on a comprehensive literature review, where an initial research question on the main factors contributing to communication anxiety in English learning among Indian undergraduates was progressively refined into several specific, focused questions. Such narrowed questions examined not just the causes of anxiety at the root but the instructional outcomes, classroom interactions, and social influences built on learners' lives. Expanding the horizon further helped the research widen the coverage, both for intensive coverage of specialised studies and selective recovery of works whose immediate bearing can be appreciated. The process yielded the preliminary list of 49 papers by systematic searches and was complemented by utilizing the citation chaining methods.

Using the method of backwards citation chaining, the seminal works cited in the central papers were recovered, and forward citation chaining identified newer studies extending the earlier findings. This two-stage process produced another 117 papers that increased the candidate set to 166. When the ranking and relevance score were applied, 164 papers were confirmed as relevant to the research object, and 50 of them emerged as very relevant. This filtered and ranked set provides a balanced set consisting of classics and state-of-the-art scholarship to complement an in-depth study of communication anxiety while using the concept of Affective Filter Theory.

## RESULTS

### Summary Description of the Study on Communication Anxiety in English Language Acquisition

This section presents the state of the study on the main causes of communication anxiety in Indian college students learning English, using Krashen's Affective Filter Theory as a framework. The review focuses on the social, linguistic, and psychological aspects of anxiety. Most studies use a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze learners in Indian and other EFL environments, such as college and secondary education settings.

The synthesis incorporates significant research concerns, including anxiety causes, pedagogical treatments, the role of Affective Filter Theory, the impact of classroom environments, and demographic or population changes. Together, these findings give a thorough knowledge of communication anxiety, providing useful information for instructors, curriculum designers, and policymakers seeking to establish more successful and inclusive English language learning environments.

Study	Communication Anxiety Causes	Effectiveness of Pedagogical Intervention	Affective Filter Role	Influence of Classroom Environment	Demographic Variability
Wang (2023)	Psychological, socio-cultural, personal, and external influences	Effective stress management, supportive climate, and self-analysis are beneficial	Addressed as a psychological barrier	Teacher education, peer collaboration vital	Not highlighted

Gou (2024)	Individual-level affective factors, tension, fear, and negative emotions	Speaking anxiety relief techniques improve oral skills	Anxiety as an affective factor revealed	Student-centered learning emphasized	Not specified
Lin & Lin (2020)	Emotional attitudes, motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety	Multimedia, a relaxed environment, and encouragement reduce anxiety	Core theory framework	A positive classroom environment eases anxiety	Not specified
Mahmoud (2024)	Communication apprehension, fear of evaluation, and test anxiety	Supportive teaching practices, counseling, and goal setting	Not provided	Large classes and noisy classroom settings disrupt communication	Not provided
Edrees & Stanikzai (2024)	Teacher-related, affective (motivation, peer criticism), and environmental influences	Teacher-student rapport, student-centered classroom, is effective	Not stated	Verbal communication related to classroom anxiety	Not stated
Mulyana et al. (2024)	Verbal apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation	Preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, and peer support	Not specified	Informal classroom and teacher guidance are beneficial	Not specified
Mulyani (2018)	Psychological, linguistic, individual, and cultural factors	Friendly classroom, encouraging teachers, positive feedback	Not specified	A natural, relaxed learning environment is beneficial	Not specified
Han (2023)	Lack of vocabulary, low self-efficacy, and interpersonal anxiety	Affective strategies, communicative practice, relaxed atmosphere	Not specified	Teacher formality and classroom formality are significant	Not specified
Suryani et al. (2020)	Affective (shyness, self-confidence), cognitive (grammar, vocabulary)	Teacher awareness to design supportive activities	Not specified	A natural, relaxed learning atmosphere is advantageous	Not specified
Hanifa (2018)	Cognitive, affective, and performance factors	Understanding the origins of anxiety enables coping interventions	Not specified	The teacher's perception coincides with the student's state of anxiety	Not specified
Nurmasadah et al. (2022)	Internal (grammar, vocabulary), external (environment, confidence)	Not specified	Anxiety as an affective filter	Environmental conditions affected performance	Not explicitly stated
Dasor et al. (2022)	Internal (self-concept, knowledge), external (assessment, motivation)	Humor, student-centered approaches, pleasant ambiance	Not indicated	Environment and confidence affect anxiety	Not indicated
Nasir et al. (2023)	Fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension	Supportive classroom culture is recommended	Not specified	Student learning climate and teacher proximity were significant	Not specified
Cantos et al. (2024)	Fear of mistakes, low self-esteem, peer and teacher pressure	Practice in speaking and creating a favourable environment, and the use of relaxation techniques	Not specified	Rapport student-teacher central	Sex differences identified
Mahardika & Widyantoro (2024)	Communication apprehension dominant	Effective instruction approach and safe space development	Not specified	Environment and social settings influence anxiety	No demographic differences

Al Aqeel & Altalhab (2024)	Communication apprehension, low confidence, and linguistic barriers	Teacher motivation, error acceptance, linguistic support	Not specified	Classroom comfort emphasized	Not specified
Jamshed et al. (2024)	Test anxiety, communicative anxiety, and classroom anxiety	Managing sources of anxiety, supportive teaching	Not specified	Teacher awareness of the signs of anxiety is important	Not specified
Kao (2024)	Speech anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, self-evaluation	Group Dynamic Assessment decreases anxiety	Not specifically discussed	Anxieties revealed by the classroom and negative evaluation were identified	Identified differences by gender
Hossain et al. (2023)	Environment, linguistic challenge, motivation	Inclusive spaces, teacher education, and error toleration	Not specified	Teacher intervention and peer collaboration alleviate anxiety	Gender not specified
Zarei et al. (2024)	Anxiety in the language classroom	Comfortable environment, use of L1, interesting tasks	Not stated	The environment impacts anxiety	No demographic differences
Aksak & Cubukcu (2020)	Affective, teacher-related, environmental factors	Teacher attitudes and classroom environment are the most important	Not specified	The teacher-student relationship plays a central role	Not specified
Indrawati & Yunus (2022)	Diverse degrees of speaking anxiety	Teacher knowledge about mental health	Not specified	Teacher exposure and exposure effect influence anxiety	Not specified
Chowdhury et al. (2024)	Sociocultural and pedagogical factors	Not specified	Not specified	Technology reduces anxiety	Not specified
Hashem (2024)	Test anxiety related to speaking difficulty	The teacher's contribution to lessening anxiety	Not specified	Focusing classroom instruction on oral skills is central	Not specified
Le (n.d.)	Participation anxiety, linguistic competence, and confidence	Teaching methods evaluated	Not defined	Lack of support from the teacher and peers	Not defined
Hidayat et al. (2024)	Interpersonal intelligence negatively correlated with anxiety	Interactive group activities are recommended	Not specified	Teacher feedback and classroom participation are required	Not specified
Wang (2017)	Communication motivation, apprehension	Positive perceptions related to intrinsic motivation	Not specified	Technology use boosts confidence	Adult learners focus
Rathiga (2014)	Self-perception theory, fear of communicative failure, and testing anxiety	English thinking suggested	Influence due to the affective filter proposed	Anxiety is reduced by online peer interaction	Female students pay attention
Rui-nan (2008)	Motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety affect listening	An environment that promotes low anxiety is suggested	Not specified	The environment impacts anxiety	Little difference by gender
Fenyi et al. (2023)	Preparation for error, an inferiority complex	Student-centered learning atmosphere, peer assessment	Not explicitly stated	Participation anxiety in the classroom is seen	Not stated
Gutierrez Fernandez et al. (n.d.)	Anxiety towards English learning	Dialogic pedagogical meetings	Not specified	Perceptions of classroom interactions are significant	Not specified

Maher & King (2023)	Language anxiety provides the basis for the production of learner silence	Cognitive behavioral perspective	Not specified	Teacher corrections and attitudes bring about anxiety	Not specified
Asmali (2019)	Tolerance for ambiguity, sense of self-competence	Mixed methods study	Not specified	Uncertainty in the classroom contributes to anxiety	Not specified
Putri et al. (2023)	Speaking anxiety and gender differences	Significant difference between males and females	Not specified	Fear of classroom evaluation (foreign language anxiety)	Gender differences significant
Hz (2022)	Personality typology and speaking anxiety	Anxiety differs by personality typology	Not specified	Speaking anxiety varies by personality typology	Not specified
Malik et al. (2021)	Psychological, cognitive, and socio-cultural factors	A friendly classroom environment is effective	Not specified	Teacher and peer support are important	Not specified
Mofareh (2019)	Shyness, fear of mistakes, mistrust	Technology and pedagogy are recommended	Not stated	The environment in the classroom contributes to fluency	Not stated
“Impacts of Foreign Language Anxiety” (2023)	Fear of mistakes, lack of confidence, negative judgment	Pedagogical insights for EMI courses	Affective Filter Theory is central	Classroom anxiety negatively correlates with performance	Not specified
Ismail et al. (2023)	Anxiety affects students' learning	Motivation and encouragement are effective	Not specified	Teacher sensitivity vital	Mixed gender differences

Anxiety of learning English is establishing itself as a key area of study, especially in the context of Indian higher education, where it serves as a tool for social interaction in addition to being the language of instruction. According to studies, anxiety in college students can take many different forms and is influenced by sociocultural, psychological, and educational factors. These factors limit their capacity to process and integrate language instruction in addition to influencing their motivation to communicate. Often used as the theoretical foundation, Krashen's Affective Filter Theory posits that heightened anxiety hinders language acquisition by blocking relevant input (Lin & Lin, 2020; Rui-nan, 2008). An analysis of fifty scholarly works reveals recurrent themes, including the psychological causes of anxiety, the impact of social context and classroom atmosphere, instructional strategies, affective filter results, challenges with language and performance, demographic shifts, technology-based coping mechanisms, and the significant negative effects of anxiety on oral communication and active participation.

### Psychoanalytic Theories

A prominent theme in the literature is the role of psychological factors in generating communication anxiety. Among the fifty studies reviewed, thirty-two highlight how fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, and general communication apprehension hinder learners' ability to participate in oral English activities (Wang, 2023; Mahmoud, 2024). Heightened self-consciousness and increased awareness of errors often intensify nervousness, causing students to avoid communicative encounters (Mulyani, 2018; Hanifa, 2018). These anxieties, whether directly or indirectly, elevate learners' affective filters, thereby limiting the reception and processing of comprehensible input (Qi, 2003; Fenyi et al., 2023).

Research also indicates that motivation and self-esteem act as mediating factors: learners with strong intrinsic motivation and healthy self-esteem tend to experience lower communication apprehension and exhibit greater oral fluency (Nurmasadah et al., 2022). Importantly, psychological barriers are not isolated traits; they interact with external influences such as classroom environment and cultural expectations, collectively amplifying overall anxiety levels.

### Role of Teacher Attitudes and Classroom Environment

According to Krashen's Affective Filter theory, the teacher has a crucial role in impacting students' emotional states and their level of cognitive engagement. Research indicates that teacher behavior impacts communication anxiety and learner motivation in a decisive way, instead of being merely incidental. Practices like constant support,

avoiding direct criticism, and creating cooperative learning opportunities are known to decrease fear, raise self-esteem, and enhance a willingness to take chances while interacting. Young (1991) and Bao and Liu (2021). These strategies enhance remembering and make language input more understandable by reducing the affective filter. Such learner-oriented approaches are particularly essential in the Indian ESL context, where exam-focused requirements and hierarchical norms generally prevent open communication.

However, teachers confront the risk of raising students' affective filters, which can show up in the classroom as emotional withdrawal, avoidance, and quietness, when they place a high priority on developing work that is devoid of errors and rely mainly on corrective feedback (Sanchez Fortuna, 2025). In such scenarios, students often view blunders as personal failings rather than as normal learning processes, which fosters communication anxiety. This is consistent with the discussion in Section 3.4, where it was shown that anxiety impairs cognitive function and reduces engagement in the classroom. As a result, teacher attitudes toward autonomy, student involvement, and managing errors are essential to both affective and cognitive learning outcomes.

It has been realized that using student-centered teaching strategies, such as small group discussions, peer assessment, and student-selected subjects, can effectively reduce anxiety and improve communication skills (Li et al., 2024). These techniques strengthen students to take communicative risks, which are crucial for learning a second language, by promoting a sense of emotional stability and learner autonomy. Such methods can change the environment in Indian classrooms, where linguistic diversity, academic expectations, and cultural norms all merge, from one of fear to one that encourages curiosity and self-assurance. As a result, affective awareness should be reinforced in teacher preparation programs, emphasizing how classroom dynamics, feedback techniques, and interaction styles impact student outcomes.

### Validation of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis provides a robust framework for understanding the role of emotions in second language acquisition, and the results of this study consistently support it. Anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence are key factors that influence how learners process linguistic input and produce output in various contexts, including Indian ESL classrooms. According to the hypothesis, emotional barriers can actively hinder the cognitive and neurological processes involved in learning a new language, rather than merely accompany lower performance. While Krashen emphasizes how psychological elements, particularly high anxiety and low self-confidence, act as filters limiting language acquisition, theories such as Self Determination Theory (SDT) focus on the type and quality of motivation.

Importantly, findings from Indian college contexts reinforce the core principles of Krashen's model while also pointing to opportunities for theoretical expansion and contextualization. In multilingual, postcolonial societies like India, English carries sociolinguistic significance far beyond its academic function, being closely linked to social status, urban access, and educational privilege. Consequently, learners' affective responses to English are shaped not only by internal cognitive processes but also by identity, class dynamics, and historical legacies. Scholars have called for a more socioculturally responsive extension of Krashen's framework that accounts for these dimensions (Luo, 2024; *Frontiers in Education*, 2025). For example, students from marginalized linguistic backgrounds may experience heightened affective filtering due not only to performance anxiety but also to internalized linguistic insecurity or societal exclusion.

The study's results highlight the importance of intentional teaching strategies that support Indian ESL learners in building communicative confidence and lowering their affective filter. Rather than being fixed, intrinsic traits, factors such as anxiety, low motivation, and intolerance of ambiguity often emerge as responses to environmental conditions that can be modified through effective pedagogy. Based on recent classroom research and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, several instructional techniques appear particularly effective.

### Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study underscore the necessity for intentional pedagogical design to reduce the affective filter and promote communicative confidence among Indian ESL learners. Anxiety, ambiguity intolerance, and low motivation are not merely learner characteristics; they are often responses to environmental conditions that can be modified through thoughtful instructional practices. Grounded in Krashen's affective filter framework and supported by contemporary classroom research, the following pedagogical strategies emerge as particularly effective:

- **Reducing the Pressure to Correct Errors:** Instead of giving immediate, public corrections, teachers can provide delayed and constructive feedback after the activity. This approach reduces embarrassment and encourages students to focus on meaning rather than form. Normalizing mistakes as a natural part of language learning also helps alleviate communication anxiety.
- **Incorporating Reflective Practices:** Strategies such as language journaling, peer observation, and self-assessment help students explain and review their fears. Students can identify emotional reactions and

progressively build resilience against anxiety-inducing situations thanks to these methods, which enhance metacognitive awareness, as observed by Hsu and Goldsmith (2021).

- ***Building Self-Confidence through Scaffolding*** begins with small, manageable tasks that gradually expand in complexity. Examples include a brief, low-pressure two-person interview, a short two-minute icebreaker such as *two truths and a lie*, or a role-play activity where students rotate through different roles. Such tasks should remain both achievable and meaningful, enabling learners to experience a sense of accomplishment.
- ***Mindfulness and Emotional Regulation*** strategies, including deep breathing, grounding exercises, or guided mindfulness sessions before high-stakes speaking activities, have been shown to reduce physiological symptoms of anxiety. These practices help recalibrate the emotional atmosphere of the classroom, particularly for students who are more vulnerable to performance-related stress.

Together, these interventions not only mitigate emotional barriers but also foster a more equitable, adaptive, and emotionally responsive language classroom. This is especially vital in the Indian context, where language learning is often intertwined with social identity and aspirations for academic success.

Research indicates that students demonstrate higher engagement and improved language production when classrooms prioritize emotional well-being alongside linguistic accuracy (Dewaele & Ip, 2013; Du & Santos, 2023). Although this review highlights important conceptual insights, there remains a shortage of empirical evidence from real classroom contexts. Longitudinal studies could illuminate how anxiety and language proficiency develop over time, while learner interviews may uncover culturally specific sources of stress and resilience that are often overlooked in current scholarship.

In addition, further inquiry is needed into how online and hybrid learning environments influence the affective filter. Reduced visibility in virtual settings may help alleviate anxiety, yet the lack of immediate feedback and community interaction can diminish motivation and introduce new pressures. Investigating these dynamics would enhance the applicability of Krashen's framework to contemporary educational practices. Importantly, addressing communication-related anxiety is not only about improving individual language outcomes but also about reshaping the emotional culture of classrooms. Responding to these affective needs is essential for building equitable and inclusive English language education in India.

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

This conceptual study examined the influence of communication anxiety on English language learning through the lens of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. A review of foundational and recent literature indicates that Indian college students frequently experience anxiety related to grammatical errors, peer evaluation, and public performance. Such affective pressures restrict classroom participation and hinder the development of speaking and listening skills. In line with Krashen's model, these emotional barriers raise the affective filter, limiting learners' ability to process and internalize language input. Conversely, when learners feel secure, confident, and motivated, the filter is lowered, facilitating more effective language acquisition.

Building on this perspective, the study explored how communication anxiety interacts with motivation and ambiguity tolerance to shape learning outcomes. The findings suggest that performance-related anxiety plays a decisive role in learner success. Students with heightened affective filters shaped by classroom dynamics, sociocultural expectations, or fear of negative evaluation are less likely to engage in meaningful communication or retain linguistic input. In contrast, learners with higher motivation and greater tolerance for ambiguity demonstrate resilience, resulting in stronger oral proficiency and higher levels of engagement.

Teachers play a critical role in either mitigating or amplifying these affective barriers. Classrooms that minimize public correction, encourage collaboration, and normalize mistakes create safer emotional environments, enabling students to take communicative risks. Strategies such as reflective journaling, scaffolding, and mindfulness have been shown to reduce anxiety and build learner confidence. Similarly, curriculum designers should integrate affective objectives into language programs, providing structured opportunities for gradual exposure to communication tasks and reconsidering assessment practices to reduce fear of judgment.

This study also contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by emphasizing the emotional and psychological dimensions of equitable learning. Affect-aware, student-centered instruction supports inclusive pedagogy, effective learning environments (Target 4.a), and the development of empathetic educators (Target 4.c). In contexts like India, where English serves as a tool for social mobility, addressing affective inequities is a step toward educational justice and broader social inclusion.

Given the conceptual and review-based nature of this study, future research should prioritize empirical investigations that capture learners' lived experiences. Qualitative approaches such as case studies, interviews, and longitudinal classroom observations can provide insights into how affective filters operate in real time.

Additionally, studies could examine the impact of factors such as gender, first language, socioeconomic background, or digital learning contexts on communication anxiety. Intervention-based research testing classroom strategies such as confidence-building workshops, gamified speaking activities, or teacher empathy training would be valuable in translating theory into practice.

Overall, communication anxiety is not solely an individual challenge but a systemic issue embedded in pedagogical, cultural, and institutional contexts. Therefore, integrating affect-focused pedagogy as a core component of language instruction rather than as a supplementary measure is essential for achieving meaningful and sustainable language acquisition outcomes, particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse settings like India.

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