On the Relationship between Speaking Anxiety, Academic Well-being, and Speaking Performance among Iraqi High School EFL Students

Ahmed R. azzawi

Faculty of Education for Human Sciences - University of Kerbala.

Abstract

Paper Info

Keywords

This study explored the complex relationships between speaking anxiety, academic well-being, and speaking performance in Iraqi EFL learners. Researchers collected data from 175 intermediate-level students using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and measures of academic well-being. The analysis revealed important connections among these factors. The results showed a strong negative relationship between speaking anxiety and speaking performance, meaning that higher levels of anxiety significantly harmed the students' speaking abilities (with a correlation of $r = -0.796$, $p < 0.01$). There was also a notable negative link between speaking anxiety and overall academic well-being, suggesting that anxiety affected not only language tasks but also the students' broader psychological health ($r = -0.549$, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, when looking at different aspects of academic well-being, the students expressed a high value for school and satisfaction with their educational choices, but they also experienced considerable school burnout, creating a confusing situation in their educational experience. The study concluded that addressing mental health factors was essential for effective language teaching. It recommended that teachers implement strategies to reduce anxiety and foster supportive learning environments, balancing academic demands with psychological support to improve both language performance and student well-being.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, all things are interconnected; therefore, being able to communicate well in English is imperative in achieving academic and professional prosperity. Some studies have been conducted in the recent past, and their findings show that language learning is not merely an intellectual activity but a sophisticated psychological one with strong roots in emotional fulfillment (Umisara et al., 2021). It is one of the most prevalent issues that can significantly hinder language learning as well as mental well-being. It is a serious issue in language learning research.

The term "speaking anxiety" is employed to describe fear and worry of speaking in a second language. It is an issue that language learners around the world experience. In a study by Chang and Tsai (2022), they identified that students normally concern themselves with grammatical mistakes, critical comments, or cannot express their thoughts. Such concerns not only create mental anxiety but also yield physical symptoms, emerging as significant obstacles to the language learning process. Rodriguez-Martinez et al. (2023) anticipated that the above anxiety reactions discourage students from positive engagement in their language ability development and that avoidance strengthens anxiety.

The affective dimension of second language learning is extremely important. Speaking anxiety can drastically damage students' self-esteem, self-confidence, and emotional health. Liu and Wang (2023) described how students avoid opportunities to speak in class because of fear of being evaluated unfavorably. Not only is avoidance detrimental to their language learning but potentially to their future mental and personal health. Their research determines that different cultures can respond differently to anxiety and therefore approach solutions rather than the eradication of this universal issue.

Speaking anxiety is fascinating to study since it is complex. There are numerous scholars such as Kayaoğlu and Sağlamel (2013) who have outlined various causes of speaking anxiety, either through language use, psychological, and even the learning environment. A more recent study conducted by Zheng et al. (2022) illustrates how anxiety impacts us physically, and also, how stress can influence thought and

performance while speaking and maintains that effective therapies must address fear of speaking from all the physical, emotional, and mental fronts.

Speech anxiety is moderate to high in one-third of the learners of a foreign language (Bai et al., 2021). It calls for the need for urgent special assistance and ad hoc instructional approaches. Palmgren et al. (2021) recognized some of the significant causes of the occurrence of such anxiety as the fear of failure in the grade, lack of confidence, and lack of adequate opportunities for practice. They also realized that aggressive testing procedures targeted at speaking can trigger inappropriate anxiety levels.

New technologies have immense potential in enabling the mitigation of speaking anxiety. Rodriguez-Martinez et al. (2023) submit a paper, which illustrates how the possibilities of adaptive learning technology and artificial intelligence can be harnessed for delivering judgment-free and personalized practice settings that can allow students to gain confidence gradually. Technology-based intervention is a new area of research for speaking anxiety reduction and language learning improvement. Similarly, Kim et al. (2022) emphasized the necessity of transforming the classroom environment into a positive space in which students develop emotional resilience, especially during difficult times.

In this study, the research seeks to examine critically the prevalence of normal speech anxiety among EFL students and its effect on educational and emotional lives. In this case, it is necessary to establish beneficial information with regards to language proficiency and the psychological factor for informing more beneficial and effective instruction. Lastly, speech anxiety is not solely a classroom problem but an obstacle relevant to assisting our students in our globalized world in acquiring communication skills they will use for business and personal success.

1.1. Research Questions

The current study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' speaking anxiety and their speaking performance?

2. Is there any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' speaking anxiety and academic well-being?

3. What are the components of academic well-being experienced by Iraqi EFL learners?

4. Does Iraqi EFL learners' gender have a significant impact on their speaking anxiety level?

2. Literature Review
2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Speaking Anxiety and Emotional Well-being

Speaking is one of the most significant elements in effective communication because it involves the use of words to speak to other individuals. Scholars like Fulcher (2003) and Chaney (2002) regard speaking as an interactive activity rather than a word-swapping process. It includes both verbal and non-verbal mechanisms for idea and feeling transmission in different contexts. A subsequent research by Zhang (2019) has also further augmented this understanding, hypothesizing that speaking is a complex task motivated by psychosocial and psychological reasons. Jiang and Dewaele (2019) have also substantiated this evidence from their research, determining that speech anxiety can greatly discourage the communicative willingness of a learner and impede his/her critical thinking skills.

Anxiety itself has been referred to as a concern or worry that is not in relation to any event. Anxiety in language learning can be described as an instrumentality to execute a group of beliefs, thoughts, and actions towards the way in which a person learns in the classroom (Llera & Newman, 2020; Palupi, 2021). It must be taken into account that anxiety is not necessarily negative in second language learning if there exists the possibility to address it positively (Ariani et al., 2017; Martí et al., 2022). However, beyond the moment where the level of anxiety becomes too intense, then anxiety functions as a hindrance to language domination. This form of anxiety usually presents itself in specific situations when the learner asks himself or herself if he or she can learn a second language. It concerns feelings of fear with respect to speaking.

Anxiety can be managed by most people through the manner in which they perceive themselves; those who are certain they are other than others may judge themselves so negatively that they fear trying something they are bad at in the first

instance (Pertiwi & Sudarsono, 2015; Thahir et al., 2018). It may be particularly awkward to speak before other people, leading to what we call speaking anxiety (Goto et al., 2018; Syahfutra, 2021).

To identify language anxiety, researchers are now widely applying the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to determine the feelings of foreign or second language learners when acquiring a foreign language (Karunia et al., 2019; Usman et al., 2018). FLCAS is useful because it universally measures the different manifestations of language anxiety learners may possess in class, including communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of criticism (Huda & Ma'mun, 2020; Rizki et al., 2019). Since the scale has been widely used by previous researchers, it was similarly used in this study to specifically explore the anxieties of students in learning English, especially during speaking tests.

There are a number of causes why language learners suffer from speaking anxiety. One of the primary reasons is fear of interacting with other individuals. There is another reason which is fear assessed negatively, and lastly, there's a generalized anxiety that may be activated (Fitriah & Muna, 2019; Kitano, 2001).

In online learning, which was introduced because of the covid pandemic, the students also faced greater challenges whenever they tried to express themselves during online classes (Efriana, 2021; Lutviana & Mafulah, 2021; Mardiana, 2020). The majority of the students realized that whenever they lagged behind in studying the subject matter, it made them shy away from engaging in online discussions. They were anxious and nervous, even when they had ideas or opinions they were to share initially. Notwithstanding the fact that e-learning was essential in a bid to minimize the Covid-19 virus spread through contact and promote learning to continue (Micciche, 2004; Syafiq et al., 2021), the majority of the activities that were initially conducted face-to-face, for instance, seminars and group studies, were postponed or completely suspended (Arroba & Acosta, 2021; Lorena Manaj Sadiku, 2015).In a bid to create an improved virtual learning environment, the students and teachers must improve their technology literacy. This will make it easy to establish positive social relationships online that will allow students to speak and feel comfortable in class.

Current studies are more focused on the neurobiological underpinnings of speaking anxiety. Of note here is Zheng et al. (2022), who used advanced brain imaging tools to investigate how language anxiety works on our bodies. They found that stress responses activate some areas in the brain that can interfere with how we understand and create language. They observe that speaking anxiety activates some threat detection patterns in brain activity that will use up cognitive resources and hinder speaking. This illustrates that anxiety is not only an emotional problem but it has actual biological effects which can impact the way we think and communicate during speech events.

Linguistic challenges are also another major reason for speaking anxiety. Chang and Tsai (2022) have well described ways in which vocabulary lack, grammatical ambiguity, and pronunciation problems may lead to anxiety among language learners. Such issues, as their research accounts, have the potential to become a vicious cycle: language difficulty results in anxiety, and consequently worsens performance. This is in agreement with the research conducted by Bai et al. (2021), wherein it was found that the majority of students respond to their anxiety by refusing to speak altogether in an attempt to shield themselves from being incompetent with their language skills.

Affective and cognitive dimensions of speaking anxiety are highly complicated. Liu and Wang (2023) conducted a comparison between manifestations of anxiety in diverse learning and cultural backgrounds. They established that the experiences of anxiety vary remarkably depending on cultural, educational, and societal features, meaning intervention can possibly not be uniform. Their work verifies that learning contexts in which overcorrection of error and attention to grammaticality can actually cause more anxiety, especially within high-stakes testing systems.

Self-efficacy and motivation are the greatest predictors of reducing speech anxiety. Rodriguez-Martinez et al. (2023) have also examined the extent to which internal (intrinsic) and external (extrinsic) forms of motivation predict levels of anxiety. They found that intrinsically motivated learners could manage speaking anxiety better. According to their research, instruction geared toward personal growth rather than student comparison can effectively decrease anxiety and build self-confidence. This is with regard to Kim et al.'s (2022) study, in which they explain the way positive

resources within a learning environment, including social support, autonomy, and coping, are capable of countering signs of anxiety.

Technology is also being used as effective solutions to reduce speaking anxiety. Rodriguez-Martinez et al. (2023) carried out a path-breaking research in the areas of artificial intelligence and adaptive learning technologies. They proved that AI-based language learning systems can provide personalized experience in the long term to build a student's confidence. They concluded, based on their research, that computer learning environments that provide instant feedback, differentiate according to the learner's ability, and permit learners to practice without critique can de-selectively screen out anxiety and improve the outcome of language learning. These tech-enhanced strategies are proving to be a major step in the right direction, especially in situations where such typical classroom environments may actually create speaking anxiety

Pedagogical interventions for speaking anxiety have evolved significantly in recent literature. Palmgren et al. (2021) suggest creating accepting, non-judgmental learning environments where learners are introduced progressively to speaking tasks of increasing difficulty. Their research confirms that interventions like peer interaction, supportive feedback systems, and individualized intervention aim at reversing anxiety and promoting language development. Evidence is consistent with Sinaga et al. (2020) research on the adverse impact of high-stakes testing practices, assuming that measurement practices that monitor process rather than product will continue to support students' psychological well-being while stimulating language development.

Recent research has added significantly to the management of speaking anxiety in learning settings. Palmgren et al. (2021) suggest that there are supposed to be welcoming and non-critical learning settings. They recommend that students are subjected to activities of speech that are scaled up progressively in terms of difficulty. What their research has shown is that the use of methods like peer collaboration, positive feedback, and one-on-one support will effectively reduce anxiety and enhance the students' language skills. This has been shown in research conducted by Sinaga et al. (2020), which shows that high-stakes testing methods can affect students' wellbeing in a negative manner. Conversely, emphasizing the process of learning more than the

end product can be more accommodating to learners' psychological well-being and improve language learning as well.

Emotional factors involved in language learning also have a determining role and must be addressed with caution. Emotional well-being, as perceived by Umisara et al. (2021), is central to language learning. Their results show that language anxiety can have a serious impact on the mental balance of the students, causing emotional disturbance other than the one originating in language learning and to the generalized realm of many areas of their study and life. This would suggest that the blended teaching methodology stressing both language competence and emotional stability is a significant component of effective language learning.

How we measure and assess speaking anxiety has also evolved. Liu and Wang (2023) have developed sophisticated instruments to analyze the different cognitive and affective facets of speaking anxiety. Their sophisticated methods render speaking anxiety as quantitative variables, allowing for more precise statistical analysis and a rich understanding of this complex issue. These developments are beneficial for researchers and educators, providing them with better measures to identify and address speaking anxiety in various learning environments.

2.2. Previous Related Studies

In the last few years, there have been lots of studies that explored how anxiety is manifested, why it occurs and how it can be controlled. Wight et al. (2018) conducted an early intervention study that particularly focused on boosting well-being in schools for young children. They carried out the study before the COVID-19 pandemic and mostly addressed the environmental factors affecting children's emotional state without specifically considering special language learning challenges.

A qualitative research study by Kim et al. (2022) explained teachers' mental well-being and mental health against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. they reported issues affecting students' learning environments indirectly and identified six work demands that affected the teachers' mental health negatively, i.e., job insecurity, workload pressure, negative attitudes towards teaching profession, worry about other people's well-being, health concerns, and multitasking. On the positive side, they could

identify three resources that promoted teachers: support from others at school, autonomy at instruction, and effective coping mechanisms. These findings highlight the importance of teacher well-being to create healthy classrooms which can contribute towards lessening student anxiety.

Umisara et al. (2021) contributed largely to the knowledge concerning speaking anxiety and its psychological impacts on English language acquisition. From their findings, speech anxiety was a significant area influencing the emotional well-being of the students as well as facilitating them to communicate in English fluently. They conducted a longitudinal study to measure the levels of anxiety across the academic year, and this identified how anxiety can change in line with changing teaching styles and assessment modes. Of particular interest, they found that anxiety peaks are significantly very high on stressful speaking exams

Chang and Tsai (2022) had researched how language learners deal with speaking anxiety, or the fear they experience when speaking. In their study, most of the students were afraid of making grammatical mistakes, negative feedback, and not being able to convey their messages effectively. They found that different situations trigger different levels of anxiety, and the most stressful condition being formal presentations. This shows how speaking anxiety is context-dependent.

Palmgren et al. (2021) researched why students suffer from speaking anxiety. They found that fear of poor grades, lack of confidence, and limited opportunities for speaking are significant causes. Conducting a combination of questionnaires and interviews, they found that anxiety is heightened when there are greater stakes and this has negative effects on the emotional health of students. Notably, their research revealed that such anxieties are not inherent characteristics; they react to variations in instructional method. This is an implication that altering the mode of instruction by teachers can suppress students' anxiety.

Sinaga et al. (2020) investigated the influence of different types of assessment on speaking anxiety. They concluded that overemphasizing speaking ability in exams may lead to more stress among learners. Testing different forms of assessment, they observed formative assessment where a focus is given on development and not just marks to minimize anxiety and enhance speaking ability. Their research tells that

teachers must reengineer the traditional assessment measures to provide more supportive context for language learners.

Rodriguez-Martinez et al. (2023) tested the language learning anxiety using technology in the guise of adaptive learning technology and artificial intelligence. In their research, they compared old-fashioned face-to-face teaching to AI-driven learning platforms and discovered that the latter offered students a less confrontational environment in which to try out speaking. Students who utilized adaptive technologies were less anxious and more likely to practice speaking. This suggests that technology innovations can be especially beneficial for anxious students in traditional classrooms.

Bai et al. (2021) investigated the affective aspects of language learning and the impact of speaking anxiety on students' overall mental wellbeing. Their study followed both anxiety and other measures of affective well-being and found evidence to suggest that speaking anxiety has the potential to have adverse effects on students' academic self-concept and confidence. Those most frequently reporting anxiety when speaking usually felt more emotional distress and decreased motivation in school and social settings. This suggests that speaking anxiety needs to be addressed not only as a language learning problem but also as a significant concern for students' overall psychological health.

Zheng et al. (2022) took a different approach to studying speaking anxiety by examining it both neurologically and cognitively. They studied the biological functioning of the brain in relation to anxiety when it comes to language learning, substantiating how stress impacts the way we learn a language and process it. With the help of advanced brain imaging techniques, they charted the brain's reaction to difficulty in speaking and got new information on how stress can be physically expressed. Their findings substantiate the possibility to engineer more efficient interventions on the basis of such neural mechanisms.

Liu and Wang (2023) conducted a comparative analysis of speaking anxiety from various educational and cultural backgrounds. They found that the anxiety levels were so varied depending on cultural, educational, and social stress. They studied students' performance across six countries and concluded that cultural orientations towards accepting errors, whether there is a focus on precision or fluency in teaching,

and social expectations regarding language proficiency, all played a role in the incidence of anxiety. Their work highlights the value of acquiring individualized approaches toward understanding and adapting to language learning anxiety, enhancing culturally responsive education over global methods.

While the aforementioned studies provide valuable insights into speaking anxiety, its causes, and potential interventions, the current study distinguishes itself through its comprehensive examination of the specific relationships between speaking anxiety, academic well-being, and speaking performance within the unique context of Iraqi high school EFL learners. Unlike previous research that often focused on single aspects or isolated variables, this study simultaneously investigates the multidimensional nature of academic well-being (including school value, burnout, engagement, and satisfaction with educational choices) and its correlation with both anxiety and performance outcomes. Furthermore, while earlier studies primarily examined technology-based interventions or general classroom environments, the present research employs validated instruments (FLCAS, academic well-being scale, and IELTS speaking assessment) to provide empirical evidence specific to the Iraqi educational context, where such research has been limited. This approach enables more understanding of how psychological factors interact with language performance in a culturally and educationally distinct setting, thereby addressing a significant gap in the literature regarding speaking anxiety among Iraqi EFL learners and offering context-specific implications for pedagogical practice.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

This study involved 175 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students from two public intermediate schools in Babylon, Iraq. The average age of the participants was 17, with ages ranging from 15 to 18. The group consisted of 98 females and 77 males, selected through a convenience sampling method. All participants were native Arabic speakers who agreed to participate in the research voluntarily. They provided consent for their involvement and were assured complete anonymity, as the survey tools did not ask for any personal identifying information.

3.2. Instruments

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was employed to collect data for this research. FLCAS was originally developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope in 1986 to specifically measure anxiety associated with foreign language learning in classroom settings. The scale is designed to assess three main components of foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension (fear of communicating with others), test anxiety (apprehension about academic evaluation), and fear of negative evaluation (apprehension about others' perceptions). FLCAS consists of 33 items that measure the degree of anxiety students experience in various language learning situations. A five-point Likert scale was utilized for the questionnaire, with response options including Strongly Agree (SA) scored as 5, Agree (A) scored as 4, Neutral (N) scored as 3, Disagree (D) scored as 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) scored as 1. Some items are reverse-scored to prevent response bias. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was calculated to be 0.91, indicating high reliability.

The second instrument utilized in the study was a measure of academic well-being developed by Tuominen-Soini et al. (2012). This measure includes four dimensions: school value, school burnout, and schoolwork engagement, as well as satisfaction with educational choices. The scale assesses the well-being of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners through 31 items. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was calculated to be 0.85, indicating good reliability. The items were displayed using a

five-point Likert-type scale, where responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Finally, to assess the speaking performance of the students, a sample IELTS Speaking Test was utilized.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

In this research, the speaking anxiety questionnaire was initially given to the participants. Following that, a sample IELTS speaking test was conducted, lasting about 15 to 20 minutes. Finally, the academic well-being questionnaire was distributed as well.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

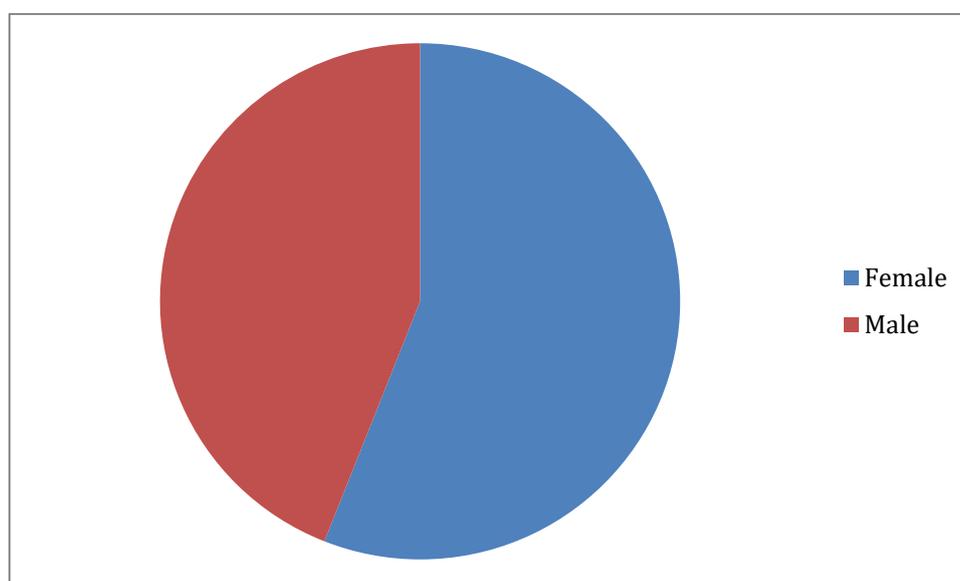The following figure shows the percentage of participants in terms of their gender

Figure 1. *The percentage of participants in terms of their gender*

4.2. Findings Related to the First Question of the Study

1. Is there any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' speaking anxiety and their speaking performance?

To address the first research question which reads as follows and examine the relationship between the speaking anxiety of Iraqi EFL learners and their speaking performance, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated.

Table 1 *The correlation between Iraqi EFL learners' speaking anxiety and their speaking performance*

Correlations			
		anxiety	Speaking score
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	-.796[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	175	175
Speaking score	Pearson Correlation	-.796[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	175	175

[**]. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results reveal a strong negative correlation between anxiety and speaking scores, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.796 ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that higher levels of anxiety are significantly associated with lower speaking scores among the 175 participants, suggesting that individuals who experience greater anxiety tend to perform worse in speaking assessments. The statistical significance of this correlation highlights the critical impact that anxiety can have on performance in speaking situations, underlining the importance of addressing anxiety to enhance individuals' speaking abilities.

4.3. Findings Related to the Second Question of the Study

2. What are the components of academic well-being experienced by Iraqi EFL learners?

To answer the second question of the study, mean and standard deviation of the academic well-being components were computed.

Table 2 *Factors Related to Academic Well-being*

	Mean	SD
School Value	3.89	0.55
School Burnout	3.95	0.51
Schoolwork Engagement	3.69	0.41
Satisfaction with Educational Choices	3.86	0.59

The results indicate various dimensions of academic well-being among students, with a mean score of 3.89 (SD = 0.55) for School Value, suggesting that students generally perceive their educational environment as important and supportive. In contrast, School Burnout has a higher mean score of 3.95 (SD = 0.51), indicating that students may be experiencing substantial exhaustion or stress related to their academic responsibilities. Schoolwork Engagement, scoring at 3.69 (SD = 0.41), shows a moderate level of enthusiasm and dedication towards their school tasks, but it is lower than the perception of school value, which may suggest a disconnection between the value placed on education and the actual engagement levels. Lastly, Satisfaction with Educational Choices scores at 3.86 (SD = 0.59), implying that students are generally content with their educational decisions, but this satisfaction should be carefully interpreted in relation to the reported burnout levels.
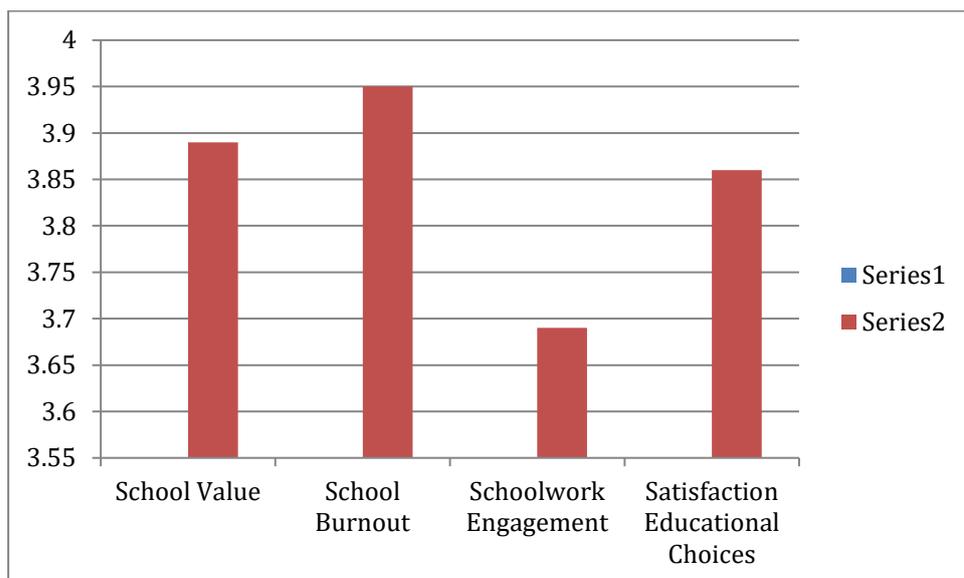
Figure 2. *Factors Related to Academic Well-being*

4.4. Findings Related to the Third Question of the Study

"3. Is there any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' speaking anxiety and academic well-being?"

To address the third research question of the study and examine the relationship between the speaking anxiety of Iraqi EFL learners and their academic well-being, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated.

Table 3 *Descriptive statistics for speaking anxiety and well-being*

	Mean	SD
Speaking anxiety overall	4.18	0.30
Well-being overall	3.78	0.36

The findings reveal a notable distinction between speaking anxiety and overall well-being among participants. With a mean score of 4.18 (SD = 0.30), speaking anxiety is relatively high, indicating that individuals may frequently experience nervousness or apprehension when it comes to speaking situations, which could hinder their

communication effectiveness. In contrast, overall well-being has a lower mean score of 3.78 (SD = 0.36), suggesting that while individuals may generally have a reasonable sense of well-being, it is not as strong as the anxiety they experience when speaking. This could imply that the stress associated with speaking anxiety may detract from individuals' overall mental and emotional health, possibly leading to challenges in social interactions and self-expression. Addressing speaking anxiety could be crucial for enhancing overall well-being and fostering a more positive experience in communication contexts.
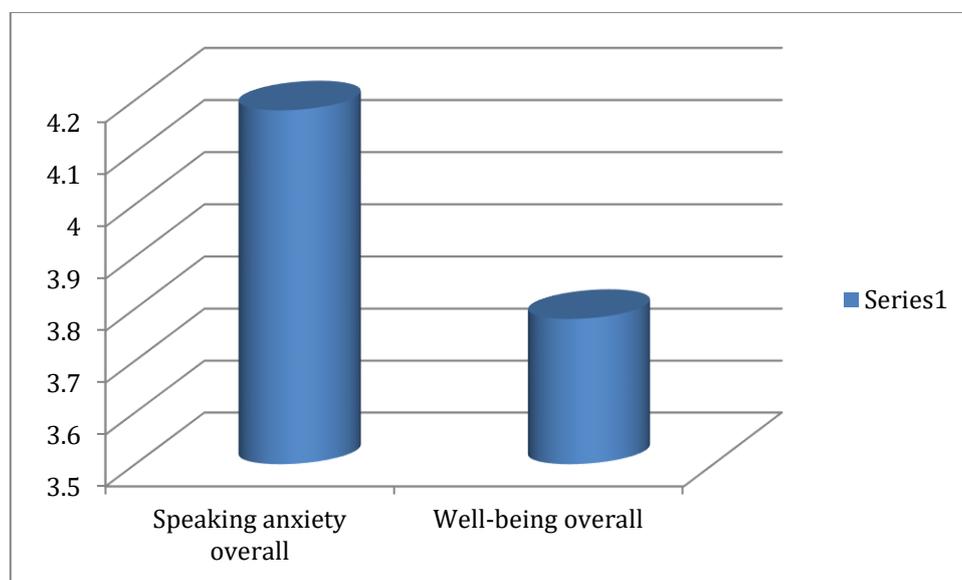

Figure 3. *Iraqi EFL students' speaking anxiety and well-being*

Table 4 *The Correlation between Iraqi EFL Learners' Speaking Anxiety and their Academic Well-being*

Correlations

		Wellbeing	Anxiety
Academic wellbeing	Pearson Correlation	1	-.549[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	175	175
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-.549[**]	1

Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	175	175

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis indicates a significant negative correlation between EFL learners' well-being and the anxiety scores, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.549 (p < 0.01). This suggests that as mean well-being increases, mean anxiety tends to decrease, and vice versa, indicating an inverse relationship between these two variables. The correlation is statistically significant with 175 participants, implying that higher levels of perceived well-being are associated with lower levels of anxiety among individuals in the sample. This finding emphasizes the importance of promoting mental well-being as a potential strategy for reducing anxiety levels

4.5. Findings Related to the Fourth Question of the Study

"4. Does Iraqi EFL learners' gender have a significant impact on their speaking anxiety level?"

To answer the fourth question of the study, an independent sample t-test (for comparing the mean scores between two groups of males and females)was utilized.

Table 5 *Descriptive Statistics for Iraqi EFL Learners' Gender*

			Group Statistics		
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Anxiety	Female	98	4.21	.291	.0294
	Male	77	4.15	.310	.0353

Table 6 Independent Sample T-Test for Investigating the Impact of Gender on

Speaking Anxiety

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Anxiety	Equal variances assumed	.147	.702	1.227	173	.222	.0560	.0456	-.034	.146
	Equal variances not assumed			1.217	158.163	.225	.0560	.0460	-.034	.146

The results of the above tables showed that students 'gender has no significant effect
on their speaking anxiety.

5. Discussion

The correlation test conducted in this study shows that mean scores of well-being and mean anxiety scores are negatively correlated (r = -0.549, p < 0.01). This indicates that when well-being increases, anxiety is decreases and the negative correlation achieved in this study agrees with conceptualization Umisara et al. (2021) has made to determine emotional well-being as a factor affecting language learning. They invoke the statistics in evidence of their argument that speaking anxiety has the potential to upset students' psychological balance, as evidenced in the descriptive statistics revealing a wide gap between speaking anxiety (M = 4.18, SD = 0.30) and general well-being (M = 3.78, SD = 0.36). This would suggest that students are experiencing very high levels of speaking anxiety in comparison with their general well-being, i.e., speaking anxiety has strength to make students very anxious and affect their mental well-being.

Correlation with speaking scores (r = -0.796, p < 0.01) is a direct proof of the effect of anxiety on language ability. It supports Chang and Tsai's (2022) study on the psychological effect of speaking anxiety that it actually inhibits students' communication competence to a great degree. The high correlation of this finding (r = -0.796) identifies anxiety as the factor behind the constraint on speaking competence, supporting Rodriguez-Martinez et al.'s (2023) cyclical processes of avoidance and anxiety that explain learners' disinvestment from natural language use.

The data on academic well-being highlights a complex relationship among various factors that both align with and challenge existing literature. The relatively high average scores for School Value (M = 3.89, SD = 0.55) and Satisfaction with Educational Choices (M = 3.86, SD = 0.59) indicate generally positive views on the significance of education, which may act as protective elements against anxiety, as suggested by Rodriguez-Martinez et al. (2023) regarding motivational influences. However, the elevated School Burnout score (M = 3.95, SD = 0.51), coupled with moderate Schoolwork Engagement (M = 3.69, SD = 0.41), presents a conflicting scenario that may illustrate the "detrimental cycle" described by Bai et al. (2021). This combination of significant burnout and a continued valuation of education implies that students may be grappling with the psychological strain mentioned by Liu and Wang (2023), where the pressures of educational demands lead to ongoing stress, even as students acknowledge the importance of their education.

The findings connect neurobiological and psychological viewpoints noted in existing literature. The significant negative correlation between anxiety and performance is consistent with Zheng et al.'s (2022) neurobiological research, which shows that stress responses can directly affect cognitive processes and language performance. This data offers quantitative backing for the qualitative insights provided by Palmgren et al. (2021) concerning anxiety triggers and their impacts on performance.

In contrast to some past studies that focused solely on speaking anxiety, our results integrate it within a wider context of academic and emotional well-being. This aligns with Kim et al.'s (2022) focus on developing supportive learning environments to enhance emotional resilience. The apparent disparity between speaking anxiety and overall well-being scores suggests that interventions specifically aimed at addressing speaking anxiety could significantly improve psychological health, reinforcing Bai et al.'s (2021) findings about the ripple effects of speaking anxiety on broader emotional well-being**.

The current study is strengthened by a considerable sample size (N = 175) and the application of validated measures, allowing for reliable statistical conclusions. However, in contrast to the longitudinal methods used by Umisara et al. (2021) and Bai et al. (2021), our cross-sectional design does not capture the temporal aspects of anxiety and well-being. Moreover, while the analysis identifies correlational relationships, it cannot establish causality between anxiety and performance— a limitation that is recognized in much of the existing literature.

The findings have important implications for language teaching methodologies. The strong negative correlation between anxiety and speaking performance indicates that tackling psychological barriers might be as crucial as linguistic instruction in enhancing speaking skills. This supports the calls from Palmgren et al. (2021) for fostering inclusive and non-judgmental learning environments, as well as Sinaga et al.'s (2020) suggestions for assessment practices that prioritize process over product. The data provides empirical support for pedagogical strategies aimed specifically at reducing anxiety to improve both linguistic performance and overall well-being.

In summary, the present findings significantly reinforce existing theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence while adding new insights into the intricate

relationships among speaking anxiety, academic well-being, and language performance. The results highlight the vital role of addressing psychological factors in language education and suggest that initiatives focused on reducing speaking anxiety could produce benefits that extend beyond language learning to overall psychological health.

6. Conclusions

This study examined interconnections among speaking anxiety, academic well-being, and language learning achievement among Iraqi EFL learners. The findings have implications for understanding of these interconnected phenomena and have stringent implications for the practice of language teaching.

Addressing Research Question 1 ("Is there any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' speaking anxiety and their speaking performance?"), the results revealed a strong negative correlation between speaking anxiety and speaking proficiency, demonstrating that anxiety is a significant impediment toward successful communication in language learning situations. This finding confirms that students with higher levels of speaking anxiety tend to perform significantly worse in speaking assessments.

Addressing Research Question 2 ("Is there any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' speaking anxiety and academic well-being?"), the analysis showed a significant negative correlation between speaking anxiety and overall well-being, indicating that the impacts of speaking anxiety extend beyond individual language capacity and affect students' overall psychological well-being. This demonstrates that as students experience more speaking anxiety, their academic well-being decreases substantially.

Addressing Research Question 3 ("What are the components of academic well-being experienced by Iraqi EFL learners?"), the correlation analysis of well-being revealed a complex situation where students reported relatively high scores for School Value and Satisfaction with Educational Choices, indicating they generally value their

education and are satisfied with their educational decisions. However, students also exhibited high School Burnout levels and moderate Schoolwork Engagement .This contradictory pattern suggests that while students recognize the benefits of learning a language, the psychological demands of attaining it may contribute to excessive stress, which increases speaking anxiety and lowers overall well-being.

Addressing Research Question 4 ("Does Iraqi EFL learners' gender have a significant impact on their speaking anxiety level?"), the t-test result showed that students' gender has no significant effect on their speaking anxiety levels.

These findings have important pedagogical implications for language teaching. First, they suggest that anxiety-reduction strategies need to be an integral part of language teaching as central rather than peripheral elements. Second, they indicate that development of students' general well-being can lead to tremendous improvement in language performance, especially in speaking contexts. Third, they demonstrate that addressing student engagement and school burnout can create more psychologically supportive classrooms that are favorable to language learning.

The implications of these findings for schools and teachers are that learning environments must be built to achieve academic challenge and psychological nurturing. A greater emphasis on the use of instructional practices that build confidence gradually, offer positive feedback, and reduce test anxiety can be a significant factor in language performance as well as in psychological well-being of the students. Additionally, implementation of interventions that directly address burnout and engagement can counteract the psychological strains evident in our findings for academic well-being.

7. Suggestions for Further Studies

The present research has some constraints that can be met in future studies. The cross-sectional nature restricted our opportunity to explore the development of anxiety, well-being, and performance longitudinally. Longitudinal designs may reveal a lot about such developmental patterns. Furthermore, the integration of quantitative and qualitative designs can help reveal more nuanced perceptions of students' lived experiences of language learning anxiety and well-being.

Such subsequent research would need to determine the effectiveness of certain interventions for treating speaking anxiety, particularly those utilizing the technology revolution and supportive test procedures. Further neurobiological investigation into the mechanisms underlying speaking anxiety would advance our database on this complex phenomenon and allow us to have more effective interventions.

Lastly, the current research adds to growing evidence that certifies the significant role played by psychological factors in language acquisition. In pointing out the high intercorrelations between speaking anxiety, psychological well-being, and performance, our findings mean that psychological barriers are not a supplement to language acquisition but a requirement for language instruction to be successful. Construction of learning environments conducive to both linguistic growth and psychological well-being is a language teaching concern of serious consequence for improving students' academic success and overall health.

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ملخص الدراسة

ناقشت هذه الدراسة الروابط المعقدة بين قلق التحدث، والرفاه الأكاديمي، ومستوى الأداء اللغوي لدى (175) طالباً عراقياً من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المستوى المتوسط، باستخدام مقياس قلق التعلم داخل الصف الدراسي (FLCAS) وأدوات قياس الرفاه الأكاديمي. وقد كشفت النتائج عن وجود ارتباط وثيق سلبي قوي بين قلق التحدث والأداء اللغوي (0.01 > p ,0.796- = r)، مما يؤكد أن مستوى القلق العالي يعيق بشكل كبير القدرات التحدثية للطلاب، كما وُجد ارتباط سالب بين القلق والرفاه الأكاديمي العام ((0.01 > p ,0.549 -= r، مما يشير إلى تأثر الصحة النفسية الشاملة للطلاب بهذا القلق. وعلى الرغم من إظهار الطلاب تقديراً عالياً للمؤسسة التعليمية ورضاهم عن مساراتهم الأكاديمية، إلا أنهم يواجهون مستويات ملحوظة من الانهاك الأكاديمي، مما يعكس حالة من التضاد في تجربتهم التعليمية. وبناءً على ذلك، توصلت الدراسة إلى ضرورة إيلاء العوامل النفسية أهمية عالية في تدريس اللغة، وتوصي بتطبيق استراتيجيات لتقليل حدة القلق وتهيئة بيئة تعليمية داعمة تتوازن فيها المتطلبات الأكاديمية والدعم النفسي لتعزيز الأداء والرفاهية في وقت واحد.