

## Studying Foreign Language Anxiety with its Causes and Effects: A case of King Khalid University EFL Learners

**Nisar Ahmad Koka**

Department of English, Faculty of Languages and Translation  
King Khalid University Abha, KSA

**Mohammad Nurul Islam**

Department of English, Faculty of Languages and Translation  
King Khalid University Abha, KSA

**Mohammed Osman**

Department of English, Faculty of Languages and Translation  
King Khalid University Abha, KSA

### Abstract.

The primary focus of the present study is to investigate the anxiety level of Saudi undergraduate students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). An attempt has been made to find out various possible causes, sources, and effects of foreign language anxiety on Saudi EFL learners. The study aims to answer the main question; if this anxiety affects the learning process of Saudi EFL learners positively or adversely. The study demonstrates some models and strategies related to causes and effects of anxiety. These models and strategies can be applied as potential management tools and strategies for reducing the level of anxiety encountered by Saudi EFL learners. The researchers employed quantitative and qualitative approaches to collecting and analyzing the data. A 33-item questionnaire adapted from Horwitz et al (1986) distributed among 271 subjects has been used as the main tool for the data collection. All the four basic language skills were tested to elicit the data for measuring the level of anxiety in Saudi students learning English as a foreign language. In addition to the above quantitative approach, some semi-structured interviews were conducted with both EFL learners and teachers. The outcome of the present study can significantly contribute to the development of the quality of learning English as a Foreign Language. It can also serve as an effective mechanism to solve problematic issues among EFL learners in general and Saudi EFL learners in particular. The study offers to introduce researchers and teachers with certain reliable scales for the evaluation of Saudi EFL learners' progress in their learning process. Five-point (5-point) Likert scale is one of these major scales used in the present study.

**Keywords:** affective domain, anxiety variable, English as a foreign language, foreign language anxiety (FLA), foreign language learning

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## Introduction

Foreign language learning a sub-area of applied linguistics is deeply related to human psychology. Some affective variables such as attitude, motivation, anxiety, inhibition and self-esteem etc. have been found to have a devastating effect on the process of foreign language learning. Towards the late quarter of the 1970s and early quarter of the 1980s, a considerable number of research studies have been devoted to investigating the effects of anxiety on foreign language learning.

According to LeDoux (1996) emotion-free minds are not really minds. Spielberg states that anxiety refers to the “subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system” (as cited in LeDoux, 1996, p.3-6). It has also been called an emotional response to “a threat value that the individual holds essential to his existence as a personality” (Kleinmann, 1977, pp.93-107).

Anxiety in general terminology refers to an individual’s state of developing a feeling of anxiousness and nervousness during learning and demonstrating his/her skills when asked to read, write, listen or speak publically. Thus the feeling of unease, nervousness, worry, apprehension, etc. experienced while learning or using a foreign language is known as foreign language anxiety. These feelings might arouse in an individual because of the fear of not being able to explore his/her skills to fulfil his/her objectives as a result of one’s poor adjusting capacity.

Foreign language learning is deeply linked with the affective domain of human Psychology. Attitude, motivation and anxiety the most critically essential constructs of the affective domain are a predisposition to respond positively or negatively towards events of learning. Attitude includes the way a student feels about the teacher, classmates, classroom, institution and even learning materials. A Positive attitude has to do a lot with learning a foreign language. Motivation is an internal state that arouses, directs, and sustains behavior. It refers to learners desire to strive for particular goals while learning a foreign language. Another effective factor that interferes with learning a foreign language is language anxiety. This affective variable has a devastating effect on performance in oral communication particularly. Inhibition and Self-esteem are two more affective variables affecting foreign language learning. It has been found that learners with high levels of inhibition often choose not to participate in any sort of group work. They generally prefer to protect themselves from exposure to others because they usually feel lesser capable than their peers. Thus inhibition has generally been found to have a negative effect on performance of an individual while learning a foreign language. Self-esteem refers to the level of self-confidence and self-respect a person has. This affective variable plays a potential role in effecting the learning process positively or negatively.

The psychological foundation of foreign language learning is based on the individual differences of various learners. The process of learning a foreign language depends on a series of factors. These factors involve: cognitive factors (language aptitude, learning strategies), affective factors (attitude, motivation, and anxiety), metacognitive factors, and demographic factors. Brown (1994, p.134), argues that the emotional side of human behavior or the ‘affective domain’ involves a variety of personality factors, including feeling both about oneself and about others with whom one comes into contact. The other factors which have been a focus of attention in research on the

relationship between foreign language learning and affective variables are: self-esteem, inhibition, risk-taking, empathy, extraversion, motivation and anxiety.

Robinson (2005) states that examining the foreign language learning process relies on two complementary theories: the theory of transition and the theory of property. Transition theory takes into account the relationship between cognitive abilities, learning processes and mechanisms used to transfer knowledge from learners' mother tongue/first language (L1) to their target language (TL)/second language (L2). The theory of property explores the features of knowledge from learners' L1 to their L2. Individual differences in foreign language learners play a crucial role in the theory of transition.

There has been a growing interest and need for understanding of foreign language anxiety (FLA) in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It was in early 1980s when Krashen (1982) attested the importance of understanding anxiety. He further asserted that, as a part of the learner's affective filter, anxiety might interfere with learning process.

Keeping in view the privileged role of English across the globe, the researchers cannot afford to disassociate themselves from investigating certain issues concerning the language. Most of these issues are associated with the factors that result in better fluency in English speaking and hence leading to better performance in the language particularly when it comes to the questioning of learning English as a foreign language. One of those factors which have been underlined to influence the performance of language learners which in turn affects language learning is anxiety to speak English.

Studying anxiety is central to the second foreign language learning. Though Saudi students learning English as a foreign language encounter significant challenges in all four basic language skills, the most challenging skill the students face is speaking skills (oral communication). One of the reasons behind this is the less exposure of Saudi EFL learners to English. Another reason for facing difficulties while communicating orally in English is that these Saudi EFL learners use Arabic predominantly in various domains of their social activity including their EFL classroom situation. One more valid reason behind this weak performance in the oral communication in their target lies in the fact that the entire process of EFL learning and teaching in the Saudi Arabia's higher education system is exam-oriented with a higher degree of focus on the teaching of reading comprehension, grammar and writing skill whereas the teaching of the subjects and topics related to oral communication receive a very little care and attention.

### ***Research Questions***

1. Do Saudi EFL learners experience anxiety while learning EFL? Does anxiety affect their process of learning positively or adversely?
2. Are there any apparent causes of anxiety experienced by Saudi EFL learners? Is it possible to cope with and treat the severe effects of anxiety?

### **Literature Review**

As said earlier, foreign language learning with reference to anxiety emerged out to be the focus of research and subject of debate of applied linguists and language experts in late 1970s and early

1980s. The pioneering research in this area is generally regarded as one carried out by Scovel (1978) who reported mixed findings and observation on language anxiety. In a study examining anxiety in a Spanish language classroom, Ely (1986) devised scales to measure Language Class Discomfort (anxiety), Language Class Risk-taking and Language Class Sociability. Horwitz and Cope (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), with the purpose of providing the foreign language learning researchers with a standard tool for the measurement of foreign language learning anxiety. Aida (1994) used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) in a study of American students learning Japanese as a foreign language. It was previously noted that the Japanese language students required around 1320 hours to reach the same level of proficiency as that of the students of French, Spanish or German reached in approximately 480 hours. Aida (1994) postulated that the students of such a difficult language had different experiences from those learning languages more similar to English. Her findings were consistent with other studies using Western languages, and the results indicated that there has been a considerable level of anxiety in Japanese class. It was also observed that the students with a higher degree of anxiety significantly scored lower grades than those of the lower anxiety group.

Price, (1988, as cited in Von WÖrde 1998, p.717) carried out another study on anxiety and language learning. In his study, Price investigated foreign language anxiety in relation to certain selected learner variables such as, sex, age, test anxiety, foreign language aptitude, and public speaking anxiety. In his study, it was noticed that foreign language anxiety was negatively associated with foreign language aptitude.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991c) conducted a study to manipulate the anxiety level of beginning language learners. In their study, the students were asked to think and report either positive or negative events from their own experiences. The learners were made to write half-page focused essays, which forced them to concentrate on their own reactions to events. To find out the range of anxiety, six anxiety scales were administered for the learner students who were under investigation. It was found that anxiety negatively affected language learning and production, which caused a disadvantage for the anxious students in the language classroom in comparison to their relaxed peers. The more interesting and useful finding revealed from the study was that the highest degree of anxiety was associated with the speaking skill. Young (1994) presented a comprehensive account on several previous investigations on language anxiety. He argued that a considerable amount of research on foreign language anxiety witnessed a negative language anxiety-language performance relationship. Sparks, Ganschow & Javorsky,(2000) have argued that FL learning is primarily based on the ability to learn a mother tongue (i.e., language aptitude) and FL learning anxieties are likely to result from FL difficulties for students .

### ***Causes/sources of foreign language Anxiety***

Working alone or in groups might be an important factor for some learners. The differences in the learners' perception of the environment and language class might happen to be one of the factors that lead them to anxiety.

Researchers have identified five different characteristics of anxiety-provoking situations (Daly & Buss, 1984; Richmond & McCroskey, (as cited in Daly, 1991.p.3-13).

- While speaking a language, people may start being nervous after becoming conscious that their performance is being judged by someone.
- People are more comfortable in familiar circumstances. On their exposure to new/unfamiliar situation and problems, they start feeling discomfort.
- People are likely to become more silent if they do not know what they are being judged on.
- If people think that they are engaged in an activity where their competence is low, they generally prefer not to be the focus of attention.
- Students with previous positive experiences while learning languages are likely to be less anxious than those who develop the fear, anxiety and failure from previous experiences.

Three common causes/sources of anxiety found in EFL learners are: fear of not sounding as good as their peers in the EFL learning class, which leads them to “communication apprehension”, “fear of being evaluated by someone else/negative evaluation”, and “test anxiety” Howrtz et al (1986, as cited in Zrekat., Abu Bakar, Latif 2016, pp,188-202).

Young (1991) on the other hand, identifies six potential sources/causes of anxiety. These are : 1-personal and interpersonal anxieties 2- learner beliefs about language learning 3- instructor beliefs about language teaching 4- instructor-learner interactions 5- classroom procedures, and 6- language testing.

### ***Effects of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)***

MacIntyre (1999) argues that foreign language anxiety may have a number of academic, cognitive, social and personal effects. The academic effects of anxiety reflected in previous research showed that a high level of FLA is directly proportional to the low level of academic achievement in language courses (Horwitz, 1986; Young, 1991; Aida, 1994). A considerable number of research studies have demonstrated foreign language anxiety to be associated with broad-based indices of language achievement. According to MacIntyre and Charos (as cited in MacIntyre, 1999, pp.134-148), the anxious learner students show less willingness towards communication and tend to speak less frequently upon providing an opportunity to communicate in a natural atmosphere. On the other hand, successful language learners according to Skehan (1991) show a strong desire to talk in order to learn. Along with a relatively weak language achievement, deterioration of class grades is another noticeable feature of anxious learners.

Tobias (1979, 1980, 1986 as cited in MacIntyre, 1999, p.41) devised a significant model of effects of FLA. According to this model, the cognitive effect of anxiety is evaluated in three stages: input, processing and output. At the input stage, anxiety plays the role of filter, which discourages rather blocks the information from getting into the cognitive processing system. In the processing stage, anxiety distracts students' attention as a result of which speed and accuracy of learning is affected adversely. Similarly, the quality of speaking or writing is influenced during the output stage.

The social effects of foreign language anxiety operate in different phases. MacIntyre (1999) suggests that for an individual language learner the personal effects of anxiety on a person may be the severe anxiety reaction, and for some learners, it is like a “traumatic experience” (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 39).

### ***Four Basic Language Skills and Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)***

There are four basic skills of language learning such as reading, writing, listening and speaking. The researchers who dealt with FLA investigated the effect of anxiety on the development of these skills of language learning in an elaborative way.

#### ***Reading Anxiety***

Lee (1999) looked at the relationship between reading and FLA from pedagogical and cognitive points of view. He came forward with a few misapprehensions of the reading process. First of all, he discusses the misconception that “successful reading equals answering comprehension questions” (Lee, 1999, pp.49-63). He stresses that according to a typical reader, the comprehension questions strictly limits readers’ interaction to the text. Secondly, he argues that reading is a private act and readers feel isolated when asked to read alone. Lee suggests that teacher should give assignments focusing on working with fellow learners, activities based on reading, discussion or work groups. The third misconception listed by Lee suggests that “reading is a linear process” He observes that for some of the anxious language learners, the reading goal is “to get through the text, to reach the bottom of the page, or to get to the end of the chapter” (Lee, 1999, p.53).

#### ***Writing Anxiety***

According to Leki (1999) writing is generally considered to be the least anxiety receiving skill. The main reason behind this fact is that unlike reading or listening, writers keep control of the content of the message, and while performing the task, they might make use of enough time to complete their task. Leki (1999) states that in some cases the leading cause of anxiety is poor writing skills whereas for others the source of anxiety might be their perfectionist character. Leki further admits that the fear of being evaluated by someone else (instructor) creates a feeling of anxiety among some learners. This is because the learners generally have difficulty in understanding the meaning of remarks written by evaluators on their writing assignments. Moreover, paying an extra amount of attention to grammar and criticizing the answers of learners gives rise to the fear of not sounding as good as their peers causes a higher degree of anxiety among a class of learners (Leki, 1999).

#### ***Listening Anxiety***

Listening skill is generally considered NOT to be an anxiety-provoking skill. However, the latest studies witness a considerable number of situations wherein listening tasks may receive anxiety (Campbell, 1999). Since some students believe that they should understand every word they listen to, they feel frustrated and confused when they hear some unfamiliar words which cause anxiety in them.

#### ***Speaking Anxiety***

Sundland and MacIntyre reported in numerous studies related to foreign language anxiety that it is the speaking skill in the foreign language learning process that receives the highest degree of anxiety (as cited in Donley, 1997, p.76-79). They also argue that the language courses wherein the students were forced to speak the foreign language were more likely to experience anxiety in comparison to the courses that did not focus on speaking. Moreover, Young (1990) claims that in a language class, the learners feel more anxious upon asking to speak in front of their peers.

### ***Coping the Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)***

Studies carried on foreign language anxiety have suggested quite a good number of techniques and ways reducing the anxiety level of EFL students. These techniques and certain classroom practices have been used by language instructors to lower the level of anxiety among various learners learning English as a foreign language. According to Donley (1997) these techniques have been grouped into four categories: 1- skill-building activities and programs, 2- procedures that promote self-regulation of emotions by bringing them under conscious control, 3- suggestions for making students more aware of the nature of language learning and 4- recommendations concerning ways to make language classes less anxiety-provoking for students. Each of these techniques has been discussed below in detail.

#### ***Skill-building***

Foss and Reitzel's relational model (1988) for managing foreign language anxiety is based on structured skill-building activities. For discussing the techniques of coping anxiety in foreign language learning classroom, they used a model of communicative competence as a starting point. They further believe that an increase in communicative competence will reduce the anxiety level of foreign language learners. According to Spielber and Cupach there are five fundamental processes operating in the competence model designed by them (as cited in Foss & Reitzel, 1988, p. 85-98). Motivation is the very first process, which takes into account the affective approach. The second component is knowledge, which operates on a system of behavioral patterns and strategies on the basis of what an individual decides how to communicate effectively in a particular situation. The third component of the model is skill which is closely related to outcome of knowledge and context. Despite a higher degree of motivation, an individual requires certain skills to communicate successfully and appropriately in the new language. The fourth operational level in this model is outcome. At this stage, the learners are supposed to be aware of the fact that a negative outcome giving rise to certain dissatisfaction even if it is better than its alternatives. Context, the final component of this relational model, is based on the assumption that each individual creates an atmosphere that facilitates or hinders the language learning process (Foss & Reitzel, 1988). In order to encourage learners' structure and maintain communicative interactions, Lucas (1984) also recommends skill-building in the form of patterns, dialogues and gambits. She further holds that the learners should be involved in extra-skill practice by exposing them to various activities such role-playing, cooperative story-telling, problem-solving, assignments etc., (Lucas 1984).

#### ***Self-Regulations of Anxiety***

Certain anxiety management tools proposed by researchers from time to time have been found quite effective in coping with foreign language anxiety. These tools include: cognitive restructuring, anxiety graphing, systematic desensitization, and biofeedback and perspective building. Cognitive restructuring proposed by McCoy (1979) later developed in detail by Foss and Reitzel (1988), in their relational model of FLA was known as rational emotive theory. It was believed that anxiety could be minimized by encouraging learners identify certain illogical anxiety-provoking thoughts. The learners were also stimulated to understand the logic of these thoughts and replace them with more productive and reasonable cognitions.

Foss and Reitzel (1988) devised an anxiety management tool known as anxiety graphics. Once anxiety occurs, this tool helps in charting it immediately. It is believed that the anxiety graph was designed to encourage learners to gain an accurate understanding of nature of anxiety. Foss and Reitzel (1988) further argue that the anxiety graph can enable the students to realize that speaking a foreign language is not a uniform and easy process; it is rather difficult and causes anxiety.

McCoy (1979) proposes the use of systematic desensitization to lower the level of anxiety among foreign language learners. This technique was later fully developed at its greater length by Schlesinger (1996, as cited in Donley, 1997). This model was believed to describe the process of getting used to an anxiety-producing situation. The anxiety-prone learners are supposed to think about an anxiety-provoking situation during the process of systematic desensitization and then associate it with relaxing thoughts and visualization of dealing the situation appropriately and repeat this process until the anxiety reaches to its minimum level. McCoy (1979) further asserts that in certain situations that involve anxiety because of ranking of fears, the learners who feel anxiety would work through them until the whole learning situation was no longer associated with anxiety-causing feelings.

Schlesinger (2005) introduced three concepts: biofeedback, progressive relaxation, and autogenic training related to the treatment of foreign language anxiety (FLA). The operation in which an individual tries to gain voluntary control over the reflex-regulated body activities is known as biofeedback. It is during this biofeedback; an individual receives information about his/her physiological reactions. This mechanism enables a learner how to monitor and regulate the previously automatic and uncontrolled physiological responses. The technique of lowering/reducing the level of anxiety in learners by learning to 'tense' and 'relax' muscle groups in the body is termed as progressive relaxation.

### ***Awareness-Raising***

From the studies devoted to foreign language learning anxiety (FLA), it is presumed that teachers can play a potential role in minimizing the anxiety level of their students by adopting new strategies while teaching them a foreign language. Crookal and Oxford (1991) suggested that instead of using certain indirect tactics that would reduce the anxiety level of learners, the teachers should directly and unambiguously tackle the problem of anxiety. They would urge on several activities that could help learners gain a healthier language learning atmosphere. Their proposed set of activities would include: a simulation of an advice column in which the learners would communicate their anxieties to an imaginary person, exchange letters with other learners and would keep a diary of feelings about their anxieties regarding their learning process. Awareness – raising involves the sharing letters and responses among small groups of learners or with the whole class of learners (Crookal & Oxford, 1991).

### ***Other Recommendations***

Oxford (1990), recommended certain strategies, which could help learners to lower their level of anxiety they develop during the process of learning a foreign language. These strategies are:

1. Physical/emotional strategies: These strategies include: progressive relaxation, deep breathing, meditation, enjoying good humor, listening to music etc.



2. Self-encouragement: positive self-talking serves as a good tool to minimize anxiety. In order to reward himself for doing well in the target language, an individual might encourage himself by taking certain sensible risks.

3. In order to find out one's ideas, opinions, and attitudes about learning a foreign language, the teacher might also use checklists, or may ask the learners to maintain a language diary to record their feelings about the whole process of learning a foreign language.

Philips (1991) observes that teachers could have a potential role in encouraging and creating a good language learning atmosphere/situation. They should encourage and appreciate the learner students' risk-taking behavior when attempting to communicate. The teachers can prepare the learner students to develop appropriate expectations about the learning process by identifying and modifying their anxiety-provoking beliefs about the learning.

Campbell and Ortiz (1991), carried out a series of workshops on foreign language anxiety (FLA). In their workshops, the participants were asked to deliberate on myths, realities, and qualities helpful and favorable for successful foreign language learning situations. Certain teaching techniques and teachers' ways of teaching have also been found to create a situation conducive to make foreign language learning process less stressful. Some experts in the area of foreign language anxiety (FLA) came forward with the suggestion that there is still certain scope of modification in teachers' methods of error correction. Moreover, those learners have been found more comfortable who treated the occurrence of errors as natural and expected phenomena in the foreign language learning process. Crookal and Oxford (1991) conducted a training session for teachers on how to deal with learner errors. In this workshop-cum-training program the participant teachers were given an opportunity to share their ideas with their colleagues on which errors needed to be corrected and why, and how the correction should be done.

According to Beauvois (1999), the use of computer classroom has been found to provide a conducive and favorable situation to reduce the level of anxiety experienced by foreign language learners. She observed that on availing an opportunity of being taught with the help of computer-aided instructions, the learners are likely to interact with each other and also with their teacher in their target language without fear of being criticized by others. Moreover, they were provided with enough time to think before they are asked to answer the questions.

## **Research Methodology**

### ***Goals and hypotheses***

The main goal of this study was to find out the effect of anxiety on the performance of Saudi students learning English as a foreign language. Based on the review of the related literature, it was assumed that there is a very strong relationship between anxiety and how different learners perform while learning EFL.

### ***Sample and Method***

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. With a view to examining the subjects of the study and eliciting the required data related to learners' level of anxiety while reading, writing, listening and speaking English, the researchers –being the teachers in the Department of English, Faculty of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University Abha, Saudi Arabia, managed to use a 33-item questionnaire adapted from Horwitz (Horwitz et al.,

1986). In order to test their writing skills, the researchers conducted several written tasks throughout their academic session. For testing their reading skill the selected subjects were made to read some seen and unseen texts aloud. Similarly, for collecting data with regard to their listening and speaking skills, the subjects under study were involved in listening activities and were asked to give oral presentations. In addition to this, the qualitative approach of collecting and analyzing data via semi-structured interviews with learners and teachers was also used.

The entire population of the study consisted of 271 English major students from different levels pursuing their bachelor's degree in English (B.A. English) at the Department of English, Faculty of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University, Abha, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In the qualitative part of the study, the researchers used semi-structured interviews with both the students and their instructors. Out of a sample of 271 students, 45 were randomly selected for the semi-structured interviews whereas three instructors teaching these students were also randomly selected for the individual interviews. All of the subjects under investigation were male and had a homogeneous pre-university and university background.

### The Findings/Results of the Study

The main focus of the investigation in this study has been to find out the effect of learner's level of anxiety on their learning English as a foreign language in relation to four basic language skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking. The level of anxiety encountered by Saudi EFL undergraduate students has been explored/presented on 5-point Likert scales ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The statistical analysis of the anxiety variable is based on this scale in which the overall result in terms of judgment depends on the students' answers to the items mentioned in the questionnaire. The given table 1 presents the statistical analysis for the variable of anxiety.

Table 1: *Statistical Analysis of Students' level of Anxiety.*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	10	3.7	3.7	3.7
	Agree	69	25.4	25.4	29.1
	Neutral	87	32.1	32.1	61.2
	Disagree	71	26.1	26.1	87.3
	Strongly disagree	34	12.5	12.5	99.8
	Total	271	100.0	100.0	100.0

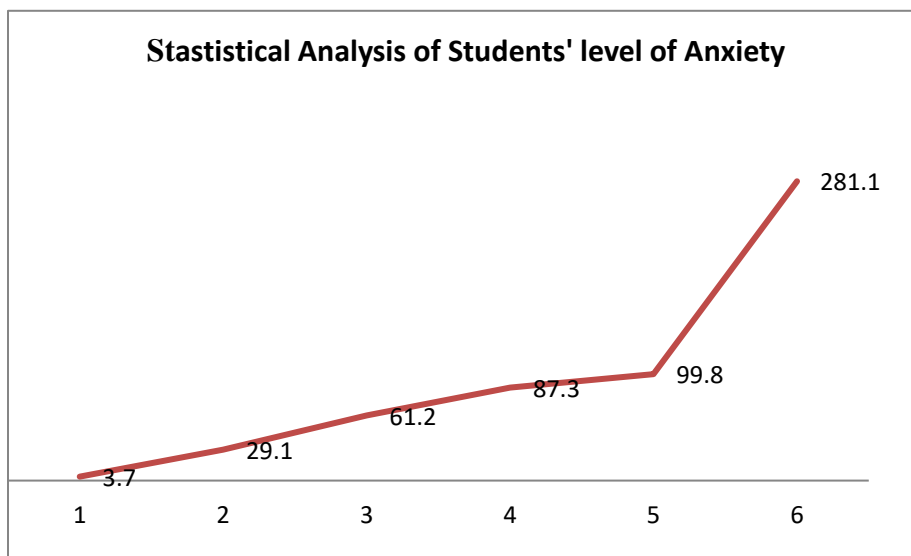


Figure 1. Cumulative cure showing students 'level of **anxiety**

From table 1 and figure 1, it could be clearly noticed that only 3.7% of the students responded the items of anxiety variable with 'strongly agree'. Majority of the students answered with 'neutral' with a percentage of 32.1 %. 26.1 % of the students responded to the items of the anxiety variable with 'disagree' that stands second highest item of the anxiety constructs in terms of receiving responses from the respondents selected for the study. 25.4% and 12.5% of the respondents answered with other two items of the variable anxiety variable i.e., 'agree' and 'strongly disagree' respectively. To sum the findings of the study briefly, it can be stated that the percentage of respondents who experienced anxiety is much higher than those who did not feel it while learning EFL across its four basic levels such reading, writing, listening and speaking.

The findings of the present investigation correspond with the findings of the studies mentioned in the literature review of the study, particularly those carried out by Horwitz et al. (1986). The study is therefore very much related to Horwitz et al. 's (1986) investigation wherein it was postulated that students experience anxiety while speaking in English on account of three factors such as "Communication apprehension" (CA), "fear of negative evaluation"(FNE), and "test anxiety" (as cited in Zrekat, Y., Abu Bakar, N., Latif, H., 2016, pp. 188-202). In the present study, it was observed that certain anxiety-provoking factors such as fear of not sounding as good as their peers, fear of being evaluated by someone else and deterioration of their course grades have been found to be operational at a very high level. This phenomenon has resulted in the arousal of a high-level anxiety among Saudi students learning English as a foreign language.

## Discussions

Findings of numerous studies of research including the present one devoted to investigating causes and effects of anxiety on foreign language learning in general and learning English as a foreign language in particular, ended up with the common consensus that the variable of anxiety adversely affects the process of learning a foreign language. Horwitz, (1980), Young (1986), and Aida, (1994), argue that that higher the level of foreign language anxiety, lower is the level of

academic achievement in language courses. It has been observed that out of four basic language skills, it is the oral communication skill wherein the learners experience the highest level of anxiety. Howrtz admits that fear of not sounding as good as their peers in the EFL learning class, which leads the learners to “communication apprehension”, “negative evaluation”, and “test anxiety” have been found to be three main factors responsible for creating an anxiety-provoking situation in a foreign language learning classes (as cited in Zrekat, Y., Abu Bakar, N., Latif, H., 2016, p. 192). As revealed by analyzing the data in the present study, the students with higher level of anxiety have been found to outnumber and outperform the students with a relatively lower level of anxiety in all basic language skills. Along with studying the disastrous effects and sources of anxiety, the researchers of foreign language anxiety have proposed a huge number of techniques and ways for minimizing the anxiety level of foreign language learners. Skill- building, self-regulation of anxiety, awareness-raising, physical/emotional strategies, self-encouragement etc., are some these techniques used by language instructors and trainers for lowering the anxiety level among foreign language learners. With the utilization of all these methods the concerned people be it the language instructors or learners have been found to be successful to cope with the issue of anxiety to a large extent.

Gardner, R.C and MacIntyre, P. D. (1993; 43(2), pp. 94-157 argue that “language anxiety is a type of situational anxiety, and study on language anxiety should utilize actions of anxiety encountered in certain L2 situations”. Language anxiety was conceptualized as “the stress and negative mental reaction triggered when learning or implementing a second language” (as cited in Heydarpour Meymeh M, Rashtchi M, Mohseni A, 2019, p.10).

The study is potentially contributory to the students, teachers and researchers of FLA in the sense that it enriches their knowledge with various effects, causes and sources of FLA. Moreover, having dealt with a considerable number of models used as tools and techniques for the treatment of FLA, the concerned students/learners could overcome the feeling of anxiety and their teachers could deal with anxiety-provoking situations very successfully.

## Conclusion

Affective variables such as attitude, motivation, anxiety, inhibition and self-esteem have been found to play a very crucial role in a foreign language learning situation. Saudi EFL learners at Faculty of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia have been found to experience a high level of anxiety when they are asked to read, write, or speak in English. The findings of the studies outlined in this study and the results of this study itself demonstrate that foreign language anxiety is a devastating factor that deteriorates rather crumbles the academic achievement level of language learners. The example of Saudi EFL learners has been found as a case at this point.

Howrtz et al states that certain anxiety-provoking factors such as communication apprehension (CA), fear of negative evaluation (FNE), and test anxiety (TA) are highly effective in producing anxiety among EFL learners (as cited in Zrekat, Y., Abu Bakar, N., Latif, H., 2016, pp.188-202). All these factors have been found to be highly operational in Saudi Arab’s EFL learning situation and learners are found to experience anxiety to a very high level. It has been observed that the findings of the present study coincide with those mentioned in its literature review considerably. In addition, on account of not expressing themselves correctly in front of their peers develops a

feeling of inferiority in them and leads them to an anxiety-provoking tendency during the course of EFL learning.

The findings of our study reveal that the majority of the respondents answered the items of the anxiety variable with 'neutral' with a percentage of 32.1 %. 26.1 % of the students responded the items of the anxiety construct with 'disagree' that stands second highest item of the anxiety constructs in terms of receiving responses from the respondents selected for the study. 25.4% and 12.5% of the respondents answered with the other two items of the anxiety variable i.e., 'agree' and 'strongly disagree' respectively. On the basis these results it can be logically stated in a nutshell that the percentage of our respondents who experienced anxiety is much higher than those who did not feel it while learning EFL across its four basic levels such reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Whereas the study explores various causes and effects of foreign language learning, it suggests certain management tools and techniques used to minimize the level of anxiety among EFL learners. Regarding the implications of this study, it adds a drop to the sea of knowledge. However, the findings of the study might guide researchers into new directions to discover profound insights about effects of foreign language anxiety.

#### About the authors

**Nisar Ahmad Koka**, did his M.A. and Ph.D. in Theoretical and Sociolinguistics Linguistics from Aligarh Muslim University Aligarh, India in 1998 and 2002 respectively. He has been engaged in teaching linguistics /applied linguistics and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in different universities/institutions for the last 20 years. Dr. Koka has published around a dozen of research articles in different national and international journals, and has also co-authored 3 books on 'Testing and Evaluation' in Indian Languages. He is currently engaged as an assistant professor at the Department of English, Faculty of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University Abha, KSA teaching English as Foreign Language (EFL)

**ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4763-1830>

**Mohammad. Nurul Islam** Mohammad Nurul Islam is an Assistant Professor in ELT, currently working in the Department of English, Faculty of Languages and Translation at King Khalid University, Abha, and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. His research interests include: ELT, ESP, and language testing. He has published many articles in professional refereed journals.

**ORCID :** <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1451-2739>

**Mohammad Osman** Mohammed Osman did his PhD in Literature from Dr B A Marathwada University of India in Literature. He did his B A from Mumbai University and M A from Dr B A Marathwada University of India. He has been teaching English at King Khaled University for last seven years. He has been involved in teaching Grammar, Writing, and Reading. He is in charge King Khalid University department of Languages and Translation Examination committee. He has interest in research in the field of linguistic, autobiographies and short stories in literature.

**ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8093-0096>

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## APPENDIX

### Questionnaire on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, adapted from Horwitz et al (1986) FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY (Horwitz et al, 1986)

**Source:** Zrekat, Y., Abu Bakar, N., Latif, H. (2016). The level of Anxiety among Jordanian EFL Undergraduates in Oral Communication Performance. *Arab World English Journal 9, AWEJ* Volume, 7 Number 3 September, 2016.

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I never feel quite sure of myself when I speak in English.					
I DON'T worry about making mistakes in English class.					
I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class.					
It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the English class.					
It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English language classes.					
During English class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.					
I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am.					
I am usually at ease (comfortable) during tests in my English class.					
I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.					
I worry about the consequences of failing my English class.					
I don't understand why some people get so upset over English class.					
In English class, I get so nervous that I forget things I know.					
It embarrasses me to volunteer for answering in my English class.					



I would NOT be nervous speaking the English language with its native speakers.					
I get upset when I don't know what the teacher is correcting.					
Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it.					
I often feel like not going to my English class.					
I feel confident when I speak in English in my class.					
I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.					
I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on in English class.					
The more I study for an English test, the more confused I get.					
I DON'T feel pressure to prepare very well for English class.					
I always feel that the other students speak the English language better than I do.					
I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.					
When English class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.					
I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes.					
I get nervous and confused when I speak in my English class.					
When I am on my way to English class, I feel very sure and relaxed.					
I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.					
I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak the English language.					
I am afraid that the other students in the class will laugh at me when I speak in English.					

I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the English language.					
I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.					