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Second Language Anxiety among Undergraduates of Three Sri Lankan Universities

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A considerable number of second language learners suffer from language anxiety when they enter the second language classroom. Most of them express their anxiety of the language in different forms, to the extent that students simply refuse to speak in English. The results of earlier research indicate that anxiety was often stated as one of the major causes of decreased motivation to learn, interference to learn and poor performance in the ESL classroom (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Gregerson, 2003; Karunakaran, Rana & Manwarul, 2013). This study was designed to explore the teachers' perception of what causes language anxiety in second language learners of three universities of Sri Lanka. Anxiety is considered a complex and multi-faceted psychological phenomenon by past researchers and they have suggested the use of different perspectives and approaches to investigate this phenomenon. This study therefore adopted interviews as a qualitative data gathering tool and 11 ESL teachers from the three universities were interviewed. The findings suggested that language anxiety can stem from learner's own sense of 'self' and their cognitive and language-related difficulties. Social and cultural aspects that may lead to language anxiety were also brought to the attention by the findings. Through the findings the researcher was able to recommend a variety of strategies to teachers that would help alleviate speaking anxiety felt by second language learners.

Key words: ESL classrooms, ELT, language anxiety, speech anxiety, teachers' perceptions