



The Impact of Foreign Language Anxiety on Speaking Performance among Libyan University EFL Learners: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of foreign language anxiety (FLA) on speaking performance among Libyan university EFL learners using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 22 undergraduate students from Yefren Faculty of Education and the University of Tripoli, while qualitative insights were obtained through document analysis. The findings reveal that anxiety exerts a moderate to high negative effect on key dimensions of speaking performance. A majority of participants reported that anxiety impairs fluency (59.1%, $M = 3.73$) and reduces performance despite preparation (63.7%, $M = 3.73$), indicating disruption in real-time language processing. Anxiety also significantly affected vocabulary recall (68.2%, $M = 3.77$) and caused hesitation in speaking (68.2%, $M = 3.77$), highlighting its strong cognitive impact. In addition, learners reported reduced confidence ($M = 3.64$) and increased tension during presentations (68.2%, $M = 3.68$), reflecting the affective dimension of anxiety. Physical symptoms such as trembling and voice instability were also observed (50%, $M = 3.32$), confirming its physiological influence. In contrast, anxiety showed limited effects on motivation (72.8% disagreement, $M = 2.27$) and class avoidance (71.4% disagreement, $M = 1.95$), suggesting that it primarily affects performance rather than engagement. The findings further demonstrate that anxiety has a weaker impact on grammar use ($M = 2.36$), reinforcing the distinction between linguistic competence and performance. Overall, the study highlights the multidimensional nature of foreign language anxiety and provides empirical evidence from an under-researched context, offering important pedagogical implications for reducing anxiety and enhancing speaking performance in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Foreign Language Anxiety; Speaking Performance; EFL Learners; Libyan Context; Mixed-Methods Approach.

تأثير القلق اللغوي الأجنبي على الأداء الشفهي لدى طلبة الجامعات الليبية متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ دراسة باستخدام المنهج المختلط الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء تأثير القلق اللغوي الأجنبي على الأداء الشفهي لدى طلبة الجامعات الليبية متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، وذلك باستخدام المنهج المختلط، حيث تم جمع البيانات الكمية من خلال استبانة منظمة طبقت على عينة مكونة من 22 طالباً جامعياً من كلية التربية بفران وجامعة طرابلس، بينما تم الحصول على البيانات النوعية من خلال تحليل الوثائق، وأظهرت النتائج أن القلق يؤثر سلباً بدرجة متوسطة إلى مرتفعة على عدد من أبعاد الأداء الشفهي، حيث أفاد 59.1% من المشاركين بأن القلق يعيق طاقاتهم اللغوية (المتوسط = 3.73)، كما أشار 63.7% إلى أن القلق يقلل من أدائهم رغم الاستعداد المسبق (المتوسط = 3.73)، مما يدل على تأثيره في المعالجة اللغوية الحظية، كما تبين أن القلق يؤثر بشكل ملحوظ على استرجاع المفردات (68.2%، المتوسط = 3.77) ويسبب التردد أثناء التحدث (68.2%، المتوسط = 3.77)، وهو ما يعكس أثره المعرفي. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، أظهر المشاركون انخفاضاً في مستوى الثقة (المتوسط = 3.64) وزيادة في التوتر أثناء العروض الشفهية (68.2%، المتوسط = 3.68)، مما يؤكد البعد الوجداني للقلق. كما تم تسجيل أعراض فيسيولوجية مثل ارتفاع الصوت وتسارع ضربات القلب لدى 50% من المشاركين (المتوسط = 3.32). في المقابل، أظهرت النتائج أن القلق لا يؤثر بشكل كبير على دافعية التعلم (72.8% عدم موافقة، المتوسط = 2.27) أو الحضور إلى المحاضرات (71.4% عدم موافقة، المتوسط = 1.95)، مما يشير إلى أن تأثيره يتركز على الأداء أكثر من السلوك. كما تبين أن تأثير القلق على استخدام القواعد كان محدوداً (المتوسط = 2.36)، مما يدعم التمييز بين الكفاءة اللغوية والأداء الفعلي. وتلخص الدراسة إلى أن القلق اللغوي الأجنبي ظاهرة متعددة الأبعاد تؤثر بشكل أساسي على الأداء الشفهي، وتقدم دلالات تربوية مهمة لتحسين بيئات التعلم وتقليل القلق لدى المتعلمين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القلق اللغوي الأجنبي؛ الأداء الشفهي؛ متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ السياق الليبي؛ المنهج المختلط

Introduction

Foreign language learning is a complex and multifaceted process that involves the interaction of cognitive, linguistic, and psychological factors. In recent years, increasing attention has been given to the role of affective variables in second and foreign language acquisition, particularly emotions such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence. Among these variables, foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been identified as one of the most significant factors influencing learner's performance, especially in speaking skills.

Foreign language anxiety is generally defined as a negative emotional reaction characterized by tension, apprehension, and nervousness when learners are required to use a foreign language, particularly in classroom settings (Chen & Guo, 2026). It is considered a distinct and situation-specific form of anxiety that arises from the unique demands of language learning, such as real-time processing, fear of making mistakes, and exposure to evaluation by others. This type of anxiety has been consistently associated with difficulties in language production and communication.

Recent studies have emphasized that foreign language anxiety is not a static construct but rather a dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon that can change over time and across learning situations. For instance, Sun et al. (2025) highlight that FLA fluctuates across different temporal frameworks and learning environments, confirming its complex and evolving nature. This dynamic perspective suggests that anxiety should be examined using comprehensive approaches that capture its variability, such as mixed-methods research designs.

In the context of second language acquisition, anxiety has been found to negatively affect learners' engagement, participation, and overall academic achievement. Lin et al. (2025) demonstrate that foreign language anxiety significantly reduces learner's willingness to communicate, which is a key factor in developing speaking skills. Similarly, Liang et al. (2024) argue that anxiety is one of the major obstacles in foreign language learning, as it hinders learner's success and performance across different language skills.

Speaking, in particular, is considered the most anxiety-provoking skill in language learning. This is because speaking requires learners to process language in real time, organize their thoughts, and express them clearly while being exposed to immediate evaluation. According to Özdemir and Seçkin (2025), common sources of speaking anxiety among university students include fear of making mistakes, lack of vocabulary, and the pressure of speaking in front of others. These factors can significantly reduce learners' confidence and willingness to participate in classroom activities.

In addition, anxiety has been shown to affect not only learner's performance but also their cognitive and emotional processes. Chen and Guo (2026) found that high levels of foreign language anxiety are associated with lower levels of engagement and reduced use of effective emotional regulation strategies. This indicates that anxiety can interfere with learner's ability to process language input and produce meaningful output. Furthermore, Wang et al. (2025) report that a high percentage of learners

experience moderate to high levels of anxiety, which are mainly related to fear of communication, negative evaluation, and test-related stress.

In Arab EFL contexts, similar findings have been reported. Attia and Algazo (2025) emphasize that foreign language anxiety is commonly observed in university classrooms, particularly during speaking activities, and is influenced by factors such as teaching methods, classroom environment, and teacher-student interaction. These findings highlight the importance of addressing anxiety in educational settings to improve learner's language performance.

Despite the extensive research on foreign language anxiety in different contexts, there is still a noticeable gap in studies conducted in the Libyan context, especially those employing mixed-methods approaches. Most previous research has focused on either quantitative or qualitative methods, without integrating both to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, limited attention has been given to how anxiety specifically affects speaking performance among Libyan university learners.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the impact of foreign language anxiety on speaking performance among Libyan university students using a mixed-methods approach. By examining both quantitative and qualitative data, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the causes, effects, and implications of speaking anxiety in the Libyan EFL context.

Problem Statement

Although English is widely taught as a foreign language in Libyan universities, many students still face difficulties in speaking despite years of instruction. One of the major factors contributing to this issue is foreign language anxiety, which negatively affects learner's confidence, fluency, and ability to communicate effectively.

The results of the present study indicate that the majority of students experience anxiety that interferes with their speaking performance. For example, many participants reported that anxiety reduces their fluency, prevents them from recalling vocabulary, and makes them feel tense during presentations. Additionally, anxiety was found to affect learner's confidence, leading to hesitation and difficulty in expressing ideas clearly. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that anxiety disrupts language processing and performance (Chen & Guo, 2026).

Furthermore, the findings reveal that anxiety also affects learners cognitively and physically, as students reported symptoms such as nervousness, shaking voice, and disorganized thinking. This supports the argument that anxiety not only impacts performance but also interferes with cognitive processing and communication (Sun et al., 2025).

Despite these challenges, there is limited research addressing foreign language anxiety in Libyan universities. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the impact of anxiety on speaking performance and to identify possible ways to reduce its negative effects.

Significance of the Study

This study holds considerable significance at multiple levels. From a theoretical perspective, it contributes to the existing body of knowledge on foreign language anxiety by providing empirical evidence from the Libyan EFL context, which remains relatively under-researched in comparison to other regional and international settings. By addressing this gap, the study enriches the understanding of how anxiety operates within diverse sociocultural and educational environments.

From a practical standpoint, the findings offer valuable insights for language teachers by highlighting the specific ways in which anxiety affects students' speaking performance. This understanding can support educators in identifying anxiety-related

challenges in the classroom and implementing more effective strategies to enhance learners' communicative abilities.

Pedagogically, the study emphasizes the importance of fostering supportive and low-anxiety learning environments that encourage active participation and reduce fear of negative evaluation. This aligns with previous research, which underscores the critical role of classroom climate and teacher support in mitigating foreign language anxiety (Attia & Algazo, 2025).

Finally, the study carries research significance, as it provides a foundation for future investigations into psychological factors in language learning, particularly through the use of mixed-methods approaches. Such approaches can offer deeper insights into the complex and multidimensional nature of foreign language anxiety and its impact on language acquisition.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Investigate the impact of foreign language anxiety on EFL learners' speaking performance.
2. Identify the main factors that contribute to speaking anxiety among university students.
3. Examine the effects of anxiety on learners' confidence, fluency, and academic performance.
4. Explore possible strategies to reduce the negative impact of anxiety in speaking situations.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the literature and findings, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

1. H1: Foreign language anxiety negatively affects students' speaking fluency.
2. H2: Foreign language anxiety significantly reduces learners' ability to recall vocabulary during speaking.
3. H3: There is a significant relationship between anxiety and students' confidence in speaking.
4. H4: High levels of anxiety lead to poorer academic performance.
5. H5: Foreign language anxiety causes hesitation and lack of clarity in speaking.

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Mixed-methods research allows for the collection, analysis, and integration of both numerical and textual data within a single study to generate more robust findings.

The quantitative component was used to investigate the negative impacts of foreign language anxiety on learners' speaking performance through a structured questionnaire. The qualitative

component involved document analysis to explore possible strategies for reducing anxiety. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the negative impacts of anxiety on EFL learners' speaking?
2. What are the possible solutions to overcome the negative impacts of anxiety?

3.2 Research Setting

The study was conducted in Libya at two institutions:

- Yefren Faculty of Education (Al Jabal Al Gharbi)
- Faculty of Languages, University of Tripoli (Translation Department)

Yefren Faculty represented the primary research site, while additional participants from the University of Tripoli were included via online participation.

Data collection took place on April 10th, 2022. English is taught as a foreign language in both institutions, and students study similar courses, including speaking and listening, phonetics, grammar, reading comprehension, and linguistics.

6. H3: There is a significant relationship between anxiety and students' confidence in speaking.
7. H4: High levels of anxiety lead to poorer academic performance.
8. H5: Foreign language anxiety causes hesitation and lack of clarity in speaking.

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For document analysis, credibility was ensured by selecting reliable academic sources and peer-reviewed studies.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using two methods:

1. Online questionnaire:

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain confidential. Participation was voluntary.

2. Document analysis:

Relevant academic documents and studies were reviewed to identify possible solutions for reducing anxiety.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques:

- **Quantitative data:**

Analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) through Google Forms.

- **Qualitative data:**

Analyzed using a thematic approach, where key themes related to anxiety reduction strategies were identified from the literature.

This combination allowed for a comprehensive interpretation of the research findings.

Results

Demographic Data

Table (1) presents the demographic characteristics of the participants involved in this study. In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were female students (72.7%, n = 16), while male participants represented a smaller proportion (28.6%, n = 6).

Regarding age distribution, most participants were between 18 and 20 years old (63.6%, n = 14), followed by those aged 21 to 23 (31.8%, n = 7). Only one participant (4.5%)

was aged 26, indicating that the sample mainly consisted of young undergraduate students.

In terms of educational level, first-year students constituted the largest group (36.3%, n = 8), followed by second-year students (27.2%, n = 6). Third-year students represented 13.6% (n = 3), while only one participant (4.5%) was from the fourth year. Additionally, students from advanced levels, including the 7th and 8th semesters, each accounted for 9.0% (n = 2), reflecting a relatively diverse academic representation.

With respect to institutional affiliation, the majority of participants were from Yefren Faculty of Education (81.8%, n = 18), whereas a smaller proportion were from the University of Tripoli (18.2%, n = 4).

Table 1. Demographic data

Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	6	28.6
	Female	16	72.7
Age	18–20	14	63.6
	21–23	7	31.8
	26	1	4.5
Level of Education	1st Year	8	36.3
	2nd Year	6	27.2
	3rd Year	3	13.6
	4th Year	1	4.5
	7th Semester	2	9.0
	8th Semester	2	9.0
Faculty	Yefren Faculty	18	81.8
	University of Tripoli	4	18.2

Questionnaire Results on Foreign Language Anxiety and Speaking Performance

The results presented in Table 2 provide a comprehensive overview of learners’ perceptions regarding the impact of foreign language anxiety on speaking performance. Overall, the findings reveal a consistent pattern indicating that anxiety exerts a

moderate to high negative influence on performance-related aspects of speaking, while its impact on motivation and behavioral avoidance appears comparatively limited.

A closer examination of the mean scores shows that the highest levels of agreement were observed in items related to academic performance, hesitation, and vocabulary recall. Specifically, Item 11 ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.08$) recorded the highest mean, indicating that the majority of participants perceive anxiety as a significant contributor to poor academic performance, with 63.7% selecting “agree” or “strongly agree.” Similarly, Item 2 ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.02$) and Item 12 ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.18$) highlight the strong impact of anxiety on vocabulary retrieval and hesitation during speaking, respectively, with approximately 68.2% of participants expressing agreement in both cases.

In terms of speaking performance under pressure, Item 10 ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.16$) indicates that anxiety significantly reduces learners’ performance despite adequate preparation, with 63.7% agreement. Likewise, Item 1 ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.05$) confirms that fluency is adversely affected by anxiety, as nearly 59.1% of participants reported agreement. These findings suggest that anxiety primarily disrupts real-time language processing and performance execution, rather than underlying knowledge.

Furthermore, anxiety appears to have a pronounced effect on affective and psychological dimensions of speaking. Item 4 ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.17$) demonstrates that anxiety reduces learners’ confidence in public speaking, while Item 5 ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.18$) indicates heightened tension during presentations, with 68.2% agreement. In addition, Item 14 ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.23$) reveals that learners perceive anxiety as negatively affecting their linguistic competence, reflecting a strong association between anxiety and self-perception.

The influence of anxiety on cognitive organization and clarity is also evident. Item 15 ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.16$) indicates that anxiety disrupts learners’ thinking and organization, while Item 13 ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.02$) shows that it affects speech clarity and comprehensibility. Although these items display slightly lower mean values, they still fall within the moderate-to-high range, confirming the cognitive burden imposed by anxiety.

Additionally, Item 9 ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.16$) highlights the presence of physical symptoms, such as trembling and voice instability, with 50% of participants reporting symptoms, such as trembling and voice instability, with 50% of participants reporting agreement. This finding suggests that anxiety manifests not only cognitively but also physiologically, further interfering with speaking performance.

In contrast, the lowest mean scores were observed in items related to behavioral avoidance and motivation. Item 6 ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 1.07$) indicates that most participants do not avoid attending classes due to anxiety, with 71.4% expressing disagreement. Similarly, Item 8 ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.19$) shows that anxiety does not substantially reduce learners’ motivation to learn English, as 72.8% of participants disagreed with this statement. These findings suggest that while anxiety affects performance, it does not necessarily lead to disengagement or withdrawal.

Moreover, Item 3 ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.01$) demonstrates that anxiety has a relatively limited impact on grammar usage, with 54.5% of participants expressing disagreement. This indicates that anxiety may have a weaker influence on knowledge-based linguistic competence compared to performance-based skills.

Finally, Item 7 ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.12$) shows a predominantly neutral response pattern regarding the transfer of anxiety to other skills such as reading and listening, suggesting that anxiety is more strongly associated with speaking-specific contexts.

Overall, the findings clearly demonstrate that foreign language anxiety predominantly affects performance, confidence, and cognitive processing during speaking, rather than learners' motivation or attendance behavior. The relatively moderate standard deviation values across items ($SD \approx 1.0-1.2$) indicate a reasonable level of consistency in participants' responses, despite some individual variability.

Table 2. Detailed Distribution and Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire Items

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Mean	SD	Rank
1	Anxiety negatively affects my speaking fluency	4.5	9.1	27.3	27.3	31.8	3.73	1.05	9
2	Anxiety prevents	0.0	18.2	13.6	40.9	27.3	3.77	1.02	8
3	Anxiety limits grammar use	22.7	31.8	31.8	13.6	0.0	2.36	1.01	15
4	Anxiety reduces confidence in public speaking	4.5	22.7	13.6	22.7	36.4	3.64	1.17	10
5	Anxiety causes tension during presentations	9.1	13.6	9.1	36.4	31.8	3.68	1.18	7

6	Anxiety causes class avoidance	47.6	23.8	14.3	14.3	0.0	1.95	1.07	16
7	Anxiety affects listening	18.2	18.2	45.5	4.5	13.6	2.77	1.12	13
8	Anxiety reduces learn English	36.4	36.4	0.0	18.2	9.1	2.27	1.19	14
9	Anxiety causes symptoms	13.6	9.1	27.3	31.8	18.2	3.32	1.16	12
10	Anxiety reduces performance despite preparation	9.1	9.1	27.3	27.3	36.4	3.73	1.16	9
11	Anxiety leads to poor performance	4.5	9.1	22.7	27.3	36.4	3.82	1.08	6
12	Anxiety causes hesitation in academic answering	9.1	9.1	13.6	31.8	36.4	3.77	1.18	8
No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Mean	SD	Rank
13	Anxiety affects clarity of speech	0.0	13.6	36.4	27.3	22.7	3.32	1.02	12
14	Anxiety affects competence	4.8	19.0	3.4	28.6	33.3	3.67	1.23	8
15	Anxiety disrupts thinking and organization	9.1	13.6	18.2	31.8	27.3	3.55	1.16	11

Discussion

The present study set out to examine the impact of foreign language anxiety (FLA) on speaking performance among Libyan EFL university learners. The findings reveal a consistent and theoretically meaningful pattern, indicating that anxiety exerts a substantial

negative influence on performance-related aspects of speaking, while its effects on motivation and behavioral engagement appear more limited. These results provide strong empirical support for the proposed hypotheses and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of foreign language anxiety in under-researched contexts.

Anxiety and Speaking Fluency

The findings strongly support H1, which proposed that foreign language anxiety negatively affects speaking fluency. A considerable proportion of participants (59.1%) reported that anxiety hampers their fluency ($M = 3.73$), indicating that learners struggle to produce language smoothly under pressure.

This result aligns closely with Teimouri *et al.* (2018), who identified a significant negative relationship ($r = -0.36$) between anxiety and language achievement. Similarly, Sun (2023) emphasized that anxiety disrupts real-time cognitive processing, which is essential for fluent speech production. The convergence of these findings suggests that fluency is particularly vulnerable to anxiety due to its reliance on rapid linguistic processing and spontaneous production.

Anxiety and Vocabulary Recall

The results also provide strong support for H2, as 68.2% of participants agreed that anxiety prevents them from recalling vocabulary during speaking ($M = 3.77$). This indicates that anxiety significantly interferes with lexical access, a critical component of oral communication.

This finding is consistent with Bajri and Elmahdi (2024), who reported that anxiety negatively affects memory and language processing. Likewise, Khodadady and Khajavy (2013) demonstrated that anxiety significantly predicts language achievement through its interaction with cognitive variables. These results collectively confirm that anxiety imposes a cognitive burden, limiting learners' ability to retrieve vocabulary efficiently during communication.

Anxiety and Confidence

The findings further support H3, which proposed a relationship between anxiety and learners' confidence. Participants reported that anxiety reduces their confidence in public speaking ($M = 3.64$) and increases tension during presentations ($M = 3.68$).

These results are in line with Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016), who found that anxiety is negatively associated with language performance, while positive emotions enhance learning outcomes. Similarly, Alrabai (2014) identified communication apprehension as a major source of anxiety, leading to reduced participation and self-confidence. Yan (2024) further emphasized that fear of negative evaluation is a central factor underlying speaking anxiety.

Together, these findings indicate that anxiety not only affects performance but also reshapes learner's self-perception and psychological readiness, which are crucial for successful communication.

Anxiety and Academic Performance

The results strongly confirm H4, as Item 11 recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.82$), with 63.7% of participants agreeing that anxiety leads to poor academic performance.

This finding supports Khodadady and Khajavy (2013), who found that anxiety significantly predicts academic achievement, and aligns with Teimouri *et al.* (2018), who demonstrated that anxiety consistently reduces language performance across contexts. However, it partially contrasts with Luo and Xiong (2025), who found no direct effect of anxiety on academic performance, suggesting that the relationship may be mediated by factors such as motivation and competence.

This discrepancy highlights the context-dependent nature of anxiety, suggesting that in the Libyan EFL context, anxiety may have a more direct and observable impact on academic outcomes.

Anxiety, Hesitation, and Clarity

The findings also provide strong support for H5, as participants reported high levels of hesitation ($M = 3.77$) and difficulties in speech clarity ($M = 3.32$). These results indicate that anxiety affects both the fluency and intelligibility of speech.

This is consistent with Sun (2023), who argued that anxiety disrupts cognitive organization during communication. Similarly, Bajri and Elmahdi (2024) found that anxiety affects language processing and performance accuracy. These findings suggest that anxiety interferes with the organization and delivery of spoken language, leading to fragmented and less coherent output.

Cognitive, Affective, and Physiological Dimensions of Anxiety

Beyond the hypotheses, the findings reveal that anxiety operates across multiple dimensions. In addition to cognitive effects, participants reported physical symptoms such as trembling and voice instability ($M = 3.32$), confirming that anxiety has a physiological component.

This multidimensional nature of anxiety supports the findings of Đorić and Kuruzović (2023), who reported that foreign language anxiety affects approximately 40–60% of learners and manifests cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally. The present study extends this evidence by demonstrating how these dimensions interact to influence speaking performance.

Performance vs Competence

One of the most significant contributions of this study is the distinction between performance-based and competence-based effects of anxiety. While anxiety strongly affected fluency, confidence, and speaking performance, it had a relatively limited impact on grammar use ($M = 2.36$), with the majority of participants expressing disagreement.

This finding suggests that anxiety primarily disrupts performance mechanisms rather than linguistic knowledge, supporting Sun (2023) and Teimouri *et al.* (2018), who emphasized that anxiety affects processing rather than competence. This distinction is critical, as it implies that learners may possess adequate knowledge but fail to demonstrate it under anxiety.

Anxiety, Motivation, and Behavioral Engagement

Interestingly, the findings indicate that anxiety does not necessarily lead to disengagement. Most participants rejected the idea that anxiety causes class avoidance ($M = 1.95$) or reduces motivation ($M = 2.27$).

These findings challenge previous research (Bajri & Elmahdi, 2024; Đorić & Kuruzović, 2023), which linked anxiety to avoidance behavior. Instead, it supports Luo and Xiong (2025), who argued that anxiety may not always negatively affect motivation and may have complex or indirect effects.

This suggests that learners may remain motivated despite experiencing anxiety, highlighting a resilience factor that deserves further investigation.

Finally, this study makes several important contributions to the literature:

It provides empirical evidence from the Libyan EFL context, which remains underrepresented in foreign language anxiety research.

1. It confirms that anxiety primarily affects performance rather than competence, offering a nuanced interpretation of its role.
2. It highlights the multidimensional nature of anxiety, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and physiological components.
3. It demonstrates that anxiety does not necessarily lead to disengagement, challenging traditional assumptions.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the impact of foreign language anxiety (FLA) on speaking

performance among Libyan EFL university learners using a mixed-methods approach. The findings revealed that anxiety exerts a significant negative effect on key dimensions of speaking performance, particularly fluency, vocabulary retrieval, confidence, and academic achievement.

The results confirmed that foreign language anxiety primarily affects performance-related processes rather than linguistic competence itself. While learners demonstrated sufficient knowledge of grammar and language structures, anxiety interfered with their ability to retrieve, organize, and express this knowledge effectively during real-time communication. This distinction between competence and performance represents a critical contribution to the understanding of foreign language anxiety.

Furthermore, the study demonstrated that anxiety is a multidimensional construct, encompassing cognitive, affective, and physiological components. Learners not only experienced difficulties in thinking and organizing speech but also reported emotional tension and physical symptoms such as trembling and voice instability. These findings reinforce the view that anxiety is not merely a psychological state, but a complex phenomenon that directly shapes language performance.

Interestingly, the findings also revealed that anxiety does not necessarily lead to disengagement or lack of motivation. Despite experiencing high levels of anxiety, learners remained committed to attending classes and learning English. This suggests that anxiety may coexist with motivation, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of its role in language learning.

Overall, the study confirms that foreign language anxiety is a critical barrier to effective speaking performance, particularly in contexts where learners are required to communicate spontaneously and under evaluative pressure.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study carry several important implications for language teaching and learning, particularly in EFL contexts similar to Libya.

First, the strong impact of anxiety on fluency and vocabulary retrieval suggests that teachers should prioritize fluency-oriented practices rather than focusing exclusively on accuracy. Activities such as role-plays, group discussions, and communicative tasks can help reduce performance pressure and improve spontaneous language use.

Second, given that anxiety significantly affects learners' confidence, it is essential to create a supportive and low-anxiety classroom environment. Teachers should avoid overly critical feedback and instead adopt encouraging and constructive approaches that build learners' self-confidence. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the importance of emotional support in reducing anxiety.

Third, the findings indicate that anxiety disrupts cognitive processing and organization. Therefore, teachers should provide learners with planning time before speaking tasks, as well as strategies for organizing ideas. Structured speaking frameworks and guided practice can help learners manage cognitive load more effectively.

Fourth, the presence of physical symptoms suggests that teachers should be aware of the physiological effects of anxiety. Incorporating relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, and gradual exposure to speaking tasks may help learners manage these symptoms.

Finally, since anxiety does not necessarily reduce motivation, educators should capitalize on learners' existing motivation by designing engaging and meaningful tasks that encourage participation without increasing stress. This balance is essential for maintaining both motivation and performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. For Teachers

- Implement student-centered and communicative teaching methods that reduce anxiety.
 - Provide positive feedback and avoid excessive correction during speaking activities.
 - Use scaffolded speaking tasks that gradually increase in difficulty.
 - Allow preparation time before speaking to reduce cognitive pressure.
2. For Curriculum Designers
- Integrate anxiety-reduction strategies into EFL curricula.
 - Design assessment methods that focus on communication rather than accuracy alone.
 - Include activities that promote confidence-building and interaction.
3. For Students
- Develop self-regulation strategies, such as practicing speaking in low-pressure environments.
 - Engage in peer interaction and group work to build confidence.
 - Use techniques such as rehearsal and mental preparation to reduce anxiety.
4. For Future Research
- Conduct studies with larger and more diverse samples to enhance generalizability.
 - Explore the relationship between anxiety and other psychological variables such as motivation and self-efficacy.
 - Investigate longitudinal changes in anxiety over time.
 - Examine the effectiveness of specific intervention strategies for reducing anxiety in EFL contexts.

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