



**The Causes and Impact of Language Anxiety on the Speaking
Skill of Saudi Female EFL Learners**

Prepare

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Abstract.

This paper aimed at investigating the issue of foreign language anxiety (FLA) and the factors that cause it for Saudi female EFL learners at college level when they speak English from two different perspectives: learners and teachers. A mixed- methods qualitative dominant methodology was used to investigate the issue. The first quantitative phase of the study collected data from 257 Saudi female EFL learners who were enrolled in the Department of English at Arrass College of Science and Arts by using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) as well as a background information questionnaire. In the second qualitative phase, 41 highly anxious learners were chosen to participate in semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions. Finally, 7 female EFL experienced teachers were interviewed to add more depth to the issue under investigation. Results of the quantitative phase revealed that the majority of participants scored medium anxiety levels. The percentage of the students experiencing FLA, whether high or moderate, was extremely high (85.21 %). Compared to the results reported by previous studies, the mean for the current sample was the highest (104.23). The qualitative analysis of the interviews revealed that FLA can originate from psycholinguistic and socio-cultural factors. The psycholinguistics factors that cause FLA for learners are: classroom environment, pedagogical and instructional practices, the role of language teachers, English-insufficient command of linguistic knowledge, preoccupation with committing errors, fear of negative evaluation, speaking activities and oral exams, fear of risk-taking, non-comprehension, competitiveness, low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence, misconceptions about learning English and unrealistic expectations, speaking in front of native/ more fluent speakers , lack of motivation, and finally lack of preparation when speaking .The socio-cultural causes of the participants' FLA are: cultural differences and unfamiliar topics, social environment and limited exposure to English, differences in the social and educational status, and gender.

Introduction

The focus of research in second language acquisition (SLA) has been primarily on issues such as language pedagogy (Grammar Translation Method, Audio-lingual, etc.), contents of pedagogical instructions, and ways to improve them (Tanveer, 2007). Consequently, the cognitive domain received the hugest attention where as little attention was paid to the affective variables learners bring with them into language classroom. It was only in late twentieth century, in the 1970s, that the SLA researchers began to study the significant role played by personality and motivational variables in second language acquisition (Shams, 2006). In order to understand this process, learners' affective variables need to be taken into account to meet their needs and interests (Samimy, 1994).

In addition, as the focus of foreign language instruction has shifted from the narrow concern for developing learners' linguistic competence to the need for communicative competence, learners are challenged to be able to speak in the target language spontaneously in various social contexts. In order to meet this challenge, attention has diverted to studying the role of affective variables like learning styles, motivation, personality traits, etc. that can impede the process of learning and speaking a foreign language. Among these affective variables, learner's anxiety has been recognized as an important area of study in SLA because of the negative influence it can have on students' performance.

Anxiety, as perceived intuitively by many language learners, negatively influences language learning and has been found to be one of the most highly examined variables in psychology and education (Horwitz, 2001). Anxiety is defined as "a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system" (Spielberger, 1983, p.1).

Speaking has been the most crucial source of anxiety in the foreign language classroom (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Koch & Terrell, 1991; Price, 1991; Young, 1990). This is also supported by the research of MacIntyre & Gardner (1991a), who

noted that almost all their subjects considered the activities that involve speaking as the most anxiety- provoking experiences in their foreign language class. Learning a foreign language requires students to apply orally what they have learned which is considered one of the most anxiety-inducing parts of the learning process. The cognitive process involved in listening, writing and reading are not equally evaluated with regard to anxiety because they do not require the same performance aspect as speaking does, and thus they do not cause as much anxiety (Horner & Redmond, 2002).

The most anxiety provoking skill in learning English for the majority of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, including those in Saudi Arabia, is the speaking skill. Many learners feel anxious and nervous while speaking English in front of others. They express their inability and sometimes even acknowledge their failure in speaking English. These learners may be good at learning other skills but, when it comes to speaking a foreign language, they claim to have a mental block against it (Horwitz et al., 1986) .What seems to distinguish speaking is the public nature of the skill; this poses a threat to students' self-concept, self-identity, and ego, which they have formed in their first language as reasonable and intelligent individuals (Horwitz et al., 1986). Every situation that enhances the chances of exposing their deficiencies and language imperfections in front of others is likely to cause language anxiety for EFL learners. This situation which could be either classroom interaction in the form of open class forum, group participation or class presentation, or giving a short talk in any public event is likely to challenge learners' communicative abilities. What, then, stops them to succeed in speaking a foreign language? In many cases, students' feeling of anxiety may impede their language learning and performance abilities.

Theorists and SLA researchers have frequently demonstrated that these feelings of anxiety are specifically associated with learning and speaking a foreign language, which distinguishes foreign language learning from learning other skills or subjects (Horwitz, 1986 ; Scovel, 1978). Horwitz and Young (1991) expressed, "we have been truly surprised at the number of students

who experience anxiety and distress in their language classes". Both teachers and students generally feel that anxiety is a major obstacle to be overcome when speaking a foreign language.

Statement of the Problem

Worldwide expansion of the English Language has increased the demand to acquire good communication skills in English. Speaking has been regarded as one of the important parts in foreign language learning. In the past, speaking was not given enough attention by both the teachers and the students. But now, with the increasing need for students to have higher oral English ability, many students do their utmost to improve their spoken English level. However, learners of the English language often express a feeling of stress, nervousness or anxiety while speaking English. As a nonnative speaker of English and an EFL teacher, the researcher herself has not only experienced foreign language anxiety (FLA) but also observed this phenomenon among students of varied levels while teaching them English at Arrass College of Science and Arts.

This problem exists among EFL learners from the beginning to more advanced levels. Even highly advanced EFL learners feel anxious while speaking English in some situations, both inside and outside the classroom settings. Those learners wonder why they cannot speak English well, as their compulsive efforts do not lead to their intended performance. Thus, when it comes to answering questions or presenting topics orally, students often feel anxious and have trouble putting their thoughts into fluent English.

Furthermore, Saudi students have limited exposure to the English language and English materials, if they depend on their instructors and the course as the only resources for their English learning. Yet, in recent years, there has been a rapid growth in the number of courses that emphasize the components of speaking and listening. However, Saudi college students still find it challenging to succeed in these courses, taking in knowledge that they have never been trained to think in English but merely to reproduce what was presented in their classes. Therefore, the current study

aimed at investigating Saudi EFL students' FLA while speaking English at college level in order to shed some light on the future of EFL learning and teaching in Saudi Arabia.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study have both theoretical and pedagogical significance. From a theoretical viewpoint, the results regarding the causes of FLA could lead to a better understanding of the complex nature of FLA and the influence it can have on foreign language learning, performance and achievement. Furthermore, the information obtained from the interviews with Saudi female EFL college students and how FLA is affecting their speaking of the English language could add to the existing literature.

Moreover, most previous studies on FLA have utilized quantitative methodologies to find the causes and effects of FLA but the results were inconsistent (Young, 1991a). Such studies failed to completely represent the participants' points of view and descriptions of language anxiety. Therefore, this study intended to be more comprehensive in nature as it employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in an attempt to identify the levels and sources of FLA; focusing on the actual sources of anxiety, as Shams (2006) suggested, could prove an effective means of alleviating FLA. The selection of a mixed methodology design in this study would contribute to the literature of FLA instead of replicating quantitative methods which have been the leading methods in the literature.

Further, in the previous literature on language anxiety, the focus was on learners' linguistic and cognitive factors while cultural factors and learners' social lives outside the classroom were seldom investigated. The current study investigated both psycholinguistic and socio-cultural factors that cause FLA to gain a more holistic understanding of this issue.

In terms of pedagogical implications, this study is also of a considerable interest to SLA researchers, EFL teachers and EFL students because of the potentially negative impact of FLA, not only on the various domains of language performance, but also on

students' attitudes and perceptions of language learning in general (Phillips, 1992). The investigation of the anxiety-producing factors that arise while communicating in the target language would hopefully broaden the insight into the issue of FLA. Understanding the importance of learning about the different causes of students' language anxiety would help EFL teachers in making the classroom environment less stressful by developing their teaching approaches which assist EFL learners in coping with their anxiety. Without this knowledge, teachers might cause students' FLA by utilizing teaching approaches that do not facilitate learning for EFL students. The current study would be a guide for EFL teachers to plan their classroom activities and teaching materials carefully to ensure that students have less anxiety while learning and specifically speaking English. It would be also important for curriculum designers to help them create curriculums that contain anxiety-reducing activities. By providing implications for curriculum designers as well as language teachers and students, the present research hoped to draw more attention to this largely neglected area of research in Saudi Arabia and contribute to the overall literature of research on anxiety in foreign language learning.

The Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this study was to find out to what extent Saudi female EFL learners feel anxious while speaking English and why they feel anxious or embarrassed while speaking in the target language. Specifically, what are the factors that make speaking English more stressful in some situations than in others? This study intended to discover the phenomenon of FLA from both inside and outside the English language classroom setting in a wider social context. This included considering the factors that originate from the learner's own sense of self, from the language learning process, or from the situation or social environment the learner is a part of.

Researchers and foreign language instructors need to understand how FLA happens and, consequently, find out the best strategies to alleviate it in learners' behaviour. Therefore, this study is interested in answering the following questions: To what extent do Saudi female EFL learners experience foreign language anxiety? Why do Saudi EFL learners feel anxious while speaking English?

Research Questions

The present paper was designed to answer the following questions:

- 1- To what extent do Saudi female EFL learners experience FLA while speaking English?
- 2-a-What are the psycholinguistic factors that cause FLA for Saudi female EFL learners while speaking English?
- 2-b-What are the socio-cultural factors that cause FLA for Saudi female EFL learners while speaking English?

Research Design

A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was chosen where the quantitative data collected in the first phase provided a basis for the collection of the qualitative data in the second phase. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was used in Phase One, while semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used in Phase Two. The quantitative data served two purposes: it gave a general idea about the levels of anxiety experienced by students in the English classroom, and it aided in the selection of participants for the second, more extensive phase of the study. Thus, although the study employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, the primary emphasis was on the qualitative data, making it a qualitative dominant study (Creswell, 2003).

Participants in Phase One

The participants in Phase One were all EFL undergraduate students. In terms of age and proficiency level, the sample of students was heterogeneous. Since anxiety is a feeling that is not limited to a certain age or level and in order to fully understand the anxiety issues, the present study was open to all class levels of the

students enrolled in the Department of English. Thus, the student participants represented different proficiency levels among EFL learners. However, the sample of students was homogeneous in terms of cultural, educational and social backgrounds. Students in the first, second, third and fourth levels participated in Phase One and their total number was 257 students. The participants had been exposed to English as a foreign language (EFL), rather than English as a second language (ESL). In comparison, there may be considerable differences in the type and amount of input available in the two environments. As a result, the quantity and quality of English that the participants in this study are exposed to is limited.

Participants in Phase Two

In Phase Two, anxious students participated in individual interviews, focus group interviews, and classroom observations. As for the interviews, purposeful sampling was applied for selecting the participants. Purposeful sampling is used when there is clear rationale or criterion for selecting the participants for the sample group to be studied (Champion, 2002). The sample of the interviews contained both students and teachers, and each was selected based on a certain criterion. The total number of the participants was 41 EFL students and seven EFL experienced teachers.

The selection of the students was carried out based on the results of the FLCAS. The learners who scored high anxiety on the FLCAS were selected from each level to attend the interviews in order to get a range of experiences related to FLA at different levels of language learning. With maximum variation sampling, students from different class levels were interviewed until the data were saturated. The criterion of selecting the participants was their level of anxiety, only those who had high levels of anxiety were selected. However, the selection of the students for the interviews was also based on their willingness to participate and those who expressed interest in the study. Therefore, when a student refused to participate in the interviews for any reason, she was directly replaced by the following student in the list of anxious students. No incentives or compensations were offered in exchange for participation.

The sample of the interviews also included EFL teachers who were heterogeneous in terms of age, nationality, specialization, and years of teaching. All of them work as lecturers in the Department of English at Arrass College of Science and Arts, except one who works as a teaching assistant. The teachers were chosen on the basis of their experience of teaching. Those who have been teaching for less than five years were excluded from the sample. The number of teachers who met the criterion was nine, two of them declined to participate in the interviews.

Data Collection Instruments

Sequential methods data collection strategies involve collecting data in an interactive process whereby the data collected in one phase contribute to the data collected in the next. Sequential designs in which quantitative data are collected first can use statistical methods to determine which findings to augment in the next phase. The research questions posed in this study were investigated in the light of several data collection instruments: (a) a background questionnaire, (b) an FLCAS, (c) semi-structured individual interviews, and (d) focus group interviews. The following is a detailed description of each:

Background Information Questionnaire

In order to learn more about students' backgrounds, a short questionnaire seeking the following information was given to all participating students in Phase One: name, age, academic level, the number of years the student has studied English, and traveling or living in an English speaking country. The questionnaire was adapted from others used for the same purpose. The obtained information helped in classifying participants for the qualitative phase of the study.

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

The FLCAS is a 33-item questionnaire designed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) that aims to measure the level of anxiety experienced by foreign language students. Eight items were designed to measure communication anxiety (1, 9, 14, 18, 24, 27, 29, 32), nine items for fear of negative evaluation (3, 7, 13, 15, 20, 23, 25, 31, 33) and five items for test anxiety (2, 8, 10, 19, 21). As

for the remaining eleven items, they are put in a group named anxiety of English classes. The scale is based on the speculation that the students' self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours affecting the levels of anxiety found in foreign languages.

The FLCAS utilizes a five-point scale with five possible responses: strongly agree (5 points), agree (4 points), neutral (3 points), disagree (2 points), and strongly disagree (1 point). Higher scores are indicating higher levels of language anxiety while lower scores indicating lower levels of language anxiety. The score is obtained by summing the responses for all 33 items, with negatively worded items reversely coded. Consequently, the lowest possible score a learner can get is 33 and the highest is 165.

For the purpose of the current study, the FLCAS was modified. The language spoken in class was specified as "English", since English as a foreign language is the main focus of this study, the words "language" and "foreign language" used in the original FLCAS were replaced by the word "English" in each item. For example, the original FLCAS item "I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak the foreign language." was modified to "I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English."

Semi-structured Interviews

The rationale behind the use of interview as a data collection tool is that it can provide access to things that cannot be directly observed, such as feelings, thoughts, intentions, or beliefs (Merriam, 1998). Moreover, interviews can confirm the findings from quantitative research data and the researcher can obtain both breadth and depth of information, and this information can provide the researcher with insights about the meaningful interpretation of the results from the quantitative data (Krueger, 1994). It also provides participants with opportunities to select, reconstruct, and reflect upon details of their experience within the specific context of their lives (Ohata, 2005) .

Giving that the primary goal of this study is to explore the sources of language anxiety, interviews seem to be appropriate as a means to understand the experiences of the participants about language anxiety because they allow for given points to be

clarified and elaborated upon where required. The interview questions are employed to understand the role of anxiety in speaking English. The questions are centered on the sources and reasons that cause learners to feel anxious while speaking English in addition to the manifestations of FLA and the strategies to cope with it.

In the present study, the interviews were designed like a guided conversation intentionally. A set of questions had been prepared in advance. Most of them were open enough to allow the interviewees to express their thoughts, feelings, or opinions freely throughout the interview. Subsequent probing questions were asked depending on the responses, as well as clarification and verification questions to ensure understanding of the speakers intended meaning.

Focus Group Interviews

The group interview technique in the form of focus group discussion is also utilized to lend breadth and richness to the data. The focus group interview was used in order to gather the participants' ideas and experiences efficiently and stimulate them to recall and share their past experiences on language anxiety in ways that may go beyond what they were able to provide in the individual interviews. Therefore, a combination of individual and focus group interviews would maximize the advantages and minimize the disadvantages that each type has if they were used separately.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from Phase One of the study was organized and initially analyzed immediately after it was collected, as the results guided the data collection and analysis in Phase Two. Data were first coded and then entered into a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 11.5, was used for the analysis of the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the background information questionnaire responses as well as the anxiety scale. The descriptive statistics consisted of means, standard deviations, maximums and minimums, and percentages.

Students' scores on the FLCAS were calculated by assigning a point value to each of the five possible responses on the Likert scale used on this instrument. For example, a score of 5 was given to "strongly agree" response, whereas a score of 1 was given to a "strongly disagree" response. Some items were reverse-scored so that a high point value indicated higher anxiety and a low point value indicated lower anxiety. For example, when the participant chose "strongly agree" for the item, "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English in my English classes," the answer was scored as 5 points. By contrast, item 2 which states "I don't worry about making mistakes in my English class" was reverse scored so that a "strongly agree" response to this item received a score of 1, indicating low anxiety. According to the scoring system of the FLCAS, the student's total score on the FLCAS is divided by 33 (the number of items). A student is considered highly anxious if the measure exceeds four. A student is considered anxious if the measure exceeds three. If a student's average on the FLCAS is below 3, then the student is not considered anxious. The means and standard deviations found in this study were calculated compared with the results of previous studies that examined FLA (see Table 5.1).

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data from Phase Two were analyzed and interpreted following the grounded theory data analysis techniques and procedures. The grounded theory approach allowed for a thorough investigation of each participant's experiences, which ultimately revealed the great complexity associated with the phenomenon of FLA. The grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method that "uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" (Davidson, 2002). Its primary objective is "to expand upon an explanation of a phenomenon (foreign language anxiety) by identifying the key elements of that phenomenon, and then categorizing the relationships of those elements to the context and process of the experiment" (p. 1). It consists of three phases of coding- open, axial, and selective- as advanced by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Grounded theory provides a procedure for

developing categories of information (open coding), interconnecting the categories (axial coding), building a "story" that connects the categories (selective coding), and ending with a discursive set of theoretical propositions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In grounded theory, data analysis and the later stages of data reduction like coding, synthesis, etc. operate iteratively. Coding is a process of simultaneously reducing the data by dividing it into units of analysis and coding each unit (Calloway et al., 1995). Steps in content analysis include collecting the data, coding the data, transforming the codes into categorical labels or themes, isolating meaningful patterns and processes, and making generalizations to explain the data's meaning (Berg, 2004).

In this study, the taped interviews were transcribed verbatim. The raw data that emerged from participants' experience about FLA were analyzed according to basic categories developed from the interview questions: psycholinguistic factors believed to cause FLA, socio-cultural factors believed to cause FLA, manifestations of FLA, and strategies believed to reduce FLA.

The data were reduced into "units of analysis" on the basis of common themes and by analyzing the language patterns of the participants. These units were codified by giving them suitable headings like "beliefs about language learning", "fear of making mistakes", "cultural differences", etc. Under each separate unit or category, portions of dialogue were detailed according to individual participant response. In this way the source of the quotation was readily identifiable. The factors were then extrapolated from the dialogue portions and listed. New categories were added until no further categories were necessary. Where appropriate, subcategories were also developed. Initial headings arose from the interview questions and were expanded when responses did not fit well under the interview question. The framework was then reduced as much as possible by collapsing headings that could potentially contain the same data. For further reduction, these categories were integrated and synthesized into four sets of core categories: psycholinguistic factors, socio-cultural factors, manifestation of anxiety, and alleviation strategies. These categories were used to explain the phenomenon under

investigation (FLA), which is the theory developed based on the data. Finally, the data were then reanalyzed using the finalized framework to ensure that the frame was appropriate. This method was repeated until the data seemed to best fit in the headings to which they had been assigned. The data were then interpreted along those categories in light of the quantitative analyses. The qualitative findings were generated from these data.

Results

In Phase One, the data obtained from the FLCAS revealed that 219 out of 257 students experience high to moderate levels of FLA while speaking English. Forty one students experienced high anxiety, 178 experienced medium anxiety while 38 students had low anxiety. The mean in this study (104.23) is higher than that in other studies which indicated that a significant number of Saudi female EFL learners feel anxious and embarrassed when speaking English.

In Phase Two, a variety of casual factors have been discussed in the interviews concluding that FLA can originate from within and outside the language classroom environment. The factors have been discussed from psycholinguistic and socio-cultural perspectives. There are 15 psycholinguistic factors that caused FLA for Saudi female EFL learners. These psycholinguistic factors are related to learners' cognition and language learning difficulties and have been discussed under various headings: 1) classroom environment; 2) pedagogical and instructional practices; 3) the role of language teachers; 4) English-insufficient command of linguistic knowledge; 5) preoccupation with committing errors; 6) fear of negative evaluation; 7) speaking activities and oral exams; 8) fear of risk-taking; 9) non-comprehension; 10) competitiveness; 11) low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence ; 12) misconceptions about learning English and unrealistic expectations; 13) speaking in front of native/ more fluent speakers ; 14) Lack of motivation; and finally 15) lack of preparation when speaking . The socio-cultural factors that caused FLA for Saudi female EFL learners are: social environment and limited exposure

to English, cultural differences and unfamiliar topics, differences in social and educational status, and gender.

Levels of Foreign Language Anxiety

Research Question 1 of the present study was: To what extent do Saudi female EFL learners experience foreign language anxiety while speaking English? To answer this question, the FLCAS was administered to 257 Saudi female EFL learners in four course levels. Descriptive analysis of the data showed that the participants in this study experienced moderate levels of FLA. Their scores ranged from 59 to 138 with an overall mean of 104.23 and a standard deviation of 14.55. Out of the 257 participants, 41 students experienced high anxiety, 178 experienced medium anxiety while 38 students had low anxiety. The percentage of the anxious participants in the four levels (85.21 %) is considered high in comparison to results of other studies.

The first level participants had the highest percentage of FLA (29.18 %), out of 67 participants, 75 scored high or medium on the FLCAS. The fourth level participants scored the second highest percentage of anxious students (22.18%), 57 students were anxious out of 67 students. This goes in parallel with the findings reported by Onwuegbuzie et al. (1999), that advanced language learners felt language anxiety as deeply and frequently as beginners.

The higher levels of FLA among the first level participants in comparison to other levels may be due to two possible reasons. First, the number of participants in the first level was the highest (92 students) in comparison to the other levels which might explain the high percentage of anxious students in that level. Secondly, students in beginning levels want to achieve better communication. As beginning learners have less knowledge, they can barely be aware of their mistakes. First-year college students have not yet developed effective foreign language learning strategies and study skills. However, when they make mistakes while speaking, they are ashamed and embarrassed. Furthermore, they believe that their teachers expect more from them. They become anxious when teachers do not understand them. They also wish not to be negatively evaluated by their teachers or peers. This

explains why students in begging levels who have fears of negative evaluation have increased levels of FLA.

Some studies showed that FLA levels did not change across course levels (Cheng, 2002; Coulombe, 2000). In contrast, the FLA levels among students in this study differ across their course levels. In the first level, 81.52 % of the students were found to be anxious. While in second level, 92.68 % were anxious. In third level, 87.72 % of the students experienced anxiety. Finally, in fourth level, 85.07 % were found to be anxious.

Based on their FLCAS scores, the participants in this study felt a little more anxious in comparison to students in other studies. The results show that more than (80%) of the participants in each level have high levels of FLA. The results obtained from the sample of the current study are compared with the results of 12 previous studies that used the FLCAS. Table 5.1 below gives more details.

Table 5.1

The FLCAS Scores of Previous Studies

Study	Language Class Enrolled	Number of Students	FLCAS Items Used	Mean	SD
Horwitz (1986)	Spanish	108	33	94.5	21.4
Phillips (1992)	French	44	33	99.3	24.6
Aida (1994)	Japanese	96	33	96.7	22.1
Truitt (1995)	English	198	33	101.2	23.4
Donley (1997)	Spanish	296	33	103.52	24.10
Cheng (1999)	English	423	33	94.9	20.0
Palacios (1998)	Spanish	445	33	94.3	22.8
Kim (2000)	English	239	33	103.9	19.8
Elkhafaifi (2005)	Arabic	233	33	90.0	23.8
Chiang (2006)	English	310	33	92.9	17.8
Chu (2008)	English	364	31	93.4	17.7
Zhao (2009)	Chinese	125	33	88.82	21.28
Current Study (2011)	English	257	33	104.23	14.55

Compared to the results reported by the above mentioned studies, the mean in the present study (104.23) is a little higher than the other studies involving various foreign languages. However, the mean on the FLCAS in this study is similar to those found in other foreign studies (Donley, 1997; Kim, 2000; Truitt, 1995). It seems that the students in this study experienced more anxiety in their English language classes than those in the previous mentioned studies. The participants in the current study had a mean score of FLA a little higher than that of other college –level populations in other studies, although the differences were not necessarily statistically significant. There are possible explanations for this finding. It should be noted that each of these studies was conducted with participants from different cultures. According to Horwitz (2001), "levels of foreign language anxiety may vary in different cultural groups"(p.117). While Horwitz (1986) and Aida (1994) found relatively similar means on the FLCAS for American foreign language learners, Truitt (1995) found relatively higher levels in Korean EFL learners, Kunt (1997) found somewhat lower levels in Turkish learners of English, while the present study found relatively higher levels in Saudi EFL learners.

Moreover, the fact that most Saudi students have no or fewer opportunities to visit or live in English speaking countries, as have been reported by the participants in the background information questionnaire, and thus have no experience of communicating in authentic English contexts can explain the higher mean of their anxiety . As a result, the students' familiarity with the English language, its people, and culture is very low especially with the fact that the participants live in a small town where there are no, if any, native speakers of English. In a foreign language environment, such as in Saudi Arabia, students have fewer opportunities to use the target language, especially the opportunity to converse with the native speakers which might make them feel more anxious when having to speak it. In addition, in recent years, because of the global economy and the massive effect of media and internet, Saudi students are lying under a great pressure when they try to communicate in English. Although students in this study were all taught by nonnative speakers of English, they still

have higher levels of FLA than any of the students in the previous studies. EFL students could experience more anxiety and feel intimidated in their English class if their instructors were all native English speakers.

To summarize the answer to Research Question 1, the majority of Saudi female EFL students experienced medium levels of FLA. Based on their FLCAS scores, the participants felt a little more anxiety in comparison to students in other studies. The qualitative results support this finding and suggest that even those with lower scores on the FLCAS may experience FLA that is at times debilitating, suggesting that anxiety is a complex phenomenon that needs to be analyzed. Hence, the necessity for the second question of the research questions is obvious.

Sources of Foreign Language Anxiety

Research Question 2 was: What are the psycholinguistic and socio-cultural factors that cause foreign language anxiety for Saudi female EFL learners while speaking English? The qualitative data were collected from the 41 highly anxious student participants and 7 experienced EFL teacher participants via semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. The causes of anxiety experienced by Saudi female EFL learners were analyzed in two areas: (1) psycholinguistic factors and (2) socio-cultural factors.

Psycholinguistic Factors

The findings of this study indicated that Saudi female EFL learners experienced FLA because of the following fifteen *psycholinguistic factors*: classroom environment, pedagogical and instructional practices, the role of language teachers, English-insufficient command of linguistic knowledge, preoccupation with making errors, fear of negative evaluation, speaking activities and oral exams, fear of risk-taking, non-comprehension, competitiveness, low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence, misconceptions about learning English and unrealistic expectations, speaking in front of native/ more fluent speakers, lack of motivation, and finally lack of preparation when speaking. Each factor is discussed in the following section.

1- *Classroom Environment*. The participants stated that a strict and formal classroom environment can cause them FLA. Fear of

being negatively evaluated under formal classroom environment supports the previous research that learners feel more anxious in highly evaluative situations, particularly in the foreign language classroom where their performance is constantly monitored by both their teachers and peers (Daly, 1991). This finding is consistent with Palacios's (1998) study which indicated that friendly classroom atmosphere may decrease student anxiety levels and that several components of classroom climate were associated with higher levels of anxiety. A one-way classroom communication with the teacher was found to be common in Saudi EFL classrooms, as opposed to a more friendly communication which seems to promote a more relaxed atmosphere, which is consistent with students' preference reported in Saito and Ebsworth's study (2004).

2- Pedagogical and Instructional Practices. Some pedagogical and instructional practices caused the participants FLA which is consistent with what Tice (1992) reported that the sources of language anxiety might be related to instructors' unnatural classroom approaches. Some participants reported feeling anxious when the teacher used random selection for calling on the students. They complained that they always felt on edge, not knowing when or if they would be called on. They also reported increasing anxiety as their turn approached when the teacher called on them in a predictable order. The teacher's procedure for calling on students was also reported as a source of language anxiety in Williams and Andrade's (2008) study.

3-The Role of Language Teachers. The findings of the current study also indicated that the students' FLA can be affected or caused by the role of the language teacher which is consistent with other studies (Horwitz et al, 1986; Price, 1991; Williams & Andrade, 2008; Young, 1990; Young, 1991). Half of the participants felt that the teacher was responsible for the anxiety-provoking situation. The participants in the interviews suggested that the role of the teacher is essential in alleviating anxiety, more vital perhaps than a particular methodology. The participants reported that teachers who provide a supportive and understanding environment, who employ nonthreatening teaching methods, and

who use appealing and relevant topics seemed to alleviate FLA. These findings mirror those of Price (1991) who reported that "instructors had played a significant role in the amount of anxiety each student had experienced in particular classes" (p. 106) as well as that of Young (1990) who noted that anxiety decreased when instructors "create a warm social environment" (p. 550).

4 - *Speaking Activities and Oral Exams*. They were reported as another source of the participants' FLA. Many participants viewed being asked to respond to teacher's questions, presenting a topic orally or having an oral exam as threatening. FLA was often associated with tasks involving speaking in front of others. Most commonly mentioned was having to stand before a class to deliver a prepared speech or from memory. All participants agreed that speaking in front of the whole class caused them anxiety. The findings of this study supported those of earlier studies (Koch & Terrell, 1991; Price, 1991; Tallon, 2006; Young, 1990) in which a large number of their subjects considered oral presentation as the most anxiety-provoking at class. Kim (1998) found that students in conversation classes experienced higher anxiety levels than students in reading classes. Thus, it is clear that foreign language learners may experience some inherent levels of anxiety when participating in oral activities, a fact that can be applied to the participants in this study. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) reported that students are very self-conscious when they are required to engage in speaking activities that expose their inadequacies and these feelings often lead to fear or even panic. Oral exams were also anxiety-provoking to most participants. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) noted that foreign language tests given orally may induce both test anxiety and communication apprehension.

5- *English-insufficient Command of Linguistic Knowledge*. Lacking explicit, phonological, semantic, and syntactic knowledge was another source of the participants' FLA. They felt like they did not know enough grammar or vocabulary to be able to speak correctly. They were reluctant to speak sometimes because they did not know how to pronounce certain words. The participants believe that they should have a perfect, authentic-sounding

pronunciation of the English language. The participants' responses regarding linguistic difficulties were also consistent with past research. The participants in Tanveer's study (2007) also reported that linguistic difficulties in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation are a cause of their anxiety.

The participants in Tallon's (2006) study felt anxious because they believed that their pronunciation of the Spanish language should be authentic-sounding. In Kojima's study (2007), the Spanish-speaking students' stress was derived from a fear of mispronouncing English words. Moreover, the findings showed that the participants felt anxious because they did not have the appropriate vocabulary. Such results lend support to MacIntyre and Gardner's research (1991b) which found negative correlation between language anxiety and the ability to recall vocabulary items. As learners can process only a limited amount of information at one time (Lightbown & Spada, 2006), the participants reported that many words do not come out when they are required to speak in a hurry.

6-Preoccupation with Committing Errors. The participants often felt anxious when they made errors and received negative evaluation from their peers or teachers. The fear of making errors and being laughed at by others prevented many participants from speaking in class. These causes were also reported in Samimy's study (1994). Previous research has supported the notion that fear of making errors is an original cause of language anxiety (Jones, 2004; Tallon, 2006). The findings of this study are in agreement in this respect. The participants were concerned with keeping their positive image in their teachers and peers' minds and thus were afraid of making errors. This was also reported in the study of Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) on perfectionism in which they stated that perfectionist students tended to be more anxious as they tried to save their positive image which is linked to their fear of making errors in front of others. The participants, although reporting feelings of anxiety over error correction, also expressed their desire to be corrected by their teachers which is consistent with the literature on language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1991).

7-Fear of Negative Evaluation of Others. The participants' fear of negative evaluation was the common cause of their FLA which was also established by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) as one of the components of anxiety. Some participants reported that they were hesitant to ask for further clarification because of their fear of appearing "stupid". These students believe that the teacher and classmates expected more from them in comparison to other students. While they feared the judgment of others to varying degrees, almost all the participants were alike in being worried about what others in the classroom thought of them when they made errors. Fear of making a bad impression or receiving negative evaluation associated with the inability to express oneself clearly and correctly was the most often cited source of FLA. Connected to this fear was the feeling that one was less capable than other students in the course. These results are consistent with those reported by Burden (2004), Kondo and Yang (2004), and Williams and Andrade (2008). This also corresponds to Horwitz (1986) who stated that the more fearful a learner is of negative evaluation, the more anxiety he or she has.

8- Fear of Risk-taking. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), "the anxious student may be characterized as an individual who perceives the L2 as an uncomfortable experience, who withdraws from voluntary participation, who feels social pressure not to make mistakes and who is less willing to try uncertain or novel linguistic forms" (p.112) The participants reported having similar aspects which caused them to be anxious. They were unwilling to take a risk and participate in the classroom or speak English unless they were certain that they were correct.

9-Low Self-esteem and Lack of Self-confidence. The participants' low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence was reported as one of the main causes of FLA. The more confidence these students had in their abilities, the less anxious they felt. This finding supports other studies that have found a strong link between self-confidence and FLA: a higher degree of confidence leads to lower levels of anxiety (Cheng, 2002; Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999; Price, 1991; Young, 1991). Onwuegbuzie, Bailey and Daley (1999) asserted that "self –esteem and self-concept play

a role in determining levels of foreign language anxiety" (p.229), this observation is supported by the results of this study. The participants' anxiety likely caused them to underestimate what they were capable of achieving which is a common practice that is done only by anxious students (MacIntyre, Noels & Clement, 1997). Motoda (2005) found that students of Japanese as a second language who hold low self-esteem about their Japanese tend to feel more anxiety than those with high self-esteem. In the present study, self-esteem regarding the target language had a strong relationship with FLA. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), "individuals who have high levels of self-esteem are less likely to be anxious than those with low self-esteem" (p.129).

10- *Misconceptions about English Learning and Unrealistic Expectations.* The participants had several misperceptions and unrealistic self-set standards related to speaking English that caused them FLA. Some self-related cognitions found in this study correspond to previously cited cognition and appeared to vary in individuals based upon their personality traits and earlier experiences of foreign language learning. The participants believe that fluency cannot be attained unless one lives in a native language country or have a private tutor. This perception caused them to underestimate their abilities and have higher expectations of themselves than they should have. The participants also emphasized the false belief of speaking English with an excellent accent which was also reported by 40% of each group of subjects in Horwitz's (1988) study. The pressure to perform like a native speaker increased the levels of FLA among the participants. This made students worry about making errors and, in turn, increased their fear of others' negative evaluation.

This corresponds to previous research which posited that anxiety in learners is produced by their beliefs and self-perceptions about language learning (Krashen, 1985; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999; Horwitz et al., 1986). According to Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986) and Horwitz (1988), the main source of language anxiety could be the students' beliefs toward the necessity of target language accuracy. Horwitz (1988) found that more than a third of foreign language students believed that they should achieve

language fluency after two years of university study. This belief is far from being realistic and may cause students great anxiety. Aydin (1999) found that students felt that their anxiety resulted from personal concerns such as negative self-assessment of language learning ability and high personal expectations. According to Gregersen and Horwitz (2002), the disturbing cognition in anxious learners appears to originate from learners' high self-expectations and unrealistic self-set standards. According to Young (1991), erroneous beliefs about language learning can contribute greatly to creating language anxiety in students. Similarly, Ohata (2005) explained that unrealistic beliefs can lead to greater anxiety and frustration, especially when the beliefs and reality clash. This goes in parallel with the participants' cognition which caused them to be anxious.

11- *Competitiveness*. Several anxious students in the present study confirmed having competitiveness as a cause of their FLA. The participants declared that the presence of good students in the classroom can make them anxious. They were more anxious whenever they felt that they are less capable than other students in the course. These findings are consistent with those reported by other researchers (Burden, 2004; Kondo & Yang, 2004; Ohata, 2005). Bailey (1983) reported that language anxiety can be caused by the learners' competitiveness when they see themselves as less proficient than the object of comparison. Young (1991) also considered competitiveness as a cause of students' anxiety. Palacios (1998) found that lack of competition was associated with lower levels of language anxiety. Most of the participants perceived themselves to have lower abilities than their classmates, which is a common belief held by highly anxious students in other studies (Bailey, 1983; Price, 1991).

12- *Lack of Motivation*. The more students are motivated, the less anxious they will be (Peng & Dong, 2010). This was also reported by some participants. In order not to feel anxious, most participants tried to prepare before their classes. Others did not have good motives to learn English which caused them to feel more anxious since they were always unprepared to speak English. EFL students may experience higher levels of communication

apprehension than ESL students (Satio & Ebsworth, 2004). The frequent contact and use of English in conversations in a second language environment might have made speaking English a familiar task and thus less anxiety-provoking for students in such environments. Further, Saudi EFL learners take English to fulfill a requirement, while ESL students consider English necessary for their daily life. Thus, there is a connection between students' motivational difference and language anxiety. This explains the low scores of anxiety among participants in other studies where English is a second language.

13- *Non-comprehension*. The participants also got nervous when they could not comprehend everything that the teacher said. The participants had difficulty understanding what the teacher was saying in class and thus were unable to respond to the teacher's questions which made them anxious whenever the teacher asked them a question. These feelings of anxiety deprived them of any practice opportunities in the classroom. Young (1992) noted that listening might generate anxiety if it were incomprehensible.

14- *Lack of Preparation When Speaking*. The findings of this study showed that lack of preparation before speaking is one of the causes of the students' FLA which supports the previous research (Onwuegbuzie et al. ,1999; Tallon,2006 ;Young,1991) which stated that the more prepared the students felt , the more confident they were in their abilities and the less anxiety they experienced. Generally, the learners' confidence was directly related to how well they prepared for each class. The participants declared that when they prepared their speaking material well, they felt more confident and less anxious. However, when they were unprepared, they lacked confidence, worried more about making errors, and felt nervous.

15- *Speaking in Front of Native/ More Fluent Speakers*. The participants' FLA was also caused by their fear of speaking in front of native or more fluent speakers. They had the perception that native speakers were perfect and thus rarely made mistakes. This goes in parallel with the findings in Tallon's study (2006) in which the students felt anxious when they had to speak in front of native or more fluent speakers. This perception proved to be an important

component in their experience of anxiety while speaking English. The participants' perception that native and fluent speakers were perfect and their desire to attain that perfection made them anxious, lending support to Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) study which found that anxious language learners and perfectionists may have a number of characteristics in common, including: higher standards for performance, more worry over the opinion of others, and a higher level of concern over their errors. These characteristics are an almost description of most of the participants.

Socio-cultural Factors

The *socio-cultural factors* that caused FLA for Saudi female EFL learners are: social environment and limited exposure to English, differences in social status, cultural differences and unfamiliar topics, and gender. The findings are consistent with Tanveer's study (2007) in which he reported the same factors as causes of language anxiety. Surprisingly, most participants reported that cultural differences were not a cause of their FLA. This is contrasted with Tanveer's findings that the differences of cultures between that of learners and target language appeared to be an important anxiety-producing factor. The participants' limited exposure to English was found to be anxiety-provoking. Real connection to English helps to reduce learners' anxiety. However, the participants had less, if any, meaningful interactions with native speakers of English and thus experienced more FLA. This study also found that learners' sense of inferiority while talking to someone higher in status may cause stress or anxiety for them. Tanveer stated that, "the social status or social distance between interlocutors can have a considerable influence on communication." (P. 52). Finally, the findings of this study showed that talking to males in English caused some feelings of discomfort and anxiety for the participants. Gender was another source of the students' FLA which was also the cause of the participants' anxiety in Tanveer's study.

Conclusion

What makes a foreign language classroom a highly anxiety-evoking place is its evaluative nature: evaluation by the teachers, peers, and by a learners' own "self", accompanied by high

expectations and beliefs about foreign language speaking. It was found that the feelings of anxiety become more threatening when the language instructors' manner of error correction is rigid and humiliating and when they consider language class a performance rather than a learning place. FLA has also been found to be worse when students have a feeling of low proficiency or lack of confidence in general linguistic knowledge. The participants expressed many problems and difficulties while speaking English, like grammar, pronunciation, lack of vocabulary etc., which were commonly thought to impede the fluency of the EFL learners and hence, were perceived to be major obstacles in achieving the desired performance goals in speaking the English language.

This study has shown that certain levels of anxiety may be necessary for students to feel motivated and to push themselves to work harder. Many student and teacher participants stated that some anxiety may be facilitating, while too many of it may be debilitating. It is a delicate situation and the right balance must be achieved. Regardless of whether the effect of anxiety was positive or negative, this study has shown that there is a role that anxiety plays in English language learning, and more specifically, in English speaking.

Although this study may not claim that all the causes of FLA have been presented, it has demonstrated most of them from the perspectives of Saudi female EFL learners and their teachers. Therefore, this study extended our understanding of the notion of FLA and the complexities associated with it. Moreover, this study lends support to the belief that FLA does in fact play a prominent role in students' learning. While there are some researchers who question the whole notion of FLA, the data collected in this study, particularly the qualitative data, revealed the importance of the affective side of language learning.

The findings of this study appear to corroborate other studies in suggesting that anxiety can negatively affect the language learning experience in numerous ways and that reducing anxiety seems to increase language acquisition, retention, and learner motivation. Therefore, this study suggested that awareness of FLA be heightened and taken seriously by teachers and students

alike. Moreover, recognizing the causes of such anxiety will not only help the students to improve their speaking skills but will also help teachers to enrich the learning experience. This may be accomplished by means of workshops or presentations elaborating FLA and exploring the positive motivational aspects of anxiety reduction. It may also be helpful for teachers to become familiar with the FLCAS instrument to better understand the many ways in which students experience anxiety.

On the whole, being anxious disables learners in many aspects. When they are anxious their mind puzzles. Although they know what to say, sometimes they cannot recall it at the vital moment. When they cannot communicate, they become frustrated.

This study has shown that Saudi female EFL learners have unique needs that must be addressed in the English classroom so that their language skills would not be lost. Modifying pedagogy, especially in the area of speaking, to better meet these students' needs will allow them to thrive as learners and perhaps one day become teachers who can pass their knowledge on to others.

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