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SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG ENGLISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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A B S T R A C T

This study investigates the factors contributing to speaking anxiety among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners at Ajdabia University. The research aims to identify how linguistic, individual, and situational factors influence students' speaking anxiety. A quantitative approach was employed, utilizing a questionnaire based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), with 100 students participating. The findings reveal that situational and individual factors have the most significant impact on anxiety, while linguistic factors contribute to a lesser extent. Anxiety levels also vary according to gender and semester, with female students and first-year students experiencing higher anxiety. The study suggests that creating a supportive classroom environment and addressing individual emotional factors can help reduce speaking anxiety and improve students' language performance.

القلق من التحدث بين متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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الملخص

تهدف الدراسة إلى التحقيق في عوامل قلق التحدث التي يواجهها طلاب جامعة اجدابيا في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، حيث تم توزيع استبيان على 100 طالب تم تصنيفه إلى ثلاثة عوامل رئيسية: لغوية، فردية، وموقفية. أظهرت النتائج أن العوامل الموقفية والفردية كانت الأكثر تأثيرًا على قلق التحدث، بينما كانت العوامل اللغوية أقل تأثيرًا. كما تبين أن مستويات القلق تختلف بشكل كبير وفقًا للعوامل الشخصية مثل الجنس والفصل الدراسي. استكشفت الدراسة أيضًا الحلول الممكنة للتعامل مع هذه العوامل، مع التركيز على أهمية إيجاد استراتيجيات للتقليل من قلق التحدث لدى الطلاب.

1. Introduction

Speaking is an indispensable part of language learning in general and the acquisition of a second or foreign language, in particular: it is one of the four macro skills that must be learned to communicate and interact with others as a human being (Diep et al., 2022). It is the final state of the second language learning process and the secret to effective communication (Pan et al., 2022). Nevertheless, speaking is not an easy task that requires time, effort, attention, and practice to build. As has been found, speaking activities, in those cases when EFL learners have to perform in front of their peers, often instil great anxiety in the learners. Tadjouri (2017) refers to this anxiety as a serious barrier to the development of various skills, especially speaking. Bashori et al. (2020) state that speaking is the most anxiety-provoking language skill out of four. The Idiom speaking anxiety is the consequence of fretting over the powers of communication. FLSA negatively influences the performance of foreign language learners. The anxious learners may shake their hands or their legs tremble uncontrollably, sweat profusely, clap, shake their hands, and go blank (Horwitz et al., 1986). In more extreme cases, voices cannot be heard, there is a freeze, and a disability to think and act (Horwitz, 2017). Many learners will even remain silent during classes, thus losing their proficiency in the foreign language through speaking. (Moafa, 2024)

1.1 Statement of the Problem

An individual's skill to speak a language fluently, especially in front of people, may be assessed by the extent of linguistic proficiency. The clarity and understanding of the communicated information are highly defined by how it was presented. Since the communication of a foreign language is an extemporary activity, it is usually judged or criticised immediately by those who listen to it. Some of the most common personality traits studied in the association of foreign language acquisition and emotional aspects revolve around self-worth, risk-taking, extroversion, motivation, and Anxiety (Noormohamadi, 2009). These attributes are expected to positively or negatively impact the language learning process. Anxiety is considered one of the most important elements, and it is one of the interesting areas of

investigation in recent times.

1.2. Research Questions

1. To what Degree do Ajdabia University English majors suffer from anxiety when speaking a foreign language in class?
2. What are the main reasons for speaking anxiety in a foreign language, and how do students view it?

1.3 Aims of the Study

- To find out if speaking anxiety emerges among English Department students at Ajdabia University in their classes
- To identify the leading causes (if any) of students' speaking anxiety
- To look into how students' speaking abilities might be impacted by anxiety related to foreign languages

1.4. Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study tries to explore whether EFL learners have speaking anxiety, what causes the anxiety, and the impact of the anxiety on students' performance. The study will be limited to the university, where students have enrolled in the English department, Faculty of Arts, at Ajdabia University.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are anticipated to be valuable for:

- **Lecturer**: The study's conclusions could help instructors better understand students who are nervous about their education and enhance learning while enhancing students' abilities, especially for those still struggling with English speech.
- **The researchers**: To help students improve their speaking performance without worrying about making mistakes that could lead to criticism, the researcher hopes that future studies will look at additional aspects associated with students' worried behaviour.
- **The Students**: Since it allows people to improve their English speaking abilities without feeling unreliable, the researcher expects that this study will also benefit students

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Speaking Anxiety

The broad word anxiety should be defined based on its symptoms in order to explain speaking anxiety and its causes. "The subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" is what Horwitz et al. (1986, p.125) define as anxiety. Anxiety-related symptoms for foreign language learners include perspiration, palpitations, stress, forgetfulness, and trouble learning the language (Yalçın & İnceçay, 2013). It is not rare that speaking anxiety in foreign language learners is a multifaceted factor that is based on multiple inner and external sources. The other major contributor is the fear of negative evaluation, and students will be worried about how their peers or lecturers will rate their language ability. This anxiety can be exceptionally high when a learner feels uncovered, as in the case of giving a speech or talking in a classroom. The other reason is incompetence, where there are issues about pronunciation, grammar, and the use of vocabulary. Suppose learners are made to feel inadequate in terms of their language level. In that case, this will lead to a sense of anxiety, and this level of anxiety can hamper their confidence to actively engage in speaking up activities as well. Moreover, the anxieties may also be stimulated by the cultural influences that may lead to the students fearing unintentionally insulting or failing to conform to the cultural norms in the language used.

The impact of the speaking anxiety on the language acquisition can be enormous and this leads to many of them forming a vicious circle. Anxiety minimizes the likelihood of engaging in speaking activities by the learners in need of speaking activities to develop their language. Such shyness can result in the absence of practice which is required to improve fluency and confidence. In addition, the expectancy to talk may interfere with the cognitive tasks in the learners to the speaking task, e.g., usefulness in vocabulary and sentence construction, thus, damaging the language competence of the learners. The latter may result in the more drastic outcome of the students dropping out of speaking activities, which is another obstacle to students learning the language. This implies that language teachers should cover the aspect of speaking anxiety so as to make

sure that, the students develop speaking skills by reducing the inhibitions to speaking.

2.2. Foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS)

The FLCAS was developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), and it was informed by the experience of students at the University of Texas at Austin who were Spanish language foreign learners and anxious. FLSA refers to Speaking Anxiety in a Foreign Language, negatively impacting language learners' performance. As it may lower oral performance and involvement in speaking activities, FLSA can be considered one of the most challenging aspects of language acquisition (Bashori et al., 2020). Even though FLSA can be observed in all areas of learning, it is special because it applies situation-specific and may apply to students who rarely encounter anxiety in other settings (Horwitz et al., 1986). Academic anxiety is a unique situation; students must communicate in a language they do not fully understand. It is defined as nervousness and worry about events and activities related to a particular area or subject (Hasty et al., 2021). Thus, FLSA has the potential to impact learners, who have not yet achieved high results but have to enhance them, by lowering their self-efficacy and ability to convey a message in a foreign language effectively. The key issue in EFL was the issue of language anxiety, leading to the development of poor emotional attitudes towards learning the language. This can be observed when the classroom involves speaking activities because many students feel anxious. Speaking is the language skill that evokes the highest level of anxiety out of all four skills (Bashori et al., 2020) (p. 420). High-anxiety children can skip or engage in speaking activities for a short time, tremble or shake limbs, or go blank, later proving that the idea that speaking is the skill that attracts the most anxiety is often not accurate. Moreover, they may also sweat or have heart palpitations, and this would not contribute to the development of oral proficiency (Horwitz, 2017, as also cited by Moafa, 2024)

2.3. Types of Anxiety

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), language learning anxiety is situation-specific and often manifests during oral language usage in schools. The autonomic nerve system is the source of this subjective experience. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) distinguished three research methods: situational, state, and trait anxiety. For language learning to be successful, it is essential to comprehend various forms of anxiety.

Trait Anxiety

Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) describe trait anxiety as a consistent personality trait that enables people to experience anxiety in any circumstance, suggesting a propensity to experience anxiety in a variety of contexts. Trait anxiety is also an important factor in language learning since it might induce an earth-shaking uncertainty in a learner that negatively influences how he or she interacts with the language. Highly trait-anxious people can approach foreign language learning with an undertone of being frightened to make mistakes or be criticised and subject themselves to self-doubts and avoidance patterns. This fear may even cause them to fail to contribute to the classroom activities like speaking where their performance will be evaluated. Thus, students may lose interest, they will not practice, and they will not develop the target language. High trait anxiety can also add to other emotional barriers such as low self-esteem or fear of an adverse assessment and this further complicates the situation when it is among language learners. This may create a cycle where anxiety becomes an inhibitor to learning and no practice makes the problem a habit and ultimately numbs their language development to a stalemate. Bearing in mind the effects of trait anxiety on language acquisition, as a teacher, it is also important that I embrace the measures that can help in reducing the effects of trait anxiety.

One of the ways of dealing with it is to create a positive classroom environment in which mistakes are perceived as an element of the learning process, and therefore not a setback. Inculcating the growth mindset in the student will enable them to understand language learning as a failure and misstep process. The other potential way in which a teacher can provide low-hazard speaking opportunities is by providing more low-stakes speaking opportunities such as informal conversations or peer conversations in order to underemphasise the importance of performance. Also, relaxation training, which might include deep breathing or a

mindfulness procedure, can be offered to students so that they cope with stress or anxiety when it occurs. It may be important to understand the characteristics that led the learner to begin feeling anxious and offer personalised support to gradually lower their anxiety levels, resulting in a greater sense of confidence and commitment to language learning.

State Anxiety

State anxiety is a temporary characteristic of an individual's personality that causes him or her to feel nervous. It is a fear experienced at a particular time, like just before a test (Spielberger, 1983). There is an elevated level of anxiety that a high level of trait anxiety may have caused. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) indicate that persons with much anxiety are typically more elevated on state anxiety. The most regular setting where academic stressors occur is at schools, where academic stressors occur due to tests and other types of academic performance scrutiny. In the situations of language learning, state anxiety can be a very real barrier since students become anxious or even scared to speak or take an exam. Such tension and anxiety could interfere with the work of the mind in terms of memory, attentiveness, and recollection ability, rendering the students incapable of working to their full potential. The student with a particular state anxiety problem during a speaking test might fail to recall the words and grammar constructions they learned. Consequently, the student will fail to perform, not reflecting his/her language level. This fear of performing well may contribute to a vicious cycle of fear, which further negatively influences the succession performances, and the fearful student is in a situation to develop a fear of language use.

Although state anxiety may be temporary, its consequences depend on how it is dealt with, and hence are profound. State anxiety can be what a teacher makes it, and is a key in assisting a student to cope with a state of anxiety in the learning environment. Anxiety can be reduced by decreasing the perceived stakes associated with speaking activities, e.g., by offering more informal ways of allowing students to receive graded practice at speaking without the fear of judgment. Further, educators may provide the students with solutions to deal with their anxiety on the spot (deep breathing, positive self-statements, or mindfulness). As a way of removing the fear focus, encouraging students to practice the communication process instead of how we should do this process, and what some evaluation criteria are can help. Through providing students with means to control their anxiety, instructors can assist them in lowering the amount and the strength of state anxiety, which allows them to perform better in language tasks.

Situation-Specific Anxiety

Situation-specific Anxiety is Anxiety around one factor, such as speaking a foreign language. It is a measure of trait anxiety that is occasion-specific, rather than either of the states characteristic of trait and state anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). This approach considers anxiety responses under specific conditions, including speaking before a crowd, passing exams, solving arithmetic problems, and participating in a second or foreign language studies. Anxiety, when under the right or wrong situation, could be boosting or devastating (Kleinman, 1977). To some learners, pronouncing a foreign language may stimulate anxiety, which is situation-specific when utilising the target language. This concept matters to this research since it will help the researcher understand how Saudi EFL students perceive situations in which they become anxious when speaking English. (Moafa, 2024).

2.4 Speaking Anxiety Factors

The causes of speaking anxiety may include ignorance, insufficient preparation, the fear of erring, and difficulties with the lecturer's instructions (Syahfutra & Wibowo, 2021). According to Horwitz et al. (1986), speaking anxiety can be attributed to three factors, which are fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and communication anxiety. Communication apprehension is a term describing the kind of anxiety characterised by the fear of expressing oneself to others due to constant monitoring, inability to control one's/communication functionality in situations, and an overall incapability of knowing himself/herself. As Horwitz et al. (1986) claim, test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety that is based on the worry that one may not manage to learn a foreign language. They tend to avoid the assessing contexts because of fear of negative

judgment (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Anxiety regarding a foreign language has also been built on a more multidimensional concept in prior research. Horwitz et al. (1986) have distinguished three of them: Hallmark, fear of a low evaluation, test anxiety, and communication apprehension in their famous FLCAS. The same sentiments have been echoed by Woodrow (2006) when she distinguished between speaking anxiety in the classroom and when a person is not in the classroom. In more recent analyses, factor analyses have been performed, both in exploratory and confirmatory, restricting to several factors. For example, Toubot et al. (2018) identified the three primary constructs in exploring Libyan EFL undergraduate students: poor self-confidence, fear of negative criticism, and anxiety concerning communication. Based on these frameworks, this current work proposes a method in which one more domain, namely, individual, is added, and a three-fold conceptualisation related to speaking anxiety is offered: situational, lingual, and individual. The lack of security among learners, which can be characterised as arising due to a couple of vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation issues, is portrayed in the lingual dimension. The individual dimension, as opposed to the situational dimension, reflects not the situational contexts of a classroom, the role of an instructor, feedback, peer pressure, and the test conditions, but rather the personality-related aspects like shyness and low self-confidence. Conceptually, the three domains incorporate the aspects of previous models, although the terms do not exactly match. This raises issues such as the fact that speaking anxiety is not uniform but is influenced by situational and personal factors, along with speech issues with language reference.

2.5. Related Studies

Horwitz et al. (1986) were the first to theorise the FLA concept that posits that FLA is a special form of anxiety that encircles students whenever they learn a given external language, which makes the students inculcate a Degree of uneasiness whenever they are in a classroom setting. Having developed this theory, Orwitz et al. (1986) enrolled 75 English-speaking Spanish speakers subjected to an FLCAS to determine the validity of their theory. Anxiety levels were extremely high, as indicated in the report; it is this form of influence that affected their proficiency levels in languages. Moreover, those who were highly anxious were those who pronounced the target language in anxiety and were not comfortable doing so. The same sentiments are supported by Aida (1994), who sets out to study the role of anxiety within an environment using the Japanese language. Aida (1994) involved using FLCAS to investigate its reliability and the correlation between the worries of the students and their performances in Japanese. In another study, Fikni et al. (2022), in a study entitled An Analysis of Factors of Anxiety of EFL Students in Speech Production, the results indicated that several factors contributed to the development of thirty amongst the students during speech production, which includes inadequate level of proficiency, the absence of prior preparation, self-confidence, fear of the audience, and fear of their ability to impart information to the audience. Toubot et al. (2018) conducted a survey of EFL students in Libya. They came to a conclusion that absence of self-confidence and fear of receiving negative grade influenced the performance of the students in a negative and significant way. This indicates that anxiety in speaking among such students is more prevalent in students who do not feel at ease in the EFL set-up. Findings of a research carried out by Effiong (2016) stated that speaking anxiety among the respondents in Malaysia was mostly associated with cultural concerns, lack of confidence, and fear of being criticized by other individuals, including students and professors.

2.6. Hypotheses of the Study

Hypothesis 1: *Students who experience higher levels of situational anxiety will report greater levels of speaking anxiety during foreign language classes.*

Explanation: This hypothesis directly links situational anxiety (such as the pressure of speaking in front of others) to speaking anxiety, and it suggests a cause-and-effect relationship. It helps explore how the classroom environment impacts anxiety levels.

Hypothesis 2: *Individual factors, including self-esteem and fear of negative evaluation, will significantly contribute to students' speaking anxiety in foreign language classes.*

Explanation: By explicitly identifying self-esteem and fear of

judgment as individual factors, this hypothesis delves into personal attributes that affect how learners experience anxiety. It tests the influence of internal factors on language learning outcomes.

Hypothesis 3: *Linguistic challenges, such as difficulties in pronunciation and comprehension, will increase students' speaking anxiety in foreign language classes, but to a lesser extent than situational and individual factors.*

Explanation: This hypothesis is designed to test the impact of language-related challenges (such as not understanding the teacher or difficulty with pronunciation) on speaking anxiety, while also comparing it to the more influential situational and individual factors.

Hypothesis 4: *Students' speaking anxiety will vary significantly across different semesters and genders, with higher anxiety levels reported among first-year students and female students.*

Explanation: This hypothesis introduces demographic variables (gender and academic semester) to explore how these factors intersect with speaking anxiety. It predicts that gender and experience (reflected in semester) might play a role in the levels of anxiety students experience

3. Methodology

In order to provide insights about the speaking anxiety and answer the questions, this research was conducted among the students of English Department at the Faculty of Arts of Ajdabiya University who were selected at random. The findings were compared with the help of a questionnaire and this quantitative research enhanced the dependability of the study.

3.1. Data Collection and Analysis

In this part, the research methods used in this study are explained. It also describes the research topic, research methodology and demographical features of the targeted group, such as gender, age and academic year/semester. This study aims to find out the speaking anxiety of the students in the English Department. Data collection will offer an understanding of the student points of view and answer research questions, give additional clarification of the failures among English students at Ajdabiya University, propose solutions to the failure and give findings of the researcher to the department to enhance the circulation of the English department course materials.

3.2 Research Design

Analysis and collection of research are performed quantitatively. These are quantitative methods that use objective measures or statistical, mathematical, and numerical examination of data obtained using surveys and questionnaires, or manipulating the existing statistical data using computing methods. This methodology focuses on accumulating numerical data and their extrapolation to greater populations or to describe certain phenomena. A questionnaire was used to collect the data, which was randomly sampled by handing out copies of the questionnaire to students of the English Department. The survey was taken from Horwitz Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and included specific alterations. It was employed as a means of obtaining data in this research. It consisted of a single list of statements and the Likert Scale answers. It included the following responses: agree, disagree, neutral, strongly agree, and strongly disagree. They were then requested to

give the answer that best portrayed their feeling. The questionnaire addressed the aspects of speaking anxiety in hurdles. This data has been collected using the print version of a paper-based survey entered into the SPSS Statistics package. The collected data were analysed using percentages and descriptive statistics to interpret the students' responses.

3.3 Sample of the Study

A total of 100 students participated in this study. The participants were from all semesters (the first to the eighth semester). They were selected from Ajdabiya University, Faculty of Arts, and the Department of English Language. Most were female (94.9%), while 5.1% were male.

Table (1) Gender

Table 1 shows that most sample members are female (94.9%), and 5.1% are male.

No	Gender	Frequency	Percent
1	Male	5	5.1%
2	Female	93	94.9%
Total		**98**	**100%**

Gender
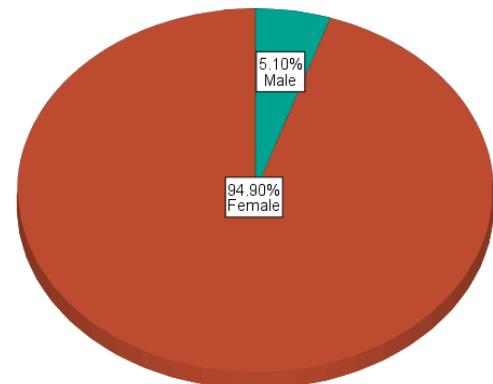
Table (2) Semester

No	Semester	Frequency	Percent
1	First semester	10	10.2%
2	Second semester	9	9.2%
3	Third semester	17	17.3%
4	Fourth semester	19	19.4%
5	Fifth semester	10	10.2%
6	Sixth semester	20	20.4%
7	Seventh semester	5	5.1%
8	Eighth semester	8	8.2%
Total		**98**	**100%**

Table 2 shows that most sample members are in the Sixth semester, with percentages of 20.4% and 19.4% in the Fourth semester, while the most petite sample sizes are in the Seventh and Eighth semesters.

Semester
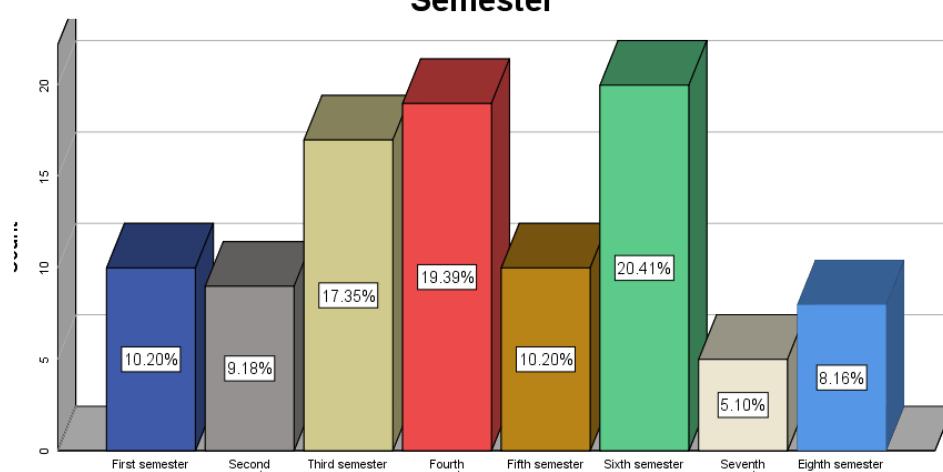
Relative Importance Index (RII)

The Relative Importance Index (RII), one of the most reliable approaches for rating variables, was used to prioritise the indicators in this study. It uses a structured questionnaire on a Likert scale.

The RII of values has been classified into:

Likert Score Interval	Relative Importance Index (RII)	Importance Level
From 1 to 1.79	$0 \leq RI < 0.2$	Low
From 1.8 to 2.59	$0.2 \leq RI < 0.4$	Medium - Low
From 2.60 to 3.39	$0.4 \leq RI < 0.6$	Medium
From 3.40 to 4.19	$0.6 \leq RI < 0.8$	High - Medium
From 4.20 to 5	$0.8 \leq RI \leq 1$	High

3.4 Description of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire measured participants' perceptions, attitudes, or opinions on speaking anxiety. The questionnaire consisted of statements with response options on a five-point Likert scale: 'Agree, Disagree, Undecided, Strongly Agree, and Strongly Disagree.' The five-point scale was chosen to reduce response ambiguity and provide participants with a straightforward way to express agreement, neutrality, or disagreement with the statements."

3.5 Data Analysis

The data entry, review, and coding were performed with IBM SPSS Statistics 28 to ensure the analysis was accurate, precise, and triple-checked. Once the data was analysed and categorised, percentage analysis and descriptive statistics were calculated to draw the whole picture of the responses. A summary describing the main features of the dataset in terms of descriptive analysis was carried out (frequency distributions, mean scores, and standard deviations). The products of such a method, positioned to identify trends and patterns in the responses given by students, are pretty helpful in creating a more complex picture of the dominant factors of speaking anxiety. The outcome was that the findings were to be described concisely and structured, which would help in their interpretation and in further formulation of recommendations.

3.6 The Analysis of the Questionnaire

Frequencies and percentages were used for each item of the questionnaire, and the results are shown as follows:

Table1 : Language speaking anxiety questionnaire

Linguistic Factors									
Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree	disagree	Weight average	(RII)	Rank	Importance Level
I do not worry about making mistakes in language class.	15	33	16	20	14	2.847	%56.3	4	M
	15.3%	33.7%	16.3%	20.4%	14.3%				
It frightens me when I do not understand what the teacher says in a foreign language.	15	21	27	7	28	3.122	%62.44	2	H-M
	15.3%	21.4%	27.6%	7.1%	28.6%				
I get nervous when I do not understand every word the language teacher says.	19	20	19	11	29	3.112	%62.46	3	H-M
	19.4%	20.4%	19.4%	11.2%	29.6%				
The more speaking tests I have, the more confused I get.	12	27	15	20	24	3.173	%63.46	1	H-M
	12.2%	27.6%	15.3%	20.4%	24.5%				
Linguistic Factors						3.064	%61.27	High - Medium	

The table results showed that the linguistic factors causing anxiety among students were medium, tending toward high, with an overall mean of 3.064 and a relative weight of 61.27%, reflecting a moderate sense of linguistic tension when speaking the foreign language.

Statement (4): *"The more speaking tests I have, the more confused I get."* ranked first with a mean of (3.173) and a relative weight of (63.46%), indicating that the repetition of speaking tests increases students' confusion, possibly due to the performance pressure and fear of evaluation.

Statement (2): *"It frightens me when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language."* came in second place with a mean of (3.122) and a relative weight of (62.44%), suggesting that the inability to fully understand the teacher raises anxiety, especially in situations that require immediate responses.

The third rank went to statement (3): *"I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says."* "With a mean of (3.112) and a relative weight of (62.46%), this statement confirmed students' heightened sensitivity to complete comprehension, which may hinder their classroom participation.

Finally, statement (1): *"I do not worry about making mistakes in language class"* ranked fourth and last, with a mean of 2.847 and a relative weight of 56.3%, indicating that some students are not highly anxious about making mistakes. However, the average still falls within the medium level, reflecting varying degrees of self-confidence among students when using the foreign language.

Individual Factors									
Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree	disagree	Weight average	(RII)	Rank	Importance Level
I never feel confident when speaking in a foreign language class.	12	26	24	13	23	3.092	61.84%	6	H-M
	12.2%	26.5%	24.5%	13.3%	23.5%				
The other students are better than I am at languages.	12	22	16	19	29	3.316	66.33%	7	H-M
	12.2%	22.4%	16.3%	19.4%	29.6%				
I start to panic when I speak without preparation in language class.	10	33	20	13	22	3.041	60.82%	5	H-M
	10.2%	33.7%	20.4%	13.3%	22.4%				
I would not be nervous speaking a foreign language with native speakers.	22	24	22	13	17	2.786	55.71%	3	M
	22.4%	24.5%	22.4%	13.3%	17.3%				
Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious.	17	31	16	13	21	2.898	57.96%	4	M
	17.3%	31.6%	16.3%	13.3%	21.4%				
I feel confident when I speak in a foreign language class.	23	30	24	12	9	2.531	50.61%	2	M
	23.5%	30.6%	24.5%	12.2%	9.2%				
I am afraid the other students will laugh at me when I speak a foreign language.	14	16	14	25	29	3.398	67.96%	8	H-M
	14.3%	16.3%	14.3%	25.5%	29.6%				
I am confidente of myself while speaking English in online learning.	42	36	11	3	6	1.929	38.57%	1	M-L
	42.9%	36.7%	11.2%	3.1%	6.1%				
Individual Factors						2.874	57.47%	Medium	

The results reveal that the overall level of situational factors contributing to speaking anxiety was medium, with a mean score of 2.568 and a relative importance index (RII) of 51.36%. This suggests that learners experience a moderate level of anxiety in specific classroom situations related to language use.

The highest-ranking statement was: *"A patient lecturer helps reduce my nervousness in* speaking English," with a mean score of 1.816 and a relative weight of 36.32%, categorised at the medium-low level. This indicates that teacher demeanour plays a significant role in reducing anxiety for many students.

On the other hand, the statement *"I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes"* ranked second-highest (RII = 68.16%) with a mean score of 3.408, placing it in the high-medium category. This highlights that foreign language classes trigger more anxiety compared to other subjects.

The statement *"I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in language class"* also received a relatively high mean of (3.0) and a weight of (60%), indicating that anticipation of participation causes significant nervousness for many learners.

In contrast, statements like *"When I am on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed"* and *"I do not understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes"* scored lower, reflecting a medium or even below-average level of anxiety in those situations. The variation in responses underscores that students' situational anxiety differs based on specific classroom dynamics, preparation levels, and personal comfort.

Situational Factors								
Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree	disagree	Weight average	(RII)	Rank	Importance Level
I tremble when I know I will be called on in language class.	19	21	23	11	24	3	60%	5	H-M
	19.4%	21.4%	23.5%	11.2%	24.5%				
I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions I have not prepared for.	19	43	14	8	14	2.540	50.81%	4	M
	%19.4	43.9%	14.3%	8.2%	14.3%				
I do not understand why some people get upset over foreign language classes.	26	36	21	6	9	2.346	46.93%	3	M
	26.5%	36.7%	21.4%	6.1%	9.2%				
I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	15	14	17	20	32	3.408	68.16%	6	H-M
	15.3%	14.3%	17.3%	20.4%	32.7%				
I feel sure and relaxed when I am on my way to language class.	29	31	25	6	7	2.295	45.91%	2	M
	29.6%	31.6%	25.5%	6.1%	7.1%				
A patient lecturer helps reduce my nervousness in speaking English.	48	33	10	1	6	1.816	36.32%	1	M-L
	49.0%	33.7%	10.2%	1.0%	6.1%				
Situational Factors						2.568	51.36%	Medium	

The highest-ranked statement (Rank 1) was *"A patient lecturer helps reduce my nervousness in speaking English,"* which had the lowest mean score (1.816) and an RII of 36.32%, categorised as medium-low (M-L). This implies that most students strongly agree that a calm and supportive teacher can significantly reduce their anxiety.

In contrast, the highest level of anxiety was reflected in the statement, *"I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes. "This statement* ranked sixth with the highest mean score (3.408) and RII of 68.16%, falling into the high-medium (H-M) level. This suggests that language classes generate more tension than other academic subjects.

Statement (5): *"I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in language class,"* also received a high RII of 60%, indicating a significant level of nervous anticipation related to spontaneous speaking tasks in class.
Meanwhile, statements like:

- *"I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions that I have not prepared for in advance"* (Mean = 2.540, RII = 50.81%, Rank 4)

- *"I do not understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes"* (Mean = 2.346, RII = 46.93%, Rank 3)

- *"When I am on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed"* (Mean = 2.295, RII = 45.91%, Rank 2) fell into the medium range, showing varied anxiety levels depending on the context.

Overall, the results show that while teacher support can reduce anxiety, learners still experience notable tension in spontaneous and evaluative classroom situations. This highlights the importance of creating a supportive and predictable classroom environment to minimise anxiety and encourage language production

4. Discussion of findings

The study's results indicate that the speakers' anxiety felt by the EFL learners is influenced by several linguistic, individual, and situational factors, each playing a different role in determining the level of anxiety through speaking.

The results showed that linguistic determinants had a moderate to high effect on speaking anxiety, with an average of 3.064 and a relative weight of 61.27 per cent. Many students said that the stress level and confusion have risen since the number of speaking assessments is relatively high. The most popular idea was the necessity of the increasing sense of confusion as more students become exposed to the opportunity to pass the speaking tests, which implies that students can be overwhelmed by the pressure related to such an evaluation. Moreover, the anxiety levels increased in real-time communication scenarios, especially when students were unable to absorb all the instructions taught by the teacher. Of particular note, however, students were less concerned about making themselves vulnerable to mistakes in the classroom. Generally, the results indicate that linguistic issues, especially peripheral ones based on performance and comprehension, are impactful, leading to language anxiety among the learners.

Individual characteristics also had a significant impact, with students feeling moderately anxious about their emotions and character attributes. Although precise figures were not provided, it is known that a large proportion of students suffer from perfectionism, low self-esteem, and anxiety about receiving a poor grade. These internal stresses frequently exacerbate anxiety, particularly in students who are afraid of making mistakes in front of their classmates or who are concerned about how others see their speaking abilities. It is more difficult for the students to engage comfortably when these personal feelings intersect with other circumstances.

Situational factors were identified as contributing to a moderate level of speaking anxiety, with a mean score of 2.568 and an RII of 51.36%. A considerable number of students expressed increased anxiety when required to respond to questions without prior preparation or when unexpectedly called upon during class discussions. Among the highest-rated anxiety statements was, "I tremble when I am aware that I will be called upon in language class," indicating the heightened nervousness associated with spontaneous speaking tasks. On the other hand, the presence of a supportive and understanding instructor was noted to reduce students' anxiety levels. This finding emphasises the importance of creating a positive learning environment, as students are more likely to engage in speaking activities when they perceive their instructors as encouraging and receptive. Such an environment fosters a sense of safety and encourages participation, even in the face of anxiety.

Although the findings of the study provide important information about the causes of speaking anxiety in EFL learners, there is a need to go into a more critical area regarding the motivation behind the emergence of certain patterns. As an example, the observation that situational causes (e.g., being called upon unexpectedly) are the most significant cause of speaking anxiety is in line with other existing studies, including that by Bashori et al. (2020). The findings of this research are consistent with the existing literature especially Horwitz et al. (1986) who found out that fear of negative evaluation was one of the main causes of language anxiety. Our research also identified that personal variables (self-esteem and fear of being judged) were also a major contributor to speaking anxiety. This also confirms the conclusion that self-perception and peer assessment are the key areas of concern toward the anxiety of speaking a foreign language among students.

But, although the linguistic factors in our research did play

a role in anxiety, it was not that much as compared to the situational and individual factors. This observation is in contrast to the literature studies, where Toubot et al. (2018) reported that linguistic proficiency was a more significant cause of anxiety among Libyan EFL students. This difference could possibly be attributed to the variation in the student population: students of Ajdabia University may experience more situational pressure (more female students, which can be subjected to additional societal pressure), which could dominate linguistic difficulties. The results also show the effect of the situational variables namely, the anxiety caused by unexpected calling upon (students) which could have a great influence on the student confidence to speak. This will concur with the work of Tadjouri (2017), who indicated that the anxiety levels can be heightened by classroom dynamics (peer observation and teacher expectations). The reality that the female students population is greater at Ajdabia University though can be an indication that the gender dynamics may be the cause of the increased levels of anxiety in some classroom scenarios. This might be attributed to the reasoning that in Libya cultural context where social and gender norms might influence the behaviors of students, this can be attributed to the observed trend.

In addition, personal variables like low self-esteem and unpreparedness were identified to be a major factor leading to anxiety. The results can be traced to Aida (1994) and Bashori et al. (2020), who, both, reported internal emotional conditions as important factors affecting speaking anxiety. Nevertheless, subsequent studies can examine how cultural perception about self expression and individualism in a pedagogical setting may serve to multiply this anxiety. Though the study is in line with a lot of the available literature, there are significant differences. As an example, the linguistic anxiety, which has been widely listed as a leading factor, was not as influential in this research. This might indicate that, although the students might have concerns related to their language abilities, the fear of being judged, and the dynamics in the classroom might be even more dominant in this situation. It should be further studied how cultural expectations of linguistic level and the relationship between teachers and students can affect this phenomenon.

This study contributes to the field of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) by providing a nuanced exploration of the specific factors contributing to speaking anxiety among EFL learners in the context of Ajdabia University. Unlike many existing studies that primarily focus on linguistic challenges, this research highlights the significant role of situational and individual factors, such as classroom dynamics and personal traits like self-esteem and fear of negative evaluation. By introducing these factors into the conversation, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding speaking anxiety, offering fresh insights that could inform more tailored, context-specific interventions to reduce anxiety and enhance language learning outcome.

5. Conclusion

Due to the results of the study, the levels of anxiety were moderate and high among the English as a foreign language learners. Situational and individual factors were the most significant influences, whereas linguistic factors were second. The analysis also indicated that the levels of anxiety were diverse among the individuals based on some factors such as gender and semester. To reduce anxiety and enhance learners' self-confidence in communicating using a foreign language, there is a dire need to consider these aspects when designing English language courses. This study implies that it has an impact on language teaching and the design of the curriculum. As the dominant influence of speaking anxiety is situational/person-related, it should be the role of the instructor to establish an environment that reduces these causes of speaking anxiety. Specifically, educators may introduce several measures to help accomplish the target, including extending low-stakes practice to help learners, encouraging their cooperation, and giving constructive feedback in a non-threatening environment. Moreover, awareness of the influence of personal variables, e.g., self-confidence and personality, would assist the instructor in teaching effectively and accommodating different students. Through a supportive and inclusive language learning environment, language

teachers will reduce the anxiety situation and increase participation levels, which, in turn, will result in better outcomes in terms of language acquisition.

6. Recommendation to Future Research

This study has shed light on aspects that lead to speaking Anxiety in EFL learners, but additional research must still be conducted on the dimensions of the anxiety in other settings, and among other individuals. As a case in point, the studies of how digital platforms may decrease or enhance speaking anxiety in online learning environments may be informative, as language teaching becomes more and more learning to do on-line. Moreover, longitudinal research would manage to examine the alterations in the degree of anxiety through time, since the students would have higher proficiency and experience in the language. The potential opportunities of future research would also include considering the possibilities of exploring the interaction of language anxiety and cultural aspects, particularly in multicultural learning settings, to develop a better conception of cultural preferences and expectations mediating the effects of anxiety. These efforts can enhance coping strategies using speaking anxiety or, can be used to assist all learners in systematically learning languages.

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