

Anxiety and Working Memory Load: A Psycholinguistic Investigation into Oral and Written Production Deficits Among Iraqi EFL Learners

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Abstract

Anxiety is considered as a major emotion factor affecting the performance of EFL learners. In Iraq, students' interaction with English is limited to the classroom and traditional teaching based on teacher-learner relations is the main teaching style. Thus, many learners face significant difficulties in the production of the language particularly in terms of speaking and writing. The current study investigates the correlation between foreign language anxiety (FLA) and language production (LP) of Iraqi university EFL learners. In Iraq, the instruction of English is mainly in teacher controlled classroom environments, making it difficult for students to learn to speak and write English. Data were gathered from students of the English Department using a Quantitative design approach via an anxiety questionnaire and speaking/writing task. The descriptive statistics and correlation analyses were then performed. From the results, it can be seen that the moderate to high levels of anxiety experienced by most of the learners is evident. There was a strong negative correlation between levels of anxiety and speaking skills, such as being less fluent, accurate and participating. Writing was also impacted, but less so. This result aligns with the previous studies that showed that speaking is more susceptible to anxiety because it is used immediately and the speaker fears to be evaluated. The study recommends that mitigating factors of anxiety can help to enhance total language performance.

Keywords: Anxiety, Symptoms of Anxiety, Productive Skills.

1. Introduction

Horwitz (2001) indicated that foreign language anxiety is a special type of anxiety that is experienced by learners when learning and using a foreign language in a foreign language environment. Horwitz and Cope (1986) found that on the basis of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) this anxiety consists of three major factors, which are communication apprehension, evaluation anxiety, and fear of negative judgment. There is still very little research that tackles this aspect. But, the relationship between foreign language learning and performance has come under the spotlight of scholars' interest. Many studies have suggested that there is an inverse relationship between the two variables. Anxiety is experienced by EFL learners from the beginning of language learning in the Iraqi context. English is taught in primary school, and English is introduced and taught in schools as a compulsory subject, at least 4 hours per week. Furthermore, English is being taught and assessed at all levels of education in Iraq. Students are tested for several times during their academic process

which includes monthly, daily, midterm and final exams. Foreign language anxiety is therefore common among university students, especially the university students. Hence, foreign language anxiety is common among the university students, particularly for the university students. Since there has been a lack of research that looks at foreign language anxiety in this context, the present study will examine anxiety levels among university students. It also tries to examine the relationship between language learning anxiety and the performance of foreign language using the FLCAS as a framework, and to find out the strength of the relationship.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Anxiety:

Language anxiety is "a unique combination of self-perceptions, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors that come into play during classroom-based language learning, which is the result of the unique nature of the language acquisition process" (Horwitz et al., 1984). It is well-known that anxiety can affect many aspects of life, such as social relationships, work productivity and educational success. It has also been identified as a factor which slows second language development (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Foreign language anxiety has two detrimental effects on learners: indirectly through worry and lack of confidence and indirectly by restricting the learner's involvement and causing deliberate avoidance of the target language. It has been accepted by scholars that anxiety can affect the learning of language in more than one way and that reducing anxiety improves language learning, retention, and learners' motivation. There is a close relationship between the concept of anxiety and the perception of the learner, thus its importance to analyze the self-perception of the learner. Self-perception refers to a general self-perception that includes self-descriptions and self-evaluations, including self-esteem. As students progress in their schooling, changes in their self-perception are thought to be contributing to increases in anxiety as students get older (Heu 2018:3). Anxiety can be classified into two types: Trait anxiety and State anxiety in psychology. Spielberger (1983) has presented trait anxiety as a relatively stable and enduring personality trait. Whereas, state anxiety is temporary and it is caused by certain situations like giving a presentation or taking an exam. Bandura (1991) also noted that the threat situation a person faces is largely dependent on his or her perceived ability and competence to deal with it, and that this ability is built on modeling. He also pointed out the importance of self-esteem in minimizing the impact of anxiety (Bandura, 1991).

2.3 Foreign Language Anxiety:

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is the fear or apprehension experienced by a learner when obliged to use a second/foreign language. MacIntyre (1993) reported that FLA is frequently observed in listening and speaking activities, in test situations, and with respect to some beliefs, e.g., "All statements in the foreign language are true. FLA has been likened to three related kinds of performance anxiety: communication anxiety, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. There is no one consensus definition for speaking anxiety, especially when referring to speaking anxiety specifically. It can be interpreted as a person's apprehension or nervousness that is associated with

expected oral encounters with foreign speakers/imagined foreign speakers in a foreign language (Heu, 2018:5). The difficulty of speaking in English during EFL classes is especially complex because it is difficult for learners to speak English with great confidence. This leads to many students being nervous, stressed, low in confidence and anxious. Anxiety can have a big impact on learners' self-confidence, causing them to believe that they have failed if they cannot communicate or show what they know. Moreover, anxiety adversely affects the language learner's achievement of language in two ways: both directly by decreasing the involvement of the language learner in the class discussion and indirectly by increasing anxiety and reducing self-confidence (Maulidia, 2019:25).

A large number of learners experience high levels of anxiety during speaking tasks. In addition, anxiety may also influence other foreign language activities such as listening and comprehension, because the anticipation of using the foreign language to process information can trigger an anxious response. As cited in Csubaşı (2010:31), Horwitz et al. (1986) identified listening and speaking as the primary sources of anxiety. This is because spontaneous, unprepared speech can be particularly unsettling, and difficulties in distinguishing sounds and linguistic structures often lead to comprehension problems. Speaking is considered one of the most challenging skills to develop, as it is affected by multiple factors. It plays a vital role and can either enhance or diminish a learner's sense of security, self-esteem, anxiety level, and willingness to take risks. Consequently, these factors may hinder the main purpose of speaking, which is effective communication. Light bown and Spada (2013), as cited in Franco (2016:16), emphasize that language learning is positively influenced when teachers create classroom environments that students enjoy attending. In such settings, teachers can significantly boost students' motivation to learn.

2.4 Causes of Anxiety Disorder:

The exact causes of anxiety disorders are still not completely understood. However, it is believed that both biological and psychological factors contribute to their development. Since anxiety disorders tend to run in families, genetic factors are likely to play a role. From a psychological perspective, anxiety is often seen as a reaction to external stressors, such as the end of an important relationship or experiencing a traumatic, life-threatening event. An anxiety disorder may develop when an individual's reaction to stress is disproportionate or when they feel unable to cope with certain circumstances. For example, some people are energized by their speaking experiences while others feel a sense of fear. These people can sweat, fear, get their heart rate up and in some cases shake. Consequently, they may not be inclined to speak when in small groups. Moreover, anxiety disorders may also be caused by medical illnesses or drug and alcohol abuse. For instance, an overactive thyroid or adrenal gland or a tumour called heochromocytoma can cause symptoms of anxiety. Some medications and chemicals can also cause anxiety: Corticosteroids, cocaine, amphetamines, ephedrine and too much caffeine. Furthermore, alcohol and certain sedatives may cause symptoms that mimic anxiety disorders to come to a person's mind during withdrawal (Remes et al., 2016).

Social and environmental factors can play a role in the development and maintenance of anxiety and could also affect a person's ability to interact well socially. These may include childhood trauma,

social withdrawal, adverse life circumstances, academic or work stress, physical or psychological health problems, and other social and cultural pressures. There are other factors such as gender that come into play. Studies have shown that women are almost twice as likely as men to suffer from anxiety (Remes et al., 2016). Other studies show that women are at higher risk for physical and emotional violence, and victimization has been linked to the occurrence of anxiety disorders (Kinderman et al., 2013).

Those who feel socially isolated or lonely usually have fewer or poorer social connections than those who have positive interpersonal relationships. Social isolation can make it difficult to initiate interactions with others, which often results in feelings of rejection and insecurity. In the same way, loneliness can trigger negative self-assessment and a sense of inadequacy, which can intensify anxious responses. Although loneliness can affect anyone, certain risk factors increase the likelihood of experiencing prolonged and severe loneliness that can negatively impact mental well-being and potentially elevate anxiety levels.

2.5 Three Components of Foreign Language Anxiety of Horwitz et al (1986):

2.5.1 Communicative Apprehension:

Communicative apprehension (CA) occurs when a learner is required to take part in any speaking situation. It describes the degree of fear or anxiety linked to actual or expected interaction with other people. Horwitz et al. (1986:127) explained that CA is a form of shyness characterized by apprehension about communicating with others. This includes difficulty speaking in groups or in public, as well as anxiety related to listening to or understanding spoken messages, which is also referred to as receiver anxiety. All of these represent different forms of CA. When learners perceive that they have little or no control over a speaking situation, anxiety may emerge due to their limited language proficiency.

2.5.2 Test Anxiety:

Test anxiety involves the fear of performing poorly in a foreign language. It refers to performance-related anxiety that results from the fear of failure. In academic settings, learners often feel pressure to achieve good results and pass their courses, which increases anxiety when they are required to complete assessments in order to meet grading requirements.

2.5.3 Fear of Negative Evaluation:

Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) relates to the anxiety learners experience concerning how others perceive their ability to use the foreign language. This includes perceptions from teachers, classmates, and native speakers, for example. Horwitz et al. (1986) described FNE as "apprehension regarding how others judge an individual, a tendency to avoid evaluative situations, and the expectation of being assessed unfavorably by others."

2.6 Causes of Language Anxiety:

Although there are various ways to classify the sources of language anxiety, most classifications agree that these causes can be either internal or external to the learner. In a comprehensive review of the literature, Zhang and Zhong (2012) grouped the sources of anxiety into four main categories that align closely with earlier research. These categories are: (a) learner-related anxiety, (b) classroom-related anxiety, (c) skill-specific anxiety, and (d) society-related anxiety. Rubio (2004) and Gkonou et al. (2019) also outlined five dimensions of self-esteem — security, identity, belonging, purpose, and competence — which can be linked to student, teacher, and contextual factors that trigger anxiety. According to Rubio, issues related to self-esteem represent the most important contributors to anxiety. Based on an in-depth review of the literature on FLA and drawing on previous classifications and research findings, anxiety-inducing factors can be broadly organized into three main groups: learner-centered factors, teacher and instructional factors, and interaction-centered factors.

2.6.1 Internally Grounded Causes:

When anxiety is linked to the learner, one of its main sources can be social anxiety. This occurs when individuals become concerned about how they are perceived and judged by others. Examples include communication apprehension, stage fright, and speaking anxiety. In other words, learners who experience anxiety in social settings are also likely to feel anxious in the classroom. In addition, anxiety may arise from the fear of being ridiculed by classmates for using incorrect grammatical structures or producing inaccurate sounds. High levels of language anxiety are also common among learners who have specific language processing difficulties in their first language. These can be deficits in phonological discrimination or sound-to-letter correspondence due to acquired or inborn language disorders. These learners might show signs of hesitation, frequent pauses, repetition or mental dyslexia.

2.6.2 Externally Grounded Causes:

The second type of language anxiety factors is about external factors that influence the perception of the learners. These include the perceptions of their teachers, teachers' behaviours in the classroom, pedagogies used, classroom policies and routines, and forms of assessment. Teacher's conduct is a crucial factor in affecting levels of anxiety. Excessive teacher talk time, the manner of error correction and the way errors are corrected can all add to their anxiety. However, lower anxiety levels are usually reported when the teacher is supportive, encouraging and ready to help (Szyszka, 2017:73).

2.7 Types of Anxiety Disorders:

Stress is a common occurrence among students at university. Academic demands, such as studying and writing assignments, as well as personal problems, such as one's relationship, family problems, being involved in sports and other campus activities, all can lead to pressures and anxiety. However, an anxiety disorder is distinct from everyday stress. Its symptoms — such as excessive worry, panic attacks, and physical discomfort — tend to be more severe and frequent, and they continue even after situational stressors decrease. An anxiety disorder often leads to significant distress and can interfere

with a person's ability to relax and experience enjoyment and overall well-being. At any given time, approximately 1 out of every 9 individuals experiences an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders that occur or worsen while in college are critical to identify and treat to prevent them from becoming lifelong and continuing into adulthood. There are several types of anxiety disorders, and each is associated with its own characteristic symptoms:

2.7.1. Panic Disorder:

Panic Disorder is marked by abrupt and intense episodes of fear and anxiety that occur frequently and unexpectedly. During a panic attack, individuals commonly experience physical symptoms such as difficulty breathing, a rapid heartbeat, dizziness, or a sensation of flushing. While panic attacks do not cause physical harm, the experience itself can be extremely distressing. As a result, individuals who have had panic attacks may develop a fear of having additional attacks and may start avoiding public settings such as parties, classrooms, and social events. College students fall within the age range at highest risk for panic disorder, which is most commonly diagnosed during young adulthood (Panic Attacks and Panic Disorder, 2021).

2.7.2. Generalized Anxiety Disorder:

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is defined by persistent and excessive worry about daily life events that is hard to control. Common symptoms include ongoing restlessness or a feeling of being on edge, trouble concentrating, muscle tension or headaches, irritability, and sleep disturbances. Individuals with GAD often experience a continuous and irrational fear that something negative is going to occur. Approximately 5% of the population is affected by GAD (Legg, 2020).

2.7.3 Phobias:

A phobia is an intense and irrational fear of a particular object or situation. Examples include spiders, air travel, enclosed spaces, blood, heights, dogs, and thunderstorms. This type of anxiety may lead individuals to unnecessarily restrict their activities to avoid encountering the feared stimulus. Phobias typically begin during childhood. Research indicates that 5-10% of the population experiences specific fears severe enough to be diagnosed as phobias. In many cases, the feared object or situation can be avoided without major disruption to daily life. However, treatment is advised when the fear results in frequent distress, or when it causes substantial interference with daily routines, activities, or relationships. Symptoms common to all phobias include panic and fear, rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath, shaking or trembling, and a strong desire to escape the situation. In addition, each specific phobia may involve unique symptoms that are related to the nature of the fear and its trigger (MedlinePlus, 2021).

(<https://medlineplus.gov/phobias.html>).

2.7.4 obsessive compulsive disorder:

In Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), obsessions refer to persistent thoughts, mental images, or urges that cause significant distress. Common examples include doubts about whether an appliance

was turned off or a door was locked, irrational fears of contamination, or intrusive thoughts about harming someone close. Compulsions, on the other hand, involve a strong urge to perform certain actions to reduce or prevent the anxiety triggered by obsessive thoughts. Examples of compulsive behaviors include excessive hand washing, counting, or the need to perform tasks in a precise way or specific sequence. While many people experience occasional obsessive thoughts or compulsive behaviors, individuals with OCD spend more than an hour each day preoccupied with these thoughts and actions. These symptoms significantly disrupt daily functioning (Baer & Jenike, 1992).

2.7.5 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder:

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can develop following exposure to a traumatic event, such as a severe accident, sexual or physical assault, or military combat. Symptoms may include avoiding reminders of the trauma or experiencing distress when exposed to them, intrusive memories of the event, emotional numbness or detachment, irritability, heightened startle response, and nightmares or other sleep problems. Not everyone who goes through a traumatic experience will develop PTSD. It is also normal to experience some of these symptoms during the weeks immediately after the event. However, a diagnosis of PTSD is made when symptoms continue for more than one month and lead to significant distress or interfere with daily functioning. Several theories have been proposed to explain the causes of PTSD. This disorder can be divided into the following symptoms:

- **Psychological Symptoms of Anxiety**

The psychological symptoms of anxiety are highly distressing and uncomfortable. Yet, these responses can be understood as the mind's attempt to protect the individual after experiencing trauma

Memory: Following a traumatic event, a person may be unable or unwilling to recall it. Although remembering can be painful, processing the event and making sense of it can support recovery and improve mental well-being.

Intrusive Thoughts or Flashbacks: These can be viewed as mental replays of the traumatic experience. In some cases, they may serve to prepare a person for potential future threats. However, in PTSD, these thoughts primarily lead to increased distress.

Avoidance and Emotional Numbing: Recalling trauma is emotionally exhausting. Avoidance and numbing can help reduce thoughts about the event. However, they also interfere with the ability to process and understand what occurred.

Hypervigilance: Being constantly "on alert" may help a person feel ready to respond quickly to another crisis. It can also provide the energy needed to cope after an accident or emergency. However, it is often draining and can prevent a person from engaging in activities they once enjoyed (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2021).

- **Physical Symptoms of Anxiety:**

Some physical symptoms occur because the body processes trauma in an incorrect way.

A. Adrenaline: This hormone is released when the body is under stress. It prepares the body for high-energy actions such as running or defending oneself. Once the threat is gone, adrenaline levels should return to normal. In PTSD, vivid memories of the traumatic event can keep adrenaline levels elevated. Persistently high adrenaline can lead to tension, irritability, and difficulty relaxing or sleeping.

B. The Hippocampus: This is a brain region responsible for processing memories. Elevated stress hormones, including adrenaline, can disrupt its normal function. As a result, memories of the trauma are not properly processed. This may cause the event to be recalled as if the danger is still present, instead of recognizing it as something that happened in the past (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2021).

2.7.6. Social Anxiety Disorder:

Social Anxiety Disorder is a persistent and extreme fear of social or performance situations that require meeting and interacting with unknown people, or being judged by others. These situations are usually steered clear of because of embarrassment or humiliation in behaving badly. If an escape is not an option, common physical reactions to anxiety might include shivering, blushing, or nausea. It's natural for people to feel nervous in social situations, but those with Social Anxiety Disorder may limit their activities so much that they avoid meeting new people or visiting new situations. Furthermore, their anxiety is likely to persist even when they are in the feared situation (Millon, Blaney, & Davis, 1999). The diagram below shows the different anxiety disorder.



Types of Anxiety

2.8 Anxiety and Language Production (Speaking and Writing):

The foreign language anxiety is considered as one of the most important affective factors which affect the learners' language production, particularly in speaking and writing. It is described by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) as a context-specific anxiety that is related to second language or foreign language learning. It has to do with communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and

test anxiety. High levels of anxiety interfere with cognitive processing, attention and memory, and thus, the effectiveness of language production. When it comes to speaking, that area is especially sensitive to anxiety because it involves speaking the language in the present and receiving instant feedback from teachers and students. A person with high anxiety is likely to engage less in classroom activity, have less accuracy and fluency, and will avoid speaking tasks, according to MacIntyre and Gardner (1991b). Anxiety also can lead to hesitancy, frequent pauses, and reliance on simple vocabulary and simple grammatical structures. Moreover, anxious learners are interested in avoiding mistakes rather than expressing meaning and thus negatively impact on their overall communicative competence.

Anxiety also has a negative effect on writing, although it typically isn't as disruptive as on speaking. Learners might experience problems organizing thoughts, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and using grammar rules appropriately when they are anxious about writing. Many anxious writers are afraid of being judged and overly self-monitored (Cheng 2004). This may result in shorter texts, slower writing speeds and less complex language. However, learners are generally less pressured when completing writing tasks as this allows for planning and revising. Several studies have confirmed the negative correlation between anxiety and productive L2 skills in EFL settings. There have been several studies which have supported the negative correlation between anxiety and productive L2 skills in EFL settings.

Various studies conducted in different educational contexts have shown that the students who experience high anxiety tend to obtain poorer results in speaking and writing activities. The results indicate anxiety management is important to improve the productive competence of learners. A supportive classroom atmosphere and willingness to take risks can help learners to be more confident and effective about expressing themselves in the target language.

2.9 Model of Analysis:

The theoretical framework used in this study for the explanation of foreign language anxiety was the Model of Foreign Language Anxiety (1986) of Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope. This model suggests that foreign language anxiety is a unique anxiety that is specifically linked to the learning of foreign language in the classroom. It is not just a general transfer of anxiety, but that of a particular emotional experience that develops with the difficulties of learning and using a second or foreign language. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), the study pointed to three major factors of foreign language anxiety:

- Communication Apprehension: Fear or anxiety students feel when made to speak or communicate in the target language. There is a strong connection to learners' speaking ability and their fear of making mistakes in front of other people.
- Test Anxiety: Worry about academic evaluation, fear of failure in language tests. It impacts on learners' performance in both productive and receptive skills.

- Fear of Negative Evaluation: about how others (such as teachers and peers) evaluate learners' language abilities. It makes students reluctant to join in class and lowers their risk-taking behavior in class. The model has been used in this study to explain the causes of Iraqi EFL learners' anxiety in the context of speaking and writing tasks. The model proposes that learning will be more stressed if learners are pushed to produce correct language, and that this will have a negative effect on their learning performance. Hence, this framework can serve as a good foundation for studying the relationship between anxiety and language production of Iraqi EFL learners.

Table (1): Application of Horwitz's FLCAS Model to the Findings of the Present Study

Component of FLCAS Model	Description	Component of FLCAS Model
1. Communication Apprehension	Apprehension that arises during verbal communication in the target language, involving the dread of speaking and the concern of making errors in front of others.	The findings indicated a significant inverse relationship between anxiety and oral performance. Iraqi EFL learners experienced heightened anxiety during speaking tasks, stemming from concerns about making mistakes and negative evaluation by peers.
2. Test Anxiety	Apprehension related to academic assessment and the possibility of failing language exams, which has an impact on learners' performance in both oral and written skills.	The participants exhibited moderate to high levels of anxiety concerning the correctness of their written sentences. This suggests that worry about being evaluated adversely affects their writing performance.
3. Fear of Negative Evaluation	Anxiety regarding the evaluation of the learner's language proficiency by instructors and peers, which results in avoidance behaviors and reduced classroom engagement.	A considerable number of Iraqi learners perceived themselves as lacking the ability to progress, which led them to withdraw from classroom engagement. This demonstrates anxiety related to negative judgment by others.

3. Methodology

This research was carried out using descriptive quantitative method. In the study, Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) is used to analyze and describe the collected data, and to present the findings of the study.

3.1 The Participants:

Fifty students selected from the English Department were the participants. They were requested to fill up a questionnaire with closed-ended items to uncover their attitudes towards language anxiety.

3.2 Instrument of the Study:

A questionnaire was used to gather the data, with the method being online. The questionnaire was closed ended with each item having three response choices: Agree, Undecided, and Disagree. It was created to assess the amount of foreign language anxiety of Iraqi EFL learners. Also, speaking and writing assessment tasks were employed to assess the oral and written performance of the learners. The speaking task was to give a short oral presentation and the writing task was to write a short paragraph. The tools produced quantitative and qualitative data for this study.

3.3.1 Results and Discussion of the Questionnaire:

The table below is a summary of the results for 50 students when asked to complete a questionnaire designed from Horwitz's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). There were two conflicting alternatives: Agree with Disagree, with a neutral alternative in the middle.

Statement 1: "I feel anxious when I have to speak in English"

This is a high level of speaking anxiety as indicated by over half of the participants (64%) agreeing with this statement. 27% disagreed, 7% said Undecided.

Statement 2: "I am worried when expressing myself in English"

About 57% of the students agreed, indicating that most students have a concern about being misinterpreted. This could be attributed to their lack of vocabulary, mispronunciation or structural errors in their sentences. Thirty-three percent disagreed, while 9% were undecided.

Statement 3: "I feel anxious when making a presentation"

The highest level of agreement (70%) was for the following item: Acting as a presenter and taking on the teacher's role is perceived as challenging for EFL learners. Competency, accuracy, and fluency are often emphasized, adding to anxiety, hesitations and fear of failure. 18% disagreed, 11% were undecided.

Statement 4: "I worry that others will laugh at my English"

The vote was split almost evenly with 46% agreeing and 48% disagreeing, while 5% were undecided.

Statement 5: "I do not want to be corrected by my teacher"

48% of the students agreed with this statement. The teacher correction is one of the factors that is identified as an anxiety factor of many EFL learners. It can decrease the learners' confidence because they lack the language skills which may result in errors and consequently, higher speaking anxiety.

Statement 6: "I feel more anxious doing oral tasks than other tasks"

Students tend to like written tests more than speaking activities is a phenomenon that is common. Oral tasks involve speaking to a teacher and peers, thus putting a strain on the learner. This could be a reason why 61% of the respondents agreed with this statement. Meanwhile, 38% felt that anxiety is not restricted to speaking situations and can apply to other situations as well.

Statement 7: "I am not worried about making mistakes while using English"

55% disagreed with this statement. This indicates that EFL learners are trying to be competent and as close as possible to native speakers. In contrast, 30% felt that it was okay to make errors when speaking a foreign language.

Statement 8: "I feel anxious while waiting for my turn to speak in English"

There was a 54% agreement with this statement. Waiting until it's your turn to talk may make you feel anxious or unsure. Errors by previous students, teacher comments and reactions by class mates can create confusion and anxiety, and have a negative effect on the learner's language production.

Statement 9: "I prefer to speak less because I feel anxious when using English"

Almost half (53%) agreed, 44% disagreed, and 3% were undecided.

Statement 10: "I feel anxious about doing more speaking tasks"

The results were close, as in the case of the above. Of those who were not undecided, 52% said that they felt anxious when they have to do more speaking tasks and 42% said that they did not feel anxious when they have to do more speaking tasks. The following table summarizes the results:

Table (1) Percentage Distribution of EFL Learners' Anxiety Levels in Speaking

No.	Statement	Agree	undecided	Disagree
1.	I feel worried when I have to speak to others in English	64%	27%	7%
2.	I'm worried about expressing myself when talking in English	57%	33%	9%
3.	I feel anxious when I have to make presentation	70%	18%	11%
4.	I feel anxious that others will laugh at my English	46%	48%	5%
5.	I don't like to be corrected by my teacher in front of my classmates	48%	42%	9%
6.	I feel anxious to do oral tasks than other tasks	61%	38%	1%
7.	I don't worry about making mistakes when 30% 60% 10% speaking English	30%	60%	10%
8.	I feel anxious when waiting my turn to speak in English	54%	30%	16%
9.	I want to speak less because I feel terribly 53% 44% anxious to use English	53%	44%	3%
10.	The more speaking tests I have, the more anxious I get	52%	30%	18%

3.3.2.2. Examining the Impact of Anxiety on Language Skills:

This research also examines the impact of anxiety on core language skills (speaking and writing). The results for each skill are included below:

3.3.2.1 Testing the Levels of Anxiety among Iraqi EFL Learners:

The results indicate that the Iraqi EFL learners' FL anxiety is moderate to high. Many students reported experiencing some form of nervousness when expressing themselves in English to others and/or teachers. The main reasons for this anxiety are: fear of making grammatical and pronunciation mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, pressure from exams. Besides, students have little or no opportunity to practice English outside the classroom which adds to their anxiety. Based on the above results, it can be concluded that Iraqi EFL learners face language anxiety which has a significant effect on their language learning process.

Table (2) Distribution of Anxiety Levels among Iraqi EFL Learners

Level of Anxiety	Frequency	Percentage
Low	8	16%
Moderate	22	44%
High	20	40%
Total	50	100%

The following table shows how many Iraqi EFL learners fall in each level according to their level of foreign language anxiety. The data indicate low level of anxiety experienced by 16% of the learners. Of the 400 students, 44% reported moderate level, 40% high level of anxiety. This means that 84% of the participants are either moderately or highly anxious. The findings suggest that foreign language anxiety is a problem of many Iraqi EFL learners. Some possible reasons for these increased levels of anxiety are fear of making mistakes, not having enough practice using English, and concerns about being assessed by peers and teachers.

3.3.2.2 Impact of Anxiety on Speaking Performance:

The results indicate that there is a strong negative correlation between anxiety and speaking performance. High anxiety learners speak less, stutter more and have simple vocabulary and sentence construction. Anxiety encourages the learner to think more about making mistakes and less about communicating meaning, thus decreasing fluency and confidence. Secondly, anxious learners may not take part in classroom activities, speeches and group discussion, thereby hindering their speaking skills and further impacting on their oral proficiency.

Table (3) Correlation between Anxiety and Speaking Performance

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (p-value)
Anxiety & Speaking	-0.58	0.001

The last table illustrates the relationship between anxiety levels and speaking performance. The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = -0.58$) shows a high negative correlation between the two variables. That is, a higher level of anxiety is correlated with poorer speaking performance. The significance level ($p = 0.001$) verifies that this is a statistically significant relationship. The findings indicate that anxiety is likely to significantly affect learners in their efforts to speak the English fluently and with confidence. Learners with high anxiety levels may be hesitant, refuse to participate in class activities, and give workmanlike speech. This is mostly because of the risk of making errors or because of negative feedback from others.

3.3.2.3 Impact of Anxiety on Writing Performance:

In addition, anxiety negatively affects learners' writing skills, but it does not happen as quickly as in speaking. Learners who suffer from writing anxiety commonly find problems in organising ideas, using appropriate vocabulary and applying grammatical rules correctly. This is often associated with slower writing speed, a tendency to self-edit and worry about being judged. So, learners are not very confident of the language and end up writing simpler texts. This implies that anxiety influences not only the quality, but also the quantity of learners' output in writing.

Table (4) Correlation between Anxiety and Writing Performance

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (p-value)
Anxiety & Writing	-0.41	0.02

The correlation between anxiety and writing ability is shown in Table (4). The correlation coefficient ($r = -0.41$) shows that there is a moderate association between anxiety and writing scores. The p value of 0.02 indicates that this is a statistically significant relationship. These results imply that anxiety has a negative influence on learners' writing ability, but its effect is less strong than it is on speaking. One possible reason is that learners have time to plan, review and edit their writing. This takes the pressure off the process, and therefore decreases anxiety in the writing process.

3.3.2.4 Comparison with Previous Studies:

The findings of this study support previous studies on foreign language anxiety. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) found in their study that anxiety was a negative factor for learners in oral performance, particularly in the context of oral tasks. Similarly, the research conducted in EFL classroom in Iran, Turkey, and several Arab countries have revealed that the higher the level of anxiety in the EFL classroom, the lower the level of fluency, accuracy, and classroom participation. This study confirms the above in the Iraqi context, and it points out that anxiety is a major factor that hinders effective language output. At the same time, this study stresses the importance of implementing anxiety-reduction strategies that are suitable for the cultural and educational environment of Iraqi EFL classrooms. This comparison is summarized below:

Table (5) Comparison between the Present Study and Previous Studies

study	context	Anxiety Level	Main Findings
Horwitz et al. (1986)	USA	High	Anxiety negatively affects speaking
Al-Khaza'leh (2019)	Jordan	Moderate-High	Anxiety reduces fluency
Present Study	Iraq	High	Speaking is more affected than writing

A comparison of the results of the current study with previous studies is shown in the table above. The findings are consistent with previous research carried out in a variety of EFL contexts such as Horwitz et al. (1986) and Al-Khaza'leh (2019), who both found high levels of anxiety and its negative impact on speaking. The results of this study confirm the above results in the context of Iraq, and it also indicates that anxiety affects speaking skills to a greater degree than writing skills. The consistency also helps to ensure the trustworthiness of the present results and indicates the universal phenomenon of foreign language anxiety. It also highlights the special role of anxiety in Iraqi EFL classrooms.

4. Conclusions

The students were found to be quite anxious about their sentences in the L2 as they felt that they were not correct. Indeed, some students thought they were not gifted enough or talented enough to. The findings reveal that EFL learners in Iraq have moderate to high FLA levels. This indicates that anxiety is a general affective factor effecting language learning in the Iraqi context. However, others may

perceive the learning of a foreign language as too hard and too complex and, as a consequence, the reality of the learning of another language may create more anxiety.

The present study sought to examine the effect of anxiety on the language production of Iraqi learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) specifically in speaking and writing. The results showed that foreign language anxiety is a problem for Iraqi EFL learners and most of the subjects had moderate to high FLA. It means that emotional issues are essential in the English language learning process in the context of Iraq.

In addition, the findings of this study support previous studies conducted in other contexts using L2 writers, which indicate that FLA is a universal issue that impairs production of L2, English. This study, on the other hand, contributes to the literature by highlighting the specific problems faced by Iraqi EFL students and emphasizing the need for context-specific pedagogies. To sum up, it is essential to reduce the anxiety levels of learners in order to improve their language production in Iraqi EFL classrooms. Teachers should create a positive and stress-free classroom, provide communicative and learner-centered activities, and provide feedback that is positive and constructive. Further research might focus on specific strategies for reducing anxiety and explore other affective variables affecting EFL learning in Iraq.

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