CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter an overview of the literature relevant to anxiety is presented. The review will be organised under six areas namely anxiety, anxiety and performance, test anxiety, test anxiety and performance, test anxiety and performance in ESL examinations, and gender and test anxiety.

2.1 Anxiety

A number of affective, motor or physiological responses to non-specific awareness of danger by humans can be termed as anxiety. It is generally defined as a sense of discomfort and worry regarding an undefined threat (Kaplan 1994). Such a threat can be physical or physiological in nature and may involve the anticipation of bodily injury, damage to self-esteem or harm to personal well-being. Anxiety is characterised by subjective, consciously perceived feelings of apprehension and tension which are accompanied by or are associated with the arousal of the autonomic nervous system (Spielberger, 1978). The anxiety level of an individual fluctuates over time in response to
both internal and external stimulation and there are stable individual differences in the degree to which anxiety would be manifested in any given situation.

Anxious feelings may be evoked from a variety of different situations (e.g. a medical examination, taking a test or an accident) and may occur in varying degrees from mild to extreme. The presence of a perceived threat, be it physical or psychological, is common to the various anxiety-producing situations in everyday life.

Anxiety is a composite effect consisting of both cognitive and physiological responses. Cognitive responses to anxiety include confusion, worry, fear and self-doubt whereas the physiological sensations of anxiety include sweating, nausea, tremors, rapid pulse and muscular tension. Anxiety-provoking situations induce these physiological responses which help improve or impair performance and allow people to avoid dangerous situations.

2.1.1. State-Trait Anxiety

Spielberger, Gorsuch and Lushene (1970) in their Trait-State Anxiety Theory separate anxiety into a transitory state and a relatively stable personality trait. Trait anxiety (A-Trait) refers to relatively stable individual differences in anxiety proneness, that is, to differences between people in the tendency to respond to situations perceived as threatening. State anxiety (A-State), on the other hand, refers to apprehension experienced at a particular moment in time,
for example, prior to taking examinations. In general, it would be expected that those who are high in A-Trait will exhibit A-State elevations more frequently than those low A-Trait individuals because they tend to perceive a wider range of situations as dangerous or threatening. High A-Trait persons are also likely to respond to stressful situations with increased A-State intensity, especially in situations that involve interpersonal relationship which pose some threat to self-esteem. Thus a person with high trait anxiety would be likely to become apprehensive in a number of different situations. Trait anxiety has been shown to impair cognitive functioning, to disrupt memory, to lead to avoidance behaviours and to have several other effects (Eysenck 1979).

The concepts of state and trait anxiety have a great deal of significance for the academic learning situation. For example, a student who is good in mathematics but mediocre in subjects requiring verbal skills would probably have very little anxiety when taking a mathematics test. On the other hand, when faced with an English test or if he is required to give a speech, the student might be very tense. Conversely, a student who is low in A-trait may be quite calm in most testing situations but he may react with intense anxiety when faced with an examination in mathematics because of a past history of failure in this subject. Thus classifying individual students as high or low in trait anxiety is not valid for predicting state anxiety in a particular situation. The level of state anxiety an individual exhibits is not only related to trait anxiety but also to certain situational variables. One of these is the importance of the event for the individual and another is the uncertainty of the outcome.
2.2. Anxiety and Performance

The relationship between anxiety and performance has been investigated extensively by psychologists for many years. The influence of anxiety on performance in a variety of laboratory tasks on performance is quite well documented. Laboratory studies have established that the complexity of the task to be performed and the level of the stress (usually defined in terms of ego involvement) inherent in the task are two factors, in particular, which must be considered in explaining the influence of anxiety.

Taylor and Spence (1952) investigated anxiety as an emotion-based drive and examined the relationship between the strength of the drive (level of anxiety) and the learning of the task. His findings indicated that high anxious subjects performed better than low anxious subjects in some situations but not in others. Anxiety appears to facilitate performance on simple, straightforward tasks where there is little response competition. On the other hand, it interferes with performance on more complex tasks where response competition is likely to occur. In conditions where ego involvement is low, a number of studies have found anxiety unrelated to performance (Sarason 1957). In conditions of high ego-involvement, anxiety has typically been found to interfere with performance (Sarason 1957; Nicholson 1958).

In learning and performance situations, it is the view of Sarason et al (1952) that anxiety acts as a cue to elicit both responses that are relevant to the
learning and performance task, and responses which are irrelevant. Task-relevant responses are observed in an increase in effort, concentration and in procedural strategies found to facilitate learning and reduce anxiety. Task-irrelevant responses may be observed as the intrusion of thoughts concerning the consequence of failures, of self-depreciating ruminations and by ego-defensive avoidant responses designed to protect the individual from loss of self-esteem. These task-irrelevant responses compete with responses relevant to the task and typically have an interfering effect on learning and performance.

Wine (1971) argues that many performance differences between high and low-anxious persons are because of attentional differences; high anxious persons are overly self-preoccupied and hence do not focus adequately on the task at hand, whereas low-anxious persons are more task focused. Other studies have also shown that high-anxious adults have more task-irrelevant thoughts than low-anxious adults (Mandler & Watson 1966; Sarason & Stoops 1978). Such task-irrelevant, self-deprecatory thinking is especially likely when tasks are introduced as tests of ability. Less anxious students also outperform their more anxious counterparts because they devote more attention to task demands and less concern to task irrelevant preoccupations.

Spielberger (1966) has indicated that state anxiety measures are more likely to relate to learning and test performance than trait anxiety measures. Other researchers have also found confirmation of this for college students (Hodges and Spielberger 1969; Meyers and Martin 1974).
The most consistent general finding is that high anxiety is associated with relatively low performance. Anxiety interferes with performance where evaluative pressure leads to preoccupation with the possibility of failure and negative evaluation. This conclusion is based on the negative correlations that were obtained in the different studies by the various researchers.

2.3 Test Anxiety

Most people perceive the testing situation to have an evaluative or assessment purpose, and feel that it is important to do well because people's lives are frequently affected by their test performance.

According to Sarason and Mandler (1952:1) test anxiety means " anticipatory anxiety in test-taking situations ..." Nicholls (1976:1) defined test anxiety as "self-evaluation", stating that test anxiety scores actually reflect students' perceptions of their own inadequacies in testing situations. Gaudry (1977) supported a similar theory, proposing that test anxiety is caused by previous failures in testing situations.

The research of Sarason and Mandler (1952) generally is regarded as the pioneering work on test anxiety. The research of Sarason (1960, 1972, 1975), Wine (1971) and others who have worked in this area (Alpert and Haber 1960; Mandler and Sarason, 1952) suggest that the concept of test anxiety refers to individual differences to anxiety proneness in test situations. Highly test
anxious people tend to perceive test stimuli as threatening and become concerned about possible failure in examinations.

Some factors that seem to contribute to test anxiety are high stake tests, severe time limits on the tests, use of letter grades, negative learning histories and the test environment and stress associated with the testing situation. The testing environment (Bachman 1990) which includes familiarity of place, personnel, the time of test and the physical conditions on the day of the test all contribute to affect students' responses to the examination. In responding to examination stress, test anxious persons are more likely to experience:

1. emotional reactions characterised by feelings of insecurity, tension, apprehension and nervousness leading to a feeling of inadequacy and loss of confidence.

2. self-centred worry cognitions which interfere with attention; and activation or arousal of the autonomic nervous system.

The effects of test anxiety result in students:

1. having difficulty reading and understanding the questions on the examination papers

2. having difficulty organising their thoughts

3. having difficulty in concentrating

4. being easily distracted by stimuli which should be irrelevant such as the temperature of the room or noise
5. having difficulty retrieving keywords and concepts when answering essay questions
6. doing poorly on an examination even though they know the material
7. having mental block such as going blank on questions and remembering the correct answer as soon as the examination is over
8. feeling physical discomfort (e.g. nausea, rapid heartbeat, excessive perspiration, muscle tension, hot flushes); and
9. worrying over their performance compared to other test takers.

Thus, in the examination situation, the test anxious students are likely to be hesitant and to have difficulty in adapting to new situations which are strange and unfamiliar such as a different building or room, an invigilator who is a stranger and the presence of a large number of candidates. As a result, the test anxious students generally experience an inability to think clearly in spite of adequate preparation. They “fall apart” when taking the test. They either answer inadequately or have a complete mental block, and so are unable to achieve goals that are well within their competencies. Blocking on a test is an avoidance mechanism which may be a method of coping with stress, attendant upon the perceived threat of harm that the individual anticipates as the inevitable outcome of the test, which is failure. This fear of some consequence of the test, for example, failure, is an overriding component of the behaviour repertory of the test anxious individual.
There is evidence that test anxious individuals actively rehearse negative self-evaluations which compete for attention during test situations (Sarason 1975; Mandler and Watson 1966; Wine 1971; Meichenbaum 1972). Expressions of lowered self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, fear of negative consequences, negative self-evaluations in relation to one's own previously established standards, self-blame for perceived shortcomings, social evaluations in relation to one's estimate of how others are doing, etc. also intrude during the test and interfere with a proper focus upon the task at hand.

The highly anxious student is slower to react in a stressful competitive situation than he is in relatively relaxed conditions of practice. As concentration is affected, sometimes students fail to notice important conditions and alternatives set out in the paper, such as the number of questions and choices available. From this it becomes clear that a high level of anxiety disrupts and disorganises behaviour through a lowering of attention, concentration and intellectual control.

When success in universities is based not only on what students know but whether they can show in an examination what they know or can do, it definitely raises a student's anxiety when taking examinations.
2.3.1. The State-Trait Model of Test Anxiety

According to the State–Trait Model of Test Anxiety (Spielberger 1972), the components of test anxiety may be specified as follows:

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An evaluative situation is one where the individual associates the situation with an evaluation and it acts as a stimulus. How the individual perceives the situation depends on the individual’s prior experience. An individual may perceive the situation positively while another individual might see it as threatening. State anxiety (A-state) reactions vary depending on previous experience and the nature of the evaluative situation. A-state reaction can be unpleasant or painful or one of arousal and enthusiasm. Cognitive reappraisal refers to the way the individual responds to a reappraisal of the stressful circumstances which helps him to identify appropriate measures of coping with the stress. These responses may be constructive, defensive, avoidant or a combination of these responses. If the individual is unable to cope with or avoid the stress, he may engage in defense manoeuvre to reduce his A-state. People who experience high anxiety in evaluative situations are very sensitive to cues that suggest oncoming tests and interpret them as a threat to their well-being and self-esteem.
Spielberger (1972) also differentiated between chronic anxiety, relatively
generalisable anxiety and the more transitional anxiety. State anxiety is a
temporary, situational reaction to a test situation, and Trait anxiety (A-trait) is a
chronic, generalized reaction to tests across situations. Spielberger showed that
Trait anxiety is built-up by a series of State anxiety inducing situations over
time due to aggravation and perceived threat.

Higher levels of A-state response are evoked in high A-trait individuals than in
low A-trait individual in an evaluative situation. Physical danger, however, has
been found to evoke a similar increase in A-state for both high and low A-trait
persons (Spielberger 1972). Thus, the evaluative situation in which there is a
threat to self-esteem and the risk of failure has been found to be more
threatening to the high-anxious individual.

2.4 Worry and Emotionality

Test anxiety has also been defined as a construct comprising two major
dimensions: worry and emotionality (Liebert and Morris 1967). The worry
dimension is primarily the cognitive component of the anxiety experience
caused by negative expectations and thoughts regarding the possibility of
failure due to past experiences and its consequence. The emotionality
dimension is associated with the physiological component of anxiety,
indicating acute autonomic responses to stressful situations. Thus test anxiety
can be said to be the increase in the level of worry and/or emotionality with
regard to a test situation. Liebert and Morris found that worry scores on the Test Anxiety Questionnaire were inversely related to test performance expectancies and subsequent test scores, while emotionality indices showed no such relationships (Spiegler, Morris and Liebert 1968). Deffenbacher (1977) concurred that worry was indeed the element of anxiety responsible for test performance fluctuations, especially in highly anxious subjects. Spielberger (1978) supported this two-component theory of test anxiety and found well-defined worry and emotionality factors in his development of his Test Anxiety Inventory.

2.5 Facilitating and Debilitating Anxiety

Sarason, Mandler and Crighill (1952:561) proposed that anxiety, per se, does not necessarily lead to poor performance:

When a stimulus situation contains elements which specifically arouse test or achievement anxiety, this increase in anxiety drive will lead to poorer performance in individuals who have test irrelevant anxiety responses in their response repertory. For individuals without such response tendencies, these stimulus elements will raise their general drive level and result in improved performance.

In 1960, Alpert & Haber observed that anxiety could facilitate as well as impair achievement and this led them to construct the Achievement Anxiety Test which contains both facilitating and debilitating anxiety scales. Facilitating anxiety refers to a state of arousal or enthusiasm in the face of a challenging task, rather than dread, worry or other unpleasant feelings that are normally considered to be the defining criteria of anxiety.
Alpert & Haber maintained that an individual may possess a large amount of both types of anxiety or one but not the other, or none of either. Facilitating anxiety is viewed as a source of motivation. In contrast, debilitating anxiety acts as a distractor and impairs performance.

2.6 Test Anxiety and Performance

Research relating anxiety to learning and performance has tended to reconfirm that high test anxiety disrupts and disorganises performance (Sarason 1963; Spielberger 1966; Whitmaier 1974). Spielberger reported that academic failure was four times as great among high anxious individuals in comparison to low anxious students of comparable ability.

Previous research has also shown that test anxiety is inversely and significantly related to academic achievement. Highly test anxious students achieve less than those low in test anxiety. Sarason and Mandler (1952) were among the first to discover significant correlation between test scores and test anxiety. In a similar research, Alpert & Haber (1960) found that both grade point averages and examination scores are predicted by test anxiety. Their research suggested that anxiety in testing situations can have either a facilitating or debilitating effect, and that these effects will vary according to aspects of the testing situation or of the individual test-taker. Sarason (1963) showed that standardised test scores in mathematics and verbal skills are also predicted by test anxiety. Liebert &
Morris (1967) found that worry scores on the Test Anxiety Questionnaire were inversely related to test performance expectancies and subsequent test scores.

Wrightman (1962) indicated that anxiety is unrelated to performance if a test is seen to be of little importance, but when a test is very important as in the case with most school and college examinations, anxiety impairs performance. Caron (1963) studied two groups of students in which one group was tested under examination conditions and the other was not. In his study he also concluded that low anxious students did significantly better than high anxious students in examination conditions.

Any procedure which emphasises the importance of an examination appears to have an adverse influence on the performance of the high anxious students. Caron’s study concurred with Wrightman’s findings. Another study (Kesterbaum and Weiner 1970) also showed that persons with low anxiety outperform those with high anxiety. Therefore, some anxiety may be beneficial to performance, while too much or too little may impede performance.

2.7 Measures of Anxiety

Scales and questionnaires have been the most frequently used measurement techniques of anxiety and test anxiety. The most popular are those developed by Mandler and Sarason (1952), Liebert and Morris (1967), Sarason (1984), Spielberger et al (1978) and Alpert and Haber (1960).
2.7.1 *Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI)*

The Spielberger et al (1978) scale was developed based on the theory that test anxiety is essentially a situation-specific form of trait anxiety. It contains 20 items, of which 8 pertain to the worry dimension and 8 to the emotionality dimension. The remaining 4 items are of a more general character. The items comprising the worry dimension reflect general thoughts pertaining to the possibility of failure in tests and its repercussions. Their content is general in the sense that no specific threats or worries are expressed. The items comprising the emotionality dimension comprise uneasiness, tension, physiological discomfort and restlessness. The TAI examined specific symptoms of anxiety before, during and after examination. Subjects respond using a four point, Likert-like scale, where a high score indicates a higher level of test anxiety.

2.7.2 *Achievement Anxiety Test (AAT)*

The AAT (Alpert and Haber) consists of two scales, a nine-item facilitating anxiety scale (AAT-P) and a ten-item debilitating anxiety scale (AAT-N). These items were chosen on the basis of their ability to predict the grade point average of college students. Each item is scored on a five-point scale along a continuum from almost never to almost always. The facilitating anxiety scale contains items like: “Nervousness while taking a test helps me to do better”; “I look forward to exams”; and “the more important the exam or test, the better I
seem to do". Examples of the items in the debilitating anxiety scale are: "The more important the examination, the less well I seem to do"; "I find myself reading the exam questions without understanding them, and I must go back over them so that they will make sense".

2.7.3  *Test Anxiety Questionnaire (TAQ)*

The TAQ was constructed by Mandler and Sarason (1952) to measure the anxiety reactions of adults taking examinations. The test is concerned with a person's reported feelings and stress reactions in the testing situation. The items, for example, are concerned with emotional feelings of uneasiness, worry cognitions and physiological indices of arousal such as heartbeat and perspiration. The TAQ contains 37 questions to which the subject answers true or false. Some sample questions are: "I have an uneasy, upset feeling before taking a final examination"; "During an examination, I frequently get so nervous that I forget facts I really know"; and "After taking a test, I always feel I could have done better than I actually did". A high score signifies high test anxiety and indicates that the subject experiences considerable discomfort about taking tests.

2.7.4  *Worry-Emotionality Inventory*

Liebert and Morris (1967) developed the ten-item Worry-Emotionality Inventory. The items were developed from items on the Sarason & Mandler
Test Anxiety Questionnaire (1952). The items are rated on a scale of 1 to 5 indicating how much the feeling, state or condition applies to the person. The range of scores on each subscale varies from 5 to 25 with increasing scores indicating more worry or emotionality.

2.7.5. *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Score (FLCAS)*

The FLCAS was developed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) to measure language anxiety in the classroom. Horwitz et al believe that the three anxieties, i.e. communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, are important parts of foreign language anxiety and have a negative impact on students’ language learning. The FLCAS contains thirty-three items to which the respondents have to respond on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Items in the FLCAS for example are “I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in language class” and “I am never sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class”. The range of scores varies from 33 to 165. A high score represents high anxiety while a low score represents low anxiety.

2.8 Anxiety and Performance in ESL

Testing procedures of some type are part of the lives of almost all language teachers and language learners. The results of examinations are important in
that they affect academic careers, job prospects, self-esteem, classroom relationships and motivation.

Second/foreign language anxiety often shows up in testing situations. Students report that they ‘know’ a certain grammar point but ‘forget’ it during a written test or oral test when many grammar points must be remembered and coordinated simultaneously. The problem can also be recognised in ‘careless’ errors in spelling and syntax. The student realises, usually some time after the test, that he knew the correct answer but put down the wrong one due to nervousness.

Various types of language examinations have been found to generate considerable anxiety in students (Shohamy 1982; Madsen 1982). The research on anxiety in relation to second/foreign language to date establishes the existence of the relationships. Some of these studies suggest that a negative relationship exists between anxiety and second/foreign language performance. However, even within these studies, anxiety may be positively or negatively related to one language skill and not another (Chastain 1975).

There have been many studies on second/foreign language anxiety in the classroom. Teachers’ common belief that second language anxiety prevails among language learners in many educational contexts has been supported in a number of studies (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner 1989). Gardner’s (1985) and Horwitz et al’s (1986) conceptualization of second
language anxiety as a type of situation-specific anxiety unique to second language learning has been generally upheld by studies incorporating a scale specifically designed for assessing second/foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner 1991). Most studies have found a consistent, negative association between anxiety and second/foreign language performance related to in-class activities.

There are not many studies that investigate the effects of test anxiety of learners learning English as a second language. One of the factors which has been found to increase anxiety is when there is an emphasis on evaluation (Wine 1971), and the importance of the evaluation to academic success. Under evaluative stress students with high levels of test anxiety tend to divide their attention between task demands and personal concerns principally composed of negative self-preoccupation, whereas those with low levels of test anxiety tend to devote a greater proportion of their attention to task demands. Test anxiety usually surfaces when the student perceives a situation as threatening or difficult. Most examinations usually consist of complex tasks and most of them require the student to recall specific elements from a larger body of previously learned materials. Since the material to be learned for an examination varies in complexity and the precise elements to be recalled are not known to the student, anxiety may affect the examination performance of the students.

Madsen (1982) found that an excessive degree of anxiety can have debilitating effects on the performance of test-takers of EFL students, as shown by an
examination of test correlations. Julkunen (1991) conducted a study in Finland which investigated the relationship between trait and test anxiety and low and high achievement in sixth and eighth graders. Before the final English Language test of the spring term the students responded to a questionnaire concerning worry, tension, test irrelevant thoughts, physical reactions and fear of failure. Student grades in English and scores on two close and open English vocabulary tasks served as achievement measures. Results indicate a connection between anxiety and performance in a foreign language.

In Kleinmann’s (1977) study of Spanish-speaking and Arabic-speaking ESL students, facilitating anxiety was found to be correlated with students’ oral production of linguistically difficult English structures. Students with high levels of debilitating anxiety attempted different grammatical constructions than students who were anxious.

Chastain (1975) examined the relationship between anxiety and course grades in three language programmes: audiolingual or regular programmes in French, German and Spanish. While there was a significant correlation between course grades and test anxiety in the French audiolingual class, students in the regular French, German and Spanish classes who experienced a higher level of anxiety were more likely to receive better grades than students with a lower level of anxiety. Chastain resolves these conflicting results by saying “perhaps some concern about a test is a plus while too much anxiety can produce negative results” (1975: 160).
Backman (1976) looked at the relationship between anxiety and language progress among Venezuelan students learning English in the US. Students’ progress was measured by a placement test, a listening comprehension test, and teachers’ ratings. However, the results did not show a significant correlation with any of the anxiety measures.

Language anxiety research suggests that students may experience different amounts of anxiety in the four skill areas of speaking, listening, reading and writing, depending on variables such as learner language experience and the relationship between the first and second language. There is not a lot of research available that investigates anxiety as it relates specifically to the four skills. Most language examinations test one or more of the language skills and students might have anxiety related to one language skill and not another. Some may be particularly susceptible to anxiety when a certain language skill is emphasised or evaluated. A student may express little anxiety around writing, for example, but considerable anxiety around speaking. Research on the effects of anxiety has concentrated on the output stage in terms of production, performance and course grades.

Research on language anxiety has consistently indicated that students experience anxiety over speaking in a second/foreign language (Horwitz 1986; Young 1986). Speaking is particularly anxiety-provoking as the students are often expected to perform beyond their acquired competence and create their
own utterances. Anxiety can affect a student’s performance. Anxiety, for example, may affect the quality of the student’s communication or willingness to communicate or verbalise their thoughts (Daly and Stafford 1984; McCroskey 1984). McCroskey (1984) has labelled this anxiety over speaking as ‘communication apprehension’, which he defines as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated oral communication with another person or persons”. Krashen (1982) hypothesised that anxiety contributes negatively to an ‘affective filter’ which makes an individual less responsive to language input. Koch and Terrell (1991) in their study of the activities examined in the Natural Approach found students who reported oral presentation, role-playing and dealing with situations to be the most anxiety-producing. Krashen, Terrell and Omaggio (Young 1992) judged speaking as more anxiety-producing than reading, writing and listening. Price (1991) also found speaking in the foreign language the greatest source of anxiety in her subjects.

In an oral testing situation (e.g. in a role play), where students have to interact with their peers and in front of the examiners and being evaluated at the same time, the natural test anxiety that most people feel comes to the fore making them nervous. Students’ fear of being negatively evaluated as they are speaking in front of others could threaten their self-esteem. Students are more anxious when they are called on to use the language in an integrative way. This might affect their performance and cause them to be unable to accomplish the task set for them successfully. The students have to listen, comprehend and react to
what is going on. If they are anxious, all their energies will be expended in dealing with their symptoms of anxiety, forcing themselves to feel relaxed or not fear the examiners or the question. The students’ minds are being used up by non-language activities and their cognitive attention is not on the task. This might cause them to be unable to produce the intonation and the rhythm of the language, forget words and phrases, hesitate, hardly speak and generally unable to perform the task required. Insufficient time for the preparation of the speaking task with the fear of negative evaluation will further cause anxiety resulting in the inability to perform the task well. However much the students have practised in class, they find the examination situation stressful and more threatening than class practice.

Young (1990) conducted a test to examine whether oral proficiency was negatively influenced by anxiety in Spanish. She found some negative correlations between students’ Oral Proficiency Interview scores and some of the anxiety measures. Young (1990) interviewed foreign language students and found that oral presentation and role-playing were also very unnerving for the students. The students did echo the popular but misinformed belief of some teachers that simply by getting more practice in speaking on command, they would be able to overcome their discomfort. However, practising a lot does not cure the problem if a student has an actual anxiety problem.

Kleinmann (1977) was one of the first to specifically examine the effects of anxiety on speaking. In her study, the subjects’ oral performance was positively
affected by facilitating anxiety. Phillips (1992), however, found a negative relationship between several anxiety measures and the quality and quantity of foreign language speech as reflected in the number of independent clauses and total number of words per communication unit.

Students feel some anxiety over listening comprehension. This is more so when they take listening comprehension tests as these tests usually include a substantial number of listening test items. Anxious students claim to hear only a loud buzz whenever they hear the foreign language and have difficulty in discriminating the sounds and structures of the target language (Horwitz 1986). They also have difficulty grasping the content of the target language. Students express frustrations because some of them find difficulty with the speed at which discourse is uttered, difficulty in understanding the spoken discourse, and the transitory nature of the spoken discourse. Students become more anxious if they have to answer questions while listening to continuous discourse, as there is a danger that some of the main ideas or important details might be missed while an answer to a previous question is being recorded. Skehan (1986) suggested that students may have problems with speed of language processing and with storing information.

Second language reading proficiency is generally measured through various methods including comprehension questions, cloze, recall and thinking aloud. All these methods have been widely used for research and evaluation purposes. Language anxiety research suggests that students may experience less anxiety
in reading as they can read again what they do not understand and will have
time to think about the test before answering comprehension questions.

Writing tasks on language tests were found to be particularly stressful for
anxious ESL writers (Madsen and Scott 1984). The students are afraid of being
evaluated because they think they will be rated negatively and thus fail the
examination. When they are forced to write, as in an examination situation,
they tend to focus less energy and attention to the task itself, and thus allow
concern to interfere with pertinent thought processes. Researchers have found
the writing of high-anxious students to be less profound, lower in quality and
less clear due to the writers’ inability to control and manipulate language
patterns with confidence (Daly 1978).

The anxious student is inhibited when attempting to utilize the second/foreign
language he has managed to acquire especially when he feels he is being
evaluated. The resulting poor test performance can contribute to a teacher’s
inaccurate assessment that the student lacks aptitude and motivation for
language learning. As long as second/foreign language learning takes place in a
formal setting where evaluation is inextricably tied to performance, anxiety is
likely to be experienced by the student.

2.9 Gender and Test Anxiety

Levels of test anxiety and the patterns of academic achievement are different
apparently for male and female students (Hembree 1988; Wigfield and Eccles
1989; van der Ploeg et al. 1984). In a majority of American studies, girls have consistently been found to obtain higher scores on test anxiety scales than boys (Sarason 1960; Morris 1976; Manly and Rosemeir 1972). Studies have shown that girls exhibit higher anxiety than boys. This is also the finding by Furst et al. (1985) of university undergraduates. The study found that girls tended to score higher and were more consistently anxious than boys. Similar findings have been obtained by Madsen (1982) in his study with females being more inclined toward high anxiety rating than males. El-Banna (1989) studied the anxiety of ESL/EFL undergraduates of one university. She found females exhibit higher anxiety than males. These studies suggest that this sex difference is universal in the study of anxiety.

2.10 Summary

This chapter gives an overview of the literature related to this topic. The various types of anxieties and their effect on performance are presented. The different measures used to assess anxiety is also presented. In addition, several studies on this topic of test anxiety and performance in ESL examinations are discussed.