



Students' Speaking Anxiety in EFL Classroom

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Abstract—Language anxiety is becoming a significant issue in language teaching and learning. It has been a common problem in the EFL context and has had a significant impact on language teaching. Furthermore, students who were learning English felt anxious, and the factors that contributed to their anxiety were identified. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to investigate some of the factors that influence students' anxiety and to identify the types of anxiety that they experience. The data were collected through questionnaires from 150 students from Cihan University-Duhok General Education Department English Branch second and third year and through semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed descriptively to answer research questions. The findings indicated that students from Cihan University had a higher level of anxiety. In addition, some factors causing students' anxiety in learning English were lack of vocabulary, pronunciation, preparation, grammar, and prior knowledge of the classroom activities, including fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, afraid of being laughed at by other students, and lack of self-confidence.

Keywords— EFL teaching and learning, foreign language anxiety, factors of anxiety, students' anxiety, speaking anxiety

I. INTRODUCTION

Some people believe that English is more difficult to learn than other languages, so learning English has become increasingly important in recent years. This is especially true in the classroom, as students' lack of comprehension of teachers' words can lead to a lack of interest in and motivation for learning English. Both speaking in front of the class and writing certain assignments might cause students to become nervous, leading to occasional mistakes.

Anxiety over one's ability to communicate in a foreign language is widely recognized as a significant emotional component in the process of learning a foreign language. According to Krashen (1982), anxiety, which functions as a component of the learner's emotional filter, has the potential to impede the process of learning a language. Recent research examines the notion of anxiety in view of its relation to the process of language learning and defines language anxiety as “the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language

context including speaking, listening and learning” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1993, p.284)

Learning to speak fluently and persuasively in English is one of the most difficult things to do since it requires the student to put themselves out there in front of an audience. Maintaining open lines of communication is essential for success. All students, beginning in middle school and continuing through college, should make an effort to become fluent in English. That's because learning how to communicate effectively in the target language is the primary objective of language learning. Therefore, students of a foreign language often think that being able to communicate effectively in spoken contexts is a necessary condition for achieving proficiency. Anxiety became an issue for the foreign language student who otherwise helps communicate a message and create communication in the community.

The ability to learn a foreign language is influenced by a wide variety of elements, including intellect, motivation, attitude, age, gender, personality, anxiety, and so on

(Skehan, 1989). The acquisition of a language should take place in a natural manner; yet, studying a foreign language in the classroom presents a number of problems for the majority of students. Anxiety, which is one of the learners' emotional factors, is acknowledged to be one of the problems that they face. Horwitz et al. (1986) define foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p.128).

Anxiety, as defined by Suleimenova (2013), is a condition of mental uneasiness and suffering that is brought on by worrying about unfavorable outcomes or potential threats. No matter how well they've prepared, students still experience anxiety while learning a new language. One thing can be said with absolute certainty: anxiety will have a negative impact on students' academic performance, regardless of what causes it or how intense it is (Saito & Samimy, 1996). For this reason, it may be challenging for them to acquire a new language. If you can speak and write in a language well enough for others to understand you, you have succeeded in learning that language. This elevates the value of verbal and aural abilities such as speaking and listening. However, it is possible that the learners' anxiety about the language will not be eliminated or avoided. It is extremely unlikely that a person who is learning a language will not experience some level of anxiety. The fact that they are experiencing anxiety is evidence that they are brave enough to be successful language learners. Anxiety, in this sense, can be seen as a positive language-learning variable. A student's confidence in his or her ability to learn a foreign language is a major factor in determining how well he or she will eventually do in that language.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Speaking Skill

Over the course of the past fifty years, four competencies have been recognized as particularly significant; however, speaking has been deemed the most important indicator of language proficiency (Brown 1994). Speaking helps people talk about their interests, describe themselves, explain events in simple terms, and share their personal experiences etc. Speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts" (Chaney and Burk, 1998, p.13).

According to Chaney and Burk (1998), speaking is the process of constructing and sharing meaning through the use of verbal or nonverbal symbols in a variety of contexts. According to Johnson and Morrow (1981), the term "speaking" refers to a common practice in oral communication that involves two or more people engaging

in an activity in which both the listeners and the speakers are required to respond to what they hear and make their own contributions in order to either convey or receive the meaning.

2. Speaking Anxiety

In the literature, there are a number of different definitions of anxiety associated with learning a foreign language. According to Ortega (2009), Horwitz et al. (1986), and MacIntyre suggested the two prominent definitions that have been enhancing our knowledge of language anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) define language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). In a similar manner, MacIntyre (1999) defines language anxiety as a feeling of stress, nervousness, emotional reaction, and worry that is linked to the process of learning a second or foreign language.

One more way to define anxiety is as a mental and physical state that is characterized by particular emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms. It mobilizes the body and helps it avoid or defend against anxiety. An external or internal antecedent or trigger can be the stimulus. Anxiety can have many different influences, both biological and psychological, as well as social and environmental, making it difficult to clearly identify a single cause (Doubek, & Anders, 2013) in Kralova (2016, p.3). According to Carlson, Buskist, Heth, and Schmaltz (2009), anxiety is "a sense of apprehension or doom that is accompanied by certain physiological reactions, such as accelerated heart rate, sweaty palms, and tightness in the stomach." (p. 558)

3. Types of foreign language speaking anxiety

Several kinds of anxiety have been described. Some types of anxiety in language learning are related to the psychology domain. According to Rod Ellis (1994) in Dorrit Sasson, anxiety divides into three parts, which are:

a- Trait anxiety

Trait anxiety is when a person has the propensity to feel nervous or anxious no matter the circumstances. Trait anxiety refers to a person's innate susceptibility even when there is no objective reason to be concerned. (Horwitz, 2001) and (Spielberger, 1972). In other words, a person with trait anxiety may feel anxious regardless of the circumstances. This anxiety is thought to be a characteristic of a person's character that remains relatively constant over time. According to Scovel (1978), trait anxiety can be described as „a more permanent predisposition to be anxious“ (p. 137).

Fitriah and Muna (2019) claim that trait anxiety is a type of anxiety that is ingrained in a person's personality and

manifests itself as a pattern of behavior that is typically permanent and challenging to alter. Students who are unable to express their feelings, emotions, ideas, or thoughts are more likely to fall into this category because they are unable to exercise self-control over their nervousness. Therefore, the effect of their participation in classroom activities on the development of their speaking ability is debatable. They are more likely to maintain their silence than to speak up or contribute some ideas in front of the class. It can also take place in any given circumstance or subject at the school.

b- State anxiety

In the case of state anxiety, a person experiences apprehensiveness as a result of a temporary shift in their emotional state as a result of an outside influence. This happens because students are subjected to a range of feelings, stresses, and pressures while studying. Moreover, students may find they have more fun participating in classroom activities if they learn to control their thoughts and feelings.

On the other hand, Woodrow (2006) and Spielberger (1972) defined state anxiety as a condition that is fleeting and varies in intensity by going up and down over time. Trait anxiety, on the other hand, is an experience that is consistent. State anxiety is usually temporary and linked to a specific event, like giving a speech. It is said to be a temporary thing that happens at a certain time. Additionally, it is considered a reaction to a specific stimulus that causes anxiety, such as an important test (Spielberger, 1983). Anxiety can also be defined as a feeling of nervousness that can change over time and fluctuate in intensity. This feeling of nervousness can be associated with state anxiety (Young, 1998). As a prime example of state anxiety, test anxiety occurs when a student feels uneasy about taking a specific exam, but this unease can fade away over time. The emotional, mental, and behavioral states of a person are all impacted by the anxiety state.

c- Situation-specific Anxiety

The third category of anxiety is known as situation-specific anxiety, and it refers to the feeling of unease that one gets when confronted with a specific circumstance (Peter D. MacIntyre Gardner, 1991). Due to the fact that numerous facets of the situation can be questioned, situation-specific studies can contribute significantly more to the overall understanding of anxiety. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) and Horwitz (2001) point out that situation-specific anxiety is the type of trait that manifests itself during language acquisition. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) and Horwitz (2001) note that situation-specific anxiety is the trait type that is seen in language learning circumstances. Horwitz (2001) asserts that language anxiety is different from trait anxiety and it is specific anxiety; likewise, she asserts that

“situation-specific anxiety is completely autonomous of other types of anxiety.”

III. METHODOLOGY

The type of methodology used to collect information and data is the quantitative method. The purpose of the quantitative method is to have a better understanding of the concerned problem which in this case is language learning anxiety and its effect on English oral performance. This study examines students' speaking anxiety levels as well as identifies speaking anxiety factors. This study found that EFL undergraduate students at Cihan University-Duhok generally experience moderate to high levels of speaking anxiety. Besides, the study concluded that there are three factors that cause speaking anxiety among EFL undergraduate students namely communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-confidence. The study also showed that the student's level of speaking anxiety is high especially when they speak English without preparation, due to their fear of making mistakes and when they speak English in front of their classmates. However, Teachers are the key solution in alleviating the students' high level of speaking anxiety.

According to Patton “The advantage of the quantitative approach is that one can measure the reactions of a great many people to a limited set of questions, thus facilitating comparison and statistical aggregation of the data.” (1987, p. 9) The researchers used a questionnaire (i.e. students' questionnaire) to collect numeric data in the present study to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. Additionally, to elicit the students' perceptions of language-speaking anxiety, a semi-structured interview was used. As proposed by Patton (1990) cited in Apsari and Satriani (2016) that semi-structured interview is designed to gather in-depth responses from respondents while also setting clear limits on questions to avoid broad student responses. The study raises the following research questions:

- 1- What are the sources of foreign language speaking anxiety?
- 2- To what extent do the students have anxiety while speaking in English?

4. Participants

The study was conducted at Cihan University-Duhok, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. 150 students from General Education Department were involved in this study. These participants were Male and Female aged between 19 and 21. All participants in the study were native speakers of the Kurdish language. The students were those who were taking English language classes.

5. Data Collection

In this study, the data was collected through the questionnaire and interview. Questionnaires and interviews were the instruments applied for conducting this study. The questionnaire was distributed among the students from General English Department- English Branch second and third year. The questionnaire is based on three categories, communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-confidence. Each category consists of six to seven statements. In the first part of the questionnaire, the participants' personal information was collected and the participants were asked to respond to three items on their age, gender, and grade. The second part had 21 statements on speaking anxiety. Through the interview, the students were asked 5 questions related to some factors influencing students' anxiety regarding pronunciation, grammar,

vocabulary, classmates, and preparation. The interview analysis began with a transcription of each sentence from the interviewee.

The data obtained from the questionnaire were distributed among the students and analyzed from the categories mentioned above. By means of these categories, the reasons for foreign language speaking anxiety were described in this EFL context.

6. The Result of the Questionnaire

This section of the study presents the results and analysis of the data collected. The three tables show the percentage of responses given by the students.

6.2 The Result of Category 1: Communication apprehension

Table 1: The Results of Communication Apprehension

No.	Statements	Yes a lot	To some extent	Not at all
1	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting	112	15	23
2	I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on in English classes.	105	20	25
3	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English	98	32	20
4	I get frightened when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English	63	32	55
5	I feel nervous while speaking English with native speakers	126	14	10
6	I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do	90	42	18
7	I get nervous and confused while speaking in English classes	128	10	12

Table 1 shows participants' results on communicative apprehension. Based on the table, there are 128 out of 150 students get nervous while speaking in English classes which is the highest number of the students among the seven statements in the first category. Students' nervousness is based on the lack of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. The lowest number of the students who get frightened when they don't understand what the teacher says in English is 63 students. Only 10 students do not feel

nervous while speaking with native speakers while 126 students feel nervous speaking with native speakers. Thus, the table shows us that the majority of the students feel nervous and anxious while speaking in English rather than feeling comfortable.

6.2 The Results of Category 2: Fear of negative evaluation

Table 2: The Results of Fear of Negative Evaluation

No.	Statements	Yes a lot	To some extent	Not at all
1	I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions that I haven't prepared in advance	98	26	26
2	I am afraid of making mistakes in English classes	104	19	27
3	I get embarrassed to volunteer answers in English classes	88	23	39
4	I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make	76	34	40

5	I am afraid of being evaluated by my accent and pronunciation	93	31	26
6	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English	97	35	18

Based on the result shown in table 2, there are 104 students feel afraid to make mistakes when speaking in English which is the highest number of the students. 76 of the students out of 150 are afraid that the teacher corrects the mistakes they make while speaking in English which is the lowest number among the statements. The majority of the students are afraid to be evaluated by the students, not by the teacher. According to the results, only 18 students are

not afraid to be laughed or evaluated by students while 40 students are not afraid to be evaluated by the teacher, thus, students are more likely afraid to be evaluated by the students.

6.3 The Results of Category 3:

Low self-confidence

Table 3: The Results of Low Self-Confidence

No.	Statements	Yes a lot	To some extent	Not at all
1	I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students	112	24	14
2	I am never quite sure of myself when I speak in English	102	22	256
3	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English classes	132	12	6
4	I am afraid of making grammatical mistakes while speaking in English	101	32	17
5	I am afraid of misusing some vocabulary when I speak in English	119	21	10
6	I struggle when I express my ideas in English	129	12	9
7	I am afraid of mispronouncing words	114	21	15
8	I don't feel confident when I speak English in classes	130	13	7

Based on the results shown in table 3, the researchers found that 132 students panic to speak in English without preparation which means they do not have the confidence and courage to speak without preparation due to mistakes they make. In addition, 130 students do not feel confident to speak in English in front of the entire student in class the reason either lack of preparation or lack of English-speaking skills. Thus, the majority of them were found to be afraid of speaking in front of others, which is consistent with McCains' (2012) results that showed that, "Nearly 90% of people reported feeling shy or uncomfortable speaking in front of others at some time in their lives" (p.1). This data, however, varies from person to person because different people have different beliefs and levels of confidence for familiar and unfamiliar audiences. Only 6 to 7 students feel confident to speak in English without being panicked which is the least number of the students. Kelly and Watson (1986) claim that confidence is an important factor in the development of speaking skills. The study provides a reason

that the students feel anxious during speaking in front of other people due to a lack of confidence.

7. The result of the Interview

The interview was used as the second data in this study to strengthen the results from the questionnaire data. The purpose of the interview was to determine what factors contributed to the students' anxiety. The interview questions are also narrated; excerpts from the interview are provided below.

8. The Factors Cause Students' Anxiety Learning English

All the interviewees felt the same thing about their anxious feeling when they made mistakes. All of the students who participated in the research put serious concerns related to the kind of evaluative situation where their speaking performance was monitored by the classroom participants. There are some major mistakes that students made which potentially provoke anxiety.

8.1 Pronunciation

Pronunciation becomes a major issue that affects students' ability to speak in front of the class. Bad pronunciation was a source of anxiety for students when they had to practice speaking. The data below illustrates the condition in which pronunciation causes anxiety.

Student 1: *it's hard for me to speak in English in front of the other students in the class because of my pronunciation. I am not convinced of my pronunciation because I am afraid that the students will laugh at me for my bad pronunciation.*

Student 2: *Sometimes I want to speak in English and participate but because I am not sure of my pronunciation and I am afraid I will make mistakes.*

Student 3: *when I see some students speak in English with good pronunciation with fewer mistakes. I feel shy to speak in English because I am afraid, they will laugh and give bad evaluations.*

According to the data presented above, the most significant issue in speaking English is poor pronunciation. This exemplifies a situation in which students felt afraid and shy when their peers laughed at their bad pronunciation. Almost all interviewees told the same thing about the kind of reaction and they felt anxious about their friends' negative assumptions. A similar result was found by Price (1991) that one of the most common sources of anxiety is the fear of being laughed at by others. Moreover, this result is additionally in line with Oxford (1999), who stated that one of the most important issues related to language anxiety is being ridiculed.

8.2 Grammar

When students practice speaking, they find it difficult to use grammar to produce appropriate sentences in English. The majority of the students struggle with the use of verbs and tenses. The following data show their difficulties with the use of grammar.

Student 1: *I always focus on my grammar and I think using correct grammar is very important when speaking in English. Sometimes because of my bad grammar, I don't want to speak in the class, I am afraid that the teacher couldn't understand and will evaluate me.*

Student 2: *For me grammar is very difficult. Usually, it's hard for me to use the correct tense when I speak in English. I can't differentiate between the rules of grammar. It's hard to know when to use past simple, past perfect, or present perfect...etc. When I speak in English with people, I know that confuse them with my bad grammar.*

According to the data presented above, grammar has become the most difficult problem for students. Students are constantly focused on grammar, and they find it difficult to

understand English. The use of the correct grammar pattern in speaking was a challenge for the students. They were unsure of how to use grammar or whether it was appropriate for the sentences they wanted to express orally.

8.3 Vocabulary:

Students must choose appropriate words to express their ideas and it is crucial for them to have the ability to recall vocabulary for expressing their ideas. The data below shows how limited vocabulary impacts their performance.

Student 1: *Sometimes I can't express my ideas in English and I struggle to speak in English because of my less vocabulary. I feel nervous when I am asked to come to the front because I forget the vocabularies I know and it makes me shy.*

Student 2: *I always memorize vocabulary every day, but it is just 'easy come, easy go', I memorize them today I forget them tomorrow. Whenever I try to speak in English, I forget to use the vocabularies I memorized and I immediately feel anxious.*

This factor had a significant impact on the participants' speaking anxiety, becoming the most influential factor causing them anxiety when speaking English. Due to their limited vocabulary, they have difficulty composing sentences when speaking in English, in this condition, they feel anxious to speak English well.

8.4 Classmates or friends:

Another factor that contributes to participants' anxious feelings is unsupportive behavior, such as ridicule by peers. They all assumed that if they make a mistake, their classmates will ridicule them. Some of the participants had painful memories of being laughed at by their classmates.

Student 1: *I want to speak in the class and answer every question the teacher asks, but I feel afraid of making mistakes and being laughed by other students.*

Student 2: *I quitted speaking in English in the class because of the other students in the class, many times they laughed at me of my mistakes that led me to feel shy and anxious.*

Student 3: *I feel anxious to speak in English especially when I am asked to speak in front of the students because there are students who are better than me. I feel embarrassed speaking in English because of my bad language and this makes me to feel afraid of negative judgment form the teacher.*

According to the data presented above, when students make mistakes, they get laughed at by their peers. Also, the students were not only afraid of being laughed at by their peers for making mistakes, but also of teachers' assumptions.

8.5 Lack of preparation:

Lack of preparation is also another factor that contributes to the students' anxiety.

Student 1: *one of the factors that make me feel nervous and anxious is preparation, especially when I am asked to speak in front of my classmates or answer the questions asked by the teachers.*

Student 2: *I feel depressed and not relaxed when I am not well prepared for the class. I usually start to panic when I go to classes without preparation and I don't feel confidence to speak in English with lack of preparation.*

Almost all of the participants regarded this as a source of anxiety. They admitted that when they did not prepare adequately for subjects or materials, they became very anxious. Iizuka (2010) discovered a similar result, that participating in class without adequate preparation frequently leads to anxiety.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

CONCLUSION

Anxiety is obviously a problem in language learning and it has a devastating impact on some students' ability to speak English. However, it is essential to be able to deal with negative feelings so that they do not interfere with one's learning and performance. The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that cause students' anxiety when speaking English, as well as the levels of anxiety among students. The researchers elaborated the findings based on the data displayed in the previous section, lining back to the research questions, in a quantitative descriptive study using a questionnaire and an interview as the instrument. Concerning the result of the data, the questionnaire consisted of 21 items, and the questionnaire was given to 150 students of the second and third grades of General Education Department, English Branch. Based on the questionnaire data from the three categories, the majority of the students were nervous and anxious when speaking in English. Furthermore, almost all of the students lacked confidence and were afraid of making mistakes when speaking in English. The students encountered various difficulties or factors when speaking English. According to the interview data, students may have some difficulty speaking English. Students struggled to deliver or speak in English, such as misspelling, mispronunciation, and selecting words. Additionally, less preparation in English or material caused to be students worried, nervous, and unsure if the teacher asks them about the material. According to the results, the students were anxious to speak in English because of lack of preparation, were afraid of falling behind in understanding the material or what the teacher was

saying, were afraid of making mistakes, were afraid of being laughed at by their peers, and were not confident of how to spell, pronounce, and select words in English. To sum up, students are anxious when the activities in the speaking class require them to speak in front of the other students; they are afraid of making mistakes, and the most common mistakes are in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

SUGGESTIONS

The researchers include some useful suggestions both teachers and students can use to enhance the quality of teaching, and learning and reduce anxiety.

1- Students must be able to analyze their speaking performance and by realizing the problems they have; they can find easy ways to deal with those problems. They can also ask for feedback from their friends and teachers about their speaking performance. Feedback is essential for students to evaluate their own performance.

2- Teachers must be able to understand their students' characteristics in order to analyze their anxiety problem and find a solution. Different characteristics of students necessitate different approaches to dealing with them. Furthermore, teachers must create a comfortable classroom atmosphere that allows pupils to speak conveniently and with less stress in order to reduce anxiety.

3- Students should indeed respect one another by assisting friends with limited English proficiency. Also, they should not be afraid to make mistakes; instead, be more confident than before.

4- Teachers need to encourage students to become more active, and confident in their practice, and help them to share their anxieties about learning English. Furthermore, teachers must be more aware of their students' progress in class and try to reduce students' anxiety as a result of their reluctance to speak in class.

5- Better understanding of the topic and better preparation reduce mistakes that occur by the students and this helps them to speak confidently during a public speaking activity.

Finally, due to the limitations of this study, additional research is required to investigate the students' anxiety in learning English. Future studies with different departments and groups of students will be beneficial in providing a better understanding of the factors that cause foreign language anxiety. To enhance student' speaking abilities, numerous strategies must be developed. Building an appropriate classroom environment is also crucial for assisting the effort to reduce anxiety. The next researchers ought to be capable to recognize the ideal classroom environment to enhance teaching and learning activities.

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