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Exploring Factors of English-Speaking Anxiety Among Kurdish EFL University Students

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Abstract

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English Speaking Anxiety,
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Second Language,
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The purpose of this study is to examine the factors influencing English-speaking anxiety among Kurdish EFL university learners to enhance pedagogical practices and interventions. This research employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, to comprehensively explore and understand the various dimensions of English-speaking anxiety among Kurdish EFL university learners. A mixed-method approach, using a questionnaire for the quantitative component and interviews for the qualitative component, was employed to explore students' perceptions and experiences. The questionnaire results highlighted the factors contributing to Kurdish EFL learners' anxiety inside the classroom, encompassing fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and lack of confidence. The results obtained from the interviews discovered that the factors that cause Kurdish EFL students' anxiety while speaking English outside the classroom were fear of making mistakes, concerns about being understood, fear of judgment and accent concerns, flawed pronunciation, and lack of confidence. The findings suggest implications for educators and policymakers in fostering a supportive classroom environment, tailoring interventions for individual challenges, and adopting a communicative language teaching approach to mitigate English-speaking anxiety among Kurdish EFL university learners.



About the Journal

Zanco Journal of Humanity Sciences (ZJHS) is an international, multi-disciplinary, peer-reviewed, double-blind and open-access journal that enhances research in all fields of basic and applied sciences through the publication of high-quality articles that describe significant and novel works; and advance knowledge in a diversity of scientific fields. <https://zancojournal.su.edu.krd/index.php/JAHS/about>

1. Introduction

Learning a foreign language is a difficult task because it requires quite a long period of devoted study and determined toil (Abdullah & Abbas, 2024). Most of the time, the challenges that EFL students face during the learning process go beyond the realm of linguistic skills, including the elaborate interaction with students' psychology. An essential emotional factor in foreign language learning is the anxiety experienced by EFL students, especially in the area of speaking skills (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014). Speaking anxiety, as the biggest concern among EFL students, which has a negative impact on their performance and capability of speaking in the English language inside and outside the classroom (Liu, 2006; Mak, 2011). Such a psychological factor considerably harms many aspects of language learning, often bringing about unsatisfactory results, even for students who have a high level of proficiency in English. Conversely, EFL educators often overlook the psychological dimension of their students, hindering the enhancement of speaking abilities as much as grammatical and pronunciation aspects. Despite identifying learners' sources of foreign language anxiety, such as communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety, teachers struggle to implement practical techniques to mitigate anxiety effectively.

Drawing on the collective teaching experience of researchers, physiological symptoms, such as trembling, perspiration, and facial reddening, are noted when students engage in conversations. These same students, however, excel and attain commendable scores in written exams when confronted with similar questions. While numerous studies have explored the factors contributing to anxiety among EFL learners within the classroom setting, there remains a dearth of research on speaking anxiety outside the classroom. The pioneering work of Horwitz et al. (1986) marked the initial exploration of psychological factors, particularly anxiety, influencing students' willingness to practice the language. Notably, there is a scarcity of studies addressing this issue in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, with only a few studies primarily focusing on factors influencing Kurdish EFL learners' speaking anxiety in the classroom, and almost no research has been conducted in this regard (Ahmed, 2016; Anwar & Louis, 2017; Ibrahim & Hamad, 2021). This research gap impedes a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to speaking anxiety in both classroom and non-classroom contexts.

Hence, the present study attempts to reveal Kurdish EFL students' viewpoints on the causes contributing to speaking anxiety in public and private universities in the Kurdistan Region. Identifying the occurrence of speaking anxiety among students and grasping its impact on performance is critical for language experts and teachers to develop influential prevention and intervention strategies. The current study aims to augment existing literature by examining factors impacting the connection between students' psychology and language learning outcomes. It also offers insights into possible danger and guides educators in formulating evidence-based strategies to handle these challenges among EFL students. The current study seeks to find answers to the following questions:

1. What factors contribute to Kurdish EFL university learners' anxiety while speaking English inside the classroom?
2. What factors contribute to Kurdish EFL university learners' anxiety while speaking English outside the classroom?

2. Literature Review

Over the past few decades, anxiety has emerged as a pivotal concern in the study of foreign languages, with Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) receiving significant attention in academic research (Horwitz et al., 1986; Yan & Liang, 2022). FLA has been conceptualized as a multifaceted concept encompassing self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors exclusive to language learning settings (Horwitz et al., 1986). As a situational phenomenon, FLA may impact students who are not normally anxious, especially during classroom activities or real-life communication in the target language (Yan & Liang, 2022). Identifying the causes contributing to FLA is

indispensable to formulating influential instructional strategies and enhancing students' language proficiency.

Horwitz et al. (1986) founded the conceptualization of FLA and developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), a commonly approved instrument for evaluating EFL students' anxiety in language classrooms. Successive studies have authenticated the reliability of FLCAS and utilized it in various EFL settings (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Phillips, 1992; Aida, 1994; Saito & Samimy, 1996; Cheng et al., 1999; Yan, 2008; Liu & Xiangming, 2019; Yan & Liang, 2022). Whereas the instrument effectively examines overall anxiety levels, researchers have underscored that quantitative instruments alone may not capture the nuanced experiences of students, underlining the significance of complementary qualitative methods.

Studies constantly show that FLA destructively impacts students' performance, mainly in speaking skills (Horwitz et al., 1986; Koch & Terrell, 1991; Phillips, 1992; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Alibec & Sirbu, 2017). Speaking is often recognized as the most anxiety-inducing skill for EFL students, as it leads students to experience direct assessment and necessitates dynamic production of the learning language. Research has shown that high levels of FLA are linked to reduced readiness to converse, lower self-confidence, and poorer classroom performance (Woodrow, 2006; Tasee, 2009).

Numerous studies have repeatedly found various major causes of FLA in EFL environments. The most frequently reported causes include communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of poor evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986; Tasee, 2009; Hamamorad, 2020). Other variables involve students' insufficient grasp of grammar and pronunciation, timidity, anxiety about speaking in public, low self-esteem, and peer-related impacts (Zhiping & Paramasivam, 2013; Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). These data show that speaking anxiety is multidimensional, with cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. In order to understand the mechanics behind FLA, a number of theoretical theories have been put forth. According to Krashen's (1987) affective filter hypothesis, psychological elements like fear may function as an imperceptible filter that prevents linguistic input processing. This theory states that excessive amounts of FLA increase the affective filter, which hinders learners' capacity to successfully learn and use the target language. MacIntyre (1999) has highlighted how the ability to speak is severely hampered by negative emotional responses, such as dread or self-consciousness when speaking.

Various aspects of language learning have been studied in terms of foreign language anxiety (FLA), encompassing communication readiness, learning styles, motivation, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. According to research, self-confidence is negatively associated with FLA, which means that students with more self-confidence have less anxiety (Anisa and Karairmak, 2017; Cubukcu, 2008). Furthermore, research on self-efficacy indicates that students' confidence in their linguistic ability might assist in reducing anxiety (Bandura, 2015; Liu & Chen, 2015). Motivation has also been shown to impact anxiety levels, with more motivated students having reduced anxiety (Castro & Peck, 2005; Marashi & Dakhili, 2015). Additional variables, like learning styles and communication readiness, have been connected to anxiety levels among students (Carreira, 2006; Hardy, 2006; Liu & Huang, 2011; Torres & Turner, 2016).

Even though FLA has received international notice, there is still little study being done in Iraq's Kurdistan Region. Ahmed (2016) found that anxiety in the classroom can be caused by a number of things, including poor preparation, unfavorable test results, linguistic mistakes, and low self-esteem. Sayer (2022) emphasized the influence of interlanguage components and the connection between phonology, grammar, and meaning on speaking anxiety in Kurdish EFL learners. To investigate the anxiety levels of Kurdish university students, Ibrahim and Hamad (2021) used both FLCAS and interviews. They discovered that speaking anxiety was moderately prevalent and

mostly motivated by the pressure to respond quickly, fear of making a mistake, negative feedback, and speaking in the presence of others.

There is a glaring lack of localized, mixed-method research in the Kurdistan Region, despite the fact that earlier studies have offered insightful information about both the causes and effects of FLA. The majority of current research either only uses quantitative tools like FLCAS or only looks at international settings, which limits our knowledge of the context-specific elements affecting speaking anxiety among Kurdish EFL learners. Furthermore, most previous studies on anxiety related to speaking English have focused on classroom interactions, paying very little attention to EFL students' experiences outside of the classroom. Addressing this gap necessitates a complete mixed-methods approach that assimilates quantitative and qualitative methods to capture students' experiences more holistically.

3. Methodology

In the current research, an embedded mixed-methods design was used to evaluate the factors that influence English-speaking anxiety among Kurdish EFL university students. The quantitative method was utilized to investigate the elements that cause English-speaking anxiety in the classroom, allowing for the identification of trends and connections among the sampled population, as suggested by Creswell (2014). The qualitative method, on the other hand, was used to investigate the elements that contribute to English-speaking anxiety outside of the classroom, eliciting nuanced insights into participants' experiences and opinions through extensive interviews. By integrating both approaches, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of English-speaking anxiety across different learning contexts, triangulating quantitative patterns with qualitative depth.

Moreover, a total of 170 Kurdish students from the Department of English Language Teaching (ELT) in the College of Education at Knowledge University, located in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, participated in this research. The sample was drawn from three academic levels, including 48 second-year, 69 third-year, and 53 fourth-year students. Additionally, 13 students (8 males and 5 females), randomly selected from these academic levels, participated in in-depth interviews to provide qualitative insights into their experiences with English-speaking anxiety. The age range of the participants spanned from 19 to 25 years, encompassing 75 males and 95 females.

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), designed by Horwitz et al. (1986), is an increasingly common 33-item self-report questionnaire meant to measure anxiety associated with foreign language acquisition in the classroom. Students respond to issues on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" (1) to "Strongly agree" (5). The scale assesses three types of anxiety: communication apprehension, which refers to fears about speaking while being called upon; test anxiety, which addresses concerns about performance evaluations; and fear of negative evaluation, which refers to fears about committing mistakes and receiving negative feedback by fellow students or teachers. Sample statements include "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class" and "I worry about what others think of my language skills." The FLCAS has been shown to be very reliable and valid in a variety of linguistic and cultural contexts, and it continues to be a benchmark instrument for measuring foreign language classroom anxiety.

Addressing the second research question focused on gaining in-depth insights into EFL speaking anxiety experiences, a semi-structured interview format was utilized. The interview protocol consisted of seven open-ended questions designed to explore nuanced aspects of speaking anxiety among Kurdish EFL students outside the classroom. The semi-structured nature allowed for flexibility, while the carefully crafted questions aimed to elicit detailed responses. Prior to the main data collection, the interview questions were pilot-tested with three students, with their feedback contributing to the finalization of the interview instrument.

Furthermore, the data collection process started with choosing and preparing research instruments.

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), was selected to assess English-speaking anxiety inside the classroom. Additionally, a semi-structured interview guide was created by the researcher to investigate factors that contribute to English-speaking anxiety outside the classroom.

To confirm the interview questions' reliability and validity, three university professors with backgrounds in English language instruction and applied linguistics examined the guide. They reviewed the questions for clarity, relevance, and compatibility with the study's objectives, and used input to improve the phrasing and structure. This technique increased the instrument's content validity while also improving the consistency and dependability of the qualitative results. Participants were then selected among Kurdish EFL university students to ensure diversity. Informed permission was gained by informing participants regarding the study's purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to pull out at any time.

For the quantitative component, students were given the FLCAS questionnaire. Responses were methodically gathered, entered into SPSS, and evaluated using proper statistical procedures to detect trends, patterns, and connections in classroom speaking anxiety. As for the qualitative component, interviews were performed in a quiet place to create an atmosphere of friendship. Interviews were recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was then performed on the transcripts to detect common themes and elements driving out-of-class speaking fear. Thus, the research combined quantitative and qualitative findings to present a full knowledge of English-speaking anxiety among Kurdish EFL students in both classroom and non-classroom settings, blending statistical trends with in-depth personal perspectives.

With regard to data analysis, the quantitative data collected through the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire were subjected to rigorous statistical analysis to address the first research question. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated to provide an overall understanding of the levels of EFL speaking anxiety among Kurdish students. With respect to qualitative data analysis, using the methodology described by Braun and Clarke (2006), inductive thematic analysis was used to examine the qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews. This approach was used as it does not impose pre-existing categories and instead lets themes arise directly from the data, which makes it appropriate for investigating students' experiences of anxiety when speaking English in both classroom and non-classroom settings. The analysis was conducted using a methodical six-step procedure:

1. Data familiarization: To fully comprehend the participants' answers, all interview transcripts were read several times.
2. Creating initial codes: To capture pertinent information on speaking anxiety, important information items were identified and given descriptive codes. For instance, codes like *peer comparison*, *lack of confidence*, and *fear of making mistakes* were developed.
3. Finding themes: Codes were analyzed for trends and categorized into initial themes, like *social communication anxiety* and *performance anxiety in the classroom*.
4. Themes review: To ensure the initial themes correctly captured the experiences of the participants and were unique from one another, they were compared to the data.
5. Defining and naming themes: The final topics were precisely identified and given names in order to convey the core of the information. *Fear of receiving a poor grade* and a *lack of practice chances*, for example, were identified as important themes.
6. Producing the report: Each theme was illustrated with representative quotes from participants, and the themes were arranged into coherent patterns.

Several researchers participated in the coding procedure to increase reliability. Discussions were held to settle differences in topic identification and coding until an agreement was obtained. This meticulous process made certain that the theme analysis offered a thorough and reliable knowledge

of the elements influencing anxiety related to speaking English outside of the classroom.

With regard to reliability and validity, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), created by Horwitz et al. (1986), was utilized to assess classroom speaking anxiety. As this instrument has been broadly employed and validated in many studies on foreign language anxiety, its construct validity and reliability are already well recognized, and it was therefore utilized in the current study without adjustments.

Regarding the semi-structured interview guide, extra measures were made to guarantee validity and reliability. Three university professors with expertise in applied linguistics and English language instruction reviewed the content to improve its validity. One professor proposed changing the question, for instance, from "Why do you feel anxious when you speak English?" to "Can you describe situations outside the classroom where you feel anxious speaking English, and explain why?" because of this. The question became more context-specific and open-ended as a result of this modification. The guide's phrasing and clarity were somewhat altered after it was pilot tested with three students who had traits in common with the primary participants. Furthermore, in terms of reliability, the interview data were coded using a methodical procedure that involved several experts. Triangulation of investigators was used, and disagreements over coding were discussed and settled by agreement. Throughout the investigation, a transparent code framework was upheld to guarantee the reliability and consistency. These measures improved the credibility and reliability of the qualitative findings.

Finally, considering ethical principles, throughout the data analysis process, ethical considerations were paramount. Participant confidentiality was rigorously maintained, and data were anonymized to protect the identity of the participants. The researcher adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring the responsible and respectful handling of sensitive information.

4. Results

The findings of the research, derived from both quantitative and qualitative evaluations, are presented in this part. The findings are arranged according to the research topics, starting with the anxiety-inducing factors that Kurdish EFL students face when speaking English in the classroom and moving on to the problems that they encounter outside of it. Semi-structured interviews and data from the FLCAS questionnaire are used in the analysis, which offers a statistical summary as well as an in-depth understanding of the experiences of students.

4.1 Factors of Anxiety Encountered by Kurdish EFL Learners while Speaking English in the Classroom

The FLCAS questionnaires quantitative analysis identified a number of significant factors that influence Kurdish EFL university students anxiety when speaking English in class. In general, students reported feeling the most anxious about test anxiety, interaction anxiety, and worry of receiving a poor grade.

1. Fear of Negative Evaluation

As shown in Table 1, participants expressed consistently high levels of anxiety related to fear of negative evaluation. Across Items 7, 13, and 23, more than 80% of students agreed or strongly agreed that their peers were better at languages, that they felt embarrassed volunteering answers, and that others spoke English better than they did ($M = 3.88-4.18$). These results highlight a strong perception of peer superiority and performance comparison. Concerns about class pace were also notable, with over half of the respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with Item 25 ($M = 3.42$), indicating anxiety about being left behind. Similarly, fear of ridicule was evident in Item 31, where more than half of the participants acknowledged apprehension about being laughed at ($M = 3.31$). Taken together, these findings underscore the salience of peer comparison, embarrassment, and ridicule as central factors contributing to speaking anxiety.

Table 1: Participants Responses to Fear of Negative Evaluation Items

Item No.		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std Deviation
7	Frequency	10	13	20	71	55	3.8882	1.13804
	Percentage	5.9	7.6	11.8	41.8	32.4		
13	Frequency	4	14	15	87	50	3.9706	.96339
	Percentage	2.4	8.2	8.8	51.2	29.4		
23	Frequency	6	0	10	95	59	4.1824	.83328
	Percentage	3.5	0	5.9	55.9	34.7		
25	Frequency	15	27	31	65	32	3.4235	1.21506
	Percentage	8.8	15.9	18.2	38.2	18.8		
31	Frequency	19	29	28	68	26	3.3118	1.24148
	Percentage	11.2	17.1	16.5	40.0	15.3		

2. Fear of Making Mistakes

As presented in Table 2, participants demonstrated a strong tendency to experience anxiety about making mistakes. For instance, in Item 19, nearly 77% agreed or strongly agreed that they feared their teacher's correction of every mistake, reflecting a heightened sensitivity to error correction. Similarly, Item 2 further confirmed this pattern, with three-quarters of students (75.3%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement "I don't worry about making mistakes in class," indicating that the majority do, in fact, worry about errors ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 1.19$). Collectively, these results highlight that fear of mistakes and teacher correction are significant contributors to speaking anxiety among Kurdish EFL learners.

Table 2: Participants Responses to Fear of Making Mistakes Items

Item No.		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std Deviation
19	Frequency	11	18	10	82	49	3.8235	1.15309
	Percentage	6.5	10.6	5.9	48.2	28.8		
2	Frequency	85	43	16	19	7	1.9412	1.19023
	Percentage	50.0	25.3	9.4	11.2	4.1		

3. Test Anxiety

Table 3 shows that participants experienced notable levels of test-related anxiety. For example, the majority reported discomfort during language tests, with nearly 68% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that they felt at ease (Item 8, $M = 2.24$, $SD = 1.37$). Panic when speaking without preparation was also widespread, with 72% agreeing or strongly agreeing (Item 9, $M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.39$). In addition, over 70% of respondents expressed worry about the consequences of failing their foreign language class (Item 10, $M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.24$). A similar pattern appeared in Item 21, where about 65% agreed or strongly agreed that studying more for a test often left them confused ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.19$). Collectively, these findings suggest that fear of failure, unprepared speaking, and test pressure strongly contribute to students' speaking anxiety.

Table 3: Participants Responses to Test Anxiety Items

Item No.		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std Deviation
8	Frequency	69	46	19	16	20	2.2471	1.37953
	Percentage	40.6	27.1	11.2	9.4	11.8		
9	Frequency	30	1	16	68	55	3.6882	1.39415
	Percentage	17.6	0.6	9.4	40.0	32.4		
10	Frequency	11	21	17	56	65	3.8412	1.24204
	Percentage	6.5	12.4	10.0	32.9	38.2		
21	Frequency	11	8	40	41	70	3.8882	1.18889
	Percentage	6.5	4.7	23.5	24.1	41.2		

4. Lack of Self-confidence

Table 4 highlights a pronounced lack of confidence among participants when speaking English. For Item 1 (“I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English”), more than 83% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, reflecting widespread feelings of uncertainty ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.06$). Similarly, Item 18 (“I feel confident when I speak in the English language in the classroom”) showed the opposite pattern, with nearly 77% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 1.09$). Taken together, these results point to a pervasive lack of confidence and self-assurance among students, particularly in classroom speaking situations.

Table 4: Participants Responses to Lack of Confidence Items

Item No.		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std Deviation
1	Frequency	2	20	6	41	101	4.2882	1.06275
	Percentage	1.2	11.8	3.5	24.1	59.4		
18	Frequency	82	49	22	11	6	1.8824	1.08690
	Percentage	48.2	28.8	12.9	6.5	3.5		

4.2 Factors of Anxiety Encountered by Kurdish EFL Learners while Speaking English Outside the Classroom

1. Fear of Making Mistakes

The majority of students (76.9%) express a significant fear of making mistakes in English, as evidenced by phrases and statements such as:

- "worry about saying the wrong thing."
- "worry for me. I feel like I need to be perfect."
- "scared of saying something wrong."
- "pressure to be flawless"
- "fear of making mistakes"
- "barrier to expressing myself"
- "hesitation to speak English casually"

This emphasizes its prevalence as a contributing factor to English-speaking anxiety. One student (7.7%) suggests that the fear depends on the situation, as indicated by phrases like “I do feel a bit of anxiety about making mistakes, especially when the conversation is more formal or when I'm around new people,” highlighting a nuanced aspect of this anxiety. Two students (15.4%) do not report a fear of making mistakes, supported by phrases like “confident in expressing myself” and “focus more on communication than perfection,” emphasizing a positive mindset focused on effective communication rather than perfection.

2. Concerns about Being Understood

The interviews revealed that difficulty in understanding English outside the classroom plays a significant role in shaping speaking anxiety among EFL students. About **38.5% of participants** reported that such difficulties heightened their anxiety, particularly because they feared being misunderstood or not responding appropriately. As one student noted, “*Difficulty in understanding English outside the classroom increases my speaking anxiety. It makes me hesitant to initiate conversations, as I fear not fully comprehending and responding appropriately.*” Another emphasized, “*Struggling to understand English in informal settings contributes to my speaking anxiety. The fear of not catching every word and potential misinterpretations makes me more cautious in my speech.*”

In contrast, another **38.5% of students** indicated that difficulty in understanding English did not trigger speaking anxiety for them. For example, one participant explained, *“I rarely face difficulty in understanding English outside the classroom, and this helps me to speak confidently,”* while another added, *“Maybe I find it challenging to understand English, but it doesn’t make me anxious. Instead, I become more careful in my communication.”*

The remaining 23.1% described context-dependent experiences, where anxiety arose only in certain situations such as hospitals, airports, or restaurants. One student stated, *“The challenge of understanding English in real-life settings, especially public places, heightens my speaking anxiety. I fear not being able to express myself clearly, which leads to a lack of confidence in social interactions.”*

Overall, these insights highlight the nuanced and multifaceted nature of speaking anxiety, demonstrating that difficulties in comprehension outside the classroom affect learners differently, ranging from heightened anxiety to increased caution or context-specific challenges.

3. Fear of Judgment and Accent Concerns

The data underscores a prevalent concern among the majority of participants, specifically 12 participants, comprising approximately 92.31%, who articulate anxiety and fear about potential judgment based on their accents. Participants such as B, C, E, F, G, H, J, K, and M express their apprehensions, conveying sentiments like, "I often feel anxious about my accent; its not great, and I worry people judge me for it," and "Having a not-so-perfect accent definitely impacts my comfort level. I feel anxious, thinking others might judge me, and it hinders my willingness to speak up." On the other hand, a small minority of participants, constituting 7.69% of the total, includes only Student D, who does not share this fear. Student D, for instance, conveys, "I have a unique accent, and I dont feel anxious about it. It adds ch aracter to my speech, and Im comfortable participating in spoken interactions without worrying about judgment."

The marked contrast in percentages underscores the diverse attitudes and emotional responses individuals may harbor regarding their accents. It accentuates the profound impact of self-perception and acceptance on ones comfort level and active participation in spoken interactions, with some participants embracing their unique accents while others contend with fears of judgment.

4. Flawed Pronunciation

Regarding the fourth interview question, *“Do you ever feel anxious about your pronunciation when speaking with someone in public, like on the street?”*, a significant majority of students (69.23%) reported that pronunciation difficulties contributed to their speaking anxiety outside the classroom. Many felt that mispronouncing words undermined their confidence, with one participant noting, *“My bad pronunciation sometimes makes me hesitant to speak English in public.”* Another explained, *“I faced judgment due to my pronunciation, and that has definitely made me more worried.”* These responses highlight how pronunciation concerns are closely tied to fear of negative evaluation and social embarrassment, intensifying students’ anxiety.

In contrast, about 30.77% of the students stated that pronunciation did not cause them significant anxiety. For instance, one student said, *“I don’t think my pronunciation affects my speaking anxiety. I focus more on conveying my ideas, and I believe that communication goes beyond perfect pronunciation.”* Similarly, another participant emphasized, *“As long as I’m understood, the occasional mispronunciation doesn’t bother me.”*

Overall, these findings reveal two distinct orientations: while most students link flawed pronunciation with heightened anxiety and reduced confidence, a smaller group adopts a more pragmatic view, prioritizing communication effectiveness over phonetic accuracy.

5. Lack of Confidence

The data obtained from the question "On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident do you feel when speaking English outside the classroom?" indicates a prevalent lack of self-confidence among the majority of participants, 10 participants, with approximately 76.92% expressing instances where they lacked confidence while speaking English outside the classroom. Here are the quotes of the participants "B, C, E, F, G, H, J, K, M, and N", respectively:

- "I have been in some cases... I didn't feel confident, especially in group discussions. My lack of confidence... I would rate the impact at around 7 out of 10."
- "My lack of confidence outside the classroom is quite noticeable, I'd say around 8 out of 10. It affects my fluency, and I tend to avoid initiating conversations, particularly in formal settings."
- "I frequently find myself lacking confidence, maybe a 6 out of 10..."
- "My confidence level is around 5 out of 10. I've had moments, especially at work, where I hesitate to share ideas in English."
- "I often feel hesitant, maybe a 7 out of 10. When I'm unsure about the vocabulary, I tend to withdraw from conversations. This lack of confidence impacts my overall communication comfort."
- "I lack confidence quite frequently, maybe 8 out of 10. It significantly affects my willingness to participate actively, and I often find myself holding back in social gatherings."
- "The impact of my lack of confidence is quite significant, I'd say around 9 out of 10. There are times when I avoid speaking altogether..."

On the contrary, around 23.08% of the students, including Students A, D, and I, report a positive and confident outlook when speaking English outside the classroom. Here are their quotes:

- "I'm confident in expressing myself in conversations."
- "..., and I speak in conversations without hesitation."
- "... I participate in spoken interactions comfortably without worrying about how others say or think."

The students' words underscore the prevalence of self-confidence issues among the majority, highlighting instances of hesitation, avoidance, and worry, while a notable minority expresses a positive and confident outlook in their spoken interactions in English outside the classroom. This emphasizes the nuanced impact of self-confidence on individuals' willingness to participate in spoken interactions.

5. Discussion

The findings, which were gathered using a mixed-method approach, provide a thorough grasp of the psychological factors affecting students' language anxiety and offer guidance for therapies and educational approaches. The findings are briefly outlined, extensively analyzed, and contrasted with the pertinent body of existing literature, which includes more recent research pertinent to the Kurdish context, in light of the study's research questions.

Concerning the first research question, participants' responses about peer superiority and worries about awkwardness and mockery in language lectures demonstrate how common the fear of a negative evaluation is among Kurdish EFL scholars. Anxiety levels during language-speaking activities are considerably raised by this fear. Speaking anxiety and involvement are significantly impacted by social evaluative issues, according to previous empirical research conducted among EFL learners (Sayer, 2022; Hamamrad, 2020; Djafri & Wimbari, 2018). As a result, EFL teachers

ought to create safe, accepting spaces where students may express themselves without worrying about receiving a poor grade.

The fear of making mistakes emerged as a prominent factor contributing to English-speaking anxiety among Kurdish EFL learners. Participants expressed concerns about teachers readiness to correct every mistake, indicating a potential source of stress during language learning activities. This finding resonates with the literature highlighting the role of fear of making mistakes in language anxiety (Sayer, 2022; Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). EFL instructors can create a learning atmosphere that encourages risk-taking and views mistakes as integral to the language-learning process, thus alleviating learners apprehensions.

Kurdish EFL learners are greatly impacted by anxiety about tests, which impairs both their ease and spontaneity when speaking in front of an audience. The latest meta-analyses demonstrating the complex effects of exam anxiety on motivation and linguistic proficiency support this finding (Horwitz et al., 1986; Zhiping & Paramasivam, 2013; Wu et al., 2024). According to current research, two useful techniques for lowering this anxiety are the use of formative evaluations and the clarification of test expectations.

The study reveals a pervasive lack of self-confidence among Kurdish EFL learners, particularly when speaking in English. The majority of participants expressed uncertainty and a lack of confidence in their language abilities, both inside and outside the classroom. This aligns with previous research (Ahmed, 2016; Sayer, 2022), highlighting the link between self-confidence and language anxiety. Educators should focus on building learners self-esteem, providing constructive feedback, and creating opportunities for positive language use to enhance learners confidence in their English-speaking abilities.

In response to the second research question, the literature has classified the fear of making mistakes when speaking English outside of formal settings as an idealistic inclination among EFL learners (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Hamamorad, 2020). According to Horwitz (2001), situational reliance, which some students express, exemplifies the variety of communication apprehension. The relationship between difficulty in understanding English outside the classroom and increased speaking anxiety resonates with findings by Young (1994) and McCroskey (1992), who noted the impact of perceived competence on communication apprehension. The varied responses within the learner population align with Dewaeles (2005) assertion that learners individual differences contribute to diverse reactions to language-related challenges.

The prevalence of anxiety related to accents aligns with studies by Derwing and Munro (2013), highlighting the impact of pronunciation and accent on learners confidence. The diversity in attitudes toward accent-related anxiety corresponds with recent literature emphasizing the role of self-perception in language learning (Mercer, 2018).

The anxiety surrounding flawed pronunciation mirrors findings by Baker and MacIntyre (2000) on the impact of pronunciation on language anxiety. The focus on effective communication over perfect pronunciation is consistent with research advocating for a communicative approach and the importance of intelligibility (Munro & Derwing, 1999).

The observed lack of confidence among the majority of participants aligns with previous research indicating the significant role of confidence in language learning (Horwitz, 2010). The positive outlook of a minority corresponds with studies emphasizing the importance of self-efficacy in language learning (Bandura, 1997).

6. Conclusion

The urgency and consequences of addressing English-speaking anxiety among Kurdish EFL

university learners within and outside the classroom are paramount. Language anxiety, with its multifaceted impacts on academic performance, interpersonal communication, and learners' psychological well-being, necessitates immediate attention. Failure to address these issues may perpetuate a cycle of apprehension, hindering the development of language proficiency and hindering students' overall academic and social success.

In addressing the factors of anxiety within the classroom, the study revealed a prevalent fear of negative evaluation, emphasizing the need for EFL educators to foster a supportive and non-judgmental environment. The fear of making mistakes and test anxiety were also identified as significant contributors to speaking anxiety, underscoring the importance of creating an atmosphere that encourages risk-taking and clear expectations. Outside the classroom, factors such as the fear of making mistakes, difficulty in understanding English, fear of judgment based on accents, concerns about flawed pronunciation, and a lack of confidence were explored.

In conclusion, this study highlights the pressing need for immediate action to address English-speaking anxiety among Kurdish EFL university learners. Implementing targeted support programs, exploring technology integration, conducting cross-cultural studies, and initiating longitudinal research can enhance our understanding and inform effective interventions. Teacher training programs and holistic approaches to language learning are also critical areas for future exploration. While recognizing the limitations of this study, such as its specific context and sample size, the findings underscore the urgency for proactive measures. As we move forward, it is essential to consider these research avenues and collaborate on creating a supportive language learning environment that fosters confidence and fluency among EFL learners.

Finally, future research could explore the long-term impact of language anxiety on EFL students' English proficiency and communication skills, considering factors like socio-cultural influences and individual differences. Additionally, investigating the effectiveness of diverse pedagogical approaches and support systems in mitigating language anxiety and enhancing language learning outcomes could provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers.

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ليکولنه وه له هۆکارهکانی دلەراوکی له کاتی قسهکردن به زمانی ئینگلیزی له نيو قوتابيانی زانکو له هەريمی کوردستان

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پوخته

دلەراوکی کاربەریهکی زۆر لەسەر توانای فیرخوازانای زمانی ئینگلیزی ههیه چونکه ده‌بیته هۆی ئەوهی که نه‌توانن به باشی په‌یوهندی و قسه به زمانی ئینگلیزی بکه‌ن. ئەم توێژینه‌وهیه به‌دواداچوون بۆ هۆکاره‌کانی دلەراوکی له‌کاتی قسه‌کردن به زمانی ئینگلیزی له نيو قوتابيانی زانکۆکانی کوردستان ده‌کات. له‌م توێژینه‌وهیه‌دا شیوازی تیکه‌لاو به‌کاره‌ینراوه، واته هه‌ردوو داتای چه‌ندایه‌تی و چو‌نایه‌تی له‌خۆده‌گریت. راپرسیه‌ک که له ۳۳ باب‌ه‌ت پیکه‌هات به ۱۷۰ قوتابی درا. هه‌روه‌ها چاوپیکه‌وتن له‌گه‌ل سێزده قوتابی ئەنجام‌درا. چاوپیکه‌وتنه‌کان نیمچه پیکه‌هاتیه‌ی بوون بۆ ئەوهی بتوانن وه‌لامی وردتر بدرینه‌وه. سه‌رجه‌م به‌شداربووان ته‌مه‌نیان 19 بۆ 25 سال بوو، و قوتابی بوون له زانکۆی نۆلج له هه‌ولیز له هەريمی کوردستان. له ئەنجامی راپرسی یه‌که‌دا چه‌ندین هۆکاری جیاوازی ده‌رکه‌وتن که ده‌بنه هۆی دلەراوکی له نيو قوتابياندا که نه‌توانن به باشی ئینگلیزی ناو پۆلدا به‌کاربه‌ینن، وه‌کو ترس له هه‌له‌کردن، ترس له هه‌له‌سه‌نگاندنی نه‌رینی، دلەراوکی تاقیکردنه‌وه و که‌می متمانه. له لایه‌کی تره‌وه، ئەنجامی چاوپیکه‌وتنه‌کان له گه‌ل قوتابیان که په‌یوه‌ست بوون به دلەراوکیان له کاتی قسه‌کردن به زمانی ئینگلیزی له ده‌ره‌وه‌ی پۆلدا ده‌ریخست که قوتابیان نیکه‌ران بوون له‌وه‌ی که تیبگه‌ن، حوکمیان له‌سه‌ر بدریت، یان ره‌خنه‌یان لێ بگيریت به‌هۆی له‌هه‌ج و بێ‌زهدکردنیان. هه‌روه‌ها نه‌بوونی متمانه هۆکاری سهره‌کی بوو. ئەنجامه‌کانی ئەم توێژینه‌وهیه چاره‌سه‌ری پراکتیکی پيشنیار ده‌که‌ن، ئەویش ئەوه‌یه که پيوسته مامۆستايان ژینگه‌یه‌کی پالپشت بنیات بنێن. هه‌روه‌ها پيوسته سه‌رنجیان له‌سه‌ر پيداويستیه‌کانی تاکه‌سه‌شيش بێت، و میتودیکی فیرکاری پيشنیار ده‌کریت که زیاتر گرنگی به په‌یوه‌ندیکردن دات نه‌ک ته‌نها تیشک‌خستنه‌ر سه‌ر باب‌ه‌ته‌کانی تری زمانه‌وانی وه‌کو ریزمان و رسته‌سازی و وشه‌سازی و فونۆلۆجی، میتودیک که بته هۆی که‌مکردنه‌وه‌ی دلەراوکی.

وشه سه‌ره‌که‌کان: دلەراوکی زمان، فیرخوازانای زمانی ئینگلیزی، لیها‌توویی قسه‌کردن، قسه‌کردن به ئینگلیزی، قوتابيانی کورد

دراسة عوامل القلق لدى طلاب الجامعات الناطقين باللغة الإنجليزية في إقليم كردستان

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المخلص

يُعد القلق من أبرز العوامل التي تؤثر سلبيًا في تعلم اللغة لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، حيث يعرقل تطوّرهم اللغوي ويضعف مهاراتهم في التواصل والطلاقة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف العوامل المؤدية إلى قلق التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلاب الجامعات كردستان. استخدمت الدراسة منهجًا مختلطًا يجمع بين الأسلوب الكمي والنوعي لتحقيق فهم شامل لأبعاد هذا القلق. شملت البيانات الكمية توزيع استبيان مكون من 33 بندًا على 170 طالبًا باستخدام مقياس ليكرت، فيما تم جمع البيانات النوعية عبر مقابلات شبه منظمة مع 13 طالبًا. كشفت نتائج الاستبيان عن عدة عوامل مؤدية إلى القلق داخل الصف، منها: الخوف من ارتكاب الأخطاء، الخوف من التقييم السلبي، قلق الامتحانات، وضعف الثقة بالنفس. أما المقابلات فقد أظهرت وجود قلق خارج الصف أيضًا، يتمثل في الخوف من عدم الفهم، الخشية من الأحكام السلبية، القلق من النطق واللجة، بالإضافة إلى تدني مستوى الثقة بالنفس. توصي الدراسة بضرورة توفير بيئة تعليمية داعمة تأخذ بعين الاعتبار الفروق الفردية، كما تدعو إلى اعتماد أساليب تدريس تواصلية للتقليل من قلق التحدث لدى طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: قلق اللغة، متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، مهارات التحدث، التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية، الطلاب الأكراد