

Exploring the Impact of Language Anxiety on English Language Proficiency Among Moroccan EFL Students

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ABSTRACT: This study aimed at exploring the impact of foreign language anxiety on language proficiency among Moroccan EFL students. The study focused on identifying the underlying causes of foreign language anxiety among EFL learners, understanding its impacts on language proficiency, and exploring potential coping strategies that students could make use of to reduce their anxiety levels. In this quantitative study, a total of 63 participants (43 males and 20 females) took part in this study by responding to the questionnaire used. The findings showed that the fear of making mistakes, fear of negative feedback or evaluation, and lack of confidence while speaking English were the primary causes of language anxiety among Moroccan EFL students. The study also found that language anxiety significantly hindered participants' speaking fluency, while reading and writing skills were less affected. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that language anxiety negatively affects academic performance and motivation to learn English. To manage their anxiety, participants reported using various strategies, such as relaxation techniques and positive thinking. The study highlights the importance of managing language anxiety in educational settings and offers practical implications for instructors to create supportive learning environments that can reduce students' anxiety levels and facilitate language learning.

KEYWORDS: anxiety, language anxiety, EFL learners, FLA, FLCAS, AFLAQ

I. INTRODUCTION

Having a good command of the English language is an essential skill for success in today's globalized world. Numerous countries, including Morocco, where English is not the dominant language have come to acknowledge its role as a lingua franca for international communication. Moreover, English's economic and social advantages lead countries to emphasize English language education. By learning English, students can gain access to several resources that are exclusively available in English, like academic libraries, podcasts, blogs, and research findings. Being fluent in English gives students the ability to pursue their goals with more confidence and success, which can unlock a world of personal and professional opportunities. However, learning a new language is not always an easy task. EFL learners often experience a range of emotions, including language anxiety, which can negatively impact their language learning and academic performance.

Language anxiety refers to the psychological and emotional stress that learners experience when using a second language. Thus, having language anxiety can negatively affect students' language performance. However, despite the growing body of research on language anxiety in EFL contexts, most studies have focused on Western countries, and there is a need for more research on language anxiety in non-Western countries such as Morocco. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of language anxiety on English language proficiency among Moroccan EFL students. In order to better understand this phenomenon, this paper seeks to determine the impact of language anxiety on academic performance, identify the main sources of language anxiety, explore the impact of cultural factors on language anxiety, and compare the levels of language anxiety between male and female learners to determine if there is a significant difference between the two groups.

This study has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it adds to the existing body of knowledge on language anxiety by investigating its impact on English language proficiency among Moroccan EFL students. This study provides valuable insights into language anxiety in non-Western settings by investigating Morocco's unique cultural and educational context. Practically, the study's findings will inform educators, policymakers, and language instructors about challenges that Moroccan EFL students encounter due to language anxiety. This knowledge can be utilized to develop teaching strategies and support systems for Moroccan EFL students that effectively address language anxiety and create a supportive learning environment.

The study is organized into several sections to ensure a coherent and accurate investigation of the research topic. The sections that follow the introduction contain a literature review, research methodology, data analysis, and discussion of the

Exploring the Impact of Language Anxiety on English Language Proficiency Among Moroccan EFL Students

findings. Each section is intended to add to a deeper understanding of the impact of language anxiety on English language proficiency among Moroccan EFL students, ending in a strong and well-informed conclusion that contains implications, and recommendations for future research.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Language anxiety is quite common among language learners, and it plays a significant role in language learning. It is defined as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). In other words, language anxiety is any feeling of fear and worry when learning or using a second language. Such emotions usually happen when learners encounter unfamiliar vocabulary, sounds, or grammatical rules. Anxiety comes into play in many different situations for language learners, and some situations may involve multiple types of anxiety.

Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three distinct types of anxieties that contribute to language anxiety, including communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. First, communication apprehension includes both production apprehension, which is associated with nervousness about speaking and expressing oneself in front of others, and reception apprehension, which relates to anxiety when receiving and orally responding to spoken messages. Second, test anxiety is caused by the fear of underperforming or failing in language-related tests. Finally, the fear of negative feedback or evaluation occurs when language learners view themselves as inadequate in impressing others with their language skills (Horwitz et al., 1986).

This literature review aims to investigate the underlying causes of language anxiety, examine the effects of language anxiety on language learning outcomes, and explore strategies used to reduce language anxiety among learners. This review intends to provide significant insights into this complicated phenomenon by exploring the existing knowledge and laying the foundation for implementing pedagogical strategies that improve language learning while addressing and reducing anxiety in classroom settings.

A. Theoretical Frameworks on Language Anxiety

The complex nature of language anxiety and its correlation with language proficiency has led to the creation of multiple theoretical models. This section presents a summary of some of the significant theoretical frameworks that have been created for exploring and gaining insight into this phenomenon.

1. Affective Filter Hypothesis.

The affective filter hypothesis, proposed by Krashen (1985), suggests that emotional factors can influence students' language learning. According to this theory, learners' negative emotions, such as anxiety, can create a mental barrier or “filter” that prevents learners from acquiring a new language. For example, some students may be afraid of making mistakes or failing to meet others' expectations. This fear creates pressure and anxiety, making it difficult for learners to perform well in the target language. Krashen suggests that the key to overcoming these emotional barriers and achieving greater success in language learning lies in reducing the affective filter. This can be achieved by providing a positive and supportive learning environment for learners where they feel safe to make mistakes and learn from them.

The affective filter hypothesis offers valuable insights into how emotions can impact learners' language outcomes. By acknowledging learners' emotional needs, teachers can engage students in a supportive learning environment that boosts learners' motivation and lowers their anxiety levels. This can encourage students, engage them, and support them to reach higher learning outcomes.

2. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS).

The FLCAS was developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) in their study. The scale is a widely used tool for measuring language anxiety in different language contexts. The FLCAS is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 33 items that assess anxiety in three different domains: communicative apprehension (CA), fear of negative evaluation (FNE), and test anxiety (TA). CA relates to anxiety when speaking or listening to others in the target language, while FNE refers to anxiety related to being evaluated by others based on language ability. TA is specific to test-taking situations and relates to anxiety around language exams or assessments.

The FLCAS has been used in numerous studies exploring language anxiety and its impact on language learning. For example, Park & French (2013) used FLCAS to examine gender differences in language anxiety and to check if there is a possible influence of gender and anxiety on second language performance. This study found that females reported higher levels of language anxiety than males and that females and high-anxiety students received higher grades in English language learning compared to males and low-anxiety students. Similarly, Al-Saraj (2014) examined the suitability of FLCAS for use with students of English in Saudi Arabia. The study developed a modified version of FLCAS called the Arabic Foreign Language Anxiety Questionnaire (AFLAQ) to identify and understand specifically what female Arab students experience when learning English in Saudi Arabia. The AFLAQ emphasizes concerns about self-presentation and embarrassment, which are important factors in Saudi Arabian culture. The study highlights the importance of considering cultural factors when developing assessments of foreign

Exploring the Impact of Language Anxiety on English Language Proficiency Among Moroccan EFL Students

language anxiety (FLA) and provides insights for a better understanding of FLA in Arab students studying English in Saudi Arabia (Al-Saraj, 2014).

B. Causes of Foreign Language Anxiety

After a close review of the literature on anxiety in language learning, at least three potential sources of language anxiety can be identified. These sources can be attributed to various factors, including the individual (learner), classroom factors, as well as cultural influences. Comprehending these factors is important for understanding the nature of language anxiety and how it affects language learners. Examining the interplay of these sources allows educators and researchers to develop effective strategies for reducing the negative effects of language anxiety and creating supportive learning environments.

1. Individual Factors.

Individual factors include personality qualities, prior language learning experiences, aptitude for language acquisition, and learning preferences that may be associated with language anxiety. Multiple research studies have identified certain individual characteristics that might increase the chances of experiencing language anxiety. Woodrow (2006) investigated the sources of anxiety associated with speaking English as a second language among Australian students. A total of 275 individuals took part in this study, who were in the final stages of their English language studies before entering university courses. The findings show that communicating with native speakers was the most common source of anxiety. Additionally, incorrect or biased beliefs held by students can lead to feelings of frustration and disappointment, which are major contributors to language anxiety. One such misconception is that learners must produce only flawless language without making any mistakes. A study conducted by Horwitz (2000, as cited in Fattahi Marnani & Cuocci, 2022) revealed that students were highly anxious regarding the accuracy of their sentences produced in the target language.

Sadighi and Dastpak (2017) investigated the sources of foreign language anxiety among Iranian EFL learners. The study involved 154 participants who completed an FLA questionnaire based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986). According to their study findings, the main causes contributing to student anxiety were "fear of making mistakes," "fear of negative evaluation," and "lack of vocabulary knowledge." These findings shed light on the specific problems and challenges that EFL learners encounter, as well as valuable insights into the factors that contribute to foreign language anxiety. Furthermore, gender is another individual characteristic that can influence language anxiety. In a study conducted by Hwa and Jaya (2014), the effect of gender on English-speaking anxiety among Malaysian ESL university learners was examined. FLCAS was used to collect data from 237 individuals at Tunku Abdul Rahman University. The findings showed that female students experienced higher levels of English-speaking anxiety compared to their male pairs, revealing that gender differences can influence individuals' anxiety levels in language learning settings.

The level of language anxiety experienced by learners may be greatly impacted by their own assessment of their language skills and personal beliefs about their competency. Price (1991, as cited in Young, 1991) conducted a study where he found that many individuals who were learning a new language believed that their linguistic skills were inferior to their peers. This led to a sense of inadequacy and a perception that they were being judged unfavorably by others. Additionally, Hembree (1988, as cited in Young, 1991) investigated the relationship between ability and anxiety and concluded that students with higher ability levels in a foreign or second language were more likely to experience lower levels of test anxiety. These findings indicate that students' perceptions of themselves and their language abilities have a central role in the emergence of language anxiety. Such beliefs can include a sense of disappointment in not achieving desired competence level despite efforts and/or the perception that others have stronger language abilities. Understanding these individual factors can contribute to forming a better understanding of the nature of language anxiety and guide the development of tailored strategies to reduce its impact on language learners.

2. Classroom Factors.

The classroom environment, shaped by teachers and instructional practices, plays a significant role in the emergence of language anxiety. Teachers, as central figures in the classroom, have a significant impact on shaping this environment and impacting students' language learning experiences. The teaching techniques used by teachers can either build a helpful and friendly environment or contribute to the development of a stressful and anxiety-inducing setting. Previous studies have shown that the methods employed by teachers in providing feedback and addressing students' errors can be a source of anxiety (Kruk, 2018, as cited in Fattahi Marnani & Cuocci, 2022). Additionally, Young (1991) demonstrated in his study that teachers' attitudes serve as indicators of FLA, highlighting instructors' mindsets in influencing students' anxiety experiences. For example, the harsh way students' errors are corrected by teachers is widely highlighted as a factor that might cause anxiety in the classroom setting. Furthermore, learners consistently show concern about responding wrongly and making mistakes in front of their classmates (Young, 1991).

Hsu (2010) conducted a study investigating whether teachers' nonverbal immediacy behaviors affected the motivation of their students to learn English. A sample of 303 individuals from a technology institution in central Taiwan participated in the study. The findings of this study showed a significant and positive relationship between students' motivation to learn English and teachers' nonverbal immediacy behaviors. These results suggest that the nonverbal communication behaviors displayed by

Exploring the Impact of Language Anxiety on English Language Proficiency Among Moroccan EFL Students

teachers, such as gestures, facial expressions, and body language, play a crucial role in fostering students' motivation in the English language classroom. The study by Hsu (2010) offers valuable insights into the significance of teachers' nonverbal communication in motivating language learners and lowering their language anxiety.

3. *Cultural Factors.*

Cultural factors have a major effect on language anxiety among learners. Individuals' experiences and emotions in the language classroom can be shaped by cultural norms, expectations, and perceptions of language learning. Cultural stereotypes and biases are one example of such cultural factors. Learners from cultures where linguistic proficiency is highly valued may feel extra pressure to perform well in the target language. This pressure can lead to anxiety since students are afraid of making mistakes or being criticized by others. Also, cultural beliefs about learning languages, such as the necessity of fluency or speaking like a native, can raise learners' anxiety. Additionally, Language anxiety can be influenced by language learners' cultural backgrounds as well as their attitudes toward risk-taking and uncertainty. In some cultures, making errors or speaking poorly may be viewed as losing face or indicating a lack of competence. Learners from such societies might become more anxious as they seek to satisfy cultural expectations of language proficiency.

Expectations from parents have been found as an important cause of language anxiety. A study conducted by Liao (1999, as cited in Zhang & Zhong, 2012) explored the experience of Taiwanese junior high school students. The study found that students experienced anxiety due to their parents' high expectations of their English language acquisition. According to the findings, students suffered from anxiety as a result of parental pressure to excel in English language courses, similar to other high-achieving students. It is important to acknowledge the impact of parental expectations on language anxiety because it emphasizes the significance of external factors in forming learners' emotional experiences. Understanding the impact of parental pressure can assist educators as well as parents to create a supportive learning environment that supports suitable language development and decreases students' anxiety.

4. *Effects of Foreign Language Anxiety.*

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been identified in previous research to have a negative impact on foreign language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu, 2012). FLA can negatively affect numerous aspects of language learning, including language competency, communication skills, motivation, and overall learning outcomes. MacIntyre (2017, as cited in Fattahi Marnani & Cuocci, 2022) classified the effects of FLA into three categories: academic, cognitive, and social effects. The academic impact includes having lower grades when learning a second language, studying more than necessary yet not achieving the expected grades, and experiencing overall challenges in academic performance. Reduced performance in tasks requiring cognitive effort is one of the cognitive consequences. FLA can cause difficulties with several stages of learning (Krashen, 1985), beginning with the initial input stage, when it acts as a barrier to the smooth flow of information into the cognitive processing system. Moreover, the occurrence of FLA in the output stage might hinder effective communication by affecting the retrieval of information that is stored in long-term and short-term memory. On a social level, FLA can lead to decreased linguistic confidence, leading to higher levels of stress while interacting in settings where the target language is dominating. These negative effects highlight the importance of understanding FLA in order to ensure successful language learning and improve learners' overall language proficiency.

Azarfam and Baki (2012) conducted a study investigating how language anxiety affects the speaking skills of Iranian EFL students in a Malaysian educational setting. The findings show a significant correlation between language anxiety and the level of proficiency in oral performance. Increased anxiety levels negatively affected the participants' speaking skills, leading to a decrease in the overall quality of their oral output. In a separate study by Zhang (2011) on ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English majors, it was found that the participants experienced a high level of anxiety when it came to writing in English. Additionally, Huang (2012) examined the correlation between FLA and English reading anxiety among Chinese students. The study showed that Chinese students often encountered reading anxiety and revealed a significant negative relationship between FLA and English reading anxiety. Overall, these research findings highlight the negative effects of language anxiety on various language skills and the importance of addressing and managing anxiety to facilitate more effective language learning experiences.

5. *Strategies Used to Reduce Foreign Language Anxiety.*

A study conducted by Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) investigated the strategies used by foreign language learners to cope with their language anxiety. The survey used in this study included 209 individuals (93 females and 116 males) who were English language learners at two universities in central Japan. An open-ended questionnaire was distributed to explore their techniques for controlling language anxiety, and respondents were asked to clarify the specific strategies they used. The findings suggested 70 basic tactics for coping with language anxiety. These strategies were then divided into five major categories: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation. The category of preparation included learners' active efforts to improve their learning skills and deal with situations that cause anxiety. Relaxation strategies aimed to reduce anxiety symptoms, whereas positive thinking involved concentrating on positive thoughts to alleviate anxious feelings. Peer-seeking strategies emphasized the necessity of connecting with other students who were experiencing similar anxieties in language classes. On the

Exploring the Impact of Language Anxiety on English Language Proficiency Among Moroccan EFL Students

other hand, the resignation category shed light on occurrences where learners tended to accept their anxiety without effectively looking for a resolution.

Pappamihel (2002) conducted a study to better understand the experiences of language anxiety among students enrolled in ESL programs in the United States. The study's sample included 178 Mexican immigrant students, with a specific emphasis on the strategies used by these students to manage their language anxiety in the context of an ESL classroom. Notably, the study found that avoidance was the most commonly used approach by students for minimizing their language anxiety. Avoidance, as frequently mentioned by participants, involved passive behavior during class sessions in which they avoided engaging in spoken conversations. These research findings emphasize the significance of avoidance as a coping mechanism used by students to deal with their language anxiety.

For effective language learning, teachers must be recognized for their role in minimizing student language anxiety (Young, 1991; Salehi & Marefat, 2014). Instructors can help students to overcome their anxieties and embrace the language-learning journey by creating an environment that fosters genuine interest and motivation. Recognizing the influence of anxiety on language learning, educators can have an important role in developing helpful strategies and creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom. Teachers have the ability to reduce language anxiety and prepare the path for students to succeed in their language learning through their advice, encouragement, and empathy.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research methodology section includes a brief overview of the study's research objectives, research questions, research design, population, data collection instruments and procedures, and data analysis procedures. It outlines the approach that is adopted to meet the research questions and objectives.

A. Research Objectives

This study aims to reach three main research objectives. First, it aims to explore the main sources of foreign language among Moroccan EFL students. Second, it seeks to uncover the ways in which foreign language anxiety affects the development of English language skills among Moroccan EFL students. Finally, it addresses investigating the strategies that can be used to minimise language anxiety among EFL learners in Morocco.

B. Research Questions

To guide the study, control its scope, and meet its main objectives, three main research questions were addressed:

- Question 1: What are the main sources of foreign language anxiety among Moroccan EFL students?
- Question 2: How does foreign language anxiety impact the development of different language skills among Moroccan EFL students?
- Question 3: What are the strategies that can be used to reduce language anxiety among EFL learners?

C. Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between language anxiety and academic performance among Moroccan English as a Foreign Language learners. This research design was chosen due to its effectiveness in gathering numerical data that can be examined statistically. By employing a quantitative approach, this study seeks to offer a systematic and unbiased analysis of the relationship between language anxiety and academic performance, thereby providing valuable insights into this area of investigation.

D. Participants

A total of 63 participants took part in this study by responding to the questionnaire used. To guarantee confidentiality, responses were collected anonymously. The sample encompassed a diverse range of individuals, primarily consisting of college/university students (88.9%). The Participants represented a wide range of ages, with the majority (84.1%) falling between 19 and 25 years old. Regarding gender distribution, the sample included 43 males and 20 females. Additionally, when asked about their primary and secondary education, 42 participants attended public schools, 5 attended private schools, and 16 attended both types of schools. This diverse range of participants in terms of their age, educational background, and current level of education contributes to the richness and depth of the study sample.

E. Instruments

The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire that was designed and spread via Google Forms. Demographic information such as age, gender, and education levels were collected from participants through the questionnaire. It also contained a series of questions meant to assess the participants' language anxiety levels, coping techniques for reducing language anxiety, and what they believed were the reasons for it. To reach a wider audience, the survey was distributed across numerous platforms including WhatsApp and Facebook. Participants were given a link to the questionnaire and asked to access and complete it. They were given enough time to respond carefully and precisely to the questions.

Exploring the Impact of Language Anxiety on English Language Proficiency Among Moroccan EFL Students

F. Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis for this study was performed using Google Sheets, a publicly available spreadsheet program that provides powerful analytical capabilities. Data collected from questionnaire responses were imported into Google Spreadsheets for further investigation and interpretation. This survey type is a powerful research tool that allows researchers to collect data and apply descriptive statistical analyses.

To provide a clear and concise overview of the collected data, descriptive statistics were employed. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to summarize the participants' demographics and responses, offering a comprehensive snapshot of the study sample. These summarized findings were then presented in the form of visually appealing graphs, allowing for a more accessible and intuitive interpretation of the data.

Overall, the utilization of Google Sheets as a data analysis tool and the application of descriptive statistics and graphical representations have enhanced the ability to draw meaningful conclusions from the collected data. This analysis approach contributes to the validity and reliability of the study findings, strengthening the overall research outcomes.

IV. RESULTS

The following section presents the results of the study, organized according to the three research questions outlined in the study. The aim of this study is to explore the various dimensions of language anxiety in Moroccan EFL students. It seeks to uncover the primary factors contributing to language anxiety, its effects on different language competencies, and possible methods to overcome it. The information presented in this section offers valuable insights regarding the experiences and perceptions of the participants, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of the implications of language anxiety for English language learning.

A. Sources of Language Anxiety Among Moroccan EFL Students: Exploring the Main Causes

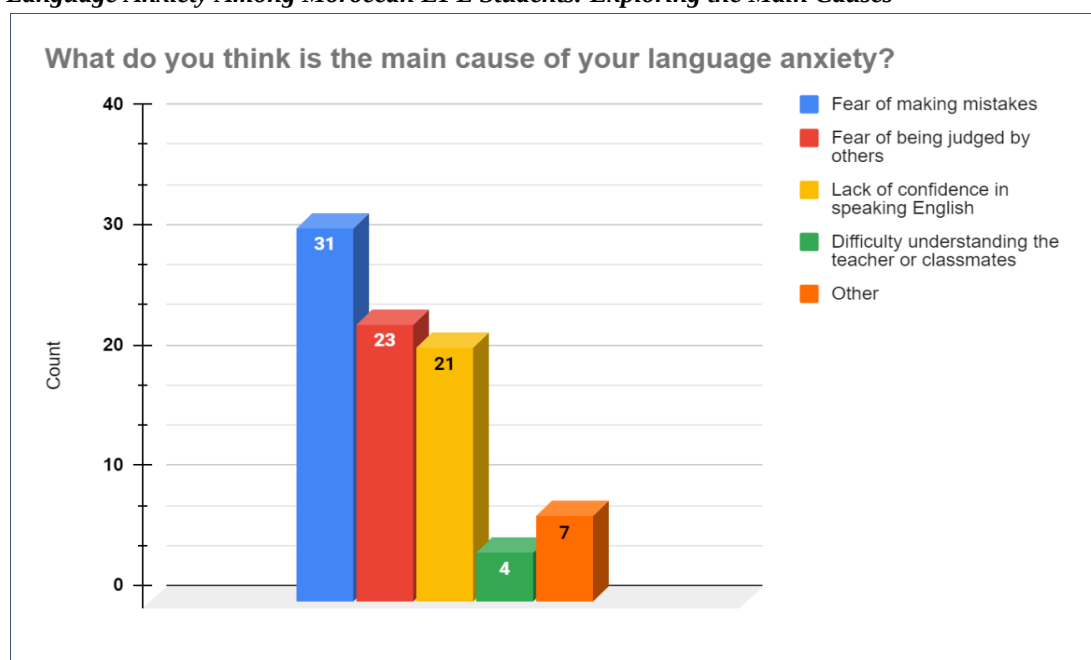


Figure 1: Causes of Language Anxiety Among EFL Learners

The question "What do you think is the main cause of your language anxiety?" was used to investigate the main causes of language anxiety among Moroccan EFL students. The findings from Figure 1 highlighted numerous key factors that contributed to language anxiety within the participants. The primary source of language anxiety was identified as "fear of making mistakes" by 31 of the respondents. Additionally, 23 participants cited "fear of being judged by others" as a significant contributing factor, while 21 participants cited "lack of confidence in speaking English." Only 4 participants cited "difficulty understanding the teacher or classmates" as a source of anxiety. Furthermore, seven participants provided other responses, such as difficulties in writing, fear of people's responses, lack of practice, difficulty in code-switching between the Moroccan dialect and English, and social anxiety.

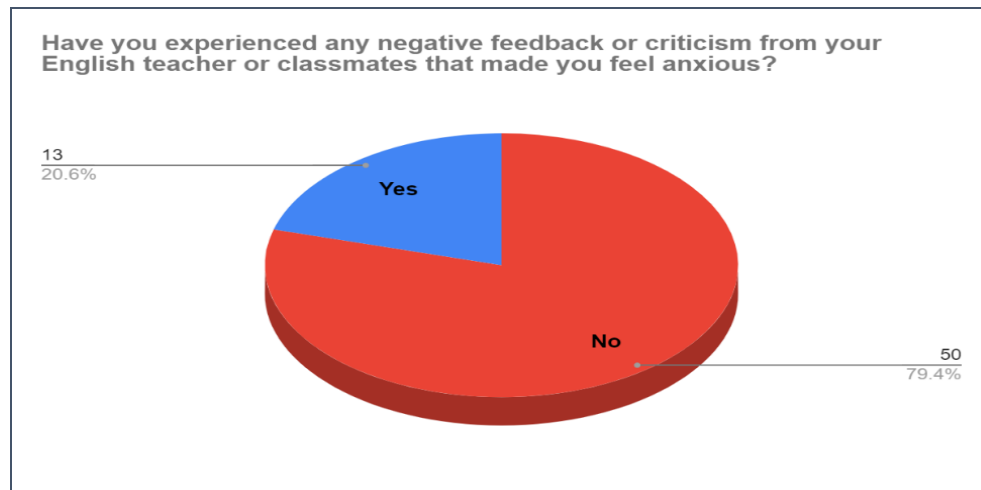


Figure 1: Impact of Negative Feedback on Language Anxiety Levels

Figure 2 presents the participants' responses to the question "Have you experienced any negative feedback or criticism from your English teacher or classmates that made you feel anxious?". Based on the data, it was found that 20.6% (13 individuals) of the total participants (n=63) reported feeling anxious due to negative feedback or criticism from their English teacher or classmates. Conversely, the majority of the participants (50 individuals, 79.4%) indicated that they had not encountered such experiences.

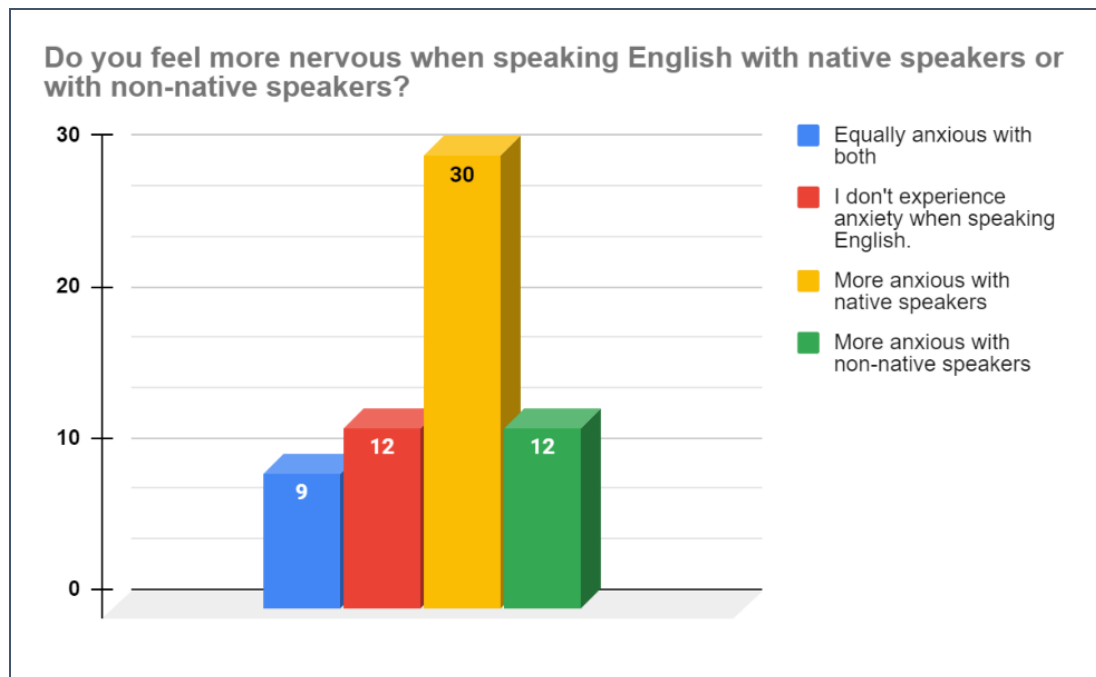


Figure 2: Nervousness in English Conversations (Native vs. Non-Native Speakers)

Figure 3 displays the responses to the question "Do you feel more nervous when speaking English with native speakers or non-native speakers?". The data provides a picture of the participants' anxiety levels in relation to the linguistic backgrounds of their conversation partners. Among the 63 respondents, 30 (47.6%) reported feeling more nervous (anxious) when speaking English with native speakers. On the other hand, 12 participants (19%) reported feeling more anxious when interacting with non-native speakers. Furthermore, 9 participants (14.3%) reported feeling equally anxious when interacting with both native and non-native speakers. However, 12 participants (19%) reported not feeling anxious when speaking English regardless of the speaker's background.

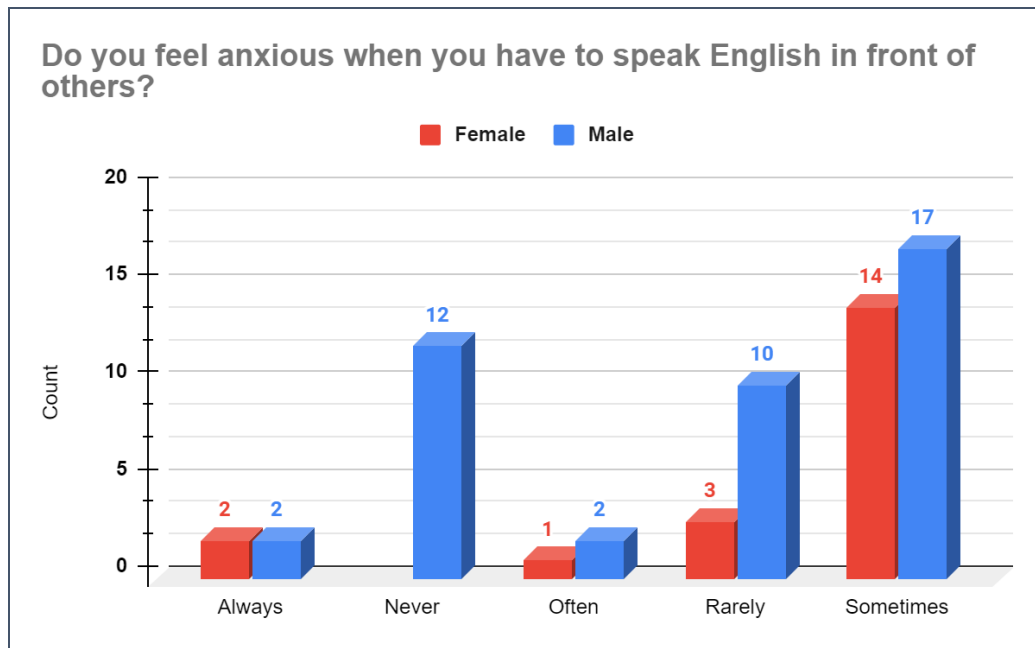


Figure 3: Anxiety Levels in English-Speaking Situations: Comparison by Gender

The graph shown in Figure 4 illustrates the responses of individuals when asked if they experience anxiousness while conversing in English in front of others. The distribution of responses among male and female participants is displayed in this graph. The participants were given five options to choose from. Among the male participants, two individuals reported feeling anxious "Always," two individuals reported feeling anxious "Often," 17 individuals reported feeling anxious "Sometimes," 10 individuals reported feeling anxious "Rarely," and 12 individuals reported never feeling anxious when speaking English in front of others. On the other hand, among the female participants, two individuals reported feeling anxious "Always," one individual reported feeling anxious "Often," 14 individuals reported feeling anxious "Sometimes," three individuals reported feeling anxious "Rarely," and none of the female participants reported never feeling anxious when speaking English in front of others.

B. Exploring the Influence of Language Anxiety on Different Language Skills Among EFL Learners

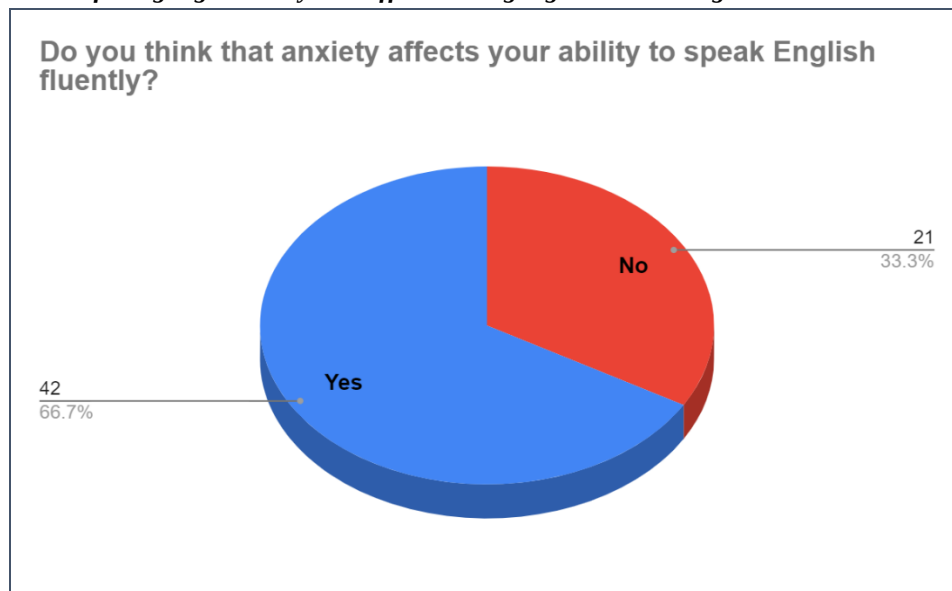


Figure 4: Influence of Anxiety on English Speaking Fluency

The data in Figure 5 sheds light on how participants perceive the impact of anxiety on their English-speaking fluency. In a group of 63 participants, it was found that 42 individuals (66. 7%) stated that their ability to speak English fluently is impacted by anxiety. However, a total of 21 individuals (equivalent to 33. 3%) expressed that their English-speaking fluency remains unaffected by anxiety.

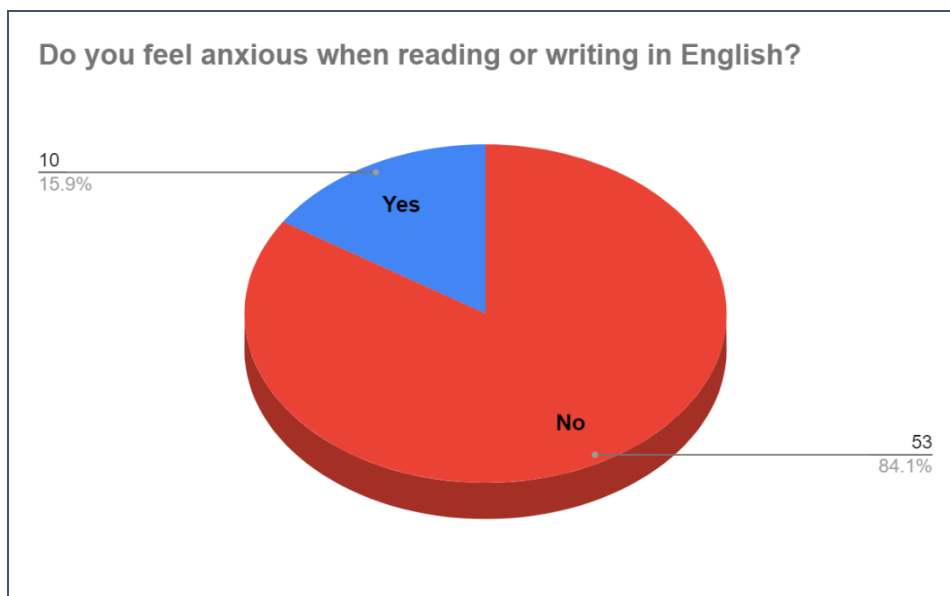


Figure 5: Anxiety Impact on Reading and Writing in English

Figure 6 displays the outcomes of the question "Do you feel anxious when reading or writing in English?". The data provides insight into the participants' feelings of anxiousness when engaging in English reading and writing activities. Out of 63 participants, a total of 10 people (15. 9%) stated that they experienced anxiety while reading or writing in English. In contrast, most of the respondents, precisely 53 participants (84. 1%), reported no feelings of anxiety when reading or writing in English.

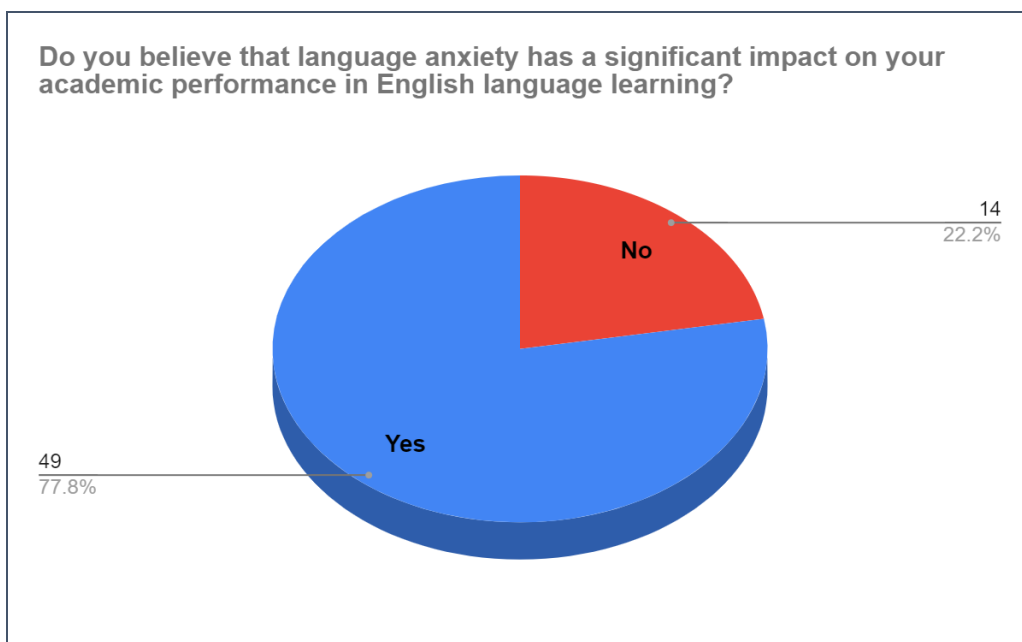


Figure 6: Influence of Language Anxiety on Academic Performance

Figure 7 displays the answers to the question "Do you believe that language anxiety has a significant impact on your academic performance in English language learning?". The statistics offer an understanding of how the respondents perceive the impact of language anxiety on their academic performance. Out of the 63 participants, 49 individuals (77.8%) believed that language anxiety greatly affects how well they perform academically in their English language learning. On the other hand, a total of 14 individuals (22.2%) stated that they do not believe language anxiety has any significant effect on their academic performance.

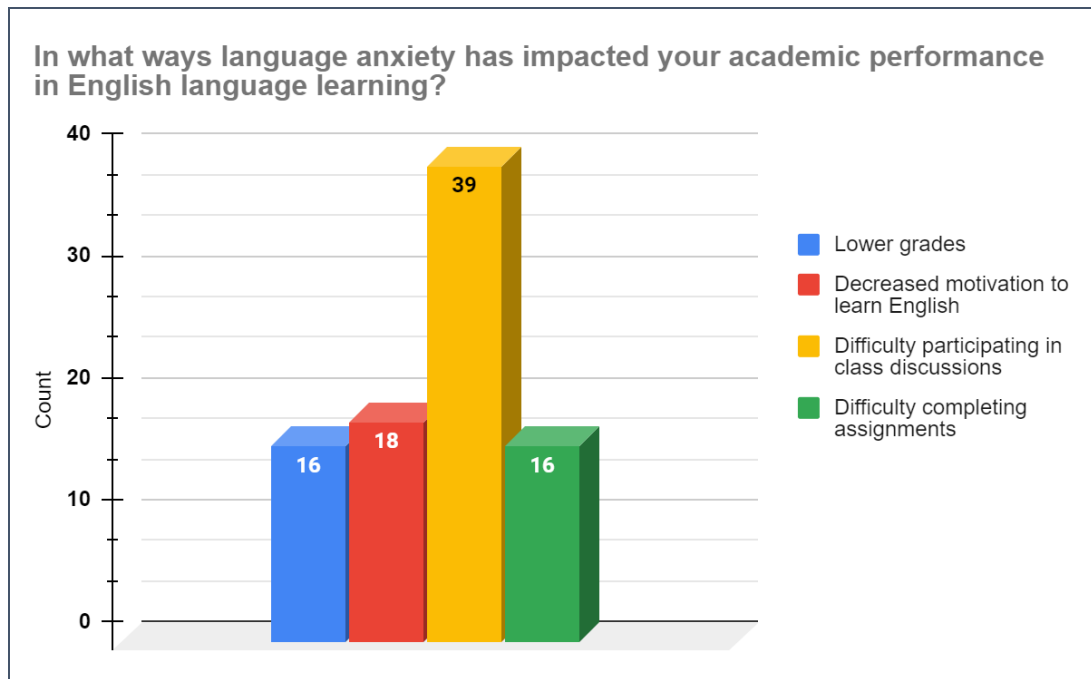


Figure 7: Perception of Language Anxiety's Impact on Different Aspects of Academic Performance

The data in Figure 8 illustrates how language anxiety has affected academic performance in English language learning, as reported by the participants in the study. The participants were presented with various choices to express their perceptions regarding the influence of language anxiety on their educational performance. The majority of participants (39) stated that language anxiety made it difficult for them to participate in class discussions. Furthermore, 18 individuals reported that language anxiety decreased their motivation to learn English. 16 individuals experienced difficulty completing assignments due to language anxiety. Finally, 16 individuals indicated that language anxiety has resulted in lower grades in their English language learning. It is worth noting that some participants picked more than one option, meaning that language anxiety has simultaneously affected them in multiple ways.

C. Strategies Used to Reduce Language Anxiety: Insights from Moroccan EFL Students

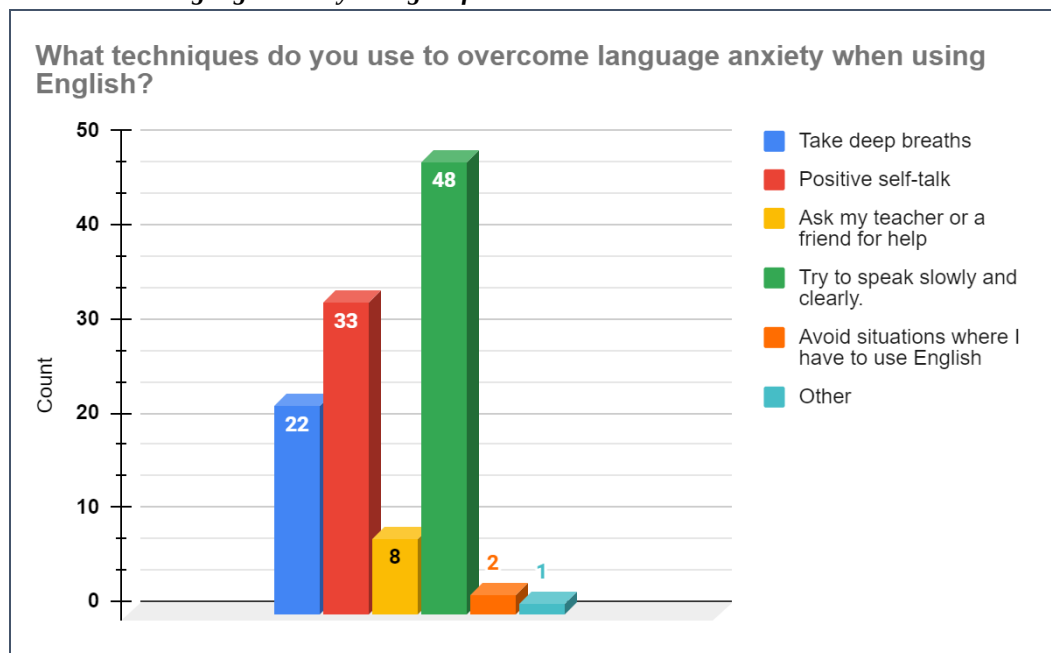


Figure 8: Techniques Used to Overcome Language Anxiety

The participants in Figure 9 were questioned about the techniques they use to cope with language anxiety when using English. According to the findings, 22 participants used the technique of taking deep breaths, 33 participants acknowledged the effectiveness of positive self-talk, 8 participants mentioned seeking help from a teacher or a friend, and 48 individuals

Exploring the Impact of Language Anxiety on English Language Proficiency Among Moroccan EFL Students

emphasized the strategy of speaking slowly and clearly. Furthermore, 2 respondents stated that they prefer to avoid situations where they have to use English, while a single participant submitted a special comment, stating the technique of acting tough and pretending self-confidence until it becomes genuine. It should be noted that some participants in Figure 14 selected multiple options, showing that people employ a combination of techniques to overcome language anxiety when using English.

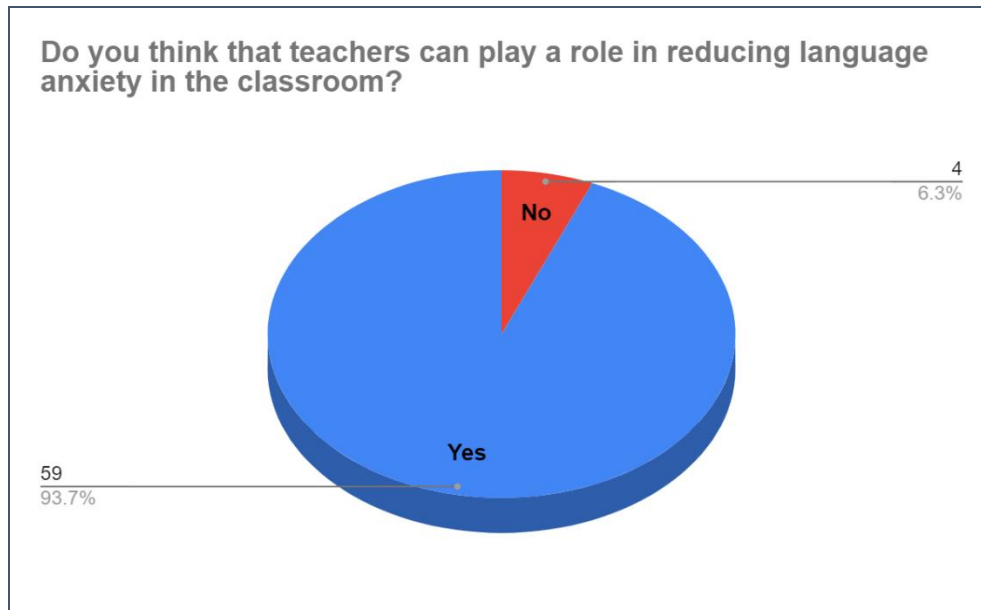


Figure 9: Perception of Teachers' Role in Reducing Language Anxiety

Figure 10 demonstrates a survey's results on teachers' impact in reducing language anxiety in the classroom. Among the 63 participants, an overwhelming majority of 59 participants (93.7%) responded that teachers have the potential to reduce language anxiety among students in the class. Conversely, only 4 individuals (6.3%) replied differently, indicating that they believe teachers play a limited role in lowering language anxiety.

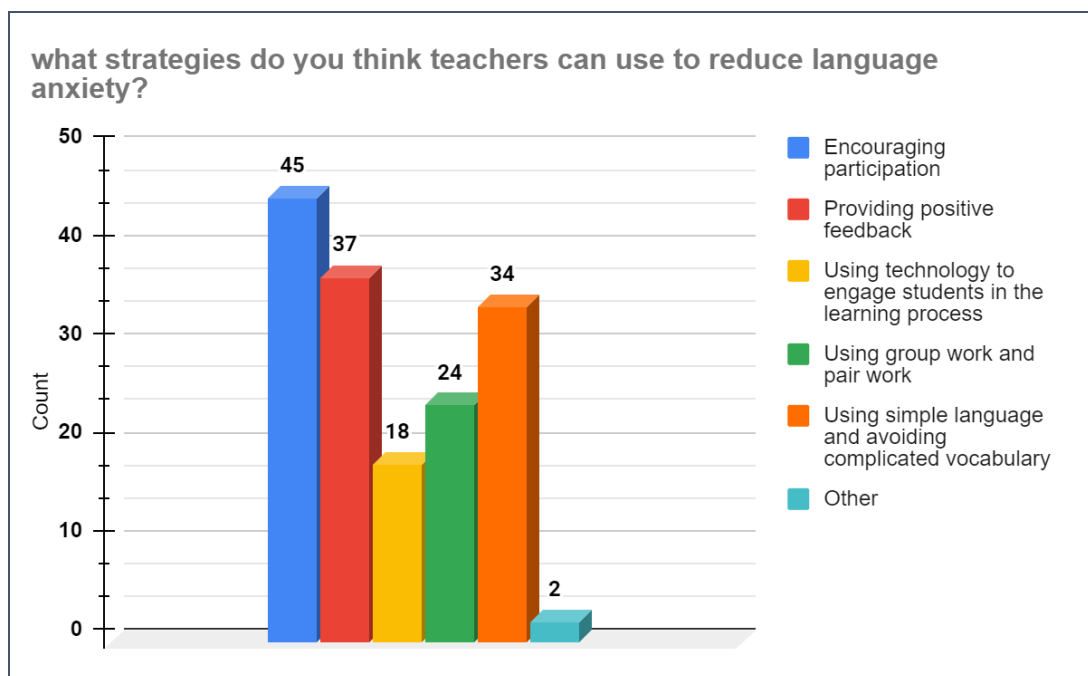


Figure 10: Perceived Strategies for Reducing Language Anxiety in EFL Classrooms

Figure 11 displays the inquiry's outcomes about effective strategies teachers can employ to reduce language anxiety. This was done to gather insights from respondents regarding their views on the most useful strategies for dealing with this issue. Multiple choices were presented to the participants (63), and the results show that 45 individuals recognized the importance of encouraging participation. Additionally, 37 individuals acknowledged the significance of providing positive feedback. The use of

Exploring the Impact of Language Anxiety on English Language Proficiency Among Moroccan EFL Students

technology was acknowledged by 18 individuals as a valuable approach to involve students in the process of learning. 24 individuals pointed out the significance of group and pair work in reducing language anxiety, while 34 emphasized the importance of using simple language and avoiding complicated vocabulary. Furthermore, two participants presented unique comments, suggesting strategies such as lightening the mood/atmosphere of the class and sharing personal anxiety experiences. It should be acknowledged that some participants opted for more than one option. It is important to note that in Figure 14, some respondents selected more than one option.

V. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to explore the characteristics of language anxiety among Moroccan EFL students, focusing on its sources, effects on language competencies, and potential strategies for overcoming it. The findings provide insight into several essential aspects of language anxiety and valuable insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions.

A. Sources of Language Anxiety Among Moroccan EFL Students

The first research question aimed to investigate the primary sources of language anxiety among Moroccan EFL students. The findings revealed that the primary source of language anxiety stemmed from a combination of factors, including the fear of making mistakes, the fear of being judged by others, and a lack of confidence in speaking English. A significant number of participants identified these elements as their main concerns. These findings are consistent with the findings of Sadighi and Dastpak's (2017) study on Iranian EFL learners, where similar causes, such as fear of making mistakes and fear of negative evaluation, contribute to language anxiety. These factors may be understood as outcomes of the participants' perception and concern regarding the evaluation and judgment of others. This aligns with earlier research emphasizing the significant role of anxiety regarding negative evaluation, which contributes to the development of language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). The participants in this study were anxious about their language skills primarily because they were concerned about the possible negative outcomes of their language performance highlighting the importance of self-evaluation and social evaluation on anxiety levels. However, only a small number of participants identified "difficulty understanding the teacher or classmates" as a source of language anxiety. This finding suggests that these participants may struggle with linguistic comprehension, particularly in terms of vocabulary knowledge. The difficulty in understanding the teacher or classmates could be attributed to a restricted range of vocabulary, which hinders their ability to grasp and comprehend spoken language. Our findings contrast those of Sadighi and Dastpak (2017), where a lack of vocabulary knowledge was identified as a primary cause of language anxiety among Iranian EFL learners.

Interestingly, when examining the data in Figure 2, It was observed that a considerable number of participants reported feeling anxious as a result of negative feedback or criticism from their English teacher or classmates, which is consistent with previous research indicating that the methods employed by teachers in providing feedback and correcting students' errors can be a source of anxiety (Kruk, 2018, as cited in Fattahi Marnani & Cuocci, 2022). However, it is worth noting that the majority of participants reported not getting any negative feedback that made them feel anxious. This finding suggests that, although they might not have encountered explicit negative criticism, their fear may have stemmed from their personal beliefs and perceptions about being negatively judged by teachers or classmates. These individual beliefs and expectations of negative evaluation from others can have a significant role in shaping individual's language anxiety (Price, 1991, as cited in Young, 1991). Even if there is no actual negative feedback, the expectation of being judged negatively can lead to anxiety and self-doubt. Thus, it is critical to recognize the characteristics of language anxiety and the impact of internal factors, such as self-perception and beliefs, in shaping individuals' anxiety levels.

The survey also uncovered that a considerable number of the respondents encountered greater levels of anxiety when speaking English with native speakers. The finding implies that language learners may experience greater anxiety when communicating with people who fluently speak the language they are trying to learn. our survey findings are in line with Woodrow's (2006) study on Australian students, where he revealed that communicating with native speakers was the most common source of anxiety. The reason behind this could possibly be linked to how the participants view themselves as having to meet certain language standards or concerns about making mistakes in front of fluent English speakers. This is in accordance with a study conducted by Horwitz (2000, as cited in Fattahi Marnani & Cuocci, 2022), which revealed that students often experience greater levels of anxiety regarding the accuracy of their sentences produced in the target language. The apprehension towards making mistakes in language and the desire to meet native speakers' expectations may contribute to heightened anxiety levels in such situations. In contrast, it is worth mentioning that some survey participants reported feeling more anxious when interacting with non-native speakers. This finding implies that language anxiety among learners may not only stem from interactions with native speakers but also from other aspects associated with communicating in English. One possible explanation for their anxiety when interacting with non-native speakers is that they believe those people to be potentially more knowledgeable or proficient in English, despite having similar language backgrounds. This phenomenon could result from a self-comparison process in which learners assess their own language skills compared to their peers. They might assume that non-native speakers should have

Exploring the Impact of Language Anxiety on English Language Proficiency Among Moroccan EFL Students

equivalent language abilities and, consequently, experience anxiety when they perceive a gap between their own proficiency and that of their conversation partners. This feeling of being outperformed or feeling inferior to speakers who share the same language background may cause increased levels of anxiety.

The findings also show that anxiety in language-speaking situations is not necessarily influenced by gender. The results depicted in Figure 4 indicate that there is no significant difference in anxiety levels between male and female participants while speaking in English in front of others. These findings diverge from those reported by Hwa and Jaya (2014) in his study on Malaysian Tertiary ESL Learners, which observed that female students experienced higher levels of English-speaking anxiety when compared to male students. The current study as well as Hwa and Jaya's (2014) study reveal different results, highlighting the complex nature of language anxiety and its relationship with gender. Although our findings did not reveal any noteworthy gender-based differences in anxiety levels, it is important to recognize the fact that personal experiences and contexts can differ. The anxiety levels among male and female language learners may vary due to diverse factors such as cultural influences, social norms, and personal beliefs concerning language abilities.

B. Foreign Language Anxiety and Its Effects on Different Language Skills

The findings presented in the results section (Figure 5) reveal that a noteworthy percentage of respondents believe that anxiety significantly hinders their ability to speak English fluently. This indicates that anxiety indeed plays a role in impeding speaking fluency. These results align with the study conducted by Azarfam and Baki (2012) which reported the existence of a significant correlation between oral anxiety and the level of oral proficiency. Various elements such as fear of making mistakes and receiving negative feedback or evaluation may play a role in causing this effect. The interference caused by anxiety can affect the flow and naturalness of their speech, leading to difficulties in expressing themselves confidently. On the other hand, the results shown in Figure 6 indicate that most participants in our study did not report feeling anxious when engaging in English reading and writing activities. This contrasts with Zhang's (2011) study on ESL writing anxiety among Chinese English students, where participants experienced high anxiety levels when they had to write in English. In addition, a study by Huang (2012) highlighted the presence of reading anxiety among Chinese students, suggesting that anxiety levels may vary across different language skills.

When comparing these results, it is apparent that speaking fluency is more significantly influenced by anxiety in comparison to reading and writing skills. The need for immediate responses, the fear associated with making errors in front of others, and the interactive nature of spoken communication may all contribute to the higher levels of anxiety observed in speaking activities. In contrast, reading and writing activities may be perceived as more controlled and less socially evaluative, leading to lower anxiety levels. Another potential factor contributing to the high impact of anxiety on speaking fluency compared to reading and writing skills could be the limited availability of opportunities for practicing spoken English in Morocco. The increased anxiety observed among participants during speaking tasks may stem from a lack of consistent practice and exposure to real-life conversational situations. Learners who have limited access to English-speaking environments, such as English-speaking communities or interactions with native English speakers, may encounter difficulties in engaging in authentic conversational interactions. As a result, learners may experience increased anxiety and reduced confidence upon encountering speaking tasks, since they have had limited opportunities to enhance and develop their speaking abilities through practice.

The findings show that a large majority of individuals believe that their academic performance in learning English is greatly affected by language anxiety (See Figure 7). These results suggest a strong connection between foreign language anxiety and learners' academic performance. The presence of anxiety among students has the potential to hinder their competence to effectively showcase their knowledge and skills during tests and classroom activities. In line with these findings, Figure 8 sheds further light on the specific aspects of academic performance that are impacted by language anxiety. The participants highlighted various significant areas where language anxiety has impacted their educational experiences. A noteworthy discovery indicates that individuals experiencing language apprehension encountered challenges in actively participating in classroom discussions, which hindered their ability to effectively engage in oral communication tasks and contribute to classroom interactions. Limited engagement in class discussions can restrict language practice opportunities, ultimately hindering speaking skills development. Additionally, participants reported that language anxiety decreases their motivation to learn English, meaning that anxiety functions as a demotivating element that could possibly lead to reduced enthusiasm and effort in language learning tasks. These findings support the classification of MacIntyre (2017, as cited in Fattahi Marnani & Cuocci, 2022) and highlight the negative impact of language anxiety on learners' academic performance. It is worth noting that the impact of language anxiety on academic performances, such as the difficulty in participating in class discussions and decreased motivation to learn, may be influenced by various classroom factors, including the personalities of teachers. Supporting this notion, a study conducted by Hsu (2010) demonstrated a positive and significant correlation between the nonverbal immediacy behaviors of teachers and a student's motivation to learn English. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that students who experience language anxiety in class discussions might be influenced by the nonverbal behaviors of teachers, which could affect their motivation and participation in the learning process.

Exploring the Impact of Language Anxiety on English Language Proficiency Among Moroccan EFL Students

Furthermore, many participants highlighted that language anxiety presents difficulties in completing assignments and makes them get lower grades. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon, such as English proficiency level and self-perception of language abilities. It is possible that students who believe they have poor English language skills might encounter heightened anxiety while encountering language learning assignments. This anxiety can negatively affect their academic performance by hindering their ability to demonstrate their knowledge and skills effectively. Comparatively, Hembree's (1988, as cited in Young, 1991) study on the relationship between ability and anxiety supports this idea. This study's findings suggest that individuals with advanced skills in a foreign or second language tend to encounter lower levels of test anxiety. It can be inferred that students with greater proficiency in the language tend to have a stronger sense of self-assurance and reduced nervousness during language learning activities and assessments, ultimately contributing to improved academic performance.

C. Strategies Used to Cope with Language Anxiety

According to the findings, learners commonly employ three main strategies to cope with language anxiety. These strategies can be divided into two categories based on their nature: relaxation and positive thinking. Relaxation techniques, such as taking deep breaths and speaking slowly, seeking to promote a sense of calmness and reduce anxiety levels. Learners can regain control and confidence in using English by intentionally slowing down their speech and focusing on clear articulation. On the other hand, positive thinking strategies focus on developing a positive mindset and strengthening self-confidence. Learners, through the use of positive affirmations, can confront negative thoughts and replace them with positive and empowering statements. These strategies are consistent with the findings of Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004), who discovered that English learners frequently employed relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, and positive thinking strategies, such as imagining oneself performing well, as effective means to manage FLA. However, it is worth noting that a lower percentage of participants chose the techniques of seeking support from a teacher or a friend and avoiding situations where English usage is essential, indicating that they are not commonly employed. Yet, various studies have shown different results. For example, Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) reported peer seeking and resignation as common strategies English learners adopt to manage language anxiety. Similarly, Pappamihel (2002) found that avoidance is the most commonly used method by students to reduce their language anxiety. These differences highlight the individuality and diversity of learners' coping strategies, underlining that the effectiveness and preference of coping mechanisms may vary among individuals.

As reported in the findings, most participants believe that teachers can reduce students' language anxiety in the classroom. This aligns with previous research highlighting the significant role of teachers in managing language anxiety (Young, 1991; Salehi & Marefat, 2014). However, certain teaching methods, particularly those involving feedback and error correction, have been identified as possible sources of anxiety for students (Kruk, 2018, as cited in Fattahi Marnani & Cuocci, 2022). Therefore, while teachers can help reduce language anxiety, it is crucial for them to integrate effective strategies and methods into their instructional practices to create a supportive and anxiety-free learning environment. The findings of the current study indicate several effective strategies that should be used by teachers to reduce language anxiety (Figure 11). Incorporating these strategies into classroom instruction can empower students, establish a good language learning environment, and ultimately contribute to enhanced language acquisition and academic performance.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study aimed at investigating the characteristics of language anxiety among Moroccan EFL students, as well as its causes, effects on language competencies, and potential strategies for overcoming it. By employing a quantitative approach and the use of a predetermined questionnaire, valuable insights were gained regarding the primary sources of language anxiety. The results showed that fear of making errors, fear of negative evaluation, and lack of confidence in spoken English were the main sources among Moroccan EFL students. The findings also highlighted the subjective nature of language anxiety and its influence on various language skills, especially speaking fluency. Language anxiety was also found to have a major impact on students' academic performance and motivation to learn. In fact, addressing language anxiety is essential for creating effective language learning environments. The identification of coping strategies, such as relaxation techniques and positive thinking, gives educators and learners practical insights. Furthermore, instructors' contributions to lowering language anxiety and creating positive learning environments cannot be underestimated. Teachers can assist students to overcome language anxiety and improve their language acquisition process by integrating effective strategies and instructional practices.

A. Implications

This study's findings have significant implications for the field of language instruction and educational practices. The results offer insight into this study's specific contributions and highlight the importance of addressing language anxiety in the classroom. The identification of the main sources of language anxiety among Moroccan EFL students has practical implications for instructors and educators. Understanding the fear of making mistakes, the fear of being judged, and the lack of confidence in speaking English can help teachers create a helpful and non-judgmental learning environment. By incorporating strategies that address these sources of anxiety, such as providing constructive feedback and fostering a positive classroom environment,

Exploring the Impact of Language Anxiety on English Language Proficiency Among Moroccan EFL Students

teachers can help alleviate students' anxiety and enhance their language learning experience. Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of targeted interventions to address the influence of anxiety on various language skills. Since anxiety affects speaking fluency more than other skills, it is essential for teachers to add activities and methods that particularly target speaking anxiety. Teachers can assist students to build confidence and minimize anxiety by offering adequate opportunities for them to practice speaking in a supportive and low-stress environment. This will improve their overall language proficiency.

The correlation between language anxiety and academic performance emphasizes the significance of dealing with anxiety-related challenges in the classroom. Educators can positively affect students' academic achievement and language development by encouraging active participation in classroom discussions, establishing a motivating learning environment, and giving appropriate help to students experiencing language anxiety. Also, the coping techniques identified in this study suggest practical implications for both teachers and students. By integrating relaxation techniques and positive thinking strategies into instructional practices, teachers can provide students with effective tools to manage their anxiety. Additionally, enhancing awareness about the availability of support from teachers, friends, and peers can motivate students to seek help when needed.

B. Limitations.

This study has a number of limitations that need to be considered while interpreting its findings. First, while this study provides valuable insights into language anxiety among Moroccan EFL students, it is important to acknowledge the presence of sampling bias. The self-selection bias introduced by participants' desire for participation could lead to biased results, since those who accepted to participate may have different levels of language anxiety than those who declined. Another limitation is the reliance only on quantitative data collected through a predetermined questionnaire. Since significant contextual information, personal narratives, and personal experiences associated with language anxiety were not deeply investigated through gathering further data, mainly qualitatively, this approach minimizes the depth and richness of the findings. Incorporating qualitative methods like interviews or open-ended questions could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. Furthermore, it is important to note that the study sample included a higher proportion of male participants compared to females. The findings regarding the correlation between gender and language anxiety among the participants may have been affected by this gender imbalance. Future studies with a more balanced gender distribution would provide a more accurate representation of the relationship between gender and language anxiety in the Moroccan EFL student population.

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