Elaboration on Foreign Language Anxiety in L2 Speaking: A Study of Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract
The study examined language learning anxiety factors, hindering EFL learners' process of learning, particularly in speaking settings and recommended useful approaches to cope with it. Using the quantitative approach as well as a qualitative semi-structured interview and focus-group discussion method, this study tried to examine the factors behind language anxiety among Iranian language learners both in the classroom and in the social context. 100 TEFL students participated in this study. The language proficiency was measured by TOEFL IBT test to make sure that the students were homogeneous. The findings suggested a variety of approaches to cope with language anxiety. It also revealed that there was a significant relationship between the participants' language anxiety and their language proficiency. The results of the interviews showed that the teachers had a key role in increasing and decreasing the students' language anxiety concerning psychosocial linguistic factors. The findings of the study can be helpful for providing some teacher-training courses, teaching language teachers some effective psychological techniques to decrease language learning anxiety factors, improving language learning process.

Keywords: language learning anxiety, English speaking skills, English speaking anxiety, language proficiency, anxiety factors

Introduction

Language anxiety is the feelings of embarrassment and shame, being afraid of making mistakes and apprehension in speaking skill. Anxiety and panic are sequences of mind and body feedbacks, which are experienced by each learner, especially when they speak in front of the class. In many cases, learners' feeling of tension, worry or nervousness may prevent their language learning and speaking skill when speaking practice is happening. The learners lately find the utterance I feel my heart beating very fast to face this speaking English language, the condition surely will be inducing their speaking in front of class. As Liu and Chen (2015) believed , the relationship between anxiety and foreign language learning is generally reported to be negative(Liu & Chen, 2015). However, the positive aspects of anxiety as far as foreign language learning have been explored by other researchers (Azmi & Sham, 2018; Budin, 2014; Kleinmann, 1977). One of the most major obstacles learners have to overcome in language classes is anxiety. Brown (2000)mmentioned that this problem usually appears once speakers undertake their oral performance to be wrong, stupid or incomprehensible. Other researchers also confirmed that language learning anxiety is one of the most devastating factor to language learning process (Dörnyei, 2014; Ehrman, 1996; Öztekin, 2011; Wang & Chang, 2010; Yashima, MacIntyre, & Ikeda, 2018). The problem happens among ESL/EFL students from beginning to more advanced levels. Even highly advanced ESL/EFL learners feel nervous while learning, and

particularly speaking English in some situations, both within and out of the classroom. These students wonder why they cannot speak English well in front of others because their habitual efforts do not lead to their intended performance (Azher, Anwar, & Naz, 2010; E. Horwitz, 2001). Horwitz and Young (1991) expressed, "we have been truly surprised at the number of the students who experience anxiety and distress in their language classes" (p.14). Similarly, Campbell and Ortiz (1991) found language nervousness among university students to be 'alarming' and predictable (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2006; Salehi & Marefat, 2014). The findings of many studies comparing learners' levels of anxiety in their foreign language class with their anxiety in the other classes (e.g. math, history, etc.) indicate that language learners experience much more anxiety in their foreign language classes (e.g., Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Gardner, 2010; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). There are many varying degrees of concentration, which seemingly make it problematic to apply boundaries towards a set of definition, (e.g., Doyon, 2000; King, 2012; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). However, some generalizations can be made. Gardner and MacIntyre (1994) defined language anxiety as "the anxiety experienced when a condition requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully expert" (p.5). Some of the symptoms include nervousness, tension, apprehension, and introversion (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Park & French, 2013; Vitasari, Wahab, Othman, Herawan, & Sinnadurai, 2010).

In general, there are two approaches to the description of language anxiety (P. MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). First, in the broader sense, language anxiety is considered as a basic human emotion, which may be brought up by many combinations of situational factors. For example, a shy student may feel anxious when asked to give a short talk in front of the class. Language anxiety may be in the form of combination of other anxieties that create a single form of anxiety that is intrinsic to language learning (Elaine K Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). The later approach believes that there is something single to the language learning experience, which makes some individuals nervous. When this nervousness or anxiety is limited to the language-learning situations, it falls into the category of specific anxiety. Psychologists use the term specific anxiety response to differentiate people, who are generally anxious in a variety of situations from those, who are nervous only in specific situations. Researchers appear to differ in their views about the definition and construct of language anxiety, but there is a merit, as MacIntyre (1995) mentioned, in discussing language anxiety, as a unique construct, because it categorizes the source of nervousness for the reader. Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, and Daley (1999) believed that students may feel nervousness in learning other subjects like mathematics, statistics, etc. and the important motivations behind being anxious may be similar for learners in various disciplines, but the sources of anxiety will be also a unique experience for each learner.

While former studies have been conducted much to investigate the existence of second/foreign language anxiety, some researchers (e.g., Guo, Xu, & Liu, 2018; Shams, 2006) viewed that even without experimental proof, the mere awareness of foreign language anxiety, even at the intuitive level, is evident enough for the existence of anxiety; therefore, worthy of fuller investigation. Reviewing earlier research, Ohata (2005) concluded that language anxiety cannot be defined in a linear manner, but rather it can be better understood as a complex psychological phenomenon, influenced by many different reasons. Thus, it seems to be more appropriate to deal with this problem from a variety of perspectives or methods (Papi, 2010; Young, 1991). For this reason, some studies in this area have been descriptive in nature. Many researchers interviewed anxious learners in order to have a better understanding of their experiences (Elaine K Horwitz et al., 1986; Price, 1991; Young, 1991). Young (1991) conducted particular interviews with famous language specialists such as Krashen, Omaggio Hadley,

Terrell, Rardin, and Ohata, asking for language teachers' role and the particular social context, they create in language- learning classroom.

Similar to the interview studies by the above researchers, this research project is another step to study the factors that cause language learning anxiety for EFL learners from two sides: from the perspectives of EFL students and EFL teachers. Thus, this study intended to be more comprehensive in nature as it looks at the problem from this variety of perspectives in an attempt to find the sources of language anxiety; focusing on the actual sources of nervousness, which could prove an effective means for improving second/foreign language anxiety. The present study was conducted at Islamic Azad University of Mashhad, Iran with different groups of students, majoring in English Translation and English Language Teaching.

The subject of language anxiety has been studied with increasing frequency in latest years because of the effect it can have on second language learning, performance, and final achievement. This study would be of considerable interest to language teachers and learners because of the potentially negative influence of foreign language anxiety, not only on the several fields of language performance, but also on learners' attitudes and perceptions of language learning. This study is also important with respect to its implication for foreign or second language education. The examination of the anxiety-producing factors, which arise while learning to communicate in the target language will positively broaden the insight into the topic of language anxiety and will help language educators in making the classroom environment less stressful.

The findings of the study conducted by Hashemi (2012) and (Bashosh, Nejad, Rastegar, & Marzban, 2013; Hashemi, 2011) suggested that language anxiety can originate from learners' own sense of 'self', their self-related cognitions, language learning difficulties, differences in learners' and target language cultures, differences in social status of the speakers and interlocutors, and from the fear of losing self-identity. Furthermore, considering the crucial role of teachers in second or foreign language pedagogy, a need was felt to investigate the beliefs and perceptions of language teachers about learning and teaching a second or a foreign language. Some language researchers believe that students try to overcome their anxiety by trying to remember the presentation stuff and by rehearsing it. Then, they bring another pressure on themselves by trying to remember what they have rehearsed and feel probably stressed because they cannot remember everything (Alrabai, 2016; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Tanveer, 2007).

Due to limited exposure to English language in some countries like Iran, language learners face serious problems in the development of their communicative competency, which is troubling for learners when they are required to speak e.g. Lightbown, 2008; Pawlak, 2013) The differences of cultures appeared to be an important anxiety-producing factor. The more uncertainty or unfamiliarity with the target language culture, the more it is likely to be anxiety provoking (Tanveer, 2007)

The use of the term losing face, by the participant supports Jones' (2004) view that language anxiety is a concern of face in different cultures. Similar to Jones' (2004) findings about culture as a causal factor in Asian context, an experienced female teacher stated, "It is not anxiety just about language, but differences in cultural practices. Amiri and Ghonsooly (2015) as well as Elaldı (2016) confirmed that cultural differences appeared to be important anxiety-producing factors, hindering language learners to learn a foreign language smoothly.

Research Questions

Q1. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' language proficiency and L2 speaking anxiety?

Q2. What elements constitute the sources of L2 speaking anxiety in Iranian EFL learners?

Q3. What is the role of the language teacher in removing or decreasing the stress and anxiety that many Iranian EFL students experience in the class?

Review of Literature

Usually, the focus of research in second language acquisition (SLA) has been on the issues such as language pedagogy (Grammar Translation Method, Audio-lingual Method, etc.), contents of pedagogical instructions, and ways to develop them. Therefore, the implications of this study remained restricted to the learning and teaching of the language itself; that is to say, to the cognitive field with little attention being paid to the affective variables students bring with them into language class. It was only in late twentieth century, in the 1970s, that the SLA researchers began to study the important role played by personality and motivational variables in second language acquisition (Baran-Łucarz, 2014; Shams, 2006b). They suggested that, in order to gain a general understanding of this process, learners' emotional variables need to be taken into account to provide for their needs and interests, Saito and Samimy (1996). Furthermore, as the focus of L2 instruction has moved from the narrow concern for increasing students' linguistic competence to the need for communicative competence as well, learners are challenged to be able to speak in the second language naturally in several social contexts. In order to meet this challenge, attention has diverted to studying the role of emotional variables like 'learning styles', motivation, personality characters, etc. that can delay the process of learning and speaking a second and foreign language. Among these emotional variables, student anxiety has come to be known as an important area of study in second language acquisition because of the negative effect it can have on students' performance (Azher et al., 2010; Yan & Horwitz, 2008).

The theoretical literature has offered a somewhat confusing account of language anxiety. Researchers have been unable to draw a pure picture of how anxiety affects language learning and performance. Some researchers reported a negative relationship between language anxiety and success. In other words, the higher the nervousness, the lower the performance (Dörnyei, 2014; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Others (e.g., Pimsleur , Mosberg, & Morrison, 1962; Scovel , 1978; Tosun, 2018) reported no relationship, or a positive relationship. Horwitz (2001) has reiterated that the matter of understanding the relationship between anxiety and achievement is unclear. The purpose and reason for these mixed results is perhaps "a comparison of the experimental research examining the relationship between anxiety and second language learning is, to a degree, confusing, presenting some conflicting evidence and illustrating that anxiety is a complex, multi-faceted construct" (Philip, cited in Shams , 2006, p.8). Furthermore to the negative effects of anxiety on language learning, success and performance, anxiety has occasionally been found to simplify and facilitate language learning. Anxiety, in its debilitating and facilitating forms, serves simultaneously to motivate and to warn the student. Facilitating anxiety "motivates the learner to "fight" the new learning task; it works the learner emotionally for approach behavior". Debilitating anxiety, in contrast, "motivates the student to "flee" the new learning task; it stimulates the individual emotionally to adopt avoidance behavior" (Scovel, 1978; Steinberg, Nagata, & Aline, 2013).

What Causes Language Anxiety?

What causes language nervousness is a central question of this research study and is of interest to all language instructors and students, as well as SLA researchers, who are interested in anxiety and learning. Considering anxiety as an extremely significant construct in language learning, SLA scholars have tried to examine the sources that language anxiety can stem from

within both academic and social situations, and have proposed a variety of strategies to handle with it. Schwartz (1972) stated that the fact that language anxiety is a psychological theory, it most likely stems from the student's own 'self', i.e., as an intrinsic motivator, e.g., his or her self-perceptions, perceptions about others (peers, instructors, interlocutors, etc.) and target language interaction situations, his/her beliefs about L2/FL learning etc., cited in Scovel (1978). Language anxiety may be a result as well as a reason of insufficient command of the target language or L2 (Daud, Daud, & Kassim, 2016; Sparks, Ganschow, & Javorsky, 2000; Zhang, 2013).

That is to say it may be experienced because of linguistic difficulties L2/FL students face in learning and using the target language. Schwartz (1972) Indicated that within social settings, language anxiety may happen because of extrinsic motivators, such as different social and cultural environments, particularly the situations where L1 and L2/FL learning takes place. Also, as Gardner said the target language is a representation of another cultural community; there is a tendency among some people to experience such nervousness because of their own concerns about society, foreignness, and the like. Social position of the presenter and the interlocutor, a sense of power relations between them, and gender could also be significant issues in causing language anxiety for L2/FL speakers. An additional detailed investigation of these issues could potentially assist language educators to alleviate anxiety in the classroom situation and to make the classroom environment less anxiety-provoking and hence to improve students' performance in the target language.

Conceptual Foundations: Components of Foreign Language Anxiety and Related Causal Factors

Horwitz, et al. (1986, p.127), considering language anxiety with relation to performance assessment and evaluation within academic and social situations, drew parallels between language anxiety and three related performance anxieties, including (1) communication anxiety (CA); (2) test anxiety; (3) fear of negative evaluation. According to (McCroskey & Neuliep, 1997; Neuliep, 2017), due to its emphasis on interaction, the concept of communication apprehension is also relevant to the conceptualization of foreign language anxiety. They said, the description of these components will lay the basics for the concept of second/foreign language anxiety, providing an insight to comprehend the sources or causes it can initiate from, all cited from Horwitz et al. (1986). As the focus in this study is on speaking skills, the first component (CA) will be explained more than the other two components.

Communication Apprehension (CA)
Many researchers (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; P. D. MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991) pointed out that the skill creating most anxiety is speaking. This anxiety comes from lack of self-confidence in our general linguistic knowledge, but if only this element were involved, all skills would be affected equally. What distinguishes speaking is the public nature of the skill, the embarrassment and shame suffered from exposing our language limitations in front of others (Arnold, 1999; Bernat & Lloyd, 2007; Trinder, 2013; Wong, 2010; Zareian, Zangoei, & Taghvaee, 2014).

One of the most studied subjects in the field of speech communication is the tendency on the part of some people to avoid, and even, fear and anxiety, communicating orally (Daly 1991). Horwitz et al. (1986, p.128) define communication apprehension as "a type of nervousness characterized by fear or anxiety about communicating with people". Most of the researches in this area are based on McCroskey's conceptualization of communication apprehension as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either actual and real or anticipated

communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey's 1997). According to Friedman (1980), communication anxiety may be particular to just a few situations (e.g., public speaking) or may exist in most everyday communication positions, or may even be part of a general anxiety trait that arises in many aspects of an individual's life. Students' personality traits such as shyness, quietness, and silence are considered too frequently precipitate CA. Bond (1984) found seven elements that could result in a quiet child (this can equally offer description of adult CA); (1) low intellectual skills, (2) speech skill lacks, (3) voluntary social introversion, (4) social separation, (5) communication anxiety, (6) low social self-esteem, (7) ethnic/cultural divergence in communication norms. While communication apprehension (CA) is but one of these factors, the others can lead to communication apprehension (Al-Shboul, Ahmad, Nordin, & Rahman, 2013; Alrabai, 2015).

Test Anxiety

An understanding of test anxiety is also relevant to the discussion of foreign language anxiety. Test anxiety, as clarified by Horwitz, et al. (1986, p. 127), "refers to a kind of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure". Test anxiety is quite universal in language classrooms because of its continuous performance evaluative nature. Unfortunately, for highly anxious learners, second/foreign languages, more than any other academic subject, require frequent evaluation by the teacher – the only fluent speaker in the class (Horwitz, et al, 1986, p.129). Horwitz et al believed that it is also important to note that oral testing has the potential to incite both test and oral communication anxiety simultaneously in susceptible students.

Fear of Negative Evaluation

According to Horwitz (1986), fear of negative evaluation is an extension of the second factor (*test anxiety*) of second or foreign language anxiety because it is not limited to test-taking conditions; rather, it may happen in any social, evaluative condition, such as interviewing for a job or speaking in second/foreign language class. It is also broader in the sense that it affects not only to the teacher's evaluation of the students but also to the perceived reaction of other learners as well (Shams, 2006b) Horwitz, et al (1986) believed that, although communication apprehension (CA), test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation provide useful conceptual building blocks for an explanation of second/foreign language anxiety, it is more than just the collection of these three components: "we consider foreign language anxiety as a different complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and moods , and behaviors related to classroom language learning rising from the uniqueness of the language learning procedure". What makes language learning a different and unique process is its interaction with the concept of 'self (Horwitz et al., 1986, p.127-128).

Empirical Background

The theoretical literature has offered a somewhat confusing account of language anxiety. Researchers have been unable to draw a pure picture of how anxiety affects language learning and performance.

Some researchers (e.g., (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2003; Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2006; Tobias, 2013) reported a negative relationship between language anxiety and success, e.g. the higher the nervousness, the lower the performance. Other researchers (e.g., Backman, 1976; (Mak, 2011; Nosratinia & Abdi, 2017; Pimsleur et al., 1962; Scovel, 1978) reported no relationship, or a positive relationship, cited in Onwuegbuzie et al. (1999, p.218). Horwitz (2010) has reiterated that the matter of understanding the relationship between anxiety

and achievement is unclear The purpose and reason for these mixed results is perhaps, as stated by Philip, (cited in Ebrahimi, 2013; Nasir, 2015; Shams, 2006), that "a comparison of the experimental research examining the relationship between anxiety and second language learning is, to a degree, confusing, presenting some conflicting evidence and illustrating that anxiety is a complex, multi-faceted construct."

Furthermore, concerning the negative effects of anxiety on language learning and speaking, anxiety has been infrequently found to facilitate language learning. Anxiety prevents language learners' success in speaking English language. Feeling of stress is deliberated as the cognitive part of anxiety and can have a negative influence on speaking. For example, failing to answer the question will only delay the future speaking of the student, and makes learner less and less effective in the classroom. (Handayani & Rahmawati, 2017; Mayangta, 2013).

Methodology

Participants
A survey model was used in the present study. According to Morgan's (1970) table- concerned with determining sample size for research activities in educational and psychological measurement, this study's sample size was calculated to be 100 EFL students concerning 95% of the level of confidence and 150 initial populations. The participants' age range was between 20 and 30 years old. The participants' language learning experience was between three and twelve years from both genders of male and female. The available 150 participants were sophomore, junior, and senior students, who took part in the study, and finally, 100 participants were randomly selected, based on Morgan's table of random sampling. They were all studying English Language Teaching and English Translation at Islamic Azad university of Mashhad- Iran.

Instruments
In order to collect the data, the following instruments were used in this study:

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)
The main instrument, used in this research for data collection, was that of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). To put it narrowly, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, FLCAS, was used to measure the participants' English language anxiety. This scale comprises 33 items. Each item is accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale: *1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.* The participants were required to answer all 33 items in the FLCAS scale in 20 minutes. This scale was chosen for this study because of its effectiveness in identifying respondents' perception of foreign language anxiety. Preliminary evidence (Horwitz et al., 1986) indicated adequate test-retest reliability over a period of 8 weeks, yielding ($r = .83$, $p < .01$), and acceptable internal consistency ($a = .93$, $N = 75$). Saito, Horwitz, and Garza (1999) also reported this instrument has a reliability coefficient of ($a = .0.94$) using Cronbach alpha formula.

Semi- Structured Interview Questions
A semi-structured interview is a qualitative method of inquiry with a pre-determined set of open questions. The interview was used to find out the participants' feelings about learning English, stressful situations, and the moment they feel anxious (Tanveer (2007). It was also used to discover the participants' opinions about the situations that caused stress and the reasons of anxiety. The interview consisted of ten open-ended questions. The questions were in English, but they were translated into Farsi by the researchers for the sake of clarity. The clearness and

appropriateness of the questions were confirmed by two experts in TEFL. The printed version was given to the participants to answer in ten minutes.

Focus Group Questions

To find out the participants' underlying psychological, linguistic, and sociocultural problems, which cause language anxiety and the strategies to cope with it, this interview was used. It included seven questions in English, but they were translated into Farsi in order to help the participants to answer the questions more accurately. The clearness and appropriateness of the questions were also confirmed by three experts in TEFL. The printed version was given to the participants to answer in ten minutes. The researcher was present in the classroom to answer the participants' questions if there was any. The questions of interview were derived from the factors that cause language anxiety, proposed by Tanveer (2007).

TOEFL IBT Test

To measure the participants' English proficiency level, the researcher used TOEFL IBT test, developed by educational testing service (2015). This test was used because it was a standard test, so its reliability and validity are considered high and acceptable. The test contained four sections or better to say, it measures four skills of English language, which are reading, listening, speaking, and writing. The researcher used the speaking section to measure the participants' proficiency level of speaking. The mentioned section had six questions. For the first two questions, the participants had to talk about a given situation for 45 seconds. The responses were scored on the ability to speak clearly and coherently. For the second two questions, the participants had to read a text and listen to a talk on the same topic. Then, they had to combine the information to create a complete and appropriate answer. In this part, the responses were scored on the ability to accurately convey the information and to speak clearly and coherently. For the third two questions, the participants had to listen to a conversation or lecture and answer the questions about it. The responses were also scored on the ability to accurately convey the information and to speak clearly and coherently.

Procedure

For the current study, 100 students were randomly selected from 150 students at Islamic Azad university of Mashhad. The participants were sophomore and junior students. At first, the foreign language classroom anxiety scale and the two interviews were given to the participants to answer. The time given to the participants for answering the questionnaire and the two written interviews were 60 minutes. The participants were asked to answer the questions carefully and ask the researcher if there were any unclear questions. The papers were collected after 60 minutes.

Knowing about the students' English language proficiency was needed for the results, so for the next week the same participants were asked to stay in class and take part in a speaking test of TOEFL. Every participant was evaluated individually by some experts in English speaking. The test had six questions, and the participants were scored according to their answers to the questions and also their coherence and clarity.

Results

This study investigated the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' language proficiency and their second language speaking anxiety. The present study was conducted based on a survey, interview, and open-ended question design. A quantitative design examined the

participants' level of second language anxiety. A qualitative design investigated their perceptions and attitudes toward language anxiety. A correlation study, a type of quantitative design, sought to determine a relationship among the variables.

An assessment of the normality of data is necessary for many statistical tests because normal data is an underlying assumption in parametric testing. Two well-known tests of normality are the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test and the Shapiro-Wilk Test. The Shapiro-Wilk Test is more appropriate for small sample sizes ($N < 50$ samples), but it can also handle sample sizes as large as 2000. For this reason, the researcher decided to use Shapiro-Wilk test, as a numerical means of assessing normality.

Table 1. Test of Normality

Shapiro-Wilk	Statistic	df	Sig.
Female Language Anxiety	.971	50	.251
Male Language Anxiety	.942	50	.142

To test the normality of variables, the Shapiro-Wilk was performed. For this test, the significant value had to be greater than ($p > 0.05$) to tell that the data is normal. According to Table 1, the significant value of the variables is greater than ($p > 0.05$); therefore, the distribution of data is normal.

The only null hypothesis of this study stated that there is no significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' language proficiency and L2 speaking anxiety. In order to test this null hypothesis, Pearson correlation analysis was performed. Pearson's Product –Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between EFL learners' language proficiency and L2 speaking anxiety. Before discussing the results of Pearson correlation, the descriptive statistics analysis were assessed and presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2. Language Anxiety Descriptive Statistics

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Female Language Anxiety	55.000	136.000	93.0000	17.62072
Male Language Anxiety	79.000	145.000	97.5600	21.19892
Valid N (listwise)	0			

The findings shown in Table 2 indicated that the number of the participants in this study was 100, and the minimum score for language anxiety was ($Min = 55$) for female and ($Min = 79$) for male. The maximum score was ($Min = 136$) for female and ($Min = 145$) for male. Female language anxieties mean score was ($M = 93$) and mean score for male language anxiety was ($M = 97.56$), which indicated that the females were less anxious than males in the current study.

Table 3. *Language Proficiency Descriptive Statistics*

		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male Proficiency	Language	14.00	24.00	19.9600	3.56262
Female Proficiency	Language	16.00	26.00	20.7400	2.38883
Valid N (listwise)					

As Table 3 showed, the minimum score for male language proficiency was (*Min* = 14 and for female was (*Min* = 16), also the maximum language proficiency score for male was (*Max* = 24) and for female was (*Max* = 26). The mean score for male language proficiency was (*M* = 19.96, and for female language proficiency was (*M* = 20.74).

Table 4. *Pearson Correlations for Male*

	Male Language Anxiety	Male Language Proficiency
Pearson Correlation	1	-.893**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	50	50
Pearson Correlation	-.893**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	50	50

As mentioned above, the only null hypothesis in this study stated that there is no significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' language proficiency and L2 speaking anxiety. According to Table 4, which showed the Pearson correlation between male language anxiety and their language proficiency, there was a significant and negative relationship (*r* = -0.89 , *p* = .000) between male language anxiety and their language proficiency. In other words, as the language proficiency was higher, the male participants' language anxiety decreased.

Table 5. *Pearson Correlations for Female*

	Female Language Anxiety	Female Language Proficiency
Pearson Correlation	1	-.975**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	50	50

Pearson Correlation	-.975[**]	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	50	50

As Table 5, which was a Pearson correlation between female language anxiety and their language proficiency, indicated there was a significant and negative relationship ($r = 0.97$, p = .000) between these two variables. In other words, as the female language proficiency increased, their language anxiety decreased. The results are significant at ($p<.01$) ; therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.
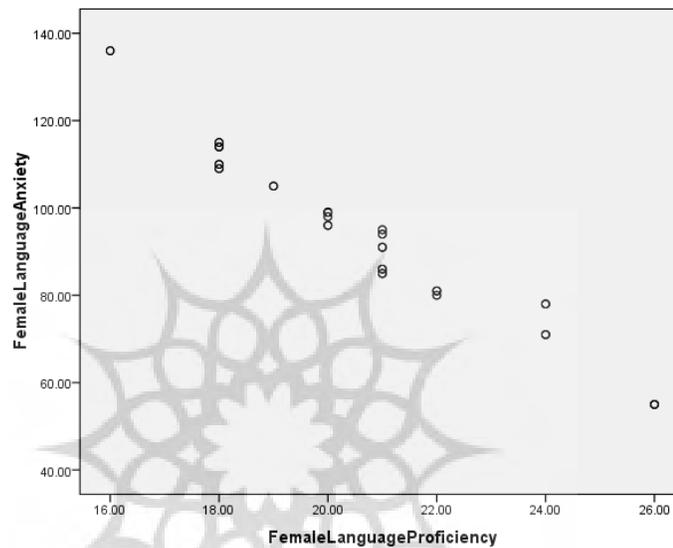

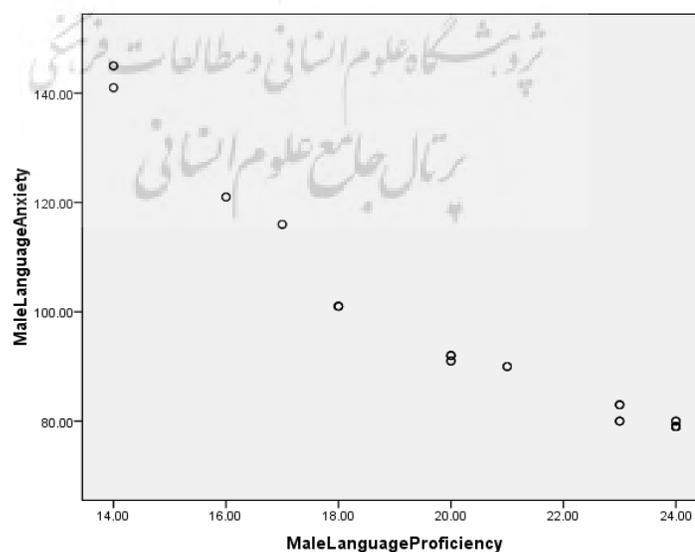**Figure 1.** *The Scatterplot of Female Language Proficiency and Language Anxiety*

Figure 2. *The Scatterplot of Male Language Proficiency and Language Anxiety*

Figures 1 and 2 indicate the negative correlation between language proficiency and language learning anxiety among male language learners. The second research question is concerned with the elements that constituted the sources of L2 speaking anxiety in Iranian EFL learners.

In order to gather qualitative data, two written interviews were given to the participants, and they were asked to write their ideas or answers in front of each question. Before analyzing the participants' answers, some information about the participants is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. *Descriptive Statistics*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Age	100	20.00	30.00	22.2300
Valid N (listwise)	100			

Table 6 showed the age range of the participants of this study. According to Table 6, the participants' age range was 20 to 30. The participants' mean score of the age was ($M = 21.85$.

By analyzing the participants' answers to the interviews, the answer to the second research question is found. The second research question wanted to discover the sources of L2 language anxiety in Iranian EFL learners. According to the answers of the interviewees, there were different reasons for language anxiety such as psychological, linguistic, environmental, social, and cultural sources.

According to the participants' answers, the psychological sources of language anxiety were: 1) lack of self-confidence, 2) lack of motivation, and 3) too much expectation of others from the learners. The participants' answer to the linguistic sources of language anxiety was remembering English words and having problems in using the correct grammar point. It was founded that the environment was an important source of language anxiety. According to the answers, the lack of frequent contact with L2 and the force to speak in front of the other students are the main sources of language anxiety.

There were some situations when the students face difficulties while speaking, which could result in feeling language anxiety. One situation is when they are trying to find the appropriate word. The other situation is when the students have problems in their pronunciation, and they are afraid of being laughed at. Another situation is when others' judgment about the students' knowledge of English is important for students.

The second research question considered the role of language teacher in removing or decreasing the stress and anxiety. The question was as the following:

What is the role of language teacher in removing or decreasing the stress and anxiety that many Iranian EFL students experience in the class?

The answer to the above mentioned question was revealed by analyzing the participants' answers to the questions of the interviews. According to the participants' answers, the language teacher has a very important and key role in increasing and decreasing the anxiety. The answer to one of the questions that asked the symptoms of stress and anxiety revealed that a language teacher have to know the symptoms of anxiety and identify them in each one of the students. The symptoms were as the following according to their answers:

≠   The students shake their legs while speaking in L2.

≠   The students stutter while speaking in L2.

≠   Sweating/perspiring, specially the palm of their hands.

≠   While speaking in L2, the students forget the words and/or grammar.

After recognizing those who are anxious, the teachers have to react in a way to reduce their anxiety. According to the responses of the interviewees, the participants had some ideas about the teachers' behavior and reaction in classrooms, which could help the students be more relaxed and enjoy the class. The ideas are as the following:

≠   Teachers should pay more attention to those who cannot keep up with the class and have problems in learning L2.

≠   Teachers should not correct the students' mistakes immediately.

≠   The class should be a place in which the students are not afraid of making mistakes.

≠   The class atmosphere has to be friendly.

≠   Teachers should ask the students to work in pairs or groups.

≠   Teachers have to try to review the previous words and grammatical points for the students, so they do not forget them.

≠   Teachers have to be able to manage the class time.

≠   Teachers should try to establish a friendly relationship with the students.

≠   Teachers have to expect the students according to their proficiency level.

≠   One of the appropriate techniques to use is code switching. Teachers have to use it to lower the students' language anxiety.

≠   Teachers have to encourage students when they are trying their best to learn English.

Discussion

The findings of the study can be helpful if language teachers apply them in the classroom. There is one important and interesting information and that is the students' feeling about learning English. According to the findings in the interviews, most of the participants had a feeling of satisfaction and want to continue learning English. However, a few of them were worried about forgetting vocabularies and grammar, and they felt anxious while they were going to speak in class. One student claimed that learning English was very difficult at the beginning, but little by little, it got more interesting.

Various studies have shown the effects of anxiety on a person's ability to acquire a second language. Teachers should be aware of the potential effects; which anxiety has on their students' abilities to acquire a second language. Matsudaand Gobel (2004) implied that teachers need to reduce anxiety and enhance self-confidence by encouraging students' involvement in classroom activities while at the same time creating a comfortable atmosphere. Horwitz and Garza (1999) noted that there are two basic options for teachers to consider: 1) help students cope with the anxiety-producing situation; and 2) make the learning context less stressful.

Three research questions were posited before the present study was undertaken. In regards to whether or not students believe that anxiety affects language learning, it appears that within this study, the answer is yes. In the current study, attempts were made to check whether language anxiety can have any significant effects on the male and female Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability. Also, it was tried to find the sources of language anxiety and the ways to reduce it.

The second question asked what elements constitute the sources of L2 speaking anxiety in Iranian EFL learners. After analyzing the data, it was clear that anxiety hindered the participants' ability to acquire a second language. Those findings suggest that the type of anxiety that may manifest in the participants is fear of negative evaluation or rather a fear of failing. Some participants reported stress and anxiety in language learning classes because of their personal perception of language aptitude, certain personality variables (fear of public speaking), and stressful classroom experiences. According to Young (1991), there are six potential sources of language anxiety 1) personal and interpersonal anxieties; 2) learner beliefs about language learning; 3) instructor's beliefs about language teaching; 4) instructor-learner inter-actions; 5) classroom procedures; and 6) language testing (p.427).

The third question asked about the roles of teachers in increasing and decreasing the language anxiety in students. After analyzing the data, it was discovered that teachers had a key role in students' language anxiety. They can increase or decrease the students' language anxiety by their behavior or reactions in class.

There were different studies (e.g., Saito, et al., 1999; Woodrow, 2006), which indicated that language anxiety can influence language learning. The results of the present study are in line with the above mentioned studies. Woodrow (2006), believed that anxiety can adversely affect oral communication for students speaking English, while (P. D. MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989) concluded that anxiety leads to deficits in learning and performance. Saito, Horwitz and Garza (1999) found that students with higher levels of foreign language anxiety also tended to have higher levels of reading anxiety, noting that students with higher levels of reading anxiety received significantly lower grades than the students with lower anxiety levels.

The results of the current study have things in common with another study done by (Hamayan, Genesee, & Tucker, 1977). They indicated in their study that there was a negative correlation between anxiety and one measure of the children's proficiency in French. In another study done by Kleinmann (1977), it was discovered that anxiety could enhance oral performance. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) stated in their study that anxious learners wanted to avoid classroom participation due to having been unsure of what they were saying or losing self-confidence when responding a question in the classroom.

Conclusion

 This study investigated the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' language proficiency and their second language speaking anxiety. According to the result of the current study, the female participants achieved lower scores in anxiety questionnaire than the male participants. In other words, the females were less anxious than the males. Also, the females performed better than the males in the language proficiency test. In the current study, attempts were made to check whether language anxiety can have any significant effects on the male and female Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability. Also, it was tried to find the sources of language anxiety and the probable ways to reduce it.

The second question asked what elements constitute the sources of L2 speaking anxiety in Iranian EFL learners. After analyzing the data, it was clear that the students believe anxiety hindered their ability to acquire a second language. The findings suggest that anxiety may manifest itself in the form of the participants' fear of negative evaluation, or rather a fear of failing. Some participants reported stress and anxiety in language learning classes because of their personal perception of language aptitude, certain personality variables (fear of public speaking), and stressful classroom experiences. The third question asked about the roles of teachers in increasing and decreasing the language anxiety in students. After analyzing the data, it

was discovered that teachers had a key role in students' language anxiety. They can increase or decrease the students' language anxiety by their behavior or reactions in class.

The results of the current study have things in common with another study done by Swain and Burnaby (1976). They indicated in their study that there was a negative correlation between anxiety and one measure of the children's proficiency in French. In another study done by Kleinmann (1977), it was discovered that anxiety could enhance oral performance. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) stated in their study that anxious learners wanted to avoid classroom participation due to the uncertainty of the correction of what they were saying or losing self-confidence when responding a question in the classroom.

Tasnimi (2009) explained that one type of anxiety is beneficial/facilitating anxiety, which is a motivation for students to fight a new learning task while helping students to make extra efforts to overcome their anxiety. The other type of anxiety is inhibiting/debilitating anxiety, which makes learners avoid the learning task in order to avoid the feeling of anxiety.

With regard to the findings, language anxiety can dramatically influence the process of language learning and teaching. Language teachers not only acknowledged that anxiety is responsible for the students' lack of success in the new language, but also helps them to tackle the feelings of nervousness and discomfort. The reaction of a language teacher toward the learners' language anxiety is believed to be highly important to help the learners to achieve the planned performance goals in the second/foreign language (Tanveer, 2007). Furthermore, language teachers should acknowledge the existence of anxiety and stress among the second/foreign language learners and should apply quick and effective approaches to help them cope with those destructive feelings. Language teachers with selecting the best method of teaching and choosing the best task can help their students to cope with language anxiety. According to the findings of this study, the students are more comfortable in group work activities. Therefore, pair and group work activities can be considered as the best ways to cope with language anxiety.

According to Tanveer (2007), creating a friendly, informal and learning-supportive environments for language students through teachers' friendly and supportive manners help students feel comfortable when speaking in the class. This can decrease the effect of social and status difference between students and teachers to a great extent. Teachers should encourage the learners feel free to make mistakes in order to acquire communication abilities. In order to decrease language learners' speaking anxiety, language teachers should learn appropriate error correction techniques concerning the instructional philosophy on reducing defensive reactions in students (Horwitz et al. , 1986) p.131).Teachers can use code switching, through which the students can understand the subject matter better, leading to more enjoyable and stress-free atmosphere in the classroom.

To help language learners have a feeling of success and satisfaction while using English language, language teachers have to avoid the activities that increase early frustration. Instead, they can begin with step by step instructional speaking activities, leading to more relaxing and enjoyable atmosphere in the classroom. In addition, by providing the students' with appropriate schemata, the students feel more relaxed and self-confident. Finally, language teachers need some special in-service training courses on general psychology, including language anxiety in order to deal with the students' feeling of stress and anxiety in their classes. Effective teacher-training courses can help language teachers learn the students' potential sources of negative language-learning anxiety and the effective ways to cope with them.

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