

# Psychological Impacts Of Covid-19 On Graduate Students In Mardan, Pakistan

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## Abstract

Natural disaster not only brings physical but also psychological destruction. The same is true of the current surge of Covid-19, which has affected mankind across the globe both, at physical and psychological level. The current study is set to focus on the psychological impacts of Covid-19 on the graduate students at Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan. In order to gauge the psychological impact of Covid-19, a close-ended questionnaire was designed. This study adapted Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) Foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) for investigating test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, faced by the learners. The state-specific anxiety is taken as an approach to study these aspects of anxiety. A descriptive analysis of the data was conducted which revealed that these learners got anxious because of fear of negative evaluation and test-anxiety regarding online classes, preparing assignments and taking online exams. Further, insufficient knowledge about the topic, lacking classroom environment and technical skills made them irritate to organize their thoughts while preparing assignments. The findings showed that anxiety can be mitigated if the teacher are properly trained in online teaching techniques enabling them to create an online academic environment. Moreover, the students need to be facilitated and encouraged to actively participate in online teaching activities. The instructor should engage the students through collaborative tasks, which will help to create a comfortable and student friendly environment for learning.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, FLCAS, psychological, test anxiety, fear, negative evaluation, state-specific anxiety.

## INTRODUCTION

History reveals that mankind has witnessed various epidemic diseases, taking a heavy human toll resulted in numerous human casualties, causing deaths and brought drastic changes in the lives of people. Coronavirus (COVID-19) is one such type of eruption evolved from Wuhan city, Hubei Province, China, in December 2019 and gradually

spread all over the world. The pandemic adversely affecting social, economic, psychological and cultural activities i.e. trade, production, tourism, and transportation. World Health Organization (WHO) called Coronavirus (COVID-19) as an infectious disease and declared it as a pandemic on March 12, 2020. Worldwide, millions of people have become the victims

of COVID-19. The emergence of pandemic Covid-19 has brought the human world to a standstill position. Lock down, suspension of flight, closure of borders, shopping malls, get to gathers, institutions and so on remained the order of the day. Media, both electronic and print, has further add to this hype by exaggerating the deadly nature of the pandemic than focusing on preventive measures. In fact, this situations has made Covid-19 more alarming and dangerous on psychological than physical level.

The surge of Covid has also strongly affected the academic world. It has converted the physical/ face to face learning environment into a virtual online learning platform. As this is a kind of new experience for majority of the learners and they were not prepared for it, consequently, they reacted strongly and have shown serious concerns about. It has made them worried about their educational career. This situation has created kind of learning anxieties among the learners in general and languages learners in particulars. The current study is an attempt to unpack the language students' anxieties in the mid of Covid -19 scenario.

### **Objectives of the Research**

1. To bring into focus the role of anxiety in online classes.
2. To adapt Horwitz et al. (1986) Foreign language classroom anxiety scale for investing the aspects of test-anxiety and fear of negative evaluation face by graduate students in Mardan during online classes through state-anxiety approach
3. To know the academic reasons of facing anxiety in online classes by graduate students in Mardan.

### **Research Questions**

- Q.1. How do Covid-19 affects psychologically the University graduate students in Mardan?

- Q. 2. How Horwitz et al.(1986) Foreign language classroom anxiety scale can be adapted for investigating the aspects of test-anxiety and fear of negative evaluation faced by the graduate students in Mardan during Covid-19 scenario?
- Q.3. What are the academic reasons of the anxiety faced by these learners?

### **Limitations**

This research is limited to the psychological impacts, anxiety and depression only. More specifically, the study targeted two main components i.e., test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation in academic context. For unpacking learner anxieties, state-specific anxiety approach from Horwitz et al.(1986) FLCAS was used. Further the study is limited to explore anxieties in the graduate students of Abdul Wali Khan University, AWKUM.

### **Review of Literature**

Anxiety has been approached and defined differently in different contexts. Machan (2002) stated that language anxiety refers to language's distinctive characteristics which presents single label English for fifteen hundred years, but thousands of miles of linguistic variations. These linguistics variations can be studied in terms of grammar, style, strategies, and discursive conventions. According to Tooth (2010), language anxiety is a multilayered concept, because we have many types of anxiety such as trait and state specific anxiety, situation-specific anxiety, and anxiety in social contexts and instructional situations. Szyszka (2017) argued that language anxiety is a multidimensional phenomenon, because it has been used by various scholars as a reliable tool for measuring the type of anxiety faced by learners when learning a foreign language such as communication

apprehension anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation which are endorsed by Horwitz et al. (1986). Gardner et al. (1970) proposed French language anxiety to measure the attitude and motivation of learners learning French. Pappameheil (2002) concluded that an effective environment and teaching help to reduce the English level anxiety that a ELL students for most of the time experience in mainstream classroom. The researcher highlighted the role of anxiety face by a student learning particular skill, however, particular situations in which they become anxious when learning a particular skill of language, need to be investigated.

Koul et al. (2009) took a different direction by comparing the motivational goals of male and female in the context of English language learning. They found that females are happened to be significantly academic oriented and more instrumental, but less socio-cultural than males towards learning English language. Researchers have noted that academic achievements and superiority are positively associated with foreign language anxiety whereas socio-cultural orientations are negatively linked with. Females revealed high level of anxiety than males. Zarie and Feizollahi (2018) investigated the concept of mapping and brainstorming that affect writing anxiety and accuracy. They conducted an experimental study wherein essay writing and second language writing anxiety inventory were used as pre- and post-test. They evaluated that experimental groups performed better than controlled group. In lexical accuracy, the two experimental groups got the same mean score, but in grammatical accuracy and writing anxiety, the concept mapping group obtained the highest mean than brainstorming group.

Horwitz, et al. (1986, p.31) conceptualized foreign language anxiety as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings,

and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process”. He devised a foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) to assess the anxiety face by students when they learn foreign language. This scale investigated the evaluation of a student performance within social and academic context by taking three factors, which are communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Aida (1994) tested FLCAS by Horwitz et al. (1986), and developed her own scale based on two key factors or major scales, which are speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Aida (1994) did not report about assessing the role of anxiety in learning a particular skill of a foreign language. This shows that the anxiety face by English language learners during learning different writing skills at different situations need to be investigated. Keeping in view the validity and reliability of the current study, it is guided by Horwitz et al. (1986).

## Research Methodology

### Participants of the study

The study was conducted at Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Pakistan. In order to collect the data, 50 students in total, 30 students from 1<sup>st</sup> semester and 20 from 2<sup>nd</sup> semester were chosen to answer the questionnaire on the basis of convenient sampling technique. These students belonged to different cities such as Mardan, Charsadda, Peshawar, Sawabi, Nowshera and Karak. These learners were in different age range such as 21-24, and 25-28.

### Data collection Instrument

Data were collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into two parts: part-1 deals with collecting personal information which are actually about age, gender, City or village of their residence in

Pakistan. Part-II consists of 5 points Likert scale which was adapted from Horwitz et al. (1986) Foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS), and the options provided to the learners are Strongly Agree, Agree, Uncertain, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. These five points Likert Scale questions are 11 in numbers.

**Procedure for Collecting Data through Questionnaire:**

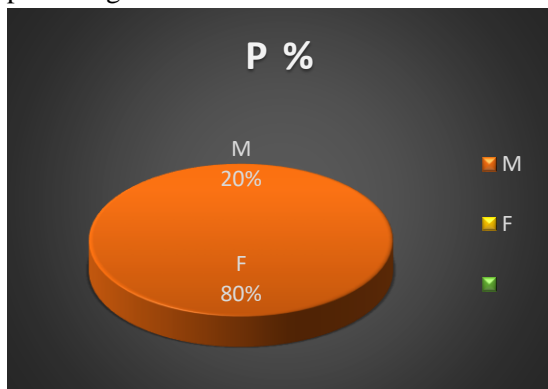
The questionnaires were shared with the above mentioned learners via email. They were given clear instructions for filling questionnaires and were collected upon completion.

**Data Analysis Procedure:**

The study being quantitative used questionnaire for data collection and accordingly were analyzed descriptively, represented through pie diagrams and column charts. In order to answer the research question, descriptive statistics in the form of percentages and frequency were used.

**Analysis of Gender of the Participants:**

The participants responded to the questionnaires were both male and female. As the male were 10 in number hence they were 20% of the total population, while female were 40 in number so, their percentage remained 80 .

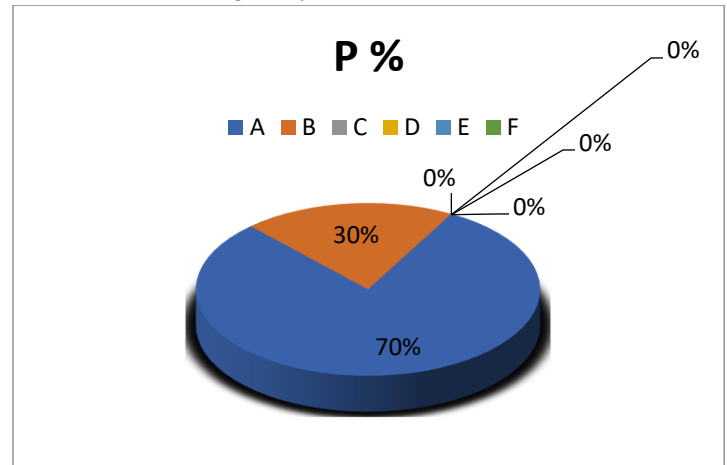


P % is for percentage, M for male, and F for female. The table shows that the learners

were male and female, so the percentage becomes 100%.

**Analysis of their Ages:**

The participants responded to questionnaires are in different range of years.

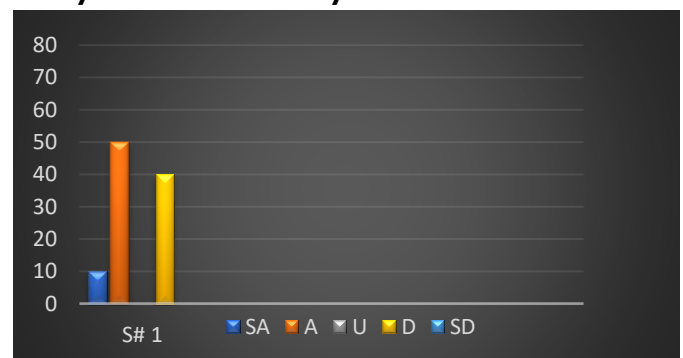


A, B , C, D, and E are coded for the range of years 21-24, 25-28, 29-32, 33-36, and 37-40 respectively. While A is of 70% and B is of 30%, and for C, D, E, and F it is found 0%. It shows that majority of students are in the range 21-24 years whereas only 30%, students found in the range 25-28 years.

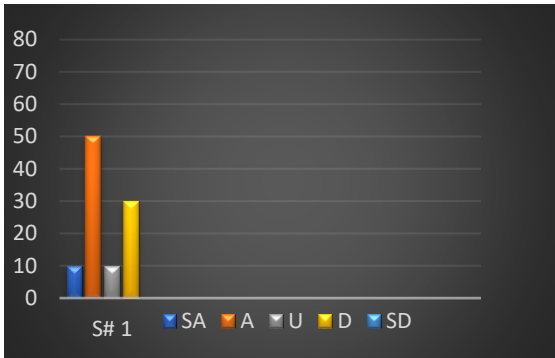
**Analysis of Part-II of Questionnaire:**

Part-II consists of 5 points Likert scale which is adapted from Horwitz et al. (1986) Foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS), and the options provided to the learners are Strongly Agree, Agree, Uncertain, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. These five points Likert Scale questions are 11 in numbers.

**Analysis of Test-Anxiety**

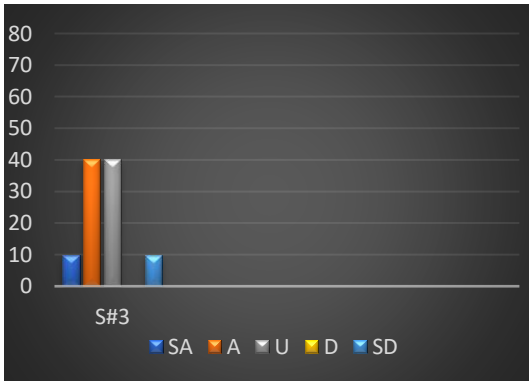


Here SA is coded for strongly agreed, A for Agreed, U for Uncertain, D for disagreed, and SD for strongly disagreed. In the above graph, S#1 is coded for **"I feel nervous about my studies, writing assignments and exams since this pandemic broke out"**. 10% of them strongly agreed , 50% of them agreed, and only 10% disagreed.

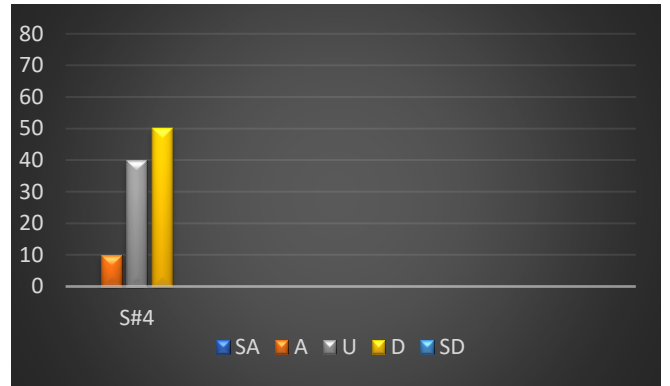


In the above graph, S#2 is coded for **"I feel anxious when I think about writing assignments being assigned by my teacher and its evaluation during this pandemic."** 10% of the respondents strongly agreed, 50% are agreed, 10% are uncertain, and 30% disagreed.

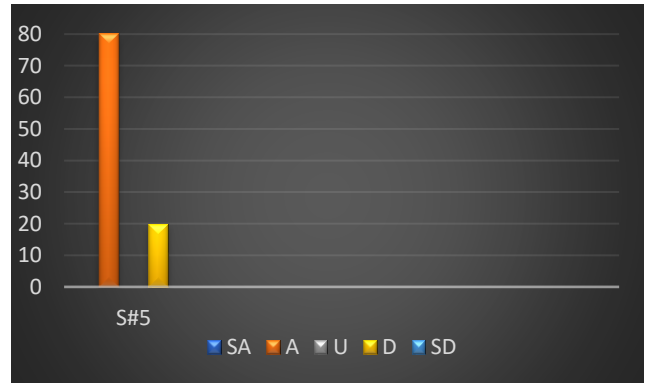
**Analysis of Questions Regarding Fear of Negative Evaluation**



In the above graph, S#3 is coded for **" The instructor is fair and impartial in gradings"**. Respondents strongly agreed were 10%, 40%, agreed, while 40% remain uncertain and 10% disagreed.

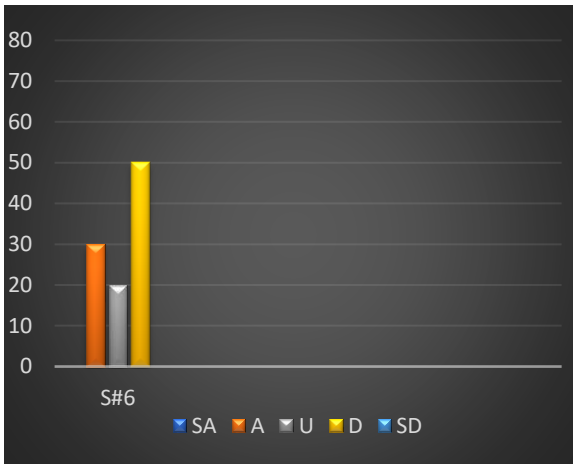


In the above graph, S#4 is coded for **" The instructor understand the individual needs of the students in online classes"**. 0% of the respondents strongly agreed, 10% are agreed, 40% are uncertain, 50% are disagreed, and 0% of them strongly disagreed to the statement.

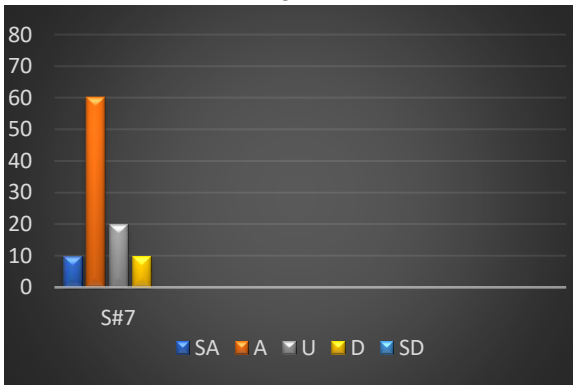


In the above graph, S#5 is coded for **"I get nervous when I forget thing in online session by my teacher"**. 80% of the respondents are agreed and 20% remain uncertain.

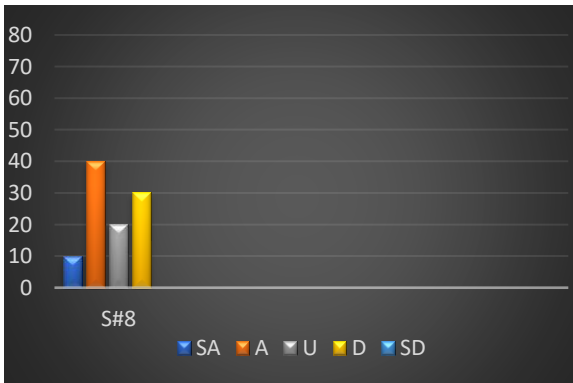
**Analysis of Academic Reasons causing Anxiety in online classes.**



In the above graph, S#6 is coded for "**I am not satisfied from online education**". 30% of the respondents are agreed, 20% are uncertain, 50% are disagreed.

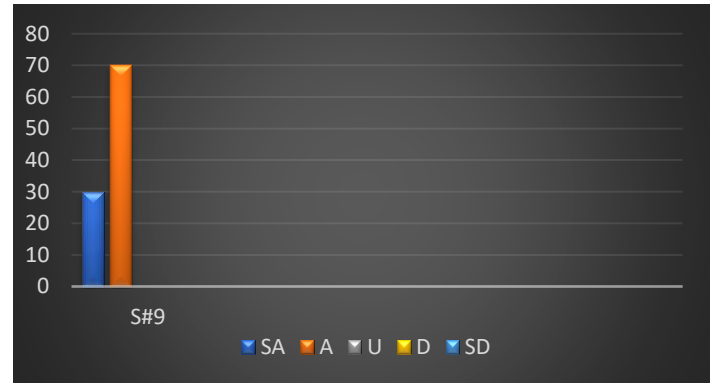


In the above graph, S#7 is coded for "**I am willing to ask questions from my classmate and instructor in online classes.**" 10 % of the respondents strongly agree, 60% are agreed and 20% remain uncertain and 10 are disagreed.

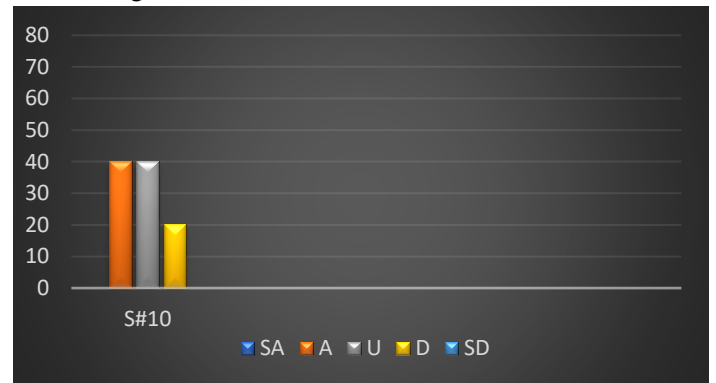


In the above graph, S#8 is coded for "**Everyone in the online class will have an equal opportunity to participate.**" 10% of

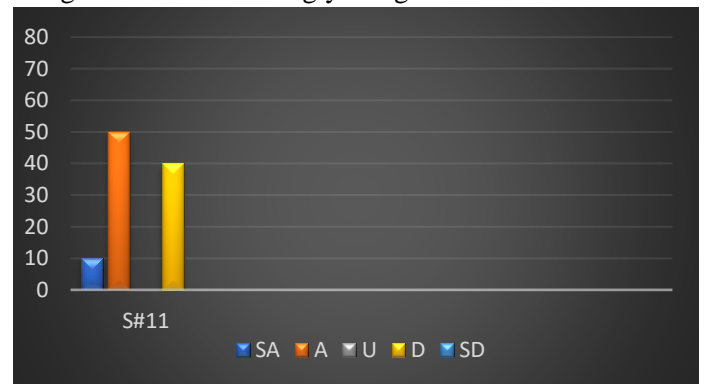
the respondents strongly agreed, 40% are agreed and 20% remain uncertain, and 30% are disagreed.



In the above graph, S#9 is coded for "**Insufficient knowledge about the assignment being assigned by my teacher make me uncomfortable in my studies.**" 30% of the respondents strongly agreed and 70% are agreed



In the above graph, S#10 is coded for "**I am able to receive constructive feedback in online classes**". 40% of the respondents are agreed and 40% remain uncertain, 20% are disagreed and 0 % strongly disagreed.



In the above graph, S#11 is coded for "**I am not totally convince that I will get the**

### same value of education in online classes".

10% of the respondents strongly agreed, 50% are agreed, 0% remain uncertain, 40 % disagreed and 0% of them strongly disagreed to the statement.

### Discussion

Majority of the students (40% strongly agreed and 50% agreed) that they feel nervous about their studies, writing assignments and exams since this pandemic broke out. Even, when they are asked that they feel anxious when they think about taking classes, building their knowledge, writing assignments and its evaluation during this pandemic, so majority of them agreed to this statement. Majority of the students are depressed as they do not have the support of teacher all the time in Covid-19. As Covid-19 has become talk of the town, therefore, they cannot focus on the studies and making them depressed anxious. In Horwitz et al. (1986) FLCAS, these are some statements related to fear of negative evaluation which is an aspect of anxiety. The test anxiety is another aspect and has been investigated when these learners were asked that they get worry when they do not prepare themselves for academic activities and get nervous about the consequences in the online class learning. Majority of the students agreed that they are having such anxiety. These students also agreed that they are anxious because of the things they forget been taught in online session.

As far as academic reasons are concerned, the learners referred to two reasons: insufficient knowledge of the topic in online class or assignment and lacking classroom environment that make them uncomfortable and feeling irritated while attending the online classes.

When they are asked that it gives them comfort when the teacher give them time to prepare before writing task, so 30% of them strongly agreed and 70% of them

agreed. While 30% of them strongly agreed and 70% of them agreed that they get anxious when their teacher give them writing task without giving them time to prepare and they have insufficient knowledge about the task.

### Conclusion

In view of the above, it can be concluded that Covid-19 has brought with itself psychological impacts such as anxiety and depression that affect the learners, in this case the graduate students studying at Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan. During this pandemic, learners are found nervous, worry, and uncomfortable regarding online class, assignments and fear of negative evaluation while giving online exams. Anxiety and depression such aspects can be investigated by adapting Horwitz et al. (1986) FLCAS. By adapting it, test-anxiety and fear of negative evaluation which are the two aspects of anxiety can be investigated. The academic reasons which cause anxiety and depression in these learners are the insufficient knowledge of the topic and lacking classroom environment which make them tough for them to organize thoughts. In order to cope with anxiety, it is important for a teacher to follow proper procedure for the online classes, give sufficient knowledge about the assignment and time to learners to prepare before writing task. In this way, they can gather knowledge about the topic they'll be asking to write and can find it easy to do. It is also important that in online session, teachers should co-operate more with students and keep them flexible and should not be overburdened with academic tasks and exams. In the online classes create an environment in which each students will participate and get an effective feedback.

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