

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

Received	2026/03/30	تم استلام الورقة العلمية في
Accepted	2026/04/23	تم قبول الورقة العلمية في
Published	2026/04/24	تم نشر الورقة العلمية في

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors and Reducing Strategies

Dr. Hassuna B. Krayem¹, Mrs. Kouthar Almutier²

The Libyan Academy for Postgraduate Studies, Western Coast Branch -
Libya

1- h.krayem@zu.edu.ly, 2- koutharalmuteer@gmail.com

Abstract

Speaking anxiety is a well-known issue faced by EFL learners and can passively affect students' oral performance. This study aimed to investigate the factors that may increase or decrease speaking anxiety among EFL learners and to identify the strategies they use to reduce this anxiety. A mixed methods design has been employed by using close-ended items and two open-ended questions administered to 80 undergraduate EFL students. The findings reveal that fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, difficulty in retrieving the proper words, and when the teachers highly focus on accuracy rather than fluency are the major sources of apprehension and nervousness among the participants while speaking English inside the classroom. In addition, the main strategies used by the participants are: practicing English outside the classroom, using fillers, paraphrasing, and teachers' encouragement. The study highlights the essential of creating supportive classroom and using effective strategies to help students to manage their anxiety, enhance confidence, and improve oral communication.

Keywords: EFL learners, FL anxiety, anxiety factors, anxiety strategies.

التوتر اثناء التحدث لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية ابي عيسى: العوامل والاستراتيجيات

د. حسونه الشير كريم¹ ، كوثر محمد المتمر²

قسم اللغة الانجليزية بالأكاديمية الليبية للدراسات العليا - فرع الساحل الغربي - ليبيا

¹ عضو هيئة تدريس، البريد الالكتروني h.krayem@zu.edu.ly

² طالبة دراسات عليا، البريد الالكتروني: koutharalmuteer@gmail.com

الملخص

يُعد التوتر اثناء التحدث بلغة أجنبية مشكلة معروفة يواجهها متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، وقد يؤثر بشكل سلبي على أداء الطلاب الشفهي. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف العوامل التي قد تزيد أو تقلل من التوتر اثناء التحدث لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، وكذلك تحديد الاستراتيجيات التي يستخدمونها للتقليل من هذا التوتر. تم اعتماد تصميم بحثي قائم على المنهج المختلط باستخدام أسئلة مغلقة وسؤالين مفتوحين، طبقت هذه الدراسة على 80 طالبًا جامعيًا من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. كشفت النتائج على عوامل مثل الخوف من ارتكاب الأخطاء، ومحدودية المفردات، وصعوبة استرجاع الكلمات المناسبة، بالإضافة إلى تركيز المعلمين بشكل كبير على الدقة بدلاً من الطلاقة، تُعد من أبرز مصادر التوتر والقلق لدى المشاركين اثناء التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية. كما أظهرت النتائج أن أهم الاستراتيجيات التي يستخدمها المشاركون للتقليل من هذا التوتر تشمل: ممارسة اللغة الإنجليزية خارج الفصل الدراسي، واستخدام كلمات الحشو، وإعادة الصياغة، وتشجيع المعلمين. تؤكد الدراسة على أهمية توفير بيئة داخل الفصل الدراسي تكون داعمة لاستخدام اللغة المستهدفة، واستخدام استراتيجيات فعالة لمساعدة الطلاب على إدارة التوتر لديهم، وتعزيز تقنهم بأنفسهم، وتحسين مهارات التواصل الشفهي لديهم.

الكلمات الدالة: متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، قلق اللغة الأجنبية، عوامل القلق، استراتيجيات القلق.

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

Introduction

Speaking skill is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills for language learners. In Libya, English is still considered a foreign language (FL) in which it is not used in daily life, it is solely used by students in an academic setting. Unfortunately, in the teaching process most of the teachers are focusing on reading and writing skills while speaking skill is given less priority. As a result, many EFL students struggle to improve this skill to reach the point of successful communication. This could be attributed to the strong feelings of uneasiness and nervousness related to speaking FL language. This psychological state known as FL anxiety, and has drawn a lot of attention from both linguists and psychologists. (Horwitz et al , 1986; Gardner et al, 1992; Al—Abed Al-haq, 2012; Al-Sarari, 2014).

According to Horwitz et al (1986:127) FL anxiety within academic and social contexts have been divided into three categories “communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation”. It has been recognized as a crucial factor for Lowering FL students’ motivation (Gardner, et al.,1992; Jain & Sidhu, 2013). On the other hand, Ellis, (1999) stated that sometimes small amount of anxiety is necessary to motive students to exert more effort to fulfil the learning objectives- ‘facilitative’ anxiety.

Previous studies have shown that speaking anxiety may be affected by various factors. These include, fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, large class size, and strict error correction (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, Dolly Jesusita, 1991). These factors may cause learners to avoid participation, hesitate, or feel uncomfortable when speaking English. To address this problem, wide range of strategies have been suggested by many scholars to decrease speaking anxiety, including peer collaboration, increasing speaking practice, and support classroom environment. He, Deyuan, 2017).

Despite the large number of research about speaking anxiety, many studies have mainly concentrated on measuring the anxiety level or the causes of anxiety rather than examining both factors that may increase speaking anxiety and the strategies used by EFL learners to reduce it. Thus, further research is needed to better understand these

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

aspects. Accordingly, this study aimed to investigate the factors that may increase or decrease speaking anxiety among EFL learners and to identify the strategies they use to reduce this anxiety. In particular, this Study aims to answer the following questions:

- What are the factors that may increase or decrease speaking anxiety among EFL students at Abu- Issa Faculty of Education?
- What are the strategies could EFL students use to reduce speaking anxiety?

Literature Review

Speaking is constantly identified as the most anxiety-prompting skill compared to listening, reading, and writing. Speaking anxiety in EFL contexts is a multifaceted psychological barrier characterized by apprehension, tension, and fear of negative evaluation when producing the target language, particularly in classroom speaking tasks, Saeed, (2024). Driven by factors like fear of mistakes, lack of preparation, and peer pressure, it often causes diminished fluency, avoidance behaviour, and reduced confidence, particularly in classroom speaking tasks Saeed, (2024). Nature of Speaking Anxiety in EFL Contexts

Speaking Anxiety in language Learning

Foreign language anxiety has a multidimensional nature that makes it hard to be defined accurately. Psychological, cultural, and social factors affect this phenomenon. According to Shabani (2012: 2378), this complexity refers to the broad scope of the concept which ranges “from an amalgam of overt behavioural characteristics that can be studied scientifically to introspecting feelings that are inaccessible”. Also, it can be attributed to its distinct components as proposed by Horwitz (1986: 128) “self- perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process”. Language anxiety has been defined in Longman dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied linguistics (Richards & Schmidt, 2002: 285) “as subjective feelings of apprehension and fear associated with language learning and use”.

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

Horwitz and Cope (1986: 125) stated that anxiety is “the subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with arousal of the automatic nervous system”. Awan et al (2010: 33-34) categorized the anxiety into three various types: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situational anxiety. The former is a stable personality trait, the second refers to the anxiety felt in a particular moment in time and the last to the feeling of nervousness and fear felt at unfamiliar or stressful situations. M.Lui, & Hong (2021) stated that when students feel anxious they show some symptoms, such as sweating, palpitations, forgetfulness, and trembling. Moreover, Ellis (1999) differentiated between facilitative and debilitating anxiety in language learning. The first refers to the type of anxiety which encourages and motivates learners to exert more effort in language learning whereas the second negatively affects students’ performance and may cause learners to avoid learning situations.

Factors Contributing to Speaking Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety has been recognized as a significant factor influencing second language learning. Identifying those factors is crucial, as it enables educators to provide effective strategies to address this issue. They could come from the student, the teacher, or the learning environment. Young (1991) identified six sources of language anxiety including anxieties of personal and interpersonal, teachers' beliefs about language, classroom procedures, instructor learner interaction, learner beliefs about language and language testing. Lui (2006 :23-25) reported some causes of anxiety among 98 Chinese EFL learners. Which are: personality, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, bad pronunciation, limited vocabulary, complexity of a grammar, difficulty in recalling the appropriate words, inability to organize the ideas, lack of familiarity with topics, and fear of being passively evaluated. This appears to be inclusive list and thus it was used in designing the items of the questionnaire of this study (see appendix). In Ihmuda’s research (2014) about exploring the factors which prevent Libyan EFL learners from speaking. He detected that fear of negative evaluation, making mistakes, lack of confidence, and shyness as an effective factors inhibiting students from speaking confidently and

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

appropriately. Both Liu (2007) and Tanveer (2007) agreed that one of the major sources of anxiety is the linguistic Factor, specifically students' lack of vocabulary and pronunciation deviation. Tanveer pointed out that when students received direct negative feedback caused by their pronunciation from their peers they felt stressed. Furthermore, Tsui (1996) suggested that class size, excessive correction task difficulty, teachers' feedback style and teachers highly focused on accuracy rather than fluency can intensify students' anxiety. Ultimately, Gardner and MacIntyre (1994) revealed that anxiety overlaps with cognitive processing such as overthinking, excessive self-monitoring, and difficulty organizing thoughts in second language use specially in tasks that needs spontaneous speech.

Impact of Speaking Anxiety on Learning

The influence of FL speaking anxiety on students' learning outcomes is multifaceted. Horwitz and Cope (1986) highlighted that high level of anxiety reduces fluency, coherence and classroom engagement. Similarly, a study by Kitano (2001) showed that anxious learners might be reluctant to speak because they fear peer judgment which limits their practice, development and this leads to low self-confidence and decrease motivation. On the other hand, Scovel (1978) distinguished between debilitating anxiety which weakens performance and facilitative anxiety, which can boost it. Thus, small amount of anxiety may increase students' preparation, motivation, and improve concentration.

Strategies to Reduce Speaking Anxiety

Research shows that learners use several strategies to handle speaking anxiety. According to Huda (2018), learners should families themselves with speaking English in their everyday life and inside the classroom. When students are used to speak with their friends or in small groups, they gradually build confidence and reduce communication fear, which make them ready to present in front of the class. Gardner and MacIntyre (1994) found that when students prepare themselves and organize their ideas beforehand, they can control their performance which helps them minimize speaking anxiety. Additionally, positive self- talk is another common Strategy by EFL learners who replace negative internal

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

thought (e.g., I will fail) with supportive thought (e.g., I can do it) Horwitz and Cope (1986). This shows how cognitive reframing helps reduce FL speaking fear. Furthermore, Oxford (1990) demonstrated that the use of paraphrasing, fillers, and hesitation devices used heavily by learners to manage linguistic limitations and help maintain the flow of the ideas while you are processing. Other than that, teachers play a vital role in reducing students' speaking anxiety. Huda (2018) stated that teachers should provide a safe and comfortable classroom environment through encouraging the students to speak in pairs or small group activities. Also, Tsui (1996) emphasized that the correction style greatly effects students' readiness to speak.

Research Methodology

The identification of the factors that contribute to FL speaking anxiety and the reducing strategies used are central to both classroom practice and research design. This study adopts a mixed methods research design combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide an in depth understanding of a research problem. Data were collected through a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire has been developed based on two forms used by previous studies (Lui (2006) and He (2017). The instrument consisted of 26 items in total: 24 closed-ended statements measured on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree), and 2 open-ended questions. The closed-ended items were designed to quantify participants' levels of foreign language speaking anxiety. The open-ended questions, on the other hand, provided space for participants to elaborate on their perceptions, share personal experiences, and describe the strategies they employed to cope with or reduce their anxiety. As a representative sample, 80 undergraduate Libyan EFL students were selected through purposive sampling procedures. For the purpose of getting deeper and more comprehensible data, the participants selection included semesters four, five and six at Abu-Issa Faculty of Education as these students are involved in studying speaking skills courses. Therefore, they are considered suitable for investigating speaking anxiety.

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

Results

Table (1): Factors Contributing to FL Speaking Anxiety

No.	Statement					
A	Psychological factors	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	I feel shy or embarrassed when speaking English.	7 9%	18 23%	29 36%	22 28%	4 5%
2	I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking English.	2 3%	8 10%	17 21%	37 46%	16 21%
3	I lack confidence when speaking English in front of others.	9 11%	21 26%	18 23%	22 28%	10 13%
B	Linguistic factors	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
4	Grammar difficulties increase my speaking anxiety	4 5%	18 23%	16 20%	29 36%	13 16%
5	My limited vocabulary makes me nervous when speaking English.	2 3%	5 6%	18 23%	35 44%	20 25%
6	Poor pronunciation makes me feel anxious when	11 14%	20 25%	20 25%	18 23%	11 14%

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

	speaking English.					
C	Cognitive factors	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
7	I feel nervous when I cannot find the right words to express my ideas.	2 3%	6 8%	15 19%	35 44%	22 28%
8	I find it difficult to organize my thoughts while speaking English.	4 5%	12 15%	14 18%	37 46%	13 16%
9	I tend to overthink while speaking English.	3 4%	12 26%	20 25%	22 28%	14 18%
D	Instructional factors	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
10	Large class sizes increase my speaking anxiety.	8 10%	16 20%	18 23%	25 31%	13 16%
11	I feel nervous when the teacher focuses more on accuracy than on fluency.	2 3%	7 9%	13 16%	37 46%	21 26%
12	Unfamiliar classroom discussion topics increase my speaking anxiety.	8 10%	8 10%	15 19%	32 40%	17 21%

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

E	Social factors	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
13	I worry that my classmates may laugh at me when I speak English.	14 18%	35 44%	15 19%	13 16%	4 4%
14	I worry about how others evaluate my speaking performance.	10 13%	23 29%	19 24%	23 29%	5 6%

Table (1) above shows several key factors contributing to FL speaking anxiety. In particular, the fear of making mistakes is considered the most effective source of anxiety. Nearly half of the participants (46%) agreed and 21% strongly agreed, pointing out that worry about errors obviously inhibits oral performance. Limited vocabulary is also a main concern for undergraduate students, with 44% of the respondents agreeing and 25% strongly agreeing that restricted lexicon makes them anxious when speaking English. Difficulty in restoring proper words were also reported with a combined 72% of the participants indicating agreement and strong agreement. Likewise, 46% of learners agreed and 26% strongly agreed that they feel nervous when teachers focus heavily on accuracy rather than fluency.

Other prominent sources involve challenges in organizing thoughts (46% agreement, 16 strong agreement) and overthinking while speaking (28% agreement, 18% Strong agreement). These findings indicate that cognitive factors correspond with linguistic limitations play a vital role in increasing learners' oral anxiety. On the other hand, social apprehensions, like fear of being laughed at by classmates (only 16% agreement and 4% strong agreement). Nevertheless, concerns about peer evaluation are still found among some students, as 29% agreed and 6% strongly agreed. This shows that social factors appeared to be less influential, although they remain exist in a few respondents.

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

Table (2): Strategies Used by EFL Learners

No .	Statement					
A	Social Strategies	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Practicing speaking English outside the classroom increases my confidence.	1 1%	2 3%	5 6%	31 39%	41 51%
2	Working in pairs or small groups helps me reduce my nervousness	3 4%	3 4%	7 9%	34 41%	34 43%
B	Instructional Strategies	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
3	I feel less anxious when teachers correct mistakes gently and indirectly.	1 1%	2 3%	9 11%	21 26%	47 59%
4	A friendly classroom atmosphere helps me feel more comfortable speaking English.	0 0%	0 0%	10 13%	31 39%	39 49%
5	Teachers' encouragement reduces me speaking anxiety.	1 1%	1 1%	6 8%	31 39%	41 49%
C	Cognitive Strategies	Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

		Disagree				
6	Preparing what I want to say before speaking reduces my anxiety.	0 0%	5 6%	7 9%	30 38%	38 48%
7	Positive self-talk helps me control my speaking anxiety.	1 1%	1 1%	10 13%	39 49%	29 36%
8	I focus on expressing my ideas clearly rather than worrying about mistakes.	2 3%	6 8%	18 23%	35 44%	19 24%
D	Communication strategies	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
9	I use paraphrasing when I do not know the exact word in English.	0 0%	7 9%	15 19%	40 50%	18 23%
10	I use fillers (e.g., well, um, you know) to keep speaking.	0 0%	5 6%	14 18%	42 53%	19 24%

Table (2) highlights strategies used by EFL Learners to mitigate speaking anxiety. Practicing English outside the classroom emerges as the most commonly accepted coping technique, with 51% strongly agreeing and 39% agreeing that it increases their confidence when they speak FL. Additionally, collaborative activities, for instance, working in pairs or small groups are equally efficient, with 43% strongly agreeing and 41% agreeing. Instructional strategies are also very helpful. For example, teachers' encouragement plays a vital role in reducing students' nervousness,

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

as evidenced by 51% of the participants strongly agreeing and 39% agreeing. In addition, teachers' gentle correction and a friendly classroom atmosphere support meaningful interaction and shape students' comfort in oral performance.

Cognitive strategies are essential as well. Preparing in advance before speaking is emphasized by 48% of the participants strongly agree and 38% agree. Similarly, 49% agreed and 36% strongly agreed that positive self-talk enables learners to manage their speaking anxiety. Finally, communicative strategies were stated by a large number of students to maintain fluency during oral tasks. For instance, 50% agreed and 23% strongly agreed that they use paraphrasing when they do not know the exact word in English while 53% agreed and 24% strongly agreed that they use fillers to maintain the speech.

Findings from the First Open-ended Question

What reasons do you think increase your anxiety when speaking English?

The findings highlighted four major themes: linguistic limitations, psychological factors, practice and communication factors, and environmental factors with nine codes emerged from the analysis of 80 respondents.

Linguistic Limitations

The prominent theme emerging from the findings is the linguistic factor, particularly lack of vocabulary and difficulty organizing ideas while speaking. Many students explicitly indicated that they feel nervous when they do not have enough words to express themselves. For example, students 7 said, "lack of vocabulary", while student 39 stated that "my vocabulary is limited". In addition, others referred to difficulty relating to formulating their thoughts during speaking. For instance, student 2 mentioned that "I cannot organize my thoughts quickly" while students 53 and 61 stated that they struggle to arrange their words while speaking. These responses indicate that limited vocabulary and difficulties in formulating ideas may interrupt the flow of speech which will increase Learner's anxiety.

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

Psychological Factors

It has been identified as an essential theme influencing students' speaking anxiety. Many respondents reported fear of being judged by others and fear of making mistakes particularly grammatical or pronunciation errors. For instance, student 1 stated that “afraid of making mistakes and speaking wrong” while students 21 and 23 clearly referred to “fear of making mistakes”. Other than that, student 44 stated that “fear of judgment” whereas student 34 expressed that “the teacher's judgement and the eyes of society.” Moreover, several participants also referred to personal characteristics such as lack of self-confidence and shyness. For example, student 31 illustrated that their concern may be related to their personality as they are generally shy and afraid of talking with others even in their mother language. Similarly, student 78 mentioned that low self-esteem combined with difficulty retrieving appropriate words makes speaking more demanding. These responses reflect how emotional and personal factors can influence students' willingness to communicate in FL.

Practice and Communication Factors

Lack of speaking practice and communication difficulties during interaction have contributed to students' speaking anxiety. Some students reported that their anxiety is due to limited opportunities to use English in real life situations. For instance, student 8 indicated that their anxiety is from “not practicing English enough” while student 64 referred to lack of practice as a source of their nervousness when speaking. Other respondents connected this issue to learning conditions outside the classroom. Student 29 explained that their anxiety is linked to limited vocabulary, and little practice outside the classroom environment. Other than that, several participants illustrated that they feel anxious when they fail to interact effectively with others during conversations. Student 43 stated that “when the listener can't understand me” also student 65 reported that when you cannot be understood for the first time. Therefore, these findings reveal that regular practice boosts students' confidence and leads to effective communication in real life situations.

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

Environmental Factors

Classroom conditions considered another source of anxiety. It has been emphasized by many students that teacher- related practice boosts their nervousness during speaking activities. For example, student 74 explained that direct corrections by the teacher during speaking activities make me feel nervous while student 17 expressed that when the teacher focuses heavily on them. In addition, other respondents referred to situational factors such as oral examinations, unfamiliar topics, talking in front of the audience, and large class size. As can see in comments like " large class size" by student 5 and student 56 stated that " talking in front of the audience. Thus, these conditions may increase the pressure on the students and make them uncomfortable which will affect their confidence and outcome.

Findings from the Second Open -ended Question.

What strategies do you personally use to reduce your speaking anxiety?

The results showed four major themes: Cognitive and affective regulation strategies, practice and social interaction strategies, language development and communication strategies, and avoidance with 7 codes arose from the analysis of 80 participants.

Cognitive and Affective Regulation Strategies

Numerous participants reported using self-encouragement, positive self-talk, and relaxation techniques to manage their apprehension when speaking English. For example, student 32 clearly said, "self-confidence" while student 73 expressed that trying to be more confident and not afraid of making mistakes. Others mentioned that they keep reminding themselves that making mistakes is a natural part of learning while student 4 explicitly said positive "self-talk". In addition, many students expressed that they use relaxation techniques to calm themselves before speaking. For instance, student 8 said "I take deep breaths to calm myself" while student 26 demonstrated that try to be calm and focus as if there is no one there. These responses show that a large number of students actively try to manage their emotions to reduce anxiety and maintain self-confidence during speaking activities.

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

Practice and Social Interaction Strategies

The analysis revealed that many students practice speaking regularly and interacting with others help them reduce anxiety and enhance their speaking skill. Several respondents highlighted the essential role of practice such as student 1 said “practice a lot and try to be confident” and student 4 stated that “practice speaking regularly”. Moreover, other students indicated that practicing English with classmates or friends can increase their confidence. For instance, student 9 said “talking with friends in English” while both students 12 and 67 claimed that practicing with partners or in groups help them reduce their anxiety. Therefore, continuous practice and social interaction play a significant role in helping students become more confident and comfortable during speaking.

Language Development and Communication Strategies

Several participants indicated that improving their vocabulary and language skills lead to feeling confident while speaking. For instance, student 53 literally stated “improve my vocabulary” and student 43 said “learning more about grammar and vocabulary”. Furthermore, some students reported increasing exposure to the English language through media and listening activities. For example, student 7 said “listening to music or podcasts” while students 57 and 34 mentioned that they watch TV series, movies or videos and then imitate them. Additionally, a few students reported using communication strategies during speech, such as hesitation expressions, body movement or simple words to keep communication. Thus those strategies help students to cope with linguistic limitations and continue speaking even though they feel unsure.

Avoidance or No Strategy

A few students stated that they do not use any particular strategies to decrease their speaking anxiety whereas others refer to avoidance behaviours. For example, student 2 said ‘stay away from talking about topics or words I don't know’ while students 31 and 8 emphasized that they do not use specific strategy, as shown in responses “I don't have any strategy” and ““nothing””. These responses suggest that although several students actively try to

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

control their anxiety through various strategies, others might be unaware of useful strategies or would rather avoid challenging speaking situations.

Discussion

Various factors lead to activating FL speaking anxiety. The effect of these factors usually makes the learners hesitate or avoid speaking the target language and thus it is essential for the students to learn how to reduce such uncertainties. The findings of this study provide a common variety of FL anxiety sources and identify the most appropriate strategies used by learners for alleviating FL speaking anxiety among EFL learners.

The results indicate that the majority of students reported that the linguistic limitations such as limited vocabulary, grammar difficulties, and challenges in organizing ideas were the major causes of anxiety. These correspond with Luis (2006), Awan (2010), and Horwitz (1986), who highlighted that limited proficiency level boosts anxiety.

Psychological factors were also notable, many participants indicated that fear of making mistakes, fear of judgment, and lack of confidence are another source of speaking anxiety. The findings align with Horwitz et al., (1986) and Shbani 2012). Who highlighted those causes as a main element of language anxiety?

Short time of practice speaking English is also reported by the students, for example student 8 said “not practicing English enough”, which supports the total finding of 90% of participants who agreed that practicing outside the classroom environment increases students' confidence. This is consistent with Ellis (1999) and Kitano (2001), who shed light on repeated practice and interaction as an effective way of reducing students' anxiety.

Environmental factors including large class size, immediate correction, teachers' focus on accuracy, and unfamiliar topics were also important. The results show that 72% of total students agreed and strongly agreed that they feel anxious when the teachers highly focus on accuracy rather than fluency whereas 61% face anxiety when dealing with unfamiliar topics. These were supported by Tsui (1996) and Young (1991). To sum up, the findings confirm that FL

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

Speaking Anxiety is multifaceted, which corresponds with Gardner and MacIntyre (1994).

The study also revealed that EFL students adopt various strategies such as cognitive and affective, social, and communication strategies. Many students reported using positive self-talk, relaxation, and self-encouragement to manage their anxiety, which aligns with The (2007) and Saed (2024) who prioritized self-regulation as an efficient way to control language anxiety.

Practice and social strategies were also heavily used. 90% of the students strongly agreed that working in pairs or in small groups and practicing English outside the classroom may increase their confidence and reduce their nervousness, which reflect what Ellis (1999), Kitano (2001), and Huda (2018) believe. They emphasized that when students familiarize themselves with English inside and outside the class with their friends or peers can reduce their communication fear and help them build confidence. 70% of the participants agreed that paraphrasing and fillers used to mitigate their anxiety, which reflect Oxford's (1990) emphasis on strategic competence. In addition, listening practice, using simple language, and expanding vocabulary are also reported by the students as other coping strategies. Interestingly, a few students stated not using particular strategies or avoiding unfamiliar words or topics. This shows the need for explicit strategy instructions, as suggested by Young (1991) and Huda (2018).

Pedagogical Implications

The study findings have significant implications for language teaching practice. It became a must the teachers employ strategies to reduce apprehension and foster confidence as speaking anxiety is considered to hinder learners' communicative skill. A motivating classroom environment is crucial, where learners feel safe to involve in using the target language without fear of negative evaluation. Moreover, teachers are recommended by the findings of this study to get their students acquainted to the anxiety-management strategies. Training students in cognitive and affective techniques to positively regulate their emotions can enhance self-encouragement, and relaxation.

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

On the other hand, classroom activities can include social and communicative strategies, group work, role-plays which help learners gradually involve in target language speaking opportunities. In addition, curriculum designers and educators have to consider learners' proficiency levels when scaffolding speaking tasks with adequate vocabulary support. Teaching development programs should emphasize the importance of recognizing anxiety symptoms and equip instructors with practical tools to address them.

Finally, By combining effective teaching practices with awareness of learners' emotional needs, it is very essential that tutorial approaches balance linguistic instruction with psychological support. Teachers can create situations that not only improve speaking performance but also promote long-term communicative competence and learner autonomy.

Conclusion

Speaking anxiety appears to be a severe issue for FL Learners and has a remarkable influence on their development of speaking skill. It is usually connected with feelings of uneasiness and apprehension which guide learners to hesitate or avoid practicing the target language. Inevitably, learners fail to achieve effective communication.

The results revealed that speaking anxiety is a multifaceted phenomenon, affected by linguistic, psychological, communicative, and environmental factors. More specifically, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, and teacher related practices were recognized as the most serious sources of anxiety.

On the other hand, the study showed that learners employ a range of effective strategies to cope with speaking anxiety, containing cognitive and affective Strategies such as positive self -talk and self-encouragement, practice and social strategies (e.g., group work, and practice outside the classroom), and communication strategies such as using paraphrasing and fillers. Nevertheless, some learners indicated a lack of awareness of anxiety- management strategies.

In summary, the findings highlighted the essential of creating a supportive and stress- free classroom environment, where students

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

feel encouraged to speak without fear of negative evaluation. Additionally, teachers provide constructive feedback, use gentle correction ways, and promote the use of effective learning strategies.

References

- Al-Abed Al-Haq, F. (2012). An investigation of the relationship between anxiety and foreign language learning among second secondary students in the second Amman Directorate of Education. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2(6), 226–240.
- Al-Saraj, T. (2014). Revisiting the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS): The anxiety of female English language learners in Saudi Arabia. *L2 Journal*, 6, 50–76. <http://repositories.cdlib.org/ucclt/12/vol6/iss1/art2/>
- Awan, R., Azher, M., Anwar, M., & Naz, A. (2010). An investigation of foreign language classroom anxiety and its relationship with students' achievement. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning*, 7(3), 33–40.
- Ellis, R. (1999). *Learning a second language through interaction*. John Benjamins.
- Gardner, R. C., Day, J. B., & MacIntyre, P. D. (1992). Integrative motivation, induced anxiety, and language learning in a controlled environment. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 14, 197–214.
- He, D. (2017). How to cope with foreign language speaking anxiety effectively? The case of university students in China. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 14(2), 159–174. <https://e-flt.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/he.pdf>
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125–132. <https://doi.org/10.2307/327317>
- Huda, N. L. A. (2018). *Speaking anxiety in the presentation of EFL students: A descriptive study at English Department of UIN Walisongo Semarang in the academic year of 2017/2018 (Undergraduate thesis)*. Walisongo State Islamic University.

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

<https://eprints.walisongo.ac.id/id/eprint/8373/1/skripsi%20full.pdf>

Ihmuda, M. (2014). Exploring factors that inhibit EFL learners from speaking English effectively: A case study of Libyan students (Master's thesis).

<https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/2748>

Jain, Y., & Sidhu, G. (2013). Relationship between anxiety, attitude, and motivation of tertiary students in learning English as a second language. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 90, 114–123.

Kitano, K. (2001). Anxiety in the college Japanese language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 85(4), 549–566.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/0026-7902.00125>

Liu, M. (2006). Anxiety in EFL classrooms: Causes and consequences. *TESL Reporter*, 39(1), 13–32.

Liu, M. (2007). Chinese students' motivation to learn English at the tertiary level. *Asian EFL Journal*, 9(1), 126–146.

Liu, M., & Hong, M. (2021). English language classroom anxiety and enjoyment in Chinese young learners. *SAGE Open*, 11(4), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211047550>

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language Learning*, 44(2), 283–305.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1994.tb01103>

Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Heinle & Heinle.

<https://www.worldcat.org/title/21332565>

Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2002). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (3rd ed.). Pearson Education.

Saeed, M. A. (2024). Anxiety in learning English as a foreign language: Causes, effects, and coping strategies. *International Journal of Humanities and Education Research*, 6(2), 89–93.

Scovel, T. (1978). The effect of affect on foreign language learning: A review of the anxiety research. *Language Learning*, 28(1), 129–142. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1978.tb00309>

Speaking Anxiety among EFL University Students in Libya: Factors
and Reducing Strategies

<http://www.doi.org/10.62341/istj-vol38-2-mr09>

- Shabani, M. B. (2012). Levels and sources of language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation among Iranian EFL learners. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(11), 2378–2383.
- Tanveer, M. (2007). Investigation of the factors that cause language anxiety for ESL/EFL learners in learning skills and the influence it casts on communication in the target language (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Glasgow.
- Tsui, A. B. M. (1996). Reticence and anxiety in second language learning. In K. M. Bailey & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Voices from the language classroom* (pp. 145–167). Cambridge University Press.
- Young, D. J. (1991). Creating a low-anxiety classroom environment. *The Modern Language Journal*, 75(4), 426–439. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1991.tb05378.x>