An Investigation of Anxiety Among Elementary School Students Towards Foreign Language Learning

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Abstract

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) plays a crucial role in language learning. This study aims to investigate the level of FLA and the impact of gender differences among EFL elementary school students. The sample of the study was 146 males and 114 female 6th. Grade Saudi Students of public schools in the Southern Region of Saudi Arabia. Foreign language classroom anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was administered and 10 students were selected and interviewed. Statistical package for social science (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. T-test was used to compare the level of foreign language anxiety among male and female students. The findings of the quantitative and qualitative data went in parallel. They showed that FLA was moderate among our participants. They also revealed that gender difference did not play a significant impact on anxiety towards foreign language learning. Furthermore, some pedagogical implications and recommendations were provided to enrich early age EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia and to overcome the negative effects of anxiety among foreign language learners.

Key words: Anxiety; Gender; EFL; Language learning; Teaching

INTRODUCTION

Motivation, attitude, gender, age, and aptitude notably affect foreign language learning. Increasingly on par with these vital factors is foreign language anxiety (FLA), a phenomenon revealed by numerous language acquisition studies spanning the past two decades. Interest in this field has grown steadily since the 1990s and researchers appear poised to continue its investigation. FLA can be defined as the apprehension occurring when a learner feels expected to perform a foreign language or the negative emotional reaction resulting from such performance (Gardner & MacIntyre 1993). FLA's measurement has included a variety of instruments, including the widely used Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). According to Al-Sibai (2005), foreign language anxiety must be investigated at greater depth in order to identify its causes and potential solutions. Such efforts could help both teachers and learners in their efforts to cope with anxiety in Saudi Arabia's ESL classrooms. As Chen and Wu (2004) indicated, "to ensure the success of English education in primary school, foreign language anxiety is a significant issue which cannot be ignored" (p.289). A rarely researched issue in Saudi Arabia has been anxiety among our foreign language students at the elementary level. As a result, this study was designed specifically to shed light on English learning anxiety among participants from a wide range of primary schools within the southern region of Saudi Arabia.

English language learning has been a problem for elementary aged Saudi students when exposure is limited solely to the classroom. Most learners express their fears and feelings of uneasiness against learning English as a foreign language. Feelings of anxiety can provoke many problems in production performance of the language. Moreover, previous researches had been associated with high school and college students. (Abu-Ghararah 1999;

Alrabai, 2014; Aljafen, 2013; Aida, 1994; Ganschow et al., 1994; Chang, 1999; Ganschow & Sparks 1996; Liao, 1999). While many studies have focused on younger students' anxiety in a variety of geographical contexts, no notable investigations have been conducted in the context of English learners *of elementary ages in Saudi Arabia*.

The main objective of this study is to investigate the level of FLA among EFL Saudi primary school learners. The second objective is to identify causes of FLA among our participants. The third is to examine the impact of gender difference between male and female FLA. The current study aims to answer the following three questions:

a)   What are the levels of FLA among the elementary school students?

b)   What are the causes of FLA among the students in the class?

c)   Is there a significant difference between male and female FLA?

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Foreign Language Anxiety

Researchers have offered various definitions of foreign language anxiety (FLA). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) defined FLA as "a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process." (p.127). MacIntyre and Gardner 1994) stated that FLA is "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second or foreign language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning, or the worry and negative emotional reaction arousal when learning or using a second or foreign language". Another definition of FLA was provided by Spielberger, (1983) as "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system." (p.15)

Anxiety in the general sense is usually divided into three different types: First, "*Trait*" anxiety is a motive or acquired behavioral disposition that predisposes an individual to perceive a wide range of objectively non-dangerous circumstances as threatening. One responds to these non-dangerous circumstances with anxiety-state reactions of intensity levels unusual high in proportion to the (realistic) magnitude of the objective danger. Trait anxiety is a relatively permanent and steady personality feature (Spielberger, 1966). Second, "*State*" is apprehension experienced at particular moment in time, for example, prior to taking exams. This anxiety can be provoked in the confrontation of the perceived threat (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). However, it is temporary and altered in time. Third, In order to attribute

the experience to a particular source, researchers adopt a "*situation-specific*" perspective to the study of anxiety. This perspective focuses on the situations in which anxiety is aroused. Unlike trait and state perspective, situation-specific perspective requires the respondents to ascribe their anxiety to particular sources. Specific situations can offer more understanding to particular anxiety across a diverse range of situations.

As examined in the following section, Horwitz and Cope (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure foreign language anxiety (FLA).

1.2 Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

In order to identify and measure foreign language anxiety, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), consisting of 33 items which ask participants to respond to situations specific to FLA, reflecting on three components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Due to the scale's high levels of constructive validation and reliability, its reliability coefficient was found to range from 0.77 to 0.83 in many studies. So, FLCAS has been widely used by many researchers to explore learners' foreign language anxiety (Aida, 1994; Ganschow et al., 1994; Chang, 1999; Ganschow & Sparks, 1996).

1.3 Causes of Language Anxiety

A number of causes of foreign language anxiety (FLA) have been identified in many studies. Horwitz (1986) determined three components of foreign language classroom anxiety:*Communication apprehension*, refers to "a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people" (p.127). McCroskey (1978) defined communication apprehension as an individual's "level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with other persons." Young (1991) in his study examined the relationship between anxiety and oral performance, results showed significant negative correlations between anxiety and the oral performance, and it claims test anxiety would affect foreign language learners with low levels of oral proficiency more than those with high levels of proficiency. Second, *Test anxiety* refers to "an apprehension over academic evaluation" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, p.42). It is explained by Sarason (1978) as "the tendency to view with alarm the consequences of inadequate performance in an evaluative situation." (p.12) It occurs when students have poor performance in their previous tests. As mentioned above, test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety deriving from a fear of failure and evaluative situations. The third cause is *fear of negative evaluation*, which is broadly defined by Horwitz et al. (1986) as an apprehension about others' evaluations,

avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others will evaluate one negatively.

Aside from Horwitz's three-component model, Young (1991) identified six primary sources of FLA, drawing from three total perspectives: the learner, the teacher, and the instructional practice. He revealed that language anxiety is caused by (a) personal and interpersonal anxiety, (b) learner beliefs about language learning, (c) instructor beliefs about language teaching, (d) instructor-learner interactions, (e) classroom procedures, and (f) language testing. Moreover, Horwitz (2001) acknowledged that low teacher proficiency is a major contributing factor to FLA.

Examining various studies revealed how potential sources of FLA can be classified into the following categories: Speaking activities, teachers' harsh teaching styles, learners' inability to comprehend, learners' learning styles, and the learning context are all sources of learners' anxiety in language classes (Oxford, 1999; Phillips, 1992; Samimy, 1994; Young, 1999). MacIntyre (1999) concluded that the "single most important source" of anxiety is related to the fear of speaking a foreign language in front of peers (p.33).

1.4 Theoretical Perspectives of Foreign Language Anxiety

Apart from the above viewpoints regarding the sources of foreign language anxiety (FLA), a debate on language anxiety is central in influencing how language achievement is produced by the Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis (LCDH), developed by Sparks and Ganschow (1993). The LCDH states that

foreign language learning is built on native language skills. The competence of a learner within the three linguistic codes in the native language forms the foundation for foreign language learning. It is also assumed that problems with one language skill are likely to have a negative effect on both the native and foreign language systems (p.42).

According to this hypothesis, language anxiety is a reflection of the side effects caused by linguistic deficiency in processing language input. Sparks and Ganschow downplayed the impact of FLA and other affective variables such as motivation and attitude. Instead emphasizing language coding abilities, Sparks pointed to matters of cognitive capacity as true influences in developing foreign language acquisition.

In contrast, Krashen (1985) pointed out in his Affective Filter Hypothesis that high anxiety will prevent classroom input from reaching the language acquisition device. From social perspectives, MacIntyre (1995) argued that language anxiety is part of a larger "social anxiety," stemming primarily from language learning's social and communicative aspects. Drawing largely upon the social dimension of anxiety, MacIntyre has long maintained that anxiety plays an essential role in language learning as a social, cognitive activity. A recurring relationship exists between anxiety, cognition, and behavior. Moreover, anxiety can interfere in all language acquisition stages: input, process, and output. In other words, understanding the causes and consequences of language anxiety from a contextual point of view is vital in facilitating the language acquisition process and development.

1.5 Foreign Language Anxiety and Language Learning

Many previous studies have investigated the relationship between foreign language anxiety (FLA) and language learning (Abu-Ghararah, 1999; Aida, 1994; Batumlu & Erden, 2007; Anyadubalu, 2010; Atasheneh & Izadi, 2012; Young, 1991; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991 Horwitz, 2001; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre ,1998, 1994; Mahmood & Iqbal, 2010). The findings of these studies were conflicted even in the same context. Communication apprehension as another source of anxiety can play a vital role in FLA. Xianping (2012) investigated the effects of language anxiety on oral performance in the classroom among 97 Chinese students. The results showed that students with high anxiety were afraid of speaking a foreign language. Rezazadeh (2009) investigated the relationships among test anxiety, gender and academic achievement. The results showed a negative relationship between test anxiety and language achievement. The results also revealed that female students have a higher level of test anxiety in contrast to male students. These results were in line with those obtained from other studies (Lashkaripour, 2006; Mwamwenda, 1994; Comunian, 1993). Most of these studies agreed that test anxiety as a source of FLA correlated negatively with language learning. When the level of test anxiety increases, the language learning decreases and vice-verse. Aydin (2008) examined the sources and levels of fear of negative evaluation as well as language anxiety among 112 Turkish students. The results of the analysis indicated that EFL learners suffer from language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Moreover, fear of evaluation also appears to be a strong source of language anxiety.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) summarized the effects of FLA on learning and performance in five aspects: Academically, FLA is one of the best predictors of language proficiency. High levels of language anxiety are associated with low levels of academic achievement. Socially, learners with higher language anxiety have the tendency to avoid interpersonal communication more often than less anxious learners. This issue becomes even more prominent when the authentic communicative competence is emphasized in current language education. Cognitively, anxiety can occur at any stage of language acquisition. Anxiety can become an effective filter that prevents certain information from entering a learner's cognitive processing system. Anxiety can influence both speed and accuracy of learning. High anxiety can impact the quality of communication output as the retrieval of

information may be interrupted by the "freezing-up" moments that students encounter when they get anxious. On an individual level, language learning could, under some circumstances, become an unpleasant experience, capable of deeply disturbing a learner's self-esteem or self-confidence.

1.6 The Impact of Gender on FLA

The relationship between foreign language anxiety (FLA) and gender is very complicated. In the past, numerous studies conducted on this topic reported different results in various contexts. In literature, several researchers claim that gender plays a significant role in FLA (Csizer & Dornyei, 2005; Abu-Ghararah, 1999; MacIntyre & Gardner 1991; Alrabai, 2014). For instance, Mejias et al. (1991) found higher anxiety among Hispanic males than females. These results are similar to those of Kitano (2001), who investigated anxiety in Japanese learners, finding that males felt a higher degree of FLA than females. Campbell and Shaw (1994) pointed out a significant correlation between gender and foreign language anxiety: Male students were more anxious while using a foreign language inside the classroom than female. Muhammad and his colleagues (2011) supported this claim in their study of FLA and the language learning attitudes of 360 male and 360 female students in Pakistani secondary school. The results showed that females were less anxious in English language class and had more positive attitude towards English.

In contrast, other studies revealed that females are more anxious in learning language than males. For instance, Gokhan and Nurdan (2012) investigated the impact of gender on FLA among 225 females and 158 males at the pre-intermediate level in Turkey. The results showed that the female learners get more anxious than the male learners while speaking in English in classroom. These results are consistent with those of Rezazadeh (2009), who investigated the impact of gender among 65 female and 45 male undergraduate Iranian students. He reported that females showed significantly higher levels of test anxiety than males. Macintyre et al. (2002) examined the effects of language type, gender, and grade on willingness to communicate (WTC). They found that levels of anxiety remain the same across three grades, 7th, 8th, and 9th, for both males and females, but revealed that female anxiety decreased from 8th to 9th grade.

Matsuda and Gobel (2004) examined the relationship between general foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), foreign language reading anxiety (FLRA), gender, extended overseas experience, and classroom performance of 52 Japanese university students. The results indicated that gender and proficiency appeared to be the best predictors of success in learning English for the first-year students. Thus, this study aims to examine the significant difference between male and female students in terms of foreign language anxiety.

1.7 Studies of Foreign Language Anxiety in Saudi Arabia

Few studies have investigated the impact of foreign language anxiety (FLA) among Saudi students in various contexts (Abu-Ghararah, 1999; Alrabai, 2014; Aljafen, 2013). Most of findings of the studies indicated that FLA plays a major role in language learning in Saudi context. For instance, Abu-Ghararah (1999) studied the effect of FLA on English achievement of 240 Saudi secondary and university students, using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The results showed a significant negative correlation between FLA and the students' English achievement. He also founded males were more anxious than females because females are highly motivated in learning English and have more time for studying, whereas males are careless and they spend most of their time in social activities. Hamouda (2012) investigated the causes of Saudi students' unwillingness to participate in the English language classroom. 159 students from Al- Qassim University participated in the study. His results showed a considerable number of students were reluctant to respond to the teacher and remained silent in oral English language classrooms due to various causes such as low English proficiency, fear of speaking in front of others, negative evaluation, shyness, lack of confidence and preparation, and fear of making mistakes. Similarly, Asif (2014) supported this claim in her study to explore the factors that cause language anxiety in the Saudi EFL learners. The results of the study indicated that FLA plays an important role in EFL learning for Saudi students. Most of the Saudi EFL learners were found to have a fear of making mistakes. They didn't take the initiative. They prefer to keep quiet, fearing they would make mistakes fatal to their images among peers.

Considering various skills, Aljafen (2013) examined the impact of writing anxiety among 296 EFL Saudi students in science colleges. The participants filled out the English writing apprehension/ attitude test (EWAT) scale survey. The findings of this research showed that the three groups (Engineering, Pharmacy and preparatory year) have almost the same moderate feelings of English writing anxiety. He revealed some causes for writing anxiety among Saudi learners: weakness of past English education, lack of confidence in writing, and fear of negative evaluation. Alrabai (2014) investigated the level of anxiety among 1,389 Saudi EFL university students and sources of foreign language anxiety (FLA) through three years by using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The findings of Alrabia's study showed moderate to high levels of anxiety, with communication apprehention being the key cause of FLA.

Above, we see the limited studies on FLA in Saudi students, though almost no investigations have been conducted regarding impact of FLA on *elementary*

students in Saudi Arabia. This study aims to focus FLA investigation on such students.

2. METHODS

In order to investigate the students' anxiety levels, the researcher combined the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the instruments. Translated questionnaires and interviews were used. The researcher used (SPSS) to analyze the quantitative data.

2.1 Instruments of the Study

The instruments used in this study included questionnaires and interviews. The study employed the FLCAS developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), which has been used extensively by researchers worldwide (Horwitz et al., 1986; Abu-Ghararah 1999; MacIntyre 1998; Young, 1991) to investigate FLA. The FLCAS comprises 33 items, each of which utilizes a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to assess respondents' anxiety in language classrooms. The total scale scores ranged from 33 to 165, with high scores indicating high FLA. Nine items (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32) were negatively worded, and their scores were reversely computed. Horwitz et al. (1986) noted that the 33 items in the FLCAS related to the three main sources of FLA: communication apprehension (items 1, 4, 9, 14, 15, 18, 24, 27, 29, 30, and 32), test anxiety (items 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, and 28), and fear of negative evaluation (items 2, 7, 13, 19, 23, 31, and 33). In addition, interviews with students were undertaken to explore the possible sources and anxiety-provoking situations.

2.2 Population of the Study

This study's population contains 6th. graders from elementary schools in the southern region of Saudi Arabia. The sample was 260 EFL students (146 males and 116 females)**,** each with English exposure limited to the classroom for an hour and a half per week during the semester.

2.3 Sample of the Study

The sample includes Saudi students from four elementary schools in the southern region. The study was conducted on 260 participants (146 males and 116 females) between 11 and13 years old. The participants were fully aware that the personal information they provided would be kept anonymous and strictly confidential, and would be eliminated after the study was finished. The questionnaire was translated into the participants' native language (Arabic) to overcome the lack of English proficiency.

2.4 Data Collection

The study combined the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the translated questionnaire and the interview. The participants were asked to complete a consent form to confirm participation in the study. Approval from a guardian was also a prerequisite. The participating students received detailed instructions on how to complete the FLCAS questionnaire and were guaranteed that their responses would remain confidential. They were provided 30-40 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Referencing in the scores of the questionnaire (FLCAS), ten highly anxious participants were selected as the interviewees. The researchers interviewed the participants one by one for 5 minutes. The interviews were tape-recorded as notes were being taken.

2.5 Validity of the Instrument

The Internal validity of the FLCAS was calculated by using SPSS. As Table 1 showed that there are highly significant, positive correlations among FLCAS components, namely with communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation ranging from .67 to .90.

Table 1
The Internal Validity Among FLCAS Components

Dimensions	FLCAS	Communication apprehension	Test anxiety	Fear of negative evaluation
FLCAS	.89[**]	.70[**]	.67[**]	1
Communication apprehension	.90[**]	.67[**]	1	.67[**]
Test anxiety	.87[**]	1	.67[**]	.70[**]
Fear of negative evaluation	1	.87[**]	.90[**]	.89[**]

Note. α= 0.05

2.6 Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability coefficient was computed using Cronbach's alpha to investigate the internal consistency of the 33 FLCAS pertaining to the current study. The reliability is 0.86.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Descriptive Data

SPSS was used in this study to calculate various descriptive data such as mean, standard deviation, frequency and percentage to indicate levels of foreign language anxiety.

3.2 Analysis of Foreign Language Anxiety Scale FLCAS

The questionnaire used to measure FLA levels in this study consisted of 33 items. The total score for this 5-graded score ranged from 33 to 165. The levels of FLA were classified into three categories, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Levels of Foreign Language Anxiety

Level	Scores	Level of FL anxiety
1	33-89	Low anxiety
2	90-108	Moderate anxiety
3	109-165	High anxiety

For **Research Question 1**: What are the levels of FL anxiety among the elementary school students?

The mean scores for both males and females were calculated by using a *t*-test method. The mean of the levels of FLA for the whole sample (*N*=260) is *M*= 94.12 which indicates a moderate level of anxiety among our participants (as shown in Table 3). Tables 4 and 5 show that means of the levels of anxiety between males and females are *M*= 95.65 and *M*= 92.59, respectively. These results are in parallel with most of the previous studies (Abu-Ghararah, 1999; Alrabai, 2014; Aljafen, 2013; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Horwitz, 2001; Young, 1991) which range from 90-96.

For **Research Question 2**: What are the causes of FLA among the students in the class?

Table 6 shows the students' responses for the FLCAS

by providing the means for both males and females and the percentages of their responses to each item, indicative of the three components (communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation). As shown in Table 6, the responses of students were represented in percentages. These percentages were calculated using the number of students who responded to the questionnaire items (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree). In this table, the researchers sum disagree and strongly disagree percentages to be negative response (-) and agree and strongly agree to be positive responses (+). (As presented in Table 6).

Table 3
Levels of FLA among the Whole Sample (*N*=260)

Levels of anxiety	Frequency	Mean	Sig.
High	48	67.68	
Medium	193	97.60	.001
Low	19	127.67	
Total	260	94.12	

Table 4
Levels of FLA among Males (*N*=146)

Levels of Anxiety	Frequency	Mean	Sig.
High	17	67.59	
Medium	122	97.74	.001
Low	7	127.43	
Total	146	95.65	

Table 5
Levels of FLA among Females (*N*=114)

Levels of Anxiety	Frequency	Mean	Sig.
High	31	67.77	
Mediums	71	97.45	.001
Low	12	127.92	
Total	114	92.59	

Table 6
Mean Scores and Percentage of FLCAS

	Item	M-M	F-M	Ave M	SA	A	N	DA	SD	(-)	(+)
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class	2.70	2.54	2.63	7.3	17.7	30.8	18.8	25.4	44.2	25
2	I don't worry about making mistakes in my English class	2.97	2.65	2.83	12.7	24.2	19.2	21.2	22.7	43.9	36.9
3	I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in my English class	2.55	2.61	2.57	9.2	19.6	18.8	23.8	28.5	52.3	28.8
4	It frightens me when I don't understand the teacher.	2.93	2.84	2.89	15.8	22.3	19.6	20	22.3	42.3	38.1
5	It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	2.87	2.96	2.91	18.5	20	18.8	19.2	23.5	42.7	38.8
6	During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	2.62	2.62	2.62	10.4	14.6	25.4	25.6	23.8	49.4	25
7	I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	2.82	2.52	2.68	11.9	21.9	18.8	17.3	30	47.3	33.8

Continued

	Item	M-M	F-M	Ave M	SA	A	N	DA	SD	(-)	(+)
8	I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	3.16	3.24	3.19	23.8	24.2	17.7	15.8	18.5	34.3	48
9	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	3.28	3.20	3.25	25.8	27.3	12.3	15	19.6	34.6	53.1
10	I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	3.45	2.82	3.17	30	17.7	16.5	10.8	25	35.8	47.7
11	I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.	2.79	2.46	2.65	8.1	14.6	32.7	23.5	21.2	44.7	22.7
12	In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	3.47	3.04	3.28	18.5	35.4	18.4	16.9	13.8	30.7	53.9
13	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	2.82	2.68	2.76	15	21.5	14.2	23.1	26.2	49.3	36.5
14	I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	3.08	2.79	2.95	24.2	15.8	22.7	15.4	21.9	37.3	40
15	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	3.18	2.79	3.01	11.5	29.2	21.9	23.1	14.2	37.3	40.7
16	Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	2.44	2.45	2.44	9.2	18.1	15.8	21.5	35.4	56.9	27.3
17	I often feel like not going to my language class.	2.21	2.59	2.38	11.5	12.3	15.8	23.1	37.3	69.4	23.8
18	I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.	3.42	3.21	3.33	26.2	21.5	23.5	16.5	12.3	28.8	47.7
19	I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	3.05	2.72	2.91	10	27.3	24.6	19.6	18.5	38.1	37.3
20	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	2.72	2.89	2.79	13.5	21.9	18.1	23.5	23.1	46.6	35.4
21	The more I study for a language test, the more con- fused I get.	2.36	2.51	2.42	8.8	17.3	15.4	24.2	34.2	58.4	26.1
22	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	2.90	3.46	3.15	25.4	21.5	13.8	20.8	18.5	39.3	46.9
23	I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.	2.83	2.65	2.75	9.6	23.5	23.5	19.2	24.2	43.4	33.1
24	I feel very self- conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	2.29	2.48	2.38	7.7	16.5	14.6	28.1	33.1	61.2	24.2
25	Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	2.81	2.58	2.71	11.5	16.9	23.1	25.8	22.3	48.1	28.4
26	I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	2.49	2.52	2.50	10	16.9	16.9	25.4	30.8	56.2	26.9
27	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	2.42	2.64	2.52	6.2	20	17.7	31.5	24.6	56.1	26.2
28	When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	3.28	3.21	3.25	21.9	20.8	28.1	18.8	10.4	29.2	42.7
29	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	3.27	2.85	3.08	18.8	26.5	16.9	19.6	18.1	37.7	45.3
30	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.	3.21	2.99	3.11	18.5	24.6	24.2	15	17.7	32.7	43.1
31	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	2.84	2.57	2.72	12.7	21.9	17.3	20.8	27.3	48.1	34.6
32	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	3.06	3.21	3.13	17.3	24.6	25.8	18.1	14.2	32.3	41.9
33	I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in	3.39	3.32	3.36	21.5	33.8	17.7	13.1	13.8	26.9	55.3

Note. M-M= Mean male, *F-M*= Female mean, Ave. *M*= Average Mean, *SA*= Strongly agree, *A*= average, *N*= natural, D= disagree, *SD*= Strongly disagree, (-)= Disagree + strongly disagree, (+)= agree + strongly agree.

All the items which scored above 50% of responses were gathered in Table 7 to summarize the most effective causes of FLA among the current study's participants.

Table 7
The Five Most Common Causes of Anxiety (Above 50%) Among Elementary School Students

Item No.	Item	Percentage
17	I often feel like not going to my language class.	69.4%
21	The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	58.4%
16	Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	56.9%
27	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	56.1%
33	I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in.	55.3%
12	In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	53.9%
3	I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in my English class.	52.3%
26	I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	52.1%

As shown in Tables 6 and 7, it can be noted that the impact of the classroom environment is very clear, specifically, from students' responses to Item 17, "I often feel like not going to my language class," to which 69.4% responded affirmatively. Almost two-thirds of the students do not feel comfortable and they feel that English class is not attractive, which leads increasing anxiety levels. This finding shows that students are not motivated to attend the class because they feel lack of self- confidence, anxiety, and fear of their teachers. This finding is supported by Al-Mohanna (2010).

In relation to communication apprehension, more than half of the students feel anxious while speaking in the classroom. This is made clear by the results of Item 27, "I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class," which show affirmative responses of 56.1%. Speaking clearly provokes anxiety among the students which is supported by Alrabai, 2014.

Regarding the impact of test anxiety as a source of FLA, it can noted from the students responses of items: 3, 12, 21 and 26 (As shown below) that more than half the students feel anxious, tense, confused and nervous because of English tests. This finding is supported by Rezazadeh, 2009. All of these findings agree that test anxiety beside communication apprehension is a major source of FLA among Saudi elementary school in our sample.

Item 3, "I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in my English class," had affirmative responses of 52.3%.

Item 12, "In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know," had affirmative responses of 53.9%.

Item 16, "Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it," had affirmative responses of 56.9%.

Item 21, "The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get," had affirmative responses of 58.4%. More than half of the students are more anxious when they feel that they will be tested or evaluated. It seems that most teachers used written and oral tests to evaluate their students.

Item 26, "I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes," had affirmative responses of 52.1%.

Item 30, "I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language," had affirmative responses of 43.1%. The strong responses to these two items, 26 and 30, support the notion that language anxiety is a distinct set of feelings, motions, and beliefs relating to the classroom, differing from other anxiety types discovered by Horwitz. Foreign language classroom anxiety is totally different from other types of anxieties.

Table 8
The Main Causes of FLA

Dimensions	R	B	t-value	Sig.
Communication apprehension	78.6	0.375	2.474	0.05
Test anxiety	17.0	0.439	29.516	0.001
Fear of evaluation	4.4	0.315	31.583	0.001

Note. α= 0.05

The results in Table 8 reveal that the main source of anxiety is communication apprehension, which accounted for 78.6 % of the total variance. Test anxiety accounted for 17% of the total variance while fear of evaluation accounted for 4.4%. (Alrabai, 2014; Linh, 2011; Zhang, 2010; Atasheneh & Izadi, 2012; Aida, 1994; Ayidn, 2009).

Question 3: Is there a significant difference between males and females in terms of foreign language anxiety?

Regarding the impact of gender on FLA, Table 9 illustrates that there are no significant differences between the male and female levels of FLA in the classroom. By using the *t*-test, the calculated value of *t* = 1.36 at *a*= .05 level indicates that there is no difference in the level of FLA between males and female in this study. It can be seen for the means that both males and females demonstrated a moderate level of FLA (*M*=94.12).

Table 9
Difference Between 6th Grade Males and Female (*N*= 260) in FLA

Gender	*N*	Mean	*SD*	*t*-value
Males	146	95.65	15.760	1.36
Females	114	92.59	20.428	

By analyzing the components of FLCAS in this study, Table 11 illustrates that there is no significant difference between males and females in the first two components (communication apprehension and test anxiety) but there is a significant difference between genders (*p<0.05*) in their fear of evaluation (males, *M*=20.72 and female *M*=19.11). This result indicates that males are more anxious in fear of evaluation than females. This finding is supported by Abu-Ghararah (1999) who found that males were more anxious than females because females are highly motivated in learning English and have more time for studying English.

Table 11
Difference Between 6th Grade Males and Females (*N*= 260) in the Components of Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

Dimensions	Gender	*N*	Average	*SD*	*t*-value	Sig.
Communication apprehension	Male	146	32.83	6.00	1.529	Not Sig
	Female	114	31.54	7.54		
Test anxiety	Male	146	42.10	7.26	0.175	Not Sig
	Female	114	41.92	8.65		
Fear of evaluation	Male	146	20.72	5.09	2.283	0.05
	Female	114	19.11	6.23		
Total	Male	146	95.65	15.76	1.365	Not Sig
	Female	114	92.59	20.42		

4. ANALYSIS OF THE QUALITATIVE DATA

In order to gain better understanding of these students' FLA, 10 highly anxious participants were selected as the interviewees, according to their scores in the FLCAS questionnaire. Data from the interviews showed that speaking English in front of classmates increases anxiety. Students were afraid that they could not respond appropriately or correctly in front of their classmates. Sometimes, their peers would laugh at their poor performances. Some students even said that speaking English in front of classmates made them more nervous than individual oral tests did. One student responded like this:

The most difficult parts of learning English are oral testing and speaking. I am afraid when my teacher asks me to read the words, that someone will hear me and laugh at me or that the teacher will be angry because I can't read them very well. (Interview/Student B7)

There is evidence that speaking in front of classmates causes some students' FLA. For some, the influence of this kind of anxiety was even more serious than that of individual oral tests. English speaking is not easy to master in a short period of time for these EFL students. Teachers found that some students had difficulty reading English vocabulary. When they had to read, their language anxiety was noticeable because of insufficient reading abilities. In order to lower students' anxiety in reading, most of the teachers focused on phonics instruction.

Tests increased anxiety in most of the students. Most test-anxious students were nervous because of low English proficiency. The other reason was related to fear of evaluation. Students were afraid that their classmates might laugh at them in the event of a poor speaking performance. Here is one statement:

I will be nervous in speaking English, because I am afraid that classmates will laugh if I say something incorrectly. (Interview/ Student B9)

The results from the interviews were consistent with those from the questionnaires.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to focus on three main purposes: a) To examine the effects of foreign language anxiety (FLA) among elementary aged EFL students in Saudi Arabia. b) To investigate the sources of FLA among the study sample. c) To explore the impact of gender on FLA.

The results of the current study revealed moderate anxiety among the participants. It showed that there are numbers of FLA sources in language learning such communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of evaluation. Communication apprehension accounted for 78.6 % of the total variance. Test anxiety accounted for 17% of the total variance, while fear of negative evaluation accounted for 4.4%.

This study also investigated the impact of gender on FLA, showing no general significant difference between males and females. Regarding components of FLA, gender did not make a difference in levels of communication apprehension and test anxiety, but males showed higher results than females on fear of negative evaluation, a result of females having higher motivation and more time devoted to studying.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the present research indicate that anxiety associated with EFL in the Saudi context is complex and multidimensional. For this reason, this study provides a range of implications and recommendations for the varied elements of the EFL processes in Saudi Arabia, as they relate to learners, teachers, and policymakers.

Teachers should play a major role in reducing anxiety among their students by creating an attractive, warm atmosphere inside the classrooms and increasing students motivation in learning English. They should help their students to cope with negative attitudes and unpleasant feeling towards learning English. Furthermore, they should build students' self confidence by using positive reinforcement, more encouragements.

Regarding speaking anxiety, teachers can remind students that it's a universal problem in language learning. Learners should be familiar with their attitudes toward speaking and the reasons behind unwillingness to speak. Students should be provided more opportunity to speak both inside and outside classrooms. Teachers should encourage their students to participate in various activities (such as dubs, competitions, school broadcast and excursions). Classroom activities can also be linked to daily life. For example, students can be asked in class to present an oral presentations about their participation in any community services or their weekend activities.

With respect to English test anxiety, teachers should create a comfortable atmosphere, a range of content difficulty, and clear explanations of instructions and grading criteria. Providing more test practice and sufficient time can reduce test anxiety.

The study recommends that the teachers should encourage learners to talk freely and openly with their teachers and other students in English, and to be patient with one another's mistakes.

EFL policymakers in the Saudi context should involve English teachers in the pre-service and in-service training programs on both general psychology and language anxiety. Such programs might enhance FLA awareness in a way that enables teachers to deal effectively with the problems of stress and anxiety in the classroom.

Future research might investigate the relationship between the variables of FLA and learners' achievements in the foreign language. This research was more concerned with investigating the general sources of anxiety among learners. It did not explore the relationship between these sources and language learning skills. A further suggestion for future research is to investigate the sources of FLA for specific language skills, such as reading, writing, and listening. Research in this area will shed light on sources that lead to anxiety regarding these skills and how these sources can be addressed.

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