

## Hybrid Identities to Overcome Language Anxiety: A Case Study

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Language Anxiety (hereafter LA), a distinct psychological construct of self-perceptions and behaviors related to classroom language learning is perceived as a significant variable highly correlated with Second Language Acquisition (hereafter SLA). However, the existing scholarship has inadequately explored the nuances of LA in relation to South Asia, especially in terms of Sri Lankan higher education contexts. Thus, the current study, situated within the broad areas of Psychology of SLA and Applied Linguistics, investigates the possibility of utilizing hybrid identities that learners may have or may opt to have to overcome LA. The objective of the present study is to analyze the accommodation of hybrid identities as a strategy used by learners of English as a Second Language (hereafter ESL) in Sri Lanka to overcome LA. Employing a case study approach, 750 undergraduates of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, covering 25% of the student population from all seven faculties were selected as participants using stratified proportionate sampling considering ethnicity, gender and disciplines. The qualitative and quantitative research utilized for data collection include a questionnaire consisting structured and unstructured questions, and semi-structured interviews. Data analysis includes both descriptive and statistical measures. Findings indicated a significant linear negative correlation between LA and learner achievement, and the significant negative correlation between LA and culturally-operated gender stereotypes which create identity disparities in learners. The social and cultural mobilization the university students experience as they enter university away from their homes, create within them a cultural displacement which in turn results in hybrid identities. The psychological struggle learners undergo to locate a safe social identity intensifies LA. The study also found that both competency-based LA and identity-based LA are experienced primarily and inescapably due to the apprehensions regarding speaking in English. Findings exemplify the linguistic inequality prevalent in the socio-cultural milieu in Sri Lankan society. This inequality makes learning English a dire need, yet, very much an anxiety provoking process because of many sociolinguistic, cultural and ideological factors related to ESL in Sri Lanka. The findings bring out the intricate interrelatedness of learner identity and LA emphasizing that the significant linear negative correlation between LA and learner achievement is connected to the affective, cognitive and sociolinguistic domains of SLA. Most importantly the findings reveal that using hybrid identities could be used to overcome LA.

**Key words:** *Hybrid identity, Language anxiety, Learner identity and learner achievement*