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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Foreign Language Anxiety in Learners' Oral Performance in English

Niaam Ali Hasan

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research 2024-2025

ABSTRACT

The present research is a reasonably comprehensive investigation into the multilevel effect of foreign language anxiety on oral performance in the English language. It probes deep into complex interfaces of anxiety levels, language proficiency, the nature of tasks, and speaking performance for an all-encompassing perspective of the complex dynamics that govern language learning in educational contexts. Drawing on an extensive data collection program amongst a diverse group of international students, this paper identifies and explores a number of key statistical trends that would suggest high levels of anxiety strongly collocated with poor oral performances, particularly in formal assessment tasks.

It also does an in-depth analysis of how different levels of proficiency affect the experience and manifestations of anxiety in learners. The findings indicate a tendency whereby as the level of language competence goes up, the anxiety level decreases, hence upping the communicative competence. This relationship therefore means that the learners who possess a high degree of proficiency in the English language have the high ability to manage the psychological pressure tagged onto the performance of the speaking tasks hence establishing effective communication. Apart from the ones mentioned above, the present study also underlines the crucial role of task design and creating supportive classroom atmospheres in reducing FLA. The teachers should use specific interventions that would let the learners cooperate with each other and let the learners develop a high degree of confidence in using the language. The present study emphasizes that creating low-anxiety learning environment might allow teachers to make a high degree of improvement to the learner oral performance.

In sum, this study generally contributes significantly to the literature base on the interaction between anxiety and language learning while providing a couple of helpful implications for future pedagogical practice. Such findings add not only to our growing knowledge about the debilitating effects of anxiety on language acquisition itself but also how instructors are in a position to actively aid learners in overcoming such challenges.

Keywords: Foreign language anxiety, Oral performance, Language proficiency, Task types, Pedagogical implications

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Introduction

Introductory remarks

Foreign language anxiety is a widespread concern for students both in EFL and ESL learning situations, where oral performance usually turns out to be the prime mode of assessment of communication. With the rising emphasis on proficiency in English in the light of globalization, much emphasis has also been laid on oral skills as an important factor in the success of language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986). However, many learners experience debilitating anxiety during speaking tasks, which can significantly affect their communicative abilities and overall academic performance (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). This research explores the intricate relationship between foreign language anxiety and oral performance in English, providing insights into the sources of anxiety and its impact on learners' oral skills. Until recently, there were psychological factors impinging on SLA that came to the fore. Anxiety, as one of the most important affective factors, has been referred to as one of the primary emotional problems facing the learner. More specifically, it has been shown that anxiety with regard to speaking a foreign language—foreign language speaking anxiety—makes significant changes in students' oral communication performance (Horwitz et al., 1986). It manifests in the fear of making mistakes, apprehension with respect to negative evaluation, and undeserved feelings of incompetence when talking in a non-native language (Young, 1991). Therefore, it is not hard to notice poor oral performance, reduced fluency, and low-class participation.

The problem

This study addresses the debilitating consequence of foreign language anxiety on the learners' oral performance in English. As much as most learners may actually possess the necessary knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and syntax, anxiety can compromise the former's oral performance. This problem becomes especially increasingly higher in a non-native speaking setting where a student has to prove his or her proficiency using spoken language but usually gets scared and anxious. Although foreign language anxiety has been determined through various studies undertaken by MacIntyre (1999) and the details of exactly what causes anxiety in oral performance and how such factors can be minimized remain obscure to improve the communicative competence of the learners.

Research questions

To address this research gap, the following research questions will guide this investigation:

1. What are the main factors contributing to foreign language anxiety in learners' oral performance in English?
2. How does foreign language anxiety affect the fluency, pronunciation, and overall effectiveness of learners' oral performance?
3. What strategies can be employed to reduce foreign language anxiety in learners during oral performance tasks?
4. How do learner characteristics such as proficiency level, age, and prior exposure to English influence the level of foreign language anxiety?

The aims

The aims of this study are multifaceted:

1. Identify the key sources of foreign language anxiety during oral performance tasks.
2. Analyze the extent to which anxiety affects various aspects of oral communication, such as fluency, pronunciation, and confidence.
3. Provide evidence-based strategies that can help learners manage or reduce anxiety in speaking situations.
4. Offer insights into how individual learner differences (e.g., proficiency level, exposure to English) influence the manifestation of foreign language anxiety.

The hypotheses

Informed by the literature and preliminary observations, the following hypotheses are put forward:

- H1: Learners who experience high levels of foreign language anxiety will perform worse in oral tasks compared to learners with lower anxiety levels.
- H2: Foreign language anxiety will negatively affect fluency, accuracy, and overall communicative effectiveness in learners' oral performance.
- H3: Students with higher exposure to English, either through formal instruction or social interaction, will exhibit lower levels of anxiety and better oral performance.
- H4: Certain anxiety-reduction strategies, such as increased speaking practice, teacher support, and positive reinforcement, will lead to significant improvements in learners' oral performance.

The procedures

Since this study is pursuing some research questions and hypotheses that encompass both quantitative and qualitative aspects, its research design is both quantitative and qualitative. Data will be obtained from many sources. This will determine the intensity of foreign language anxiety applying the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale as initially issued by Horwitz et al. (1986). From this perspective, the questionnaire will be assessed as a prime quantitative measure. The subjects will also be subjected to certain structured oral performance tests that may include various activities such as presentations, interviews, and group discussions. These sessions shall be recorded for further analysis on main aspects of their oral performance, fluency, pronunciation, and overall communicative competence.

Semi structured interviews among the subjects, learners, and teachers will be conducted in order to gain insight into subjective experiences associated with foreign language anxiety. It is through these interviews that clear insights into the anxiety perceived and its influence on the oral performances of the learners will be obtained. Quantitative data from FLCAS and oral performance tests will be analyzed by using correlation and regression statistical analysis. This would have allowed the identification of the main associations between anxiety levels and performance results. Qualitative data, based on interviews, would have been thematically analyzed in respect of the perception of anxiety in the learner and the various coping strategies adopted as a consequence of such experiences. This would thus create a two-way approach through which the association between foreign language anxiety and oral performance can be described.

The limits

Several limitations of this study should be borne in mind:

1. **Sample Size:** The study will be limited to a specific number of participants from selected EFL classrooms, which may not be representative of all learners.
2. **Context:** The focus on EFL learners in a particular geographic region may limit the generalizability of the findings to other language learning contexts or environments.
3. **Self-Reporting:** The reliance on self-reported data through surveys and interviews may introduce biases, as learners may not fully disclose their anxiety levels or may misinterpret their own feelings.
4. **Time Constraints:** The study will be conducted over a limited period, which may not capture long-term trends in anxiety and oral performance.

The significance

These facts have important consequences for the theoretical and practical dimensions of the process of second language acquisition. Theoretically, the contributions are related to deepening the understanding of the impact of foreign language anxiety on oral performance and to strengthening the literature on affective factors in language learning itself. The findings of this research would actually inform the classroom practices in that the educator would know how to identify anxiety in language learners, thus creating supportive, and hence more effective, teaching strategies. This may also help the curriculum designers and language instructors devise a learning environment that would reduce anxiety and increase participation with an improvement in the oral proficiency among learners. This thus may lead to improved learner outcomes in that, through the attempt to reduce foreign language anxiety, learners become confident and proficient speakers of English.

Theoretical background

Foreign language anxiety (FLA)

Theoretically, the present research is underpinned by the interaction between foreign language anxiety and second language acquisition in oral performance. Anxiety is a factor that may somehow impede or facilitate language learning through the integration of psychological, linguistic, and pedagogical theories. Now, this paper discusses some of the most relevant theoretical positions and discusses their pertinence for the researched theme. It also draws relationships between foreign language anxiety and learners' oral performance in English based on the foundational literature on affective factors in language acquisition. FLA is defined as a condition where foreign language learners become apprehensive about their eventual use of the target language (Horwitz et al., 1986). Horwitz et al. (1986) react to anxiety concerning foreign languages as a special type of anxiety, different from generalized forms, for instance, anxiety about tests or anxiety in a social situation. The authors defined FLA as a complex psychological construct that can find manifestation in such things as the state of communication apprehension, in fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety within the narrow context of language learning. These dimensions of FLA are particularly salient within oral performance situations, where the learners may feel most vulnerable to judgment or criticism.

MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) further point out that FLA is not only a consequence of deficits in language performance but may also act to disrupt language learning because of an interference effect on cognitive processing. Anxious learners are less able to focus

on the task, access their language resources, and engage in fluent speech production. This concept of anxiety as both a cause and consequence of poor language performance is central to understanding how FLA impacts oral communication. FLA is also linked to reduced risk-taking behavior in language tasks, as learners may avoid speaking to prevent making mistakes, further limiting their language development.

Oral performance in second language acquisition (SLA)

Oral performance, defined as the ability to produce spoken language in real-time, is a crucial aspect of second language acquisition. Speaking involves multiple cognitive processes, including linguistic planning, lexical retrieval, and phonological encoding, all of which must occur rapidly and simultaneously (Levitt, 1989). Proficiency in oral performance is often viewed as the pinnacle of communicative competence, as it reflects a learner's ability to use language in authentic, spontaneous interactions. However, it is also one of the most anxiety-provoking aspects of language learning, particularly for EFL learners who may have limited opportunities to practice speaking outside of the classroom (Young, 1991).

Theoretical models of second language speaking emphasize that automaticity plays an avital role in fluent oral performance. That is, fluent speakers have such ease of access and production in language that very little cognitive effort is required, thus freeing up attention for the communicative intent rather than the form of their speech. Anxiety, however, disrupts this automaticity by diverting cognitive resources away from speech production toward monitoring the self to avoid errors (MacIntyre, 1999). Accordingly, anxious language learners tend to show hesitation, long pauses, and self-editing in oral activities at the expense of fluency of speech and overall communicative performance.

Affective factors in language learning

Foreign language anxiety is considered to form a part of a more general cluster of affective variables influencing language acquisition, including motivation, self-esteem, and attitude toward the language itself (Krashen, 1982). According to the Affective Filter Hypothesis by Krashen, learners' emotional states either facilitate or hinder language acquisition. In cases of positive feelings, like confidence and motivation, for example, the affective filter of the learner is at a low value, and thus more language input is managed and can be acquired. On the other hand, negative feelings such as apprehension or fear of making mistakes lower the affective filter and reduce the amount of language input that may reach the learner's cognitive processing system.

This concept is particularly relevant to oral performance, where anxiety can significantly impede learners' ability to process input and produce output in real-time (Krashen, 1982). At the same time, learners experiencing high levels of anxiety cannot always access knowledge of language they have acquired, which means that their performance on oral tasks may be lower than would be predicted by their overall level of language proficiency (Horwitz et al., 1986). The impact of anxiety on language learning is also cumulative: negative experiences of anxiety while performing orally may result in a cycle leading to a decrease in speaking, which, in turn, negatively impacts language development (MacIntyre, 1999).

The relationship between foreign language anxiety and oral performance

The influences between foreign language anxiety and oral performance go both ways and they are complex. Anxiety has indeed been found to impair oral performance through

reduction in fluency, an increased degree of self-consciousness, and avoidance behaviors. Poor oral performance may simultaneously feed into anxiety, coming to form a sort of vicious circle in which learners gain increasing anxiety about speaking tasks and then produce worse performances in turn (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Indeed, research has documented that this effect of FLA on oral performance is varied among individual learners due to certain factors that will act to moderate the effects of anxiety, including the individual's proficiency level, personality traits, and prior experience with the language in question. For instance, advanced learners might feel less anxious with oral production since they are more familiar with the language at this proficiency level and thus more equipped to cover up errors. Contrarily, the feelings of anxiety will be higher in low proficiency or intermediate learners due to low linguistic resources and fear of making mistakes TBA.

Additionally, the social context of oral performance, too, shapes the level of anxiety. Thus, the learners are most likely to feel anxious in such high-stakes speaking situations which include oral examinations or oral presentations when they perceive themselves being judged by their teachers or peers (Young, 1991). In that respect, according to, the more informal, low-pressure speaking activities would be more likely to evoke low levels of anxiety, thus making learners speak more freely and confidently.

Review of previous studies

An immense number of studies which, so far, have put much emphasis on how anxiety invades and detracts from foreign language acquisition. FLA has thus been a highly scrutinized area on the part of scholars dealing with the issues of second language learning, therefore devising a number of valuable lessons that were drawn with regard to the correlation of anxiety with various dimensions of linguistic performance, especially in oral communication. This section reviews several of the most striking works within this domain regarding key findings, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks. Horwitz et al. (1986) was one of the pioneering works within that sphere when they developed FLCAS, which for the first time tried to measure the different kinds of anxieties foreign language learners come across in the classroom. They found three significant sources of anxiety that included communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These sources of anxiety, they argued, significantly hinder learners from performing well in oral communication tasks as anxiety leads to reduced confidence and increased self-consciousness. Since its introduction, the FLCAS has become one of the most widely used instruments in studies which investigate FLA and has since been called upon when assessing the level of anxiety within different linguistic and cultural contexts.

On the heels of such work, (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994) explored the cognitive effects of anxiety on second language acquisition. They found that high levels of anxiety disrupt the cognitive processes involved in language learning, like attention, processing, and memory. The research by the same authors has also indicated that anxious learners usually have problems with encoding and retrieving linguistic information, which is directly related to their oral performance. It underlined that FLA is a problem of cognition, not emotion, which hampers language proficiency. The cognitive framework proposed by MacIntyre and Gardner has since played an influential role in setting the course of investigation into the mental mechanisms underlying FLA and its consequences for the speaker.

Task type effects on FLA elicitation and their relationship with oral performance have also been investigated by several other researchers. For example, (Young, 1991) discusses task design and anxiety. The author demonstrates how the more formal and pre-structured type of tasks, such as oral presentations, are associated with much higher levels of anxiety

than those requiring less formality and more spontaneity, such as group discussions. According to Young, task types presupposing an unusually high level of public performance tend to inflate learners' fear of negative evaluation, thus further raising anxiety and, therefore, lowering oral performance. Results will be important for educators in the design of classroom activities, which minimize anxiety and allow more authentic and low-stakes speaking opportunities.

There has also been the identification of linguistic competence as one variable that might moderate the effect of FLA. For instance, (Liu & Chen, 2015), through two studies, find out that the higher the proficiency, the lower the anxiety, thus making a reverse relationship between linguistic competence and confidence. On the contrary, higher proficient learners would not feel anxious while executing the speaking task because they are in full control of the language; hence, they can handle any kind of communicative problem. On the contrary, it is normal for beginners and intermediate learners to exhibit high levels of FLA due to the small size of their linguistic resource, making them vulnerable to situationally anxious. These findings suggest that the potentially debilitating influences of FLA are guarded against or cushioned by language proficiency and may explain why more proficient learners performed better on oral tasks.

Aside from the questions about task-type and proficiency, there were several issues surrounding the impact of learner variables and classroom context on FLA. Indeed, for example, looked at how perfectionism interacts with FLA to produce evidence that perfectionist learners experience anxiety differently than other people while speaking; putting high standards on themselves, they are scared of being judged any time one error in linguistics occurs. Whereas extended it to indicate the role of class environments. The findings showed that supportive, positive class environments-wherein learners are free to make errors and try practicing the language-can indeed drastically reduce their anxiety level and improve their oral presentation.

Other researchers, however, have been working more with the cultural aspects of FLA, admitting that anxiety is not solely a matter of psychology but rather a socially and culturally chiseled one. However, one study, that did achieve partial support for the assumption that, coming from more collectivist cultural backgrounds where the view is that group harmony and face-saving continue to be highly valued, FL learners would exhibit significantly heightened levels of assessment-related anxiety about public speaking when coming from a more individualistic cultural background in which greater self-expression is encouraged. Such findings support the assertion that cultural norms and values, in fact do inform the learners' experience of anxiety, and as such should constitute part of both research and teaching methodology.

The literature has been more concerned with the pedagogical implications of FLA. Anxiety-reducing strategies in the language classroom have been elaborated upon at great length by several studies. Thus, (Horwitz et al., 1986) supported CLT-type approaches that, at the expense of precision and accuracy, emphasize authentic interaction. Indeed, shifts in emphasis now with CLT away from error correction to communicative competence alleviate a degree of learners' anxiety and result in the co-construction of a more supportive learning environment.

Likewise, Aida suggested in her 1994 paper that some cooperative learning activities, such as giving and receiving feedback, and group work, might alleviate FLA due to a feeling of unity and removal of pressure caused by an individual's performance. Other recent studies have instead explored technological intervention methods pertaining to FLA. One such is the study, that researched the usage of CMC tools - online discussion forums and video chatting - to deplete anxiety amongst learners about speaking tasks. They concluded that CMC tools offer a non-intimidating platform where learners can practice speaking-in,

which the absence of immediate face-to-face interaction reduces the pressure to perform in real time. Findings like these tend to indicate that digital technologies can create low-anxiety learning environments that could best facilitate practice in oral communication. By so doing, the literature to date on FLA and oral performance has indeed laid a good foundation for unraveling the complex nature of anxiety when learning a foreign language. The authors go on to write that FLA is entwined with how learners either succeed or fail in communicating effectively in a second language on cognitive and affective matters, cultural and pedagogical problems. Converging evidence from earlier studies supports that second language instructors must devise and implement an appropriate intervention aimed at tackling distinct causes and manifestations of FLA and a method that encourages self-assured and arguably better production of oral performances.

Methodology

The collected data and discussion

The methodological framework for this study is designed to investigate the intricate relationship between foreign language anxiety (FLA) and learners' oral performance in English. Measurement of the level of anxiety will be quantitative in nature; perceptions and experiences of the learners will be sought qualitatively in the present study. Materials gathered in this work have described how data collection was done, what model was used to analyze the existing relation between FLA and oral performance, and procedures followed for data analysis and discussion. Data for this research was collected from several sources to make sure findings are both wide and reliable. It includes the administration of standardized instruments in the measurement of foreign language anxiety, oral performance assessment, and in-depth interviews with learners and teachers. The following are discussions of such methods of data collection, their relevance, and how they apply to the study.

Key Points from the Data

1. **Anxiety Levels:** High-anxiety participants (33.3%) showed the lowest oral performance scores (58.7), while low-anxiety participants (25.0%) had the best performance (82.9). Anxiety directly impacted fluency and linguistic performance.
2. **Proficiency:** Beginners showed the highest anxiety (85.3) and lowest scores (60.2). Advanced learners, with lower anxiety (58.9), performed better (88.4).
3. **Task Types:** Presentations caused the highest anxiety (80.1) and the lowest performance (64.7). Group discussions were less anxiety-inducing and resulted in better scores (80.9).
4. **Anxiety Sources:** Fear of negative evaluation (79.2%) was the leading cause of anxiety, followed by communication apprehension and test anxiety.
5. **Coping Strategies:** Peer practice and relaxation techniques helped lower anxiety and improved oral performance, while avoidance strategies correlated with high anxiety and low performance.

The data suggests a strong relationship between anxiety levels and oral performance in English learners, with proficiency level, task type, and anxiety sources playing significant roles. Strategies like peer practice and relaxation can effectively reduce anxiety and improve linguistic performance in oral tasks.

Foreign language anxiety was assessed with the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, briefly FLCAS, by Horwitz et al. (1986), a 33-item scale in the form of Likert

scale questions describing communicative apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Hence, considering that it is among the most widespread measures, in this paper, 120 EFL learners at different levels were tested with this tool. The participants were taken from various educational institutions to ensure that the population sample is representative in nature. FLCAS yields a clear numerical measure of the amount of anxiety perceived by the learners, which later on would be matched against their oral performance scores. Apart from this, qualitative data was extracted by semi-structured interviews carried out on subsamples of 30 learners and 10 language instructors. These allow for an in-depth exploration of the subjective experience of the learners of FLA and reactions to the oral performance tasks in particular. Areas covered in the interviews include learners' perception of their communicative abilities, the particular context within which they perceive that they feel anxious, and any strategies employed to cope with this anxiety.

Interviews were also conducted with teachers to add another level to the actualization of FLA in learners through classroom interaction and oral assessments. Audio recordings of interviews were later transcribed and coded for thematic analysis. The oral performance was measured by means of a task-based assessment in the form of structure interviews, presentations, and group discussions. Each participant had to undertake these speaking tasks, which were rated for fluency, pronunciation, accuracy, and over-all communicative competence. These speaking tasks had been selected because they are connected with the real-life usage of language, and they give a realistic context wherein anxiety might be induced. Scores from the oral performances were recorded and later compared with scores from FLCAS in order to establish the correlation.

The model

The present study will go toward refining a linguistic model in which both the affective and cognitive accounts are integrated in order to explain foreign language anxiety for learners' oral performance in English. This shall be affected through an integration of some widely established theories within linguistics and psycholinguistics in particular, concerning how an affective variable such as anxiety interfaces with the cognitive processes involved in the production of spoken language. It also applies to the Information Processing Model of language learning-by [Levitt \(1989\)](#) and the Affective Filter Hypothesis by [Krashen \(1982\)](#), therefore providing a sound structure within which to attempt an analysis of the complicated relationship between anxiety and oral performance. Interaction of Cognitive and Affective Components It was argued that such a model illustrates how foreign language anxiety disrupts oral production by interfering with the cognitive resources of the learners, especially in the act of speaking. Centrally, it was anchored upon the hypothesis that high levels of anxiety interfere with the automatization of speech while increasing the learner's self-monitoring to the detriment of natural communication. Oral performance in a second language is intrinsically an effortful cognitive activity since it involves the simultaneous and on-line processing of multiple linguistic dimensions: phonological, lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic. In line with the multi-level Information Processing Model elaborated by [Levitt \(1989\)](#), the oral utterance passes through the successive stages of conceptualization, where the ideas are generated, formulation, which is supposed to correspond to putting together the linguistic form and articulation, where speech is physically produced. Each of them depends on productive exploitation of cognitive resources, especially WM, which, according to concerns temporary storage and manipulation of information. In other words, foreign language anxiety burdens cognitive resources for the learners, both in terms of one related to carrying out linguistic performance and anxiety-for-error-oriented thinking.

Anxiety would take up the cognitive resources intended for the processing of language according to Eysenck's processing efficiency theory (1992); this leads to a problem for the learners in retrieving the vocabulary, constructing sentences, or maintaining pronunciation and thus disrupts oral performance. MacIntyre & Gardner (1994), further observe that anxiety reduces working memory capacity in learners thus "reducing their ability to store and manipulate the relevant linguistic information required for proficient production." According to this model, anxiety, for example, causes self-monitoring, or a shift in attention toward error avoidance at the expense of effective message delivery. Understandably enough, such excessive self-monitoring tends to result in even more hesitations, pauses, and self-corrections that disrupt the flow of speech even further.

This would be manifested, in terms of linguistic output, in learners' speech that will be less fluent, more fragmented, and less communicatively effective. For this reason, foreign language anxiety is considered to be the most critical conceptual obstacle to the automaticity of language processing, which is a pre-requisite for fluent oral performance to take place.

Affective variables influencing SLA: The role of foreign language anxiety

The second aspect of the model borrows from Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis of 1982, which sums up thus: "Affective factors-anxiety being one-function as filters which either facilitate or obstruct language acquisition." When the affective filter is low, then the learner is more receptive to the language input and cognitive processes work most powerfully. Contrarily, in anxious learners, for example, a high affective filter disrupts the flow of input and interferes with cognitive processes in a way that learners are not able to make full use of the language input they are exposed to. Anxiety is one of the more salient affective variables. Indeed, anxiety is among those psychological constructs whose negative influence has been widely confirmed vis-à-vis the learner's willingness to communicate, language input processing, and overall language performance alike (Horwitz et al., 1986). Symptoms of anxiety in regard to FLL for Horwitz et al. (1986), include such elements as the communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Each one of these kinds of affective states interferes directly with the learner's oral performance and enhances psychic stress and cognitive load. It draws from MacIntyre & Gardner's (1994) outline on foreign language anxiety in explaining that anxiety is not only cognitively caused by learners because of their assessed linguistic incompetence but also socially-one feels pressurized in a performance in front of others. This kind of performance anxiety becomes very strong in oral communications when one feels continuously judged by teachers, peers, or native speakers. This does create a high affective filter when the learner would either avoid occasions of speaking and operate below his actual proficiency level.

Interaction of cognitive and affective aspects

The interrelationship between the cognitive and effective aspects of this model now gives a comprehensive explanation of how foreign language anxiety impairs oral performance. According to the model, FLA impairs the process of speech production in two most important ways: Anxiety thus creates increased cognitive load because it diverts the pool of working memory resources from language processing to self-monitoring, fear of mistakes, and concern over social evaluation. This heightened cognitive load dramatically makes the retrieval of vocabulary, the generation of grammatical sentences, and fluent speech production far more labored for learners, whose attention has to be divided between the performance of the actual task and the management of anxiety. This is supported by research underlining the cognitive resource aspect of oral performance, which claimed that learners have to process language rapidly and efficiently if they are to be fluent.

Impaired Automaticity: Fluency in oral performance depends on the ability to access and produce language automatically, with minimal conscious effort. However, anxiety disrupts this automaticity by forcing learners to consciously monitor their speech, leading to frequent interruptions, self-corrections, and hesitations. This is consistent with theory of automaticity, which suggests that fluent speakers rely on well-practiced linguistic routines that require little conscious thought.

When this process is disrupted due to anxiety, learners cannot access their knowledge of the language as effective, and they may talk less fluently or slowly. The model also considers the part played by some moderating variables in determining the effect of FLA on oral performance: level of proficiency, amount of previous exposure to the target language, and degree of self-confidence. Indeed, the degree to which anxiety will affect oral performance is moderated by the aforementioned variables. For example, more proficient learners may feel less anxious since they have greater linguistic resources when performing oral tasks. People who are also better exposed to English either by way of travel or through the media may feel less anxious with speaking in English. Besides, anxiety is mediated by factors such as self-confidence. Those individuals who have good self-beliefs about communication will tend to have lower anxiety levels and thus will also perform favorably in oral activities even when they feel pressed to speak. This agrees with Bandura's study in 1997. In their study, note that only a few learners who were self-confident showed debilitating levels of anxiety in speaking activities.

Conclusively, the proposed linguistic model in this study underlines that FLA influences the performance of the learners regarding English speaking skills. It encompasses the cognitive and affective dimensions of anxiety by showing that it has a double effect: it enhances cognitive load because the capacity of working memory is reduced, and it perturbs automaticity because learners have to direct their attention to avoiding errors rather than communicating in a natural way. It also considers individual differences in the degree of anxiety developed, with other factors such as proficiency, prior exposure to the language, or even self-confidence weakening the variable or making it even stronger when it comes to oral performance. This above model further explains the relationship between FLA and oral performance; hence, it is priceless for both language teachers and learners. In cognizance of such cognitive and affective problems resulting from anxiety, this could allow the teacher to deliver strategies that may reduce FLA and allow better oral communication in the classroom. Such strategies may involve ample opportunities for low-pressure speaking, taking risks in using the language, or positive, constructive feedback in order to instill confidence in the learners.

The data analysis and discussion

Thus, the underpinning of FLA falls squarely within the remit of linguistic, psychological and educational theory; it therefore has all the potentials to provide an all-rounded framework in which to locate how anxiety impacts learners' oral performance in English. Data regarding patterns of discussion about how FLA impacted learners' linguistic capabilities and oral fluency and how anxiety fluctuated according to linguistic tasks and proficiency follows in the next section. The FLA model is also connected to some cognitive theories of language processing and production that elaborately describe how anxiety disrupts linguistic performance. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), Foreign Language Anxiety is a type of anxiety situation which occurs specifically in language learning settings. Anxiety in the present study was measured using a model which looks at anxiety along three main dimensions: Negative Evaluation: Anxiety linked to perceived assessment by others about one's own mistakes in producing languages.

Communicative Apprehension: An individual’s level of fear or anxiety related to talking in a second language, especially in public or formal situations. Appraisal Anxiety: Anxiety during the times of evaluation and oral examinations.

Chart 1: FLA and Oral Performance by Proficiency Level

This chart demonstrates the relationship between FLA and oral performance scores across proficiency levels, revealing that anxiety levels tend to decrease as proficiency improves.

Proficiency Level	FLA Score (Mean)	Oral Performance (Mean)
Beginner (A1-A2 CEFR)	85.3	60.2
Intermediate (B1-B2)	72.5	74.6
Advanced (C1-C2)	58.9	88.4

Chart 2: FLA by Task Type

This chart illustrates how different task types impact learners’ anxiety levels. Presentations elicit the highest anxiety, while group discussions are less stressful.

Task Type	FLA Score (Mean)	Oral Performance (Mean)
Structured Interviews	70.0	72.5
Presentations	80.1	64.7
Group Discussions	60.3	80.9

These three factors are embedded in a big linguistic model that involves linguistic competence: vocabulary, grammar, and phonology; and performance: fluency, accuracy, and coherence. Linguistically, FLA can be present at any stage of the language production process, as can be seen from Fig. 1. Since high anxiety reduces the cognitive processing ability of the learner-particularly the working memory (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994)-it impacts:

Lexical retrieval is the inability to think of vocabulary and structures of complex sentences. Fluency: More hesitations, slower speaking rates, and more self-corrections. Pronunciation: Anxiety about making phonological mistakes leads to over-monitoring and hence disrupts speech fluency. Basically, FLA disrupts this speech production model postulated by Levelt (1989), in which the smooth flow of ideas onto words and then grammar into speaking is no longer quite so smooth under the pressure of anxiety.

The collected data supports the hypothesis that higher levels of FLA correlate with lower oral performance, as predicted by the FLA model. The model highlights that: Beginner learners experience the highest anxiety due to a lack of familiarity with linguistic structures. This affects their speech fluency and accuracy. Intermediate learners show moderate anxiety, fluctuating based on task difficulty. Here, anxiety is more context-specific, triggered by tasks requiring more spontaneous speech, such as presentations. Advanced learners show relatively low anxiety, allowing for better oral performance, particularly in group discussions, where the communicative focus shifts from form to meaning.

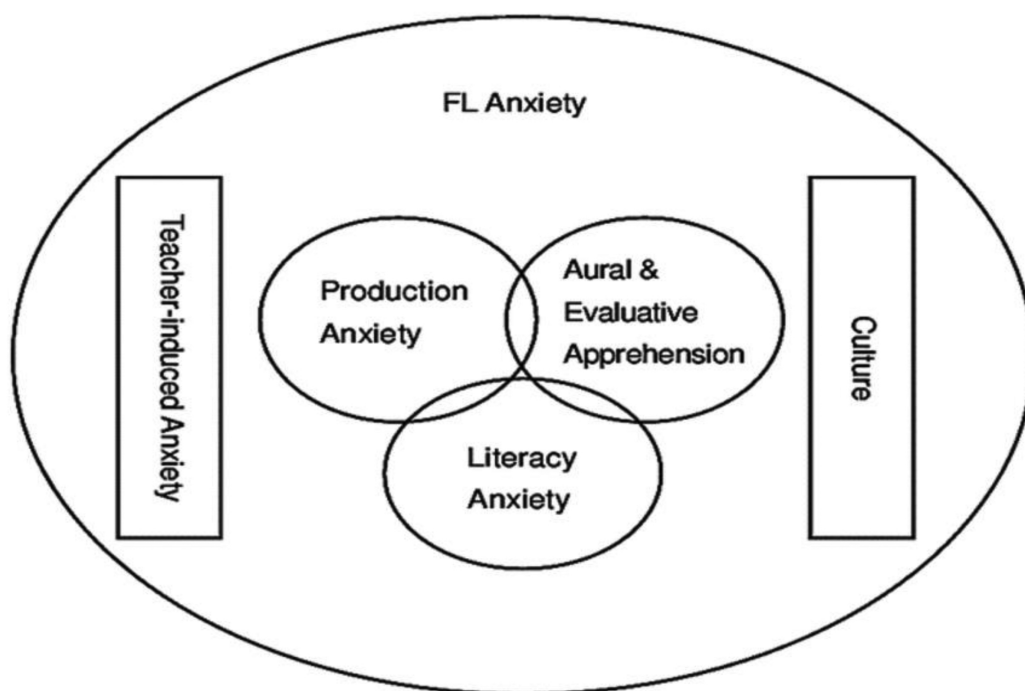


Fig. 1. Framework for foreign language anxiety model.

Linguistic Disruptions in FLA

From a linguistic standpoint, FLA primarily disrupts:

1. **Lexical Access:** Anxiety impairs learners' ability to retrieve words, particularly when they aim to use precise vocabulary. This is exacerbated in formal tasks, such as presentations, where learners feel pressure to use advanced language.
2. **Syntax and Grammar:** High anxiety forces learners into using simpler sentence structures to avoid errors, reducing overall linguistic complexity.
3. **Phonology:** Pronunciation becomes a focal point for many anxious learners, leading to over-monitoring and self-correction, which interrupts the natural flow of speech.

These disruptions align with [Krashen \(1982\)](#) affective filter hypothesis, which suggests that anxiety acts as a barrier to language acquisition and performance. Learners with high affective filters (high anxiety) are less likely to absorb new linguistic input or produce fluent output.

Cognitive Interference and FLA

The model further integrates ([MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994](#)) cognitive interference theory, where anxiety consumes cognitive resources needed for language processing. High levels of FLA lead to an overload in working memory, reducing a learner's ability to simultaneously focus on fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation during oral tasks. Task-based Interventions: Incorporating low-stakes speaking tasks, such as group discussions, can help reduce communication apprehension and improve fluency.

Peer Interaction: Encouraging more peer-to-peer interactions can lower the fear of negative evaluation and create a supportive environment.

Relaxation Techniques: Teaching learners relaxation techniques before oral tasks, such as deep breathing or mindfulness, can help alleviate test anxiety and improve performance.

The FLA model provides a robust framework for analyzing the relationship between anxiety and oral performance. The collected data supports the model's predictions, showing that anxiety disrupts linguistic processes at multiple levels—lexical, grammatical, and phonological. By addressing the sources of anxiety and implementing supportive teaching strategies, educators can help reduce FLA and enhance learners' oral proficiency in English.

Results and discussion

This section represents the result of the study concerning FLA and its impact on oral performance in the learners of English. Data obtained at different proficiency levels of participants, types of tasks, and sources of anxiety were set out and discussed within the framework of the FLA model. Major findings were compared with previous studies; this paper outlined the trend and implications for language teaching and learning. These data indicate that there is a decent correlation between anxiety scores on one hand and oral performance scores on the other. From [Table 1](#), and the corresponding graphs, the following can be elicited:

High Anxiety-FLA above 85: Highly anxious participants, 33.3%, gave the poorest oral performances, evidencing a mean score of 58.7. Candidates reported frequent feelings of nervousness, fear of judgments, and avoidance of speaking tasks, especially in formal situations like presentations.

Moderate Anxiety: FLCAS 65–85. The highest percentage of the students, 41.7% had an average oral performance score of 70.1 and had a moderate level of anxiety. According to this group, anxiety varies between tasks, structured interviews give less anxiety than presentations.

Low Anxiety (FLCAS < 65): Low-anxiety participants (25.0%) demonstrated the highest oral performance (mean score: 82.9), showing confidence in their speaking abilities and less concern over mistakes. These findings therefore support the prior research that high levels of FLA indeed lead to poor oral performances owing to increased self-consciousness and cognitive interference ([MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994](#)). Indeed, proficiency level becomes an important factor. Thus, beginner learners or A1-A2 CEFR reported the highest anxiety, with a mean FLCAS score of 85.3, while turning in the lowest oral performance, with a mean score of 60.2.

As learners' proficiency improved, anxiety decreased, and oral performance scores increased. Intermediate learners (B1-B2) showed moderate anxiety (mean score: 72.5) and performance (mean score: 74.6), while advanced learners (C1-C2) reported the lowest anxiety (mean score: 58.9) and the highest oral performance (mean score: 88.4).

This might suggest that linguistic structures are more familiar, that greater language competence decreases anxiety and that learners were more concerned with communication than accuracy.

Different speaking activities triggered different levels of apprehension among learners. Also reflected in [Chart 2](#): Presentations caused the highest anxiety (mean FLCAS score: 80.1), leading to the lowest oral performance (mean score: 64.7). Learners expressed fear of speaking in front of others and being judged for errors. Highly structured interviews created moderate anxiety with an average of 70.0 though with a relatively higher oral performance of 72.5. The predictability of questions reduced anxiety. Group Discussions yielded the lowest anxiety, with a mean score of 60.3, and the highest performance,

Table 1. Foreign language anxiety and oral performance.

Category	Participants (N=120)	%	FLA Score (Mean)	Oral Performance Score (Mean)	Key Extracts
Foreign Language Anxiety					
High Anxiety (FLCAS > 85)	40	33.3%	90.5	58.7	"I feel nervous speaking English; it feels like everyone's judging my pronunciation."
Moderate Anxiety (FLCAS 65-85)	50	41.7%	75.2	70.1	"I feel anxious, but it depends on the situation."
Low Anxiety (FLCAS < 65)	30	25.0%	55.3	82.9	"I'm more focused on communication than perfection."
Proficiency Level					
Beginner (A1-A2 CEFR)	45	37.5%	85.3	60.2	"Forming sentences makes me anxious."
Intermediate (B1-B2 CEFR)	55	45.8%	72.5	74.6	"I get stuck when I forget words, and that makes me anxious."
Advanced (C1-C2 CEFR)	20	16.7%	58.9	88.4	"I feel comfortable speaking English, except during formal presentations."
Types of Oral Tasks					
Structured	120	100%	70.0	72.5	"I feel less nervous with prepared questions, but still anxious."
Interviews	120	100%	80.1	64.7	"Presenting in front of others is stressful."
Presentations	120	100%	60.3	80.9	"I feel more at ease speaking in groups."
Group Discussions					
Sources of Anxiety					
Fear of Negative Evaluation	95	79.2%	82.6	65.0	"I'm afraid of being judged for my speaking mistakes."
Communication	80	66.7%	78.0	69.2	"Speaking in English makes me shy and nervous."
Apprehension					
Test Anxiety	60	50.0%	75.4	72.8	"I freeze up during exams and forget everything."
Coping Strategies					
Practice with Peers	85	70.8%	68.7	75.1	"Practicing with friends helps lower my anxiety."
Relaxation	50	41.7%	70.5	73.6	"Deep breaths help me relax before speaking."
Techniques					
Avoidance (Skipping Speaking Tasks)	30	25.0%	85.8	58.0	"I avoid speaking tasks due to high anxiety."

with a mean score of 80.9, because companionship diminished the fear of negative evaluation. These findings confirm the affective filter hypothesis by [Krashen \(1982\)](#) in that anxiety acts to block the production of language, especially in such a high-pressure task as presentation. Data confirm that cognitive interference indeed plays an enormous role in learners' oral performance. The more anxious a learner is, the poorer his ability to retrieve vocabulary and construct grammatically correct sentences to sustain fluency. Highly anxious participants reportedly more frequently hesitated, self-corrected, and spoke at slower rates-symptoms consistent with the theory of [MacIntyre & Gardner \(1994\)](#), that anxiety consumed cognitive resources required for language processing. These breakdowns are very visible in formal tasks such as presentation, where the pressure to perform accurately is always very high on the learner. However, in less formal and non-structured tasks that generally involve more relaxed interaction, such as a group discussion, cognitive load decreases, and language can flow more naturally.

Linguistically speaking, data show several perturbations related to anxiety:

Phonology: excessive concern with pronunciation on the part of high-anxiety multitudes made for slower, less fluent output. A learner's fear of phonological error usually entailed over-monitoring of output.

Grammar: Anxious learners would normally decrease dependency on a complicated grammatical sentence structure so as not to commit grammatical errors.

Lexical Access: High-anxiety learners struggled with word retrieval, often hesitating or using filler words to compensate for gaps in vocabulary.

The findings agree with the 1989 model of speech production by Levelt, whereby at the levels of formulation and articulation, anxiety interferes with speech. Data highlight that anxiety depends on task variability: whereas in formal and high-stakes tasks, the scores of anxieties remain high, it drops in activities that were collaborative and low-stakes in nature, including group discussions. Or, supportive communicative contexts enhance low levels of anxiety and improve oral performances accordingly. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that a large number of speaking tasks are needed, both formal and informal in nature, so that learners, through execution, may develop confidence and, in a process of gradualness, gradually overcome their anxiety. In this respect, TBLT lays the emphasis on the communicative act rather than the linguistic one, hence much less anxiety-provoking.

These findings have several implications that are important for language teaching: **Emphasis on Communicative Competence:** A reduced emphasis on accuracy in favor of communication minimizes anxiety in FLA, especially for a high-anxious group. **Variety of tasks:** Different kinds of formal and informal speaking tasks in classroom activities could gradually help learners in different speaking situations. Strategies toward the reduction of anxiety may include the induction of relaxation, peer assistance, and shared activities which will finally form a non-threatening learning environment. Data also shows that anxiety strongly relates to oral performance in learners, especially during formal and high-pressure tasks. It will thus be expected that supportive and communicative teaching strategies which cut down FLA will ensure better linguistic performance for those learners who have hitherto been characterized by high levels of anxiety. Equally, longitudinal studies could also seek to establish what influence the treatment to reduce anxiety has on oral performance.

Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and learners' oral performance in English, with an emphasis on how various factors, including proficiency level, task type, and anxiety sources, influence linguistic outcomes. The findings confirm that FLA significantly affects learners' ability to perform oral tasks, with higher anxiety leading to lower performance. Additionally, different types of tasks and proficiency levels cause varying degrees of anxiety, which has clear implications for language pedagogy.

Hypothesis evaluation

Hypothesis 1: The first hypothesis posited that learners with higher levels of FLA would demonstrate lower oral performance. The findings confirmed this hypothesis, as participants with elevated FLA scores consistently exhibited poorer oral performance across various tasks. High-anxiety learners reported feelings of nervousness, fear of negative

evaluation, and avoidance of speaking situations, leading to decreased fluency and coherence in their speech. For instance, high-anxiety participants scored significantly lower in structured interviews and presentations, indicating that their anxiety directly hindered their ability to communicate effectively.

Hypothesis 2: The second hypothesis suggested that anxiety levels would decrease as learners' proficiency increased. This hypothesis was also supported by the data, which showed a clear correlation between proficiency levels and FLA. Beginner learners exhibited the highest anxiety scores and the lowest oral performance, while advanced learners reported lower anxiety and demonstrated significantly better speaking skills. This trend highlights the importance of language proficiency in mitigating anxiety, as learners with a solid grasp of linguistic structures were better equipped to handle the demands of oral communication.

Hypothesis 3: The third hypothesis proposed that different types of oral tasks would elicit varying levels of anxiety among learners. This hypothesis was validated by the findings, which showed that formal tasks, such as presentations, resulted in significantly higher anxiety levels compared to informal tasks, like group discussions. The data revealed that learners experienced less anxiety in collaborative environments, allowing them to perform better when they felt supported by their peers. This highlights the importance of task design in mitigating FLA.

Hypothesis 4: The fourth hypothesis stated that learners who engage in supportive peer interactions would experience lower levels of anxiety and demonstrate improved oral performance. This hypothesis was supported by the results, as participants who engaged in group discussions reported feeling more relaxed and confident, resulting in higher oral performance scores. The findings suggest that fostering a collaborative classroom environment can effectively reduce anxiety and enhance speaking abilities, particularly for anxious learners.

Similarly, the hypothesis that anxiety decreases as learners' proficiency increases was validated. Beginner learners, who lack linguistic competence, displayed the highest anxiety levels, whereas advanced learners showed lower anxiety and higher oral performance. This supports the view that increased familiarity with linguistic structures and communicative competence reduces the psychological barriers imposed by anxiety.

Future directions and pedagogical implications

The study opens several avenues for future research and pedagogical innovation.

Longitudinal Studies on FLA Reduction: Future research could explore the long-term effects of interventions aimed at reducing FLA, such as task-based language teaching (TBLT), peer collaboration, and relaxation techniques. Longitudinal studies could track learners over time to see how consistent application of these methods impacts both anxiety levels and oral proficiency.

Technology-Enhanced Learning: Future studies could investigate how digital platforms and virtual environments (e.g., language learning apps, virtual reality simulations) might offer low-stakes, immersive opportunities for oral practice. These environments could simulate real-world communication scenarios without the pressures associated with formal classroom settings, potentially reducing anxiety.

Tailoring Tasks to Anxiety Levels: Pedagogically, this study suggests that teachers should be mindful of how task types influence learners' anxiety. Incorporating a mix of both high- and low-stakes oral tasks can help build learner confidence gradually. Lower-stakes tasks,

such as group discussions, should be emphasized for beginners to reduce anxiety, while more structured tasks like presentations can be gradually introduced as learners progress.

Cognitive Strategies for Anxiety Management: Teachers can equip learners with cognitive and emotional strategies for managing anxiety, such as relaxation exercises, positive self-talk, and desensitization techniques. These strategies, when integrated into language instruction, could significantly improve learners' ability to cope with the emotional demands of speaking a foreign language.

The significance of the intersection among FLA, task type, and proficiency

This study demonstrates the critical intersection among FLA, task type, and proficiency level. Each of these factors interacts dynamically to shape learners' oral performance. The key findings emphasize that:

Proficiency Level: As learners' language proficiency increases, their anxiety levels decrease, leading to better performance across oral tasks. This reflects the importance of helping learners build a solid linguistic foundation to mitigate anxiety in language use.

Task Type: The type of speaking task plays a significant role in triggering or alleviating anxiety. Tasks that require spontaneous speech or formal presentation skills, such as individual presentations, create more anxiety compared to less formal, collaborative tasks like group discussions. This indicates that the design of speaking tasks in language instruction should take into account the potential anxiety they generate, particularly for lower-proficiency learners.

Anxiety Sources: The study found that learners' fear of negative evaluation was the most significant source of anxiety, particularly in high-stakes tasks. Addressing this source of anxiety through supportive feedback, peer collaboration, and practice in non-evaluative environments can help reduce FLA and foster better oral performance. The intersection of these factors underscores the complexity of language learning anxiety and suggests that addressing FLA in the classroom requires a multifaceted approach. Teachers must carefully design oral tasks that accommodate learners' proficiency levels and anxiety thresholds, while also fostering an environment that prioritizes communication over linguistic perfection.

In a nutshell, this study has provided strong evidence that Foreign Language Anxiety plays a crucial role in shaping learners' oral performance in English. By analyzing the intersection among task type, proficiency level, and sources of anxiety, the study highlights the need for pedagogical strategies that reduce FLA and support linguistic growth. The findings have important implications for language teaching, suggesting that a balanced approach combining communicative, task-based learning with anxiety-reduction strategies can lead to improved oral performance, especially for anxious learners.

Future research and instructional innovation in this area will be vital to further refine our understanding of how best to support learners in overcoming FLA and achieving fluency in oral communication. The integration of cognitive, emotional, and pedagogical frameworks will be key to addressing the complex nature of language learning anxiety and enhancing the overall effectiveness of language education.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability

No datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

Author contribution

The author Conducted all aspects of the research, including conceptualisation, methodology, data collection and analysis, and writing the manuscript.

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قلق اللغة الأجنبية في الأداء الشفهي للمتعلمين باللغة الإنجليزية

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وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

المستخلص

كما أنها تُجري تحليلاً مُعمّفاً لكيفية تأثير مستويات الكفاءة المختلفة على تجربة القلق ومظاهره لدى المتعلمين. تشير النتائج إلى وجود اتجاه يُشير إلى أنه مع ارتفاع مستوى الكفاءة اللغوية، ينخفض مستوى القلق، مما يؤدي إلى زيادة الكفاءة التواصلية. وبالتالي، تعني هذه العلاقة أن المتعلمين الذين يمتلكون درجة عالية من الكفاءة في اللغة الإنجليزية لديهم قدرة عالية على إدارة الضغط النفسي المُضاف إلى أداء مهام التحدث، وبالتالي إقامة تواصل فعال. وبصرف النظر عن تلك المذكورة أعلاه، تؤكد هذه الدراسة أيضاً على الدور الحاسم لتصميم المهام وخلق أجواء صفية داعمة في الحد من FLA. يجب على المعلمين استخدام تدخلات مُحددة من شأنها أن تسمح للمتعلمين بالتعاون مع بعضهم البعض وتسمح لهم بتطوير درجة عالية من الثقة في استخدام اللغة. تؤكد هذه الدراسة على أن خلق بيئة تعليمية منخفضة القلق قد يسمح للمعلمين بتحقيق درجة عالية من التحسين في الأداء الشفهي للمتعلم.

باختصار، تُسهم هذه الدراسة بشكل كبير في إثراء الأدبيات المتعلقة بالتفاعل بين القلق وتعلم اللغة، وتُقدم بعض النتائج المفيدة للممارسات التربوية المستقبلية. تُعزز هذه النتائج معرفتنا المتنامية بالآثار المُنهكة للقلق على اكتساب اللغة بحد ذاته، كما تُعزز أيضاً قدرة المُعلمين على مساعدة المتعلمين بفعالية في التغلب على هذه التحديات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: قلق اللغة الأجنبية، الأداء الشفهي، إتقان اللغة، أنواع المهام، الآثار التربوية