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Language Anxiety in Higher Education: A Study of Pakistani Bilinguals' Experience in English Classroom Presentations

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the prevalent issue of language anxiety experienced by students during university presentations, with emphasis on the anxiety of English language skills among students pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in English. The study seeks to highlight the frequency of language anxiety, examining its levels, gender-related influences, the factors and effects caused by language anxiety. A mixed method technique is opted to conduct the research. The level of language anxiety and gender influence is calculated through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27.0.1. Whereas the factors and effects are determined through interviews and field notes. The research concluded that a moderate level of language anxiety in English exists in which males show higher level of anxiety than the females. The factors found out to be language proficiency, lack of practice, preparation, fear of making mistakes, fear of not performing well, lack of confidence and comparison with other students. Whereas effects include lack of confidence to present, avoiding presentations and lack of motivation to learn second language to be fluent in it. Teachers and students should work together to diminish this problem by overcoming factors like Stop comparing students with each other. Introduce grading system and not the percentile. Students should practice standing in front of the mirrors to boost the level of confidence.

Introduction

Post-colonialism refers to the backwash of Western imperialism. It is the era when postcolonial states struggle for their identity and culture because colonial mixing of two cultures resulted in prevalent identity crises. Colonialism left its traces for prolonged period of time such as in the form of lost identities and hybrid cultures of colonized people (Abbas & Gohar, 2023). It is evident from the example of Pakistan that even after 77 years of independence, Pakistan is entangled in the colonial nets (Yasmin F, Zaman A & Khan K, 2023). The Western people, the holders of supremacy and prestige, influenced colonized people to such an extent that they seem their own culture as inferior (Iqbal et., al, 2023). As is the case of Punjabi language in the context of Pakistan. The people of Pakistan label Punjabi speakers as illiterate and people possessing lower status in society. Language has always been politicized in South Asia (Kalra, & Butt,2023). South Asia visualizes English as an emblem of power and inequality (Bharadwaj 2017, Ramanathan 2005). Thus, even after decolonisation, English enjoys the predominant status in India and Pakistan (Chohan, 2016).

There is no doubt that in the contemporary world of multilingualism, English serves the purpose of lingua franca and predominantly English has earned the significance in every domain of life (Nishnathi, 2018). In order to ace the academic race and to progress in careers, it is essential to embrace English language (Dutta, 2020). Similarly, the majority of the young population opt to enhance their productive skills (speaking and writing) in English due to the status associated with it and for the high chances of financial and geographical mobility (Davis & Weinberg 2022). But English language cannot be separated from Western colonialism (Kandiah 2010 & Sadana 2012). In actual, epidermalization of inferiority is a product of colonialism. This concept is deep rooted in the psyche of colonized people that even after being released from physical colonisation, they consider themselves inferior and the colonizers superior. They have lost the concept of "self" and got mixed identities which troubles the psyche (Iqbal et., al, 2023). It is why, those who speak English proficiently are marked as snobbish whereas those could not speak English well are marked as illiterates (Nakassis, 2016). Moreover, research findings revealed that English words and clauses are profoundly carved into the local language practices (Canada rajah 2013, Ramanathan, 2005).

Furthermore, in Pakistan, English medium schools are in multitude (Abbas & Iqbal, 2018). Elite English medium schools promise high proficiency in English as the researchers studied and proved socioeconomic status as independent and proficiency as dependent variable (Schofield, & Mamuna, 2003). Moreover, language proficiency in English is directly associated with high rate of employment (Xiong & Yuan, 2018; Doan & Hamid, 2019 & Abbas, et al., 2021). In Pakistan, students learn English from primary level to higher level which includes more or less than twelve years of student life (Evans, 2002, Yasir et., al, 2021). But they still lack proficiency in English (Pervaiz et. al, 2022). One of the reasons is the lack of exposure to the real-life use of English (Khan, 2015 & Shahzadi, 2018). It is because English plays a mere role in their lives to surpass the examination (Evans, 1999 & Memon, 2000). Secondly, students lack proficiency in English due to language anxiety (Nazir et al. 2014).

Anxiety is a temporary behavioural response to a particular situation (Galante, 2018). Whereas, foreign language anxiety is associated with the tension or negative attitude towards learning and using second language (MacIntyre, 1999). Horwitz shared the honour of conducting vast research in the field of foreign language anxiety. He (1986) determined three factors that cause foreign language anxiety, "communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety" (Khasawneh, 2016). Contrary to other skills of language, speaking is found to be the most face threatening act and oral presentations are source of anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986).

In case of Pakistan, most students are bilingual, even before learning English as a third language. When the students are required to learn a third language in addition to it, it becomes distressing for them. Therefore, when learners are required to deal with the coexistence of three languages in the school curriculum, it is to be regarded as an anxiety-provoking process (Arruabarrena & Herrarte, 2023). At the university level, English language is used in assignment, lecture delivery, research projects, class participation and formal classroom presentations (Riaz, 2021). Moreover, students speaking native languages at home or scoring lower grades in English exhibit higher anxiety levels when presenting or participating in the class (Arruabarrena & Herrarte, 2023). Unfortunately, in the current traditional study environments across Pakistan, students are made fun of if they fail to communicate in English properly and this is a major cause for them to avoid communicating in English, let alone present or speak in front of the entire class. For most students, 'Speaking in front of others' is rated as the biggest cause of anxiety followed by

'worries about grammatical mistakes', 'pronunciation' and 'being unable to talk spontaneously' (Awan et., al, 2010).

Pakistan is not an English-speaking country, yet English has a great social value and prestige associated with it here. It is taught in all schools and all mainstream curriculums across the country. It continues to be taught as a compulsory subject even at intermediate and university levels. Due to this, students feel a high degree of anxiety while learning it and even more so when speaking it. This may be mainly because of the fact that they might feel highly overwhelmed by the language and the importance its proper use holds. In Pakistan, English language enjoys the heightened symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991).

Since they experience this language anxiety, most students feel highly reluctant when speaking in front of the class, whether for presentation or for participation purposes. Some even prefer to lose marks over presenting and participating in the class and might even leave the classroom altogether when asked to do so. And this is a trend prevalent all over the world. English Language Learners (ELL) students often interact less in the classroom, choosing instead to remain as far away as possible from the action of the classroom (Pappamihiel, 2002).

Vast research has been conducted in anxiety, types of anxiety, factors, effects, and coping mechanisms in various countries. This study is aimed to find the level of language anxiety, gender influence, factors and effects of language anxiety in English during classroom presentations in the students of Bachelors of Science in English in the two private leading universities of Lahore.

Literature Review

An anxiety is a broader term studied since 1970s in the fields of psychology and linguistics. It is the state of discomfort and unease. Anxiety is a subjective feeling that is activated by automatic nervous system marked by confusion, tension and apprehension (Spielberger, 1983). Language anxiety is a term associated with the discomfort in learning, teaching or using language (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). It is common in foreign language and more frequently in speaking tasks. Despite of any factor causing language anxiety, it is inevitable as at is natural in second language that is learned not acquired (Sutarsyah, 2017). Even, speaking in native language infront of the people provokes anxiety in many people (McCrosky, 1984). Foreign Language Anxiety is a situational entity that occurs temporarily in a certain context (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a; Spielberger & Vagg, 1995).

Speaking English in public or particularly in classroom trigger anxiety for students significantly for those who are not proficient in second language (Dellah, et al., 2020). Even students with high proficiency in second language avoid to speak in class due to anxiety (Ely, 1986; Horwitz et al., 1986; Ewald, 2007; Tóth, 2011). The research was conducted in which second language speakers were observed to determine the anxiety in oral presentations and it was reported that all students were anxious at the time of presentations (Chen, 2015).

The sufferers of foreign language anxiety portray apprehension and discomfort in in-class speaking activities (Horwitz et al., 1986) particularly, due to the comparison drawn by them between the speaking abilities of themselves and others (Kitano, 2001). Receptive skills of language (reading and listening) and writing in foreign language make students anxious but speaking in foreign language is the most anxious part (Kim, 2009; MacIntyre, 2017). In classroom settings, speaking tasks are highly associated with higher rates of

anxiety than any other task (Koch & Terrel, 1991) and particularly, oral presentations (King, 2002). It is reported that out of four language skills, speaking is the primary skill that students compare with their classmates, instructors and native speakers (Kitano, 2001). Such students often face anxiety issues during classroom oral participation like lack of concentration, sweating, trembling and dry mouths (Boyce et al., 2007). Higher level of anxiety elicits the will power of individual to communicate (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; Yashima, 2012).

Depending on the effects of anxiety, it is divided into three types: debilitating anxiety (negative), facilitative anxiety (positive) and non-effecting anxiety. It was commonly assumed that anxiety had negative consequences but studies revealed that sometimes, anxious students perform better than other students. It is may be due to their higher vulnerability of taking risks (Smith, 2016). Numerous research has been conducted to determine the nature of relationship between anxiety and academic achievement. A vast number of students with high anxiety scored less whereas few students with lower anxiety performed exceptionally (Fadlan, 2020). Language anxiety may become a source of motivation and challenge to surpass for some students (Khairi & Lina, 2010). Anxiety in required amount offers motivation and encouragement while anxiety in abundance may lead to drawbacks like falling graph of academic records (Tercan & Dikilotas, 2015).

Students of ESL who have debilitating anxiety tend to use variety of grammatical construction as compared to students with lower anxiety level (Kleinmann, 1977). Similarly, anxious students produce more literal messages in contrary to non-anxious group which encodes explicit messages (Steinberg & Horwitz, 1977). Thus, anxiety impacts the communicative competence of students as individuals with high level of anxiety prefer to avoid complex sentences in foreign language to avoid difficulties (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986). Moreover, Students claimed that speaking in class in foreign language without preparation is tough. It is easy for them to answer the bookish questions or to give speech that is prepared beforehand but when they are asked to perform a role play without any previous announcement, they got stuck (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986).

One significant factor of language anxiety is fear of test. When students are aware that they would be graded or marked, they forget what they knew before like students forget the grammar points in oral tasks (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986). Another factor of language anxiety is students' disbelief of producing error-free language. They opt silence than speaking incorrectly (Horwitz 1984). Communication apprehension is closely associated with foreign language anxiety (McCroskey, 1977). Communication apprehension is anxiety of interacting with people or on easy words, it is lack of communicative competence or courage of communicating in a social context. It highly contributes to language anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986). One consequence is that students skip classes to eliminate anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986).

Moreover, people who are conscious of self-representation and personal image, consider themselves as a different person when speaking in foreign language. It impacts positively as they become less anxious. Furthermore, there is an important term introduced as "affective filter", in which individual becomes unable to receive input in the foreign language due to anxiety which retreats his process of acquiring language (Krashen, 1980).

Geer (1966) presented the study that undergraduates with higher anxiety show prominent symptoms of anxiety like, speech disruptions, slower speech rate and longer period of silence than lower anxiety students. Lewis, et al. (1996) postulated that anxious participants frequently paused for a longer time period than non-anxious individuals. Aida (1994) examined the language anxiety in college students of Japan with the aid of Horwitz's

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The findings disclose the inverse relationship between FLCAS scores and academic grades. Another study was done in Thailand in 2012 by Yaikhong and Usaha. They formulated a scale for public speaking class anxiety including the factors causing language anxiety, that are, apprehension, fear of grading, fear of negative feedback, discomfort in using a foreign language. The study suggested that there are different levels of anxiety among L2 students (Liu, 2006). In addition, Mak conducted a case study and identified five factors of in-class language anxiety, fear of failure, fear of negative feedback by peers or teacher, speech anxiety, inability to communicate with native speakers of foreign language and unacceptable attitude towards foreign language class (Mak, 2011). The study indicated that all Asian students visualize oral presentations as face threatening (King, 2002).

This study seeks to explore the language anxiety in English during in-class presentations of Pakistani students through mixed method including quantitative study through FLCAS and SPSS, and including qualitative study through fieldwork and interviews to find out the level of language anxiety in in-class presentations among students, gender influence, factors and effects of language anxiety.

Material and Methods

This study utilizes mixed method approach to measure language anxiety in students during classroom presentations in English. The primary data was collected from classroom observations, online questionnaire and interviews of participants. Firstly, questionnaires were filled by participants via online platform. Then, field notes were collected while observing presentations of participation in order to figure out level of anxiety and possible reasons of language anxiety during presentations in English. Further, interviews of few participants were conducted to provide more evidence for the research finding.

Research Context

This study was undertaken in Language and Literature department of two well-known private universities for the investigation of language anxiety during classroom presentations in English. The students were enrolled in six courses. Each course allocated 10 percent weightage to presentation. Some of the course instructors asked students to present in groups while some of them preferred individual presentations. Even in group presentations, an individual is supposed to present for 5 minutes. As students were enrolled in seventh semester, each instructor wanted them to present in English avoiding being bilingual. Instructors allocated topics of presentations two weeks prior the actual day.

Participants

The sample of this study was 51 in number, 31 males and 20 females. The students were enrolled in seventh semester by the time of data collection. Participants of this study had different background but they were familiar with presentation style and judgement criteria as all of them were experiencing it since six semesters.

Instrument

For qualitative data, a widely used instrument, fieldwork notes was used as Chunguang Tian (2019) used them in his study. Field notes consists of three sections, firstly detailed information about the sample i.e. name, age, date and time of observation,

secondly notes about observations about presentation, thirdly the comment section for the data observed and in the last personal observations made by researchers.

In order to collect quantitative data, an anxiety questionnaire was conducted. The questionnaire was developed on the basis of widely used foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz and others (Horwitz et al, 1986). It incorporated 20 items presented on five-point Likert type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly disagree (instrument is attached in appendix). The questionnaire was created on online platform i.e. google forms and was transmitted to students of 7th semester of BS English via online sources.

Data Collection

Researchers visited classrooms and observed presentations of students of the same course taught by different teachers, but all of them belonged to the seventh semester. Field notes were collected by observing presentations of 6 participants (3 males and 3 females) in classroom. Participants' verbal and non-verbal actions, fluency, environment of classroom, number of students in classroom and teachers mood was focused while observing presentations.

Later on, questionnaire was created and transmitted to students. The participants were informed that this questionnaire is for academic purposes and their response would be confidential.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews of 4 participants were conducted individually so that they can express their perspective and experience openly. They were asked about general questions about language anxiety as well as their behavior observed in field notes. The length of interview varied from 5 to 8 minutes depending on presentation of participants and how forthcoming participants were in sharing their experience.

Prior to main data collection, a pilot study used by Arruabarrena and Herrarte in 2023, was conducted in order to test authenticity of the research tool participants were asked to fill questionnaire in order to validate online questionnaire. Interview of these students was conducted as well. Later one some of the questions were rephrased to eradicate the harshness of tone and for comprehension.

Data Analysis

All of the field notes were entered on Word document and read repeatedly by researcher to figure out possible recurring patterns of language anxiety.

Quantitative results were examined through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.1.0. Mean score and standard deviation was calculated for all questions related to anxiety (Larson & Hall, 2010) and independent t-test was conducted through SPSS to determine the gender influence.

Results and Discussion

The mean value and standard deviation of each construct of the modified FLCAS responses represent the level of anxiety. The mean score ranging from 0.00-2.50 represents lower level of anxiety, the mean score ranging from 2.51-3.50 represents moderate level of anxiety, the mean score ranging from 3.51-5.00 represents higher level of anxiety.

Table 1
Mean and Standard Deviation Score

No	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	I feel reluctant when I have to present without preparation.	2.3922	1.26615
2.	I feel anxious about making mistakes in the presentation.	2.2157	1.06421
3.	I tremble when I know it's my turn for presentation.	2.3529	1.27787
	I often think of skipping the class to delay presentation.	2.9804	1.33402
5.	I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.	2.7059	1.18818
6.	Students presenting before me are a source of anxiety for me.	2.7255	1.41532
7.	I keep thinking that other students are better at language than I am.	2.7647	1.15911
8.	I get nervous when teacher and students ask questions.	2.8824	1.29069
9.	I feel pressure to prepare well.	2.9020	1.13587
10.	I am willing to give more presentations in English in the upcoming semesters.	2.3725	1.39944
11.	The more presentations I give, the less anxious I feel.	2.3333	1.07083
12.	I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	3.3333	1.32162
13.	I feel uncertain when I am speaking in English.	3.0000	1.05830
14.	It is convenient to volunteer answers in Urdu language.	2.2745	1.05978
15.	The more I prepare, the more I get confused.	2.9020	1.41781
16.	I worry about the consequences of not performing well.	2.4118	1.25182
17..	I can get so nervous that I forget things I know.	2.3725	1.34106
18.	I am afraid that my teacher is ready to correct my language mistakes.	2.8431	1.25495
19.	Even if I am well prepared, I feel anxious.	2.4902	1.43349
20.	I can feel my heart pounding when I am called for presentation.	2.5882	1.32931

The results of this research depicts that the participants went through a moderate level of anxiety in English in classroom presentations. It aligns to the previous studies conducted by Aqilah and Aminabibi, 2019; Balemir, 2009; Dellah, et. al, 2020.

In Pakistan, the prime reason of language anxiety is that children speak languages other than English as their mother tongue such as Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Hindku and many more whereas language of instruction in schools is English. Moreover, English is taught through Grammar Translation Method rather than Direct Method leading towards more focus writing and reading rather than speaking and listening. Furthermore, a person becomes confident only when he is fluently speaking and it usually occurs in one's native language. As English is our second language and is taught through GTM, one can never achieve fluency leading towards feeling uncertain during presentations.

To locate the difference between level of anxiety between males and females, mean values and standard deviation are calculated separately for males and females.

Table 2
Group Statistics

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
QTotal	male	31	58.0323	17.03816	3.06014
	female	20	44.8000	9.18580	2.05401

The finding of this study is contrary to the previous studies conducted by Balemir, 2009, Gorkhan and Nurdan, 2012, Dellah et., al, 2020, which suggested that females experienced higher level of anxiety in classroom presentations. It supports the studies of Campbell & Shaw, 1994, and Capan & Simsek, 2012, which shows males as more anxious than females.

Table 3
t-test results for anxiety level and genders

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
QTotal	Equal variances assumed	6.765	.012	3.180	49	.003
	Equal variances not assumed			3.590	47.801	.001

To figure out the statistical difference between the mean values of males and females, an independent t-test was applied with the aid of SPSS. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances is necessary to check the statistical difference (Connolly, 2007). The variances are not equivalent as $p<0.05$ that is 0.012. The probability of value $p=0.003$ is smaller than 0.05, so the result is statistically significance.

In Pakistan, males are capable of doing wonders as they tend to find midway to every task rather than performing that task. When it comes to education and extra-curricular activities they prefer to figure a way to escape. For an outstanding presentation, one needs to be well prepared but males prefer to omit this part leading towards them feeling anxious during presentations as compared to females who burn their midnight oil to perform well in presentation.

Through qualitative and quantitative data gathered, the factors causing language anxiety are inferred as language proficiency, lack of practice, preparation, fear of making mistakes, fear of not performing well, lack of confidence, comparison with other students. Language proficiency cannot be measured accurately but it has impact on the language anxiety. Those students who are more anxious are less proficient in English as sample 1, 3 and 4 from appendix 3 (interviews) claimed to be not proficient enough. Those who are not proficient, they lack the confidence also.

(Interview: Sample 1)

Q: Do you think you are proficient in English?

A: No, I am not

Sample 3

Q: Do you think you are proficient in English?

A: Not as much

Sample 4:

Q: Do you think are you proficient in English?

A: Yes 50/50

Secondly, in most cases English is not a part of daily routine as many students do not practice or use English frequently. Thus, they avoid talking in English and end up with language anxiety. Thirdly, preparation is also an important step prior to presentation. Males being careless towards academics give no attention or spare no time for preparation resulting in language anxiety.

Fear of making mistakes is another factor contributing to language anxiety. It is not frequently supported by majority. Thus, it makes few people anxious as mean score for making mistakes is less than 2.50.

Table 4
Mean and standard deviation

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel anxious about making mistakes in the presentation.	2.2157	1.06421

In some individuals fear of making mistakes is disguised by the fear of not performing well, that includes self-conscious people. Some students have a certain criteria build for themselves that bound them to perform well. Moreover, considering other students better than oneself also causes language anxiety in students.

Table 5
Mean and standard deviation

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I keep thinking that other students are better at language than I am.	2.7647	1.15911

(Interview: Sample 3)

Q: Do you think there is any other student who is more proficient in English than you in your group or in class ?

A: Yes there is in my group or in class also.

According to earlier research language anxiety during presentations, factors of language anxiety are fear of eye contact, fear of people laughing at them and fear of making mistakes (Fadlan, 2020). In Pakistan, prime factor of language anxiety during presentation is lack of proficiency in English language. As native language of students is different from language of instruction leading toward language anxiety during presentations. Also, people in Pakistan tend to compare children with each other ignoring the fact that every child has a different personality and possess different talents. The unwanted comparison leads toward insecurities and lack of confidence which ultimately causes language anxiety during presentations.

Through qualitative and quantitative data gathered, the effects of language anxiety are inferred as lack of confidence, lack of motivation to learn second language and forgetting points that one knows before.

The purpose of using sample from seventh semester is to study the effects thoroughly. The students of seventh semesters have past three years of graduation but they do not feel confident about themselves while speaking English. They lack motivation to learn English or to be proficient in English. Due to language anxiety in classroom presentations, students forget what they prepare as well as what they know before like grammatical points.

(Interview: Sample 1)

Q: Do you forget what you prepare?

A: Yes it happens most of the time.

(Interview: Sample 3)

Q: Do you forget the points that you have prepared?

A: yes I miss them

The factors discussed above leads Pakistani students towards facing adverse effects such as lack of confidence and motivation as they consider that if they can't perform in a presentation then how can they perform further in practical life, that is, job interviews or official presentations.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that students of BS English of private universities experienced moderate level of anxiety during classroom presentations in English. Further, statically significant difference is found in language anxiety with regard to gender as males have shown higher level of language anxiety than females. Moreover, the factors causing language anxiety are indicated as lack of practice, preparation, fear of not performing well, lack of confidence, comparison with other students and language proficiency. Also, the effects of language anxiety are inferred as lack of confidence, lack of motivation to learn second language and forgetting points that one knows before.

Recommendations

There is a need to find solution to the commonly shared problem of language anxiety in English during classroom presentations among students of Universities of Pakistan rather than just blaming the system. For this, one need to face the problem rather than ignoring or running from it. Teachers and students should work together to diminish this problem by overcoming factors like:

- Students should learn that avoiding things is not solution but a problem in itself. They should opt for more presentations as "practice makes man perfect". Although the purpose is not to seek perfection but to overcome the language anxiety in English.

- It is high time to understand that comparison kills creativity and washes away the confidence. Our education system promotes cramming rather than creativity which leads towards student avoiding such situations where they have to incorporate their creative abilities. Hence, stop comparing students with each other.

- Introduce grading system and not the percentile system as percentile system leads towards competition. Unfortunately, in Pakistan's education system there is no healthy competition. Grading system will help students loose unnecessary pressure and focus will diverted from competition towards learning

- Moreover, students should practice standing in front of the mirrors to boost the level of confidence. Rehearsal makes man perfect. During rehearsal , students will come to know what they are lacking. Also, through rehearsal, students will gain fluency and they will be able to build eye contact with the audience while facing mirror.

- Students should be encouraged to make mistakes as one can learn from his mistakes. Each task in this world must have margin for mistake. It is through mistakes, one learns to perform better. Therefore, teachers must not treat mistakes with severe criticism rather they should motivate students to correct them and learn from their mistakes.

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