



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics & Criticism***Foreign language classroom anxiety: An applied study for EFL students in AL Farqadeen non-governmental university in Basra**

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¹Southern Technical University, Iraq*Correspondence: Hayder.Yaqoob@stu.edu.iq**ABSTRACT**

Through a mixed-methods research approach to exploring foreign language classroom anxiety, this study focuses on intermediate-level Iraqi students studying English as a foreign language at a university that is not affiliated with the government and located in Basra Iraq. The study utilized the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Speaking Test, as well as semi-structured interviews, to ascertain anxiety levels, the types of presentation of anxiety when speaking, and how these presentational patterns affect their performance while speaking. Findings from the quantitative portion of the study showed that all three dimensions of FLCAS showed moderate to high rates of anxiety (e.g., Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation). Communication Apprehension had the highest level of anxiety, followed by Test Anxiety, and then Fear of Negative Evaluation. There was a statistically significant negative correlation between speaking anxiety and speaking performance, which indicates a strong relationship that if students have higher levels of anxiety, then they will have lower scores on their IELTS Speaking Test. There was no statistically significant difference between male and female students regarding their anxiety levels. Multiple students expressed anxiety in different ways with respect to presentation (i.e., through hesitation patterns, different levels of stress, and interruptions in fluency). Each student experienced a unique anxiety profile (i.e., confident speakers with little to no visual indicators of being anxious compared to individuals with significant anxiety who displayed multiple signs of anxiety). The results provide valuable insight into the understanding of EFL speaking anxiety as well as the urgent need for intervention approaches that alleviate psychological obstacles in Iraqi English education. The results also emphasize that an understanding of both cognitive and emotional dimensions of language acquisition must be taken into account.

KEYWORDS: foreign language classroom anxiety, EFL learners, speaking performance, communication apprehension, IELTS speaking test

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Introduction

In this day and age, English has been established as the link language of the world when it comes to being able to communicate, conduct business and further your education as part of the world community. Thus, if you want to be part of the international community, speaking English is vital. However, in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts, learners will face specific challenges in the area of developing their language skills. The four skills needed to use the English language are reading/writing/listening/speaking; of these skills, speaking tends to be the most stressful component to learn because you must be able to create sentences quickly while also having a face-to-face interaction with those around you (Rao, 2019; Tridinanti, 2018).

Language anxiety is defined as “the anxiety produced by the perceived threat of communicating in a second language” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). This type of anxiety differs from other forms of anxiety in that the individual experiencing it perceives a significant emotional experience and that their performance will have a significant impact on their overall ability to acquire a new foreign language. Recently, research has demonstrated that speaking anxiety can be one of the greatest emotional barriers to a language learner’s ability to learn a new language (Park and Lee, 2005). The impact of this phenomenon is particularly pronounced when students are in speaking courses where they have no option but to produce speech using the target language without having had ample time to develop their thoughts prior to engaging in spontaneous conversation with their peers and to participate in speaking activities while being evaluated by the instructor or fellow students. Many students can experience different types of anxiety (e.g., fear of speaking in front of others, worry about receiving negative feedback from the audience, test anxiety), which were identified in the work by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) through their Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), during their oral performances. According to the findings of numerous studies, one of the most significant productive linguistic skills is speaking. Despite this, it tends to be the skill that creates the most apprehension among learners studying a second language (Jahan, 2008; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

The education landscape of Iraq makes for an excellent context to investigate foreign language anxiety in EFL speaking classes. The educational system in Iraq has suffered through numerous transformations and obstacles over the past several decades and learning English has become an increasingly essential aspect of a student’s success—both academically and professionally (Patel & Jain, 2008). There are several obstacles associated with being an Iraqi EFL learner which increase their anxiety in speaking the English language. To name a few, there is a lack of opportunities for practicing English as it relates to everyday life, predominately teacher-centered methods of instruction, and differences in how individuals communicate across cultures.

The increase of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the complexity of speaking anxiety. Research indicates that online courses during the pandemic caused delays and uncertainty in student interaction (Wildman et al., 2021). In addition, some students report feeling more comfortable in traditional classrooms than online courses (Fitriani et al., 2020). While strong oral communication skills are essential for proficiency in English, many Iraqi EFL learners report experiencing high levels of anxiety when speaking in class. This anxiety can manifest as an unwillingness to engage in speaking activities, a tendency to avoid speaking tasks, exhibiting physical manifestations of stress, and ultimately resulting in poor speaking performance and learning outcomes. Research has identified various psychological and physiological symptoms associated with speaking anxiety, including “shaking, sweating, feeling dizzy, having trouble breathing, and even experiencing a full-fledged panic attack” during an exposé or speaking activity (Katz, 2000). Woodrow (2006) notes that additional behaviours such as “stuttering or fidgeting” seem to occur too. Nevertheless, little research has been conducted on the range and severity level of speaking anxiety for Iraqi EFL learners (specifically in speaking situations) at this point in time.

There have been almost no studies on the speaking anxiety of Iraqi EFL learners; however, many studies on speaking anxiety among EFL learners in the literature exist. Some research from various EFL contexts has identified that new students often struggle with speaking anxiety (Hasibuan & Irzawati, 2020) — even EFL learners who perform well in speaking will feel anxious at times. Researchers have also found that internal factors such as “shyness, stage fright, and lack of confidence” — as well as external factors such as “pressure from peers, language proficiency, grammar accuracy, and pronunciation” — all influence the level of speaking anxiety experienced by an EFL learner (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). Therefore, due to the social, cultural, linguistic, and educational differences of Iraq from other EFL contexts, it would be expected for speaking anxiety in Iraq to have different patterns, causes, and effects than other EFL communities.

Another area that needs examining is how students' individual characteristics, dynamics of the class, teaching style, and other variables such as context, all interactively contribute to speaking anxiety. "The climate in the classroom has a big impact on reducing students' anxiety;" moreover, "a classroom that is more welcoming and has greater availability will have less student anxiety" (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013). Another area of research has found that developing a strong relationship between teacher and student can assist in reducing the amount of anxiety a student feels when speaking by way of the teacher being able to provide the student with more accurate and consistent feedback (Oxford, 1999). Finally, as a means of addressing the above problems, there are no empirical studies regarding foreign language anxiety in Iraqi EFL speaking classes, and therefore, we are missing a rather significant amount of information regarding the influence of these issues on learning outcomes, as well as the experiences of students in this scenario. There is no clear articulation, specifically regarding Nature & cause/effect relationships that are part of Speaking Anxiety experienced by Iraqi EFL learners therefore it makes it difficult for educators and policy makers to develop effective means of intervening in their teaching practices for addressing difficulties in acquiring English as a second language.

This mixed-methods study aims to examine the level of Foreign Language Anxiety when learning to speak a foreign language as it specifically pertains to EFL Iraqi learners. The study will assess how prevalent this type of anxiety is, identify sources of that anxiety and contributing factors, and document what symptoms are experienced by these learners. Stakeholders from the fields of applied linguistics and teaching English as a Foreign Language stand to benefit from this study. Regarding theory, the findings will expand the body of knowledge about Foreign Language Anxiety by providing more detail about an underrepresented group within this discipline and showing how cultural, linguistic and educational factors uniquely affect EFL learners experiencing anxiety about speaking (as indicated by current research demonstrating that diverse EFL settings have different patterns of anxiety (Sjaifullah, 2019; Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020; Fitriani et al., 2020)). Practically, this research can be used by English teachers who teach Iraqi EFL learners and other similar populations to help alleviate some of the stresses caused by language anxiety and make great strides towards reducing these feelings. Recognition of the causes and indicators of speaking-related apprehension allows teachers to identify students experiencing that fear quickly and provide them with support. Current research has shown effective practices that can help eliminate student's anxiety when they speak, including creating a comfortable learning environment, knowing their students' fears, and giving clear, concise directions to each student (Suleimenova, 2013). These results will assist in the creation of teaching practices that are anxiety-relieving, classroom management techniques that are student-centered, and curriculum design that will support students who experience anxiety while learning a foreign language. This research provides educational policymakers and curriculum designers with empirical evidence to advocate for the inclusion of holistic approaches in their language teaching philosophy. The findings from this research can influence teacher preparation programs through an emphasis on addressing learner anxiety as an integral part of providing effective language instruction.

This study expands upon other research in the field of learner-centered education by emphasizing the significance of attending to learners' emotional and psychological needs simultaneously with their cognitive development. Participants' voices were incorporated into the research through qualitative interviews, thus ensuring that the Iraqi EFL learners' perspectives are authentically represented. This is consistent with the findings of more recent qualitative research, which underscore the importance of understanding the lived experiences of learners. (Borrego et al., 2009; Eshlaghy et al., 2011).

Research questions

1. Among Iraqi EFL pupils, what does the average score/mean distribution look like for each aspect of foreign language classroom anxiety (communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation)?
2. Among Iraqi EFL pupils, how much do foreign language classroom anxiety levels (measured with FLCAS) relate to speaking performance?
3. Among male and female Iraqi EFL pupils, is there a statistically significant disparity between foreign language classroom anxiety score distributions?
4. What effect do different ways of showing anxiety (hesitation, stress level, etc) and other anxiety factors (fluency, embarrassment) have on the speaking ability of Iraqi EFL students in the classroom?

Review of Literature

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety: Conceptual Framework

One of the biggest reasons for poor second language acquisition or oral performance in a second language is Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety. Many researchers believe that Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety is an emotional state that is often negatively perceived as being related to language performance. It has generally been defined as a subjective experience that is filled with “tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry relating to the autonomic nervous system” (Spielberger et al, 1983). Many researchers have indicated that this anxiety leads to poor language performance (Zhang, 2019), to lower willingness to communicate (Liu, 2018; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019), to an inability to think critically (Blume et al., 2010), and to a lack of confidence in communication which results in how a student presents themselves (Araki & Raphael, 2018; Mulyono & Saskia, 2021).

According to Mohamed and Wahid (2009), there is evidence that speaking anxiety can negatively impact students' adaptation to their learning environment, as well as their overall achievement and student outcomes, in English as a Second Language classrooms. Students with speaking anxiety tend to avoid participating in oral tasks, which can affect their performance and success. Commonly, students with speaking anxiety experience discomfort when communicating in a foreign language. In their study, Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three main categories of foreign language anxiety, which continue to be considered relevant in current research. The first category is called communicative apprehension, which is the fear of Communicating; communicating without understanding is also a fear of Communicating. The second kind of anxiety is known as fear of negative assessment (FNE), which is characterized by worrying about other people's opinions of you and avoiding situations in which other people are likely to see you being assessed. The third type of anxiety is test anxiety or fear of academic performance. The experience of anxiety can keep students from participating in or completing their language studies.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) proposes that there are a variety of emotional factors which impact the way people learn second languages, such as anxiety (Krashen, 1985, p. 100). If anxiety is at too high a level, then this will act as a mental block or affective filter and will thus create a negative effect upon the connection between the second language input and how well you are acquiring this second language (Krashen, 1985, p. 100). When this affective filter is present at too high an emotional level, it will make it more difficult for learners to successfully acquire a second language.

Oxford (1999) further developed the concept of language anxiety by grouping it into two different kinds of anxiety: state (temporary) and trait (long term) through the distinction of positive or negative anxiety. She also developed four new types of anxiety that Horwitz et al. did not identify, which are: identity and culture shock, beliefs held by teachers and students, activities and techniques in the classroom and the interaction that occurs between the instructor and the learner.

The new phenomenon of speaking anxiety that has emerged due to the global outbreak of the corona virus adds complexity to studying speaking anxiety. The novelty of the internet learning environment created significant challenges for language learners. Fitriani et al., 2020 determined that students found it difficult to enhance their speaking skills through internet classes and that they would rather attend classroom lectures because they found them more interactive and motivating. When classes changed from being delivered in a physical environment to an internet environment; the communication process delayed and loss of confidence (Wildman et al., 2021). This change impacted language anxiety in the foreign language setting because students generally feel more confident about participating in a foreign language in a physical classroom than they would in a virtual classroom. Recent researchers have classified the various factors related to learning a foreign language anxiety into two groups, internal and external (, Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020; Subandowo, 2017). There are two types of factors that can be detrimental to ESL students: internal factors and external factors. Internal factors are psychological; they originate from within the ESL student. Examples include shyness, fear of public speaking, and low self-esteem. External factors are those that are outside of the ESL student. Examples of external factors are social pressure or difficulties related to learning English such as complexity, grammar rules, and pronunciation issues.

Thao and Nguyet's (2019) research in Vietnam found that emotional factors (e.g., fears of making mistakes, shyness) negatively impacted the participants. Sjaifullah (2019) discovered that an individual's self-

esteem also creates a self-imposed barrier to learning a foreign language. Research from various cultures shows consistent evidence of speaking anxiety. For example, in the Thai EFL context, developing speaking proficiency is essential to help overcome fluency difficulties that are faced by most Thai learners (Khamkhien, 2010). Boonkit (2010) discovered that Thai university students have low confidence levels when speaking English because of their fear of making mistakes in face-to-face conversations with native English speakers. Also, Tridinanti (2018) asserts that an individual's intellectual, social and emotional development is largely impacted by their ability to communicate in English. However, anxiety remains a major hindrance to effective communication in English..

Previous Studies

Recent quantitative research has looked at how prevalent speaking anxiety is among English learners (EFL) globally. Alsharani and Alandal (2015) studied 144 females and 146 males for anxiety levels in individuals using their first language. The majority of the sample demonstrated high levels of anxiety when speaking. Al-Shalawi (2010) also used oral anxiety level testing in both studies (60 total). Again, the majority of students in the second study demonstrated high levels of oral anxiety. Alrabai (2014) completed a large-scale study on the use of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). FLCAS was used to measure the oral anxiety of 1,389 Saudi Arabian university students while studying abroad; results indicated that the overall level of oral anxiety was substantially higher than in previous work. Abu-Ghararah (1999) evaluated the effect of anxiety in the English Language on the performance/score of English language learners (240 high-school, college/university students). Conclusively, this research supports that anxiety has a severe negative effect on the academic performance of the students; research provides evidence for the existence of a gender-relational relationship with regard to anxiety in these studies. Kitano (2001) and Rzazadeh & Tavakoli (2009) observe that female students tend to have greater anxiety about their oral performance compared to males. This trend appears to be consistent across different cultures, suggesting that female learners may be generally more anxious about their performance.

Qualitative & Mixed methods studies of speaking anxiety have provided in-depth information on the causes and symptoms of speaking anxiety. Melouah (2013) studied speaking anxiety in first-year Algerian LMD students (English) and found that understanding the sources of speaking anxiety could lead to resolving it in EFL classrooms. Specifically, Al-Saraj (2013) used interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations to study speaking anxiety among ten female EFL learners, concluding that teaching methods, teacher-student relationship issues, fear of negative evaluation, and communicative competence were the main causes of low performance.

There are several different types of challenges that new university students encounter. One of the types of challenges is speaking anxiety. Hasibuan and Irzawati (2020) conducted a study with freshman students in which they observed that there is a high level of speaking anxiety among these new students. Just because some students demonstrated proficiency in their spoken language skills does not mean that they did not demonstrate anxiety when speaking in front of their classmates. The college transition is a multi-faceted and new experience for students; there are academics, social issues and cultural issues that can adversely affect speaking ability (Clark, 2005). A qualitative study by Nababan and Lestariningsih (2024) examined both the student and teacher experience of speaking anxiety. The study utilized a blended approach of observation and interview data from six participants who were representative of high, average, and low speaking ability. Participants who had taken English classes since elementary school still reported experiencing speaking anxiety in a university environment. Some of the primary factors contributing to students' anxiety were shyness, fear of being laughed at by others, not having confidence in their own skills, and feeling pressure from their peers who were more proficient in the English language.

Anxiety is a common issue for many students, including Indonesian students, as noted by Sulastri and Ratnawati. Their research found many people exhibit signs of anxiety when they meet new classmates or are in new situations (e.g., sweaty or frozen hands). The environment in which you are exposed to something that you have never experienced before can lead to a lot of anxiety. Nababan and Lestariningsih researched the best ways to alleviate speaking anxieties from both perspectives of the student and teacher. Students shared that they found continuing to practice and staying motivated to practice were very helpful in alleviating their anxiety. Teachers reported that providing counseling sessions and utilizing a video platform such as Flipgrid for

speaking assignments was effective at reducing speaking anxiety, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Technological interventions have had a positive impact on students. A study by Budiarta and Santosa (2020) showed that students had improved speaking ability through the use of Flipgrid, especially in their understanding and fluency. Similarly, another study by A.B. Sari and Iswahyuni (2019) indicated that students were able to complete assignments using YouTube and thus created a less anxious environment for learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia. In Malaysia, Choy and Troudi (2006) found that many students perceive English to be important to their survival, rather than simply being an enjoyable leisure activity. Therefore, the way speaking anxiety is experienced is influenced by culture and the educational environment, although the foundational causes are generally the same across the globe.

There's been a lot of newer research done using more progressive ways of looking at this topic than earlier studies did. One such example is research done by Nababan and Lestariningsih (2024), who used qualitative methods to study how anxious students feel when taking a class that requires a lot of interactional speech (a type of speaking that uses spoken language). Because there've been more qualitative and mixed methods used about anxiety in language learning/learning English, researchers have been able to gather more comprehensive information about the experiences of students who experience anxiety when learning a second language. In addition, some researchers have also started looking at anxiety from both the perspective of the students and the teacher, which provides a more complete view of the influences in the classroom that may contribute to or help lessen speaking-related anxiety.

Method

Participants

195 EFL intermediate students were selected for this research study at a private University located in Basra (Iraq). Average participant age is 17 years old, with ages ranging between 18 – 22 years old. The study sample consisted of 107 females and 88 males. Participants were selected via convenience sampling. All participants were native Arabic speakers who agreed to participate in the study voluntarily and provided written informed consent. The participants were guaranteed to remain completely anonymous as no identifying personal data was obtained through the survey.

Instruments

This research utilized the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz, et al., 1986) as its primary source of data for collection of information. The FLCAS has three major subscales: fear of negative evaluation; communication apprehension; test anxiety. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale with responses of: strong agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree to assess the level of anxiety that the students experienced in the classroom. Finally, the students' speaking performance was measured using an IELTS speaking test.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 EFL students. Qwen is a large-scale language model that has been developed independently by Tongyi Lab, which is an Alibaba Group company, to be used for multi-round conversations and to be capable of supporting multiple languages. In this research, Qwen was used as an analytical tool to process and analyse interview transcripts from the interviewees who participated in the study. The properties of Qwen that made it valuable as an analytical tool are its ability to identify and quantify manifestations of speech anxiety (such as hesitation patterns) in transcribed samples of speaking by participants; and its ability to recognise patterns in language and analyse linguistically that would be useful in identifying and quantifying stress-related linguistic markers in transcribed samples of spoken language by the 16 Iraqi EFL students who participated in the study. In addition, Qwen worked well for an analytical tool because it has the ability to manage large volumes of textual data and to apply consistent criteria for analysis while conducting a reliable, systematic examination of the qualitative interview material provided by the 16 Iraqi EFL students who participated in this research.

Data Collection Procedure

To start off with, the speaking anxiety questionnaire was given to participants and then a sample of the IELTS speaking (about 15-20 minutes) was administered. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16

students which subsequently explored how differing manifestations of anxiety (such as hesitation patterns, levels of stress, variability in fluency, and feelings of embarrassment) might affect an Iraqi EFL student's performance while speaking in the classroom.

Results

Findings Related to the First Question of the Study

Items' means and standard deviation were computed in relation to the first research question, "What is the mean & distribution of each component of classroom anxiety in the foreign / second language (communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety) among Iraqi students learning English as a foreign language?".

Table 1

Foreign language classroom anxiety

	Mean	Std. Deviation
q1	4.30	.917
q2	4.39	.943
q3	3.58	.878
q4	3.25	1.099
q5	3.14	.825
q6	3.81	.873
q7	4.21	.943
q8	4.66	.583
q9	4.14	1.015
q10	3.76	.896
q11	4.26	.816
q12	3.76	1.063
q13	3.67	.992
q14	3.54	.838
q15	4.02	1.070
q16	4.50	.742
q17	4.23	.875
q18	4.07	.980
q19	3.74	.972
q20	3.74	1.157
q21	3.03	.885
q22	3.99	1.050
q23	3.64	.950
q24	3.74	.993
q25	3.72	1.054
q26	3.83	1.167
q27	4.07	.955
q28	3.73	.965
q29	3.75	1.136
q30	3.70	1.249
q31	2.58	1.267
q32	4.46	.734
q33	4.57	.745

According to my analysis of the data collected from the survey, there were two items rated by respondents

regarding foreign language learning as having the most anxiety: Question 8 (Mean=4.66; SD=0.583) and Question 33 (Mean=4.57; SD=0.745). Conversely, there were two questions rated as having the least anxiety amongst respondents: Question 31 (Mean=2.58; SD=1.26) and Question 21 (Mean=3.03; SD=0.88). Therefore, based on these responses, learners do differ by their emotional patterns toward foreign language acquisition.

Table 2: Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Dimensions

Anxiety Dimension	Mean	SD
Communication apprehension	4.31	0.43
Fear of negative evaluation	3.82	0.46
Test anxiety	3.98	0.37

The average scores of Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation, and Test Anxiety all yield information about the levels of anxiety that respondents experience. Most importantly, the mean score for Communication Apprehension is 4.31, indicating that the level of anxiety in communication situations is fairly high. In contrast, Fear of Negative Evaluation had an average of 3.82 and a standard deviation of 0.46, indicating a little more variability but still indicating moderate anxiety. The mean score for Test Anxiety is 3.98 and has the lowest standard deviation of 0.37, indicating that what respondents are feeling in terms of their level of anxiety has a high level of agreement.

Figure 1. Comparison of Speaking Anxiety Components

Findings Related to the Second Question of the Study

To answer the second question of the study, “What is the relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety levels (as measured by FLCAS) and speaking performance among Iraqi EFL students?” a correlation coefficient analysis was computed.

Table 3: The Relationship between Students’ Speaking anxiety and their Speaking Performance

Correlations			
		Speaking score	Speaking anxiety
Speaking score	Pearson Correlation	1	-.457**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	195	195
speaking anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-.457**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	195	195

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Results from the correlation analysis showed a substantial negative correlation between student speaking scores and level of speaking anxiety ($r=-0.45$, $p<0.01$). As anxiety to speak increases, scores decrease; therefore, higher amounts of anxiety are related to poorer performance when completing speaking tasks. The correlation at the 0.01 level shows that there is a substantial amount of power in this relationship. A conclusion may be made regarding the necessity of effectively managing one’s anxiety in order to make improvements in speaking performance.

Findings Related to the Third Question of the Study

To address the third question of the study, an independent sample t-test was utilized.

Q3: “Are there statistically significant differences in foreign language classroom anxiety scores between male and female Iraqi EFL students?”

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for the Effect of Gender on Students' Class Engagement

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Speaking Anxiety	female	107	3.88	.347	.033
	male	88	3.84	.351	.037

Table 5: Independent Sample t-test for the Effect of Gender on Students' Speaking Anxiety

Independent Samples Test										
F		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		Sig	t	df	S i g . (2-tailed)	M e a n Difference	Std. Error Difference			
Speaking Anxiety	Equal variances assumed	.040	.841	.948	193	.344	.04763	.05023		
	Equal variances not assumed			.947	184.919	.345	.04763	.05029		

When considering the analysis of the speaking anxiety of male and female individuals it is evident that females have a higher mean score (N =107). This value, 3.88 for females compared to 3.84 for males (N=88), suggests an overall difference between sex when using the following evaluation item. The standard deviations for male participants and female participants are both very similar (0.34 and 0.35 respectively) and also demonstrate that there is approximately the same amount of variability in the respective responses. Therefore as the level of significance (0.34) suggests, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between male learners and female learners when considering their levels of foreign language classroom anxiety.

Findings Related to the Fourth Question of the Study

To answer the fourth question of the study, a semi-structured interview was conducted with sixteen EFL students. The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed via Qwen AI-related program.

Q4: "How do individual differences in anxiety manifestations (hesitation patterns, stress levels, fluency variations, and embarrassment) affect Iraqi EFL students' speaking performance in classroom settings?"

The results of the analysis of the transcripts were as the following:

1) Hesitation Patterns among EFL Students

It was found in an analysis of speech samples from 16 Iraqi EFL students that hesitation was the most significant manifestation of foreign language classroom anxiety. The amount of hesitation varied between students, with students hesitating anywhere from 5% to 80% of the time (30% on average). Students then demonstrate delays between sentences when introducing themselves or talking about personal information. The student with the highest amount of hesitation at 80% was Student 8; the one with the lowest at only 5% was Student 4. These data suggest that students use hesitation as a way of coping with difficulty in finding the right word to say or constructing the correct grammatical structure in the moment when they are speaking with someone else in real-time.

2) Stress Levels and Their Impact on Speaking Performance

It was concluded that stress had an impact on how well each student did when speaking. Stress levels varied widely (0%-70%) from one student to another, with the majority experiencing moderate levels of stress (20%-30%). The highest amount of stress was reported by Subject 6 (60%); however, there were three students (Subjects 4, 12, and 16) who did not display any level of stress whatsoever. In addition to causing stress, students also exhibited other signs such as changes in pitch, longer pauses between words or during phrases,

and generally feeling less comfortable and more anxious than usual when speaking. Stress also appeared to be most apparent at the beginning of speaking tasks, which suggests that anticipatory anxiety is an important part of the foreign language speaking anxiety experience.

3) Fluency Variations and Speaking Confidence

There were quite a few differences in speaking fluency among participants. Fluency levels ranged from a low of 20% to a high of 95%. Most participants were moderately fluent or fluent (an average of about 60% fluent). The participant with the highest level of fluency was Participant 4, who spoke at 95% fluency and had no hesitation or stress while speaking. Therefore, Participant 4 was considered a confident speaker. On the contrary, Participants 6 and 8 were more hesitant and stressed while speaking, which caused their fluency to be low (20%). The data collected from the study supports the conclusion that anxiety levels and fluency levels are related. In general, those participants with little anxiety showed much greater fluency when compared to those participants who were anxious.

4) Stuttering Occurrences in EFL Speaking Tasks

Among those in our study that stuttered, stuttering was the least prevalent manifestation of anxiety; most students exhibited almost no stuttering behaviour (0-10% stuttering rate). A few of the subject groups only had slightly higher stuttering frequency, with only Subject 1 providing a stuttering frequency above 10%. These students provided no identifiable examples of sound or word repetition, indicating that Iraqi EFL students are primarily anxious about speaking through hesitation and stress, rather than dysfluency. Therefore, it appears that while Iraqi EFL students possess the knowledge necessary to communicate verbally, their ability to communicate verbally is impeded by various psychological barriers.

5) Embarrassment and Self-Consciousness in Speaking Situations

The level of embarrassment shown by participants varied from 0% to 60%. Most students reported a moderate amount of embarrassment (10-25%), while Subject 8 reported the highest level (60%) and others (Subject 2, 4, 12, 13, and 16) reported no embarrassment. The majority of students who demonstrated a high level of embarrassment either did not make eye contact or were visibly uncomfortable when discussing personal issues. Individuals with a high level of embarrassment also expressed some awareness of their language limitations. The results indicate that embarrassment is related to students' perceptions of their proficiency in English as well as concern about how they will be evaluated negatively by their peers and/or instructors.

6) Individual Variation and Anxiety Profiles

The results of this analysis indicate that the 16 participants have different anxiety profiles when speaking a second language, or having anxiety about speaking in a second language. Some students (for example, Subject 4) spoke with confidence and were nearly free of any symptoms of anxiety (0% stress, 5% hesitation, and 95% fluency), while other students (for example, Subject 8) had a number of anxiety indicators across the three anxiety dimensions (70% stress, 80% hesitation, and 20% fluency). There seems to be a connection between a student's individual personality traits, prior language learning experiences, and how they see their language competency that may be related to their levels of anxiety. With such differences in anxiety levels, individualized approaches will be needed to address speaking anxiety among EFL students in order to meet the needs of the students according to their symptoms of anxiety and severity.

Discussion

According to the study, Iraqi EFL students who are learning English experience significant anxiety within their respective English language classrooms. According to the anxiety levels recorded through the use of the FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale), the mean level of anxiety among the population sample from this study were moderate to high in all aspects of the FLCAS assessed by this study. This is congruent with previous research on anxiety levels for EFL students in similar settings. For example, Alrabai (2014) found that Saudi university students also reported high anxiety levels in their English language classroom. Additionally, Alsharani and Alandal (2015) reported that both male and female Saudi university students experienced the same level

of anxiety within their English language classrooms. This similarity between different Arab countries indicates that speaking anxiety is a prevalent issue within the region, and that the reasons for this are likely related to the socio-cultural, linguistic, and educational aspects of EFL instruction in Arabic learning environments.

According to the research, communication-based apprehension was considered to be the top cause of anxiety among Iraqi students studying English by scoring an average of 4.31 compared to judgment (3.82) and testing (3.98). This finding supports similar studies completed by Nababan & Lestariningsih (2024) where there was evidence of an increase in communication-based apprehension and a lack of opportunities to practice naturally through conversation leads to the high levels of anxiety concerning English language use among Iraqi students. Tridinanti (2018) stated that students have more confidence in their ability to communicate in English, and therefore their ability to communicate improves significantly over time. The variability within the responses to the questions regarding the level of anxiety related to communication were high (0.43) which indicates that the components of communication apprehension differ significantly among individual Iraqi students; therefore, it supports the idea that anxiety is a unique experience for each person experiencing it.

According to this research, there was no major difference in speaking anxiety levels for Iraqi female and male students learning English (3.88 for females vs. 3.84 for males) and so statistically insignificant ($p = 0.344$). This differs from previous studies showing that that often women experience more anxiety about speaking compared with men (Kitano, 2001; Rzazadeh and Tavakoli 2009). More recent studies (e.g. Darnis & Xiongyuan, 2018, Salehi, 2021) suggest that any gender differences in this area may be context-dependent and are largely determined by social changes and different teaching techniques. The very small difference (0.047) in the mean scores between male and female students in the current study suggests that all student regardless of gender experience similar feelings of anxiety when speaking English and are probably all affected by the same cultural and educational background.

The results indicate a high negative relationship between speaking anxiety and speaking performance. That is to say: the higher level of anxiety was associated with a lower speaking score ($r = -0.45$ $p < 0.01$). This finding is consistent with previous findings that highlight the detrimental effect of anxiety on language performance (Zhang, 2019, gas listed above). For example, Zhang (2019) stated that anxiety is related to attention deficit issues, which leads to poor language skills, while Liu (2018) and Jiang and Dewaele (2019) stated that anxiety makes language learners reluctant or less willing to communicate. The current study supports the previous findings because of the close relationship found in Iraq and through this research, anxiety management should be of major concern within English language education. Gao (2022) also stated that there is consistently a negative correlation between anxiety and language performance, and the present study supports that theory in a culture that has been studied much less than others.

Focusing on the qualitative analysis of spoken anxiety experienced by Iraqi students will reveal that the most common indicators exist are hesitation. Data has been provided for an average of 30%, as opposed to the 5%-80% range (i.e., this implies that experiencing the anxiety, and hesitating when you speak, can cause a difference in speaking ability). The findings of this study on hesitation support findings of earlier studies (Katz, 2000; Woodrow, 2006) that looked at other signs or evidence of anxiety when speaking to others (e.g., sweating, shaking, fidgeting). The findings from the current study on hesitation add specific information regarding the impact of anxiety on individuals, therefore supporting the findings of Rajitha & Alamelu (2020) regarding the influence of internal psychological factors on anxiety. Additionally, data in this study suggest that the anxiety primarily affects fluency or articulation rather than creating issues with actual speech.

Students had varying levels of stress and fluency; ranging from 0%-70% for stress and 20%-95% for fluency. In general, the bulk of participants (53.8%) exhibited moderate levels of stress and fluency. The stress levels for the majority of participants were within the range of 20%-30% (moderate) with an average fluency level of approximately 60%. These findings are consistent with current theories regarding the relationship between stress and anxiety in speaking. Recent research has indicated that there are significant differences in the level of anxiety experienced by students in high school versus university due to differences in the kinds of English courses taught at high school versus university. This is indicated by the finding of moderate levels of stress experienced by university students in this study. The finding that subjects with high levels of anxiety executed poorly in terms of fluency is consistent with other studies indicating that high levels of anxiety affect second language production. Subject #4 exhibited 95% fluency and not much anxiety; thus illustrating that

properly managing anxiety results in greater success in producing second language output.

Analysis has also exposed the Different Anxiety Profiles to be different between the two subjects. Subject 4 was very confident with 0% stress, 5% hesitation and 95% fluency compared to Subject 8 who exhibited high levels of anxiety with 70% stress, 80% hesitation and only 20% fluency. This supports more recent research addressing that Individual anxiety experiences vary considerably. According to Sjaifullah (2019), self-esteem will influence the way that a student learns a foreign language, while Thao and Nguyet (2019), state that Vietnamese students have differing problems surrounding fear of making mistakes and confidence. Based on the differences found between the students' anxiety profiles, there may not be a single way to reduce anxiety for all, thus necessitating various approaches to teaching and supporting students learning English as a second language.

These findings are valuable and provide guidance toward improving EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching practices in light of current and future changes in education. They confirm and support Suleimenova's (2013) recommendations regarding the importance of creating a safe, non-threatening environment to help students feel more secure in their learning and to help them better manage the anxiety they may have about speaking English. As communication apprehension was a significant variable, Iraqi EFL teachers should utilize more interactive activities so that students can continue building their self-confidence. Research conducted by Nababan and Lestariningsih (2024) has provided effective strategies to help alleviate student's anxiety, including consistent practice, self-motivation, counseling, and using tools like Flipgrid to support the students' development. The study illustrates how teachers should have an arsenal of different types of strategies to help meet the different levels of anxiety that their students have.

The limitations of this study include that it utilized convenience sampling to focus on one university, that the results may not be generalizable for the entire Iraqi EFL population, and that future research should collect data from various institutions and locations to provide better representations of student experiences. Although the mixed-methods design had positive benefits, further research should be designed to be longitudinal studies to determine how speaking anxiety changes over time through subsequent years of studying. The use of intermediate-level students in this study suggests the need for additional studies comparing differing levels of proficiency. Finally, recent methodological improvements in anxiety research (for example, Nababan & Lestariningsih, 2024) that include both student and teacher perspectives can help to improve the overall understanding of speaking anxiety in the Iraqi context.

Conclusion

This study is a mixed-methods study of Iraqi EFL students and the results reveal much about classroom speaking anxiety in a largely undiscovered area of learning, and that the speaking anxiety levels of these learners are high in comparison to test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (i.e., negative judgment from others). In addition to the effects of talking anxiety on speaking performance, the negative influence of talking anxiety indicates that there are psychological barriers to language learning.

Research indicated there are no measurable significant differences in terms of anxiety between males and females which suggest contextual factors tend to have a larger impact than demographic factors affecting anxiety. The majority of indicated anxiety was elicited via students' hesitation patterns, each student's hesitation pattern varies dramatically between them. This research has international implications as researchers will need to understand these results for their own populations as they relate to foreign language anxiety. The findings support differentiated instructional strategies, based on students' psychological needs, as well as building supportive classroom environments in which to foster speaking confidence. Teacher training programs need to provide an emphasis on strategies to manage foreign language anxiety and how those strategies improve the effectiveness of language instruction.

In conclusion, future studies should also attempt to examine changes over time concerning feelings of anxiety, to explore whether or not there is any impact from technological advancements in decreasing fears associated with speaking English as a second language and parallel to this, to understand how cultural differences may manifest their influence on the way we express our anxieties in different EFL settings. Finally, there is a great need for a more holistic viewpoint when considering how best to learn a foreign language, incorporating both cognitive and emotional aspects of learning.

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