



**A Study of the Factors Contributing to EFL Speaking Anxiety at Zawiya University**  
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### Abstract

The major aim of this study is to investigate the main causes of speaking anxiety among first semester students at Zawiya University. A Sample of 55 students who were chosen randomly from the whole number of the first semester students at the English department were the participants. Data was collected by using a questionnaire. This questionnaire aims to answer the main research question: what are the main causes of speaking anxiety among first semester students at Zawiya University. The collected data was analyzed by using SPSS program and discussed in relation to the research question of this study. The findings of this study show that the main causes of speaking anxiety are communication apprehension (CA), the fear of negative evaluation (FNE) and low self-confidence (LSC). The results also show that anxiety is one of the factors which are responsible of students under achievement and low performance.

### عنوان البحث

دراسة في العوامل المؤدية الي القلق عند التحدث باللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية بجامعة الزاوية

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### ملخص البحث

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى التحقق من العوامل الرئيسية المسببة للقلق عند استعمال مهارة الكلام بين طلاب الفصل الاول بجامعة الزاوية. استهدفت هذه الدراسة عدد 55 طالب وطالبة تم اختيارهم عشوائيا من طلبة الفصل الاول بقسم اللغة الانجليزية. تم جمع البيانات باستخدام طريقة الاستبيان، حيث ان هذا الاستبيان يهدف للإجابة على سؤال البحث: ما هي العوامل المسببة في القلق عند طلاب الفصل الاول بقسم اللغة الانجليزية عند استعمالهم لمهارة الكلام؟ تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام طريقة SPSS وأظهرت النتائج ان القلق صادر عن الخوف من التقييم السلبي، ضعف الثقة بالنفس والتأثر عند التواصل. ايضا الدراسة توضح ان القلق مسؤول عن ضعف الانجاز والتطبيق لدي هؤلاء الطلاب.

### Introduction

There is a general observation among teachers that Libyan students, particularly at the university level, faced a lot of problems including feelings of tension, concern and worries

about classroom tasks, such as speech production, listening comprehension, reading texts, composing writing, and so on. Also suffer from anxiety while learning English, their suffering is even worse when using it orally. Speaking anxiety is found to have a detrimental effect on students' confidence, self-esteem and level of participation. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) pointed out that speaking in the target language seems to be the most threatening aspect of foreign language learning.

Anxiety in itself is not a bad thing since a certain amount of anxiety can motivate a student to learn and acquire a language. However, language teachers have noticed that there is a high level of anxiety which negatively affects many language students' behavior and their educational outcomes, too. It may cause fear or unwillingness to communicate with others in that language. It also plays an important role in EFL learning because it can be positive or negative according to how greatly it is felt by the students. It is anxiety of this extreme that no doubt hinders students' performance.

Although this phenomenon has given attention all over the world, only a few studies were done in the Arab World. No significant study has appeared in Libya especially in Zawiyah university and this research paper tries to shed some light on speaking anxiety on English language first semester students' performance.

## **Literature Review**

### **Anxiety**

Anxiety was known as the state of " apprehension, vague fear which is only indirectly linked with an object" Scovel (1978:134). May (1977:125) saw it as " an emotional response to threat to some value that the individual holds essential to his existence as a personality". In a similar vein, Spielberger (1983:1) defines it as the " subjective of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system".

### **Speaking Anxiety**

Horwitz, and Cope (1986:130) define speaking anxiety as "a distinct set of beliefs, perceptions, and feelings in response to foreign language learning in the classroom". In other words, it is a feeling of uneasiness, worry and nervousness experienced by non-native speakers when learning or using a foreign language.

Toubot (2018) revealed that the students' anxiety rises when classroom activities are less engaging, lacking in cooperation, unsuitable teacher teaching style, demanding classroom atmosphere, time factors, and unsuitable teaching contents (Zia & Norrihan, 2015). Exploiting qualitative interviews, Riasati (2011) showed that the grounds for language anxiety as observed by three Iranian EFL adult learners included absence of preparation and implementation of the types of activities. Additionally, Sharif and Ferdous (2012) inspected bases of language anxiety among 60EFL university students in Bangladesh, and the study specified that the most worrying aspect was connected to teachers. Equally, Subasi (2010) examined the causes of English anxiety among 55 Turkish university learners in oral practice. The study revealed that teachers' manners and teaching procedures were key bases of students' anxiety in English oral practice.

### **Sources of Speaking Anxiety**

Scovel (1978) mention that anxiety is a really complicated experience which needs to be perceived as a gathering of feelings, personality traits and state of emotions which lead to specific variables that create anxiety. Learners could be more anxious when they are trying to make a formal speech even if he or she have self confidence in his or her own capabilities since he or she has been through experience handling a similar situation in an informal speech. Anxiety always depends on how the learner perceives a situation or task as well as how important it is to the learner. Therefore, in order to know how anxiety could affect a learners' performance, it is vital to concentrate on the sources of anxiety which will be discussed below.

#### **A. Communication apprehension:**

It is the anxiety that the student experiences while communicating in his/her foreign language. It takes place when the learners have limited knowledge of foreign language and problems in conveying and understanding a message in a foreign language.

#### **B. Fear of negative evaluation:**

Students' fears are brought on by the environment of the foreign language classroom, where they are being evaluated. The evaluation from the teacher is crucial to a foreign language student (Horwitz et al., 1986). However, criticisms from peers are also a significant cause of anxiety. Young (1991) found that anxious learners thought their skills in language were weaker than their peers' and they were looking down at them. They are afraid to speak out loud in front of the class. Young (1990) in his survey study indicated that students learning Spanish

said that they would speak out loud and answer more questions if they were not afraid to give the wrong answer.

### **C. Anxious foreign language learners:**

Anxious foreign language learners have trouble distinguishing between the target language's sounds and structure: it is reported by Horwitz et al. (1986), that many students, who experience foreign language learning anxiety, claim to understand nothing of the teacher's output. Disability of comprehend the target language is a main cause of anxiety.

### **D. The teacher:**

Some teachers think that intimidating their students will cause them to become motivated to learn and speak the foreign language. Young (1991:428) states that: "Teachers who believe their role is to correct students constantly when they make any error, who feel that they cannot have students working in pairs because the class may get out of control, who believe that the teacher should be doing most of the talking and teaching, and who think their role is more like a drill sergeant than a facilitator's may be contributing to learner language anxiety".

These four aspects are always involved in a language classroom. They do not necessarily occur all at the same time, although it is possible. Their occurrence depends on the lessons or objectives of each class. The first aspect takes place in speaking classes during student to student or teacher to student interaction. Test anxiety stems from a fear of having a test and can be triggered through either of the two mentioned conversations. The last aspect takes place when a student knows that he/she is going to be evaluated so he/she might not feel confident and then a negative feeling may occur.

### **Studies Conducted about the Main Causes of Speaking Anxiety**

speaking anxiety as a phenomenon has received considerable attention since 1950s. It is considered to be the most common educational problem which effects on EFL students' performance.

Toubot, Seng and Abdullah (2018) presented a study which aims to investigating EFL the fourth-year students' level of speaking anxiety. Also, the study investigates the main factors that contribute to increasing speaking anxiety among EFL learners. The Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS) has been adapted to collect quantitative data and

specifically measure speaking anxiety. The sample of the study was 300 fourth-year English department students at three universities in Libya. The findings of this study revealed that students experienced a moderate to high level of EFL speaking anxiety. Additionally, the findings of the study revealed that the low self-confidence factors.

Sadighi and Dastpak 2017 presented a study which aim to investigate the sources of foreign language speaking anxiety of Iranian EFL learners. 154 EFL students participated in the study. They were required to fill out a foreign language anxiety questionnaire which was developed based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). The results of the study indicated that fear of making mistakes”, “fear of negative evaluation”, and “lack of vocabulary knowledge” were the main factors which caused anxiety among students.

### **Methodology**

In this study, two instruments are used: a pilot study and students' questionnaire. The pilot study is conducted first to confirm the existent of the problem then the students' questionnaire is used. The results of the students' questionnaire were put in tables. Then the results are analyzed and discussed, and the conclusion and recommendations are drawn accordingly.

### **Research Questions**

This research tries to answer the following question:

What are the main sources of speaking anxiety among first year students at English department?

### **Participants of the Study**

The participants of this study were students from the first semester in English department at zawiya university. A sample of 55 students participated in this study. The purpose of this study was clearly explained to participants.

### **Instrument of Gathering Data**

In this research, a questionnaire of 12 items is applied. The general purpose of the items is to investigate the main causes of speaking anxiety among first semester students at English department. It is adopted from Ozturk (2014). In order to make sure that students understand

all the items appeared in the scale, it was translated orally into Arabic, to test validity, the adapted questionnaire was presented to two experts in the field of education to find out whether the questionnaire was adequate to its objectives or not. According to experts' suggestions the questionnaire was written in its final form. To assure the reliability of the questionnaire, the researcher used test-re-test method. It was administered to 10 participants from the first semester in English department. These participants were selected randomly.

**Data analysis**

The results obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed and presented in the tables.

**Part one: Communication Apprehension**

Item	Calculated Mean	Standard deviation	Calculated	percentage
1- I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English.	1.74	0.723	87	58%
2-I am always feel that the other students speak English better than I do	2.50	0.677	125	83.33%
3- I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	2.12	0.798	106	70.6%
4-. I get frightened when I don't understand what the teacher says in English.	2.48	0.706	124	82.6%

The results obtained from table one show that 58 % of students say that they feel overwhelmed by the number of rules they have to learn to speak. 70% of students say that they get upset when they don't understand what the teacher is correcting, whereas 83% of students say that they feel the other students speak English better than they do. And 82% of students say that they get frightened because they don't understand what the teacher is saying in English.

**Part two: Fear of Negative Evaluation**

Items	Calculated Mean	Standard deviation	calculated	percentage
5- I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	1.50	0.580	75	50%
6- I get embarrassed to volunteer answers in English classes.	1.40	0.571	70	46.6%
7- I am afraid of making mistakes in English classes.	2.28	0.701	114	76%
8- I feel afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.	2.32	0.712	116	77.3%

The results obtained from table two show that 50% of students are afraid that their English teacher is ready to correct every mistake they make. 46% say that they get embarrassed to volunteer answers in English classes, whereas, 76% of students say that they are afraid of making mistakes in English classes. And 77% of them are afraid to be laughed at by the other students when they speak in English.

**Part three: Low Self-Confidence**

Items	Calculated Mean	Standard deviation	calculated	percentage
9-I feel confident when I speak in English class.	1.54	0.734	77	51.3%
10 - I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students	2.36	0.721	118	78.6%
11- I don't feel confident when I speak English in class.	2.42	0.672	121	80.6 %
12-. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English classes.	2.30	0.762	115	76.6%

The results obtained from table three show that% 51of students feel confident when they speak in English class. 80% of students say that they don't feel confident when they speak English in class, whereas, 78% of students say that they feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of the other students. And 76% of students say that they start to panic when they have to speak without preparation in English classes.

### **Discussion of the Results**

The results obtained by table (1) communication apprehension show the majority of the students believe that they feel that the other students speak English better than they do. These results are in agreement with the result obtained by Scovel (1978). He found that anxious learners thought their skills in language were weaker than their peers' and they were looking down at them. They are afraid to speak out loud in front of the class.

The results obtained by table (2) Fear of Negative Evaluation show the majority of students said that they feel afraid of making mistakes in English classes. These results are in agreement with the results obtained by Young (1990). He indicated that students learning Spanish said that they would speak out loud and answer more questions if they were not afraid to give the wrong answer.

The results obtained by table (3) Self Confidence show the majority of the students believe that they don't feel confident when they speak English in class without preparation. These results are in agreement with the results obtained by Scovel (1978). He found that there was a big percent of students who feel panic when they have to speak without preparation in English classes because they think that their trust in themselves decreases.

To sum up, it could say that fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, and lack of vocabulary knowledge were the main factors which caused speaking anxiety among English first year students.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

#### **Conclusion**

The data of this study reveal that Foreign language speaking anxiety is a vital issue and has a remarkable impact on the development of students' speaking skill. It is associated with feelings of discomfort that causes the students to avoid speaking in the target language. There are various sources of foreign language speaking anxiety. These sources are "communication

apprehension (CA)", "the fear of negative evaluation (FNE)", plus "low self-confidence (LSC)". The results also show that anxiety is one of the factors which are responsible of students under achievement and low performance.

To sum up, speaking anxiety has many sources. These sources are: students don't understand what the teacher is saying or demands exactly in English. They don't feel confident when they speak English in class. They feel that the other students are going to be able to speak better than them. Also they're afraid of the criticism that will follow after they speak. They're afraid of making mistakes because they think that their English teachers are going to be correcting them in front of the whole class which is embarrassing for most of them.

### **Recommendations**

In order to eliminate the anxiety that is presents on speaking classes different policies should be used, first, teachers should be more encouraging and should promote conversation inside as well as outside the classrooms. Second, Teachers should also provide a friendly, warm, relaxed and a better environment so that the students won't be afraid to speak. Finally, students must be encouraged to speak in public places and teachers should utilize learner-centered strategies and establish rapport with their students through problem-solving activities, role-play, and group discussion.

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