Saudi EFL Students' Speaking Anxiety from the Perspective of their College Instructors

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is considered an essential literacy skill and enjoys a superior status among other language skills. Thus, this current study aims at scrutinizing Saudi EFL trainees' speaking anxiety from their college instructors' perspectives. It adheres to qualitative approach and utilizes face-to-face interviews with four language instructors. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The results showed that EFL instructors at Saudi colleges of technology are aware of their students' speaking anxiety. Thus, they reported several causes that lead to students' foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA, hereafter) such as fear of making mistakes, the limited exposure to the language, low language proficiency, and fear of receiving negative evaluation from both their instructors and peers. In addition, the results revealed that the instructors use different strategies that help alleviating their students' FLSA such as building good relationships with students, creating positive and friendly atmosphere in the classroom, increasing students' engagement in the class and correcting students' erroneous beliefs about language learning. Encouraging and motivating students to participate in oral tasks was a significant strategy stated by the instructors, which help reduce students' FLSA in the classroom. The study concludes that the type of curriculum and overcrowding classes are factors that significantly affect the instructors' awareness of their students' FLSA.

Key words: Speaking anxiety, English as a foreign language, Foreign language anxiety

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Implicit emotions, whether favorable or not, have been strongly linked to the process of second language learning. Students' anxiety is one of the unfavorable emotions which has been a subject of investigation in SLA for decades. It occurs due to frequent and intense worries and develops from imagining tacit negative emotions (Kundu & Tutoo, 2011). Spielberger (1972, p.482) defined anxiety as "an unpleasant emotional state or condition which is characterized by subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, and worry, and by activation or arousal of the autonomic nervous system." Several researchers have proposed definitions to conceptualize anxiety in a language learning context. These share some features of Spielberger's definition, including fear, nervousness, and apprehension (Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz & Young, 1991).

Types of Anxiety

In their attempt to develop an overall understanding of anxiety and its typology, Cattell and Scheier (1960) introduced the concepts of trait and state anxieties. Trait anxiety is characteristic of a person who feels anxious in many situations (MacIntyre, 1995). Students who suffer from trait anxiety are likely to be anxious most of the time, not only in the classroom. Therefore, trait anxiety is regarded as a stable personal trait. In contrast, state anxiety refers to the anxiety that a person experiences at a particular moment (e.g., giving a presentation) (He, 2018). Students with state anxiety experience it in specific situations which they perceive as threatening, regardless of whether the danger objectively exists (Barnes et al., 2002).

According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1991c), the impact of anxiety on language learning is not accurately depicted by the concepts of trait and state anxieties alone. Thus, they proposed situation-specific anxiety, which, as the name implies, is a form of state anxiety triggered by a specific situation (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991c). Over time, an empirical evidence base was developed for all these forms of anxiety.

When learners experience anxiety repeatedly in specific situations such as a language class, this might result in associating that class with anxiety (MacIntyre, 2017). Therefore, language anxiety might start as state anxiety (i.e., a feeling of worry in the language class). If the learner keeps experiencing it in the context of language learning, the learner might associate the language class with this experienced anxiety (Dewaele et al., 2017; Horwitz et al., 1986). FLA can thus be understood as one form of situation-specific anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Research Objective

The primary objective of the present study is to:

- Examine the Saudi EFL instructors' awareness of their students' FLSA.

Research Question

Based on the research objective, the following research question has been formulated:

- To what extent are Saudi EFL instructors in Saudi colleges of technology aware of their students' FLSA?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study is significant because of four reasons. First of all, although there are over 75 colleges of technology in Saudi Arabia, there is no research investigating foreign language speaking anxiety FLSA in this context. Second, investigating the factors that trigger FLSA in EFL classes at colleges of technology may offer insightful pedagogical information that educators as well as policymakers may utilize to create effective solutions for this issue. Third, examining Saudi EFL instructors' awareness and perceptions of their students' speaking anxiety is fundamental since this is considered the first step towards addressing the issue. Accordingly, the study is an investigation into FLSA from the perspectives of Saudi EFL instructors. Moreover, this study uncovers the challenges that could influence instructors' awareness from their points of view, which might help in providing different insight about FLSA. The fourth reason for the significance of this study is that most previous studies on foreign language anxiety in the context of Saudi Arabia have involved quantitative methodologies which, in turn, did not completely represent students' or instructors' perspectives of FLSA. In this study, qualitative method was used to understand students' FLSA and its causes from the perspectives of their instructors. Therefore, the use of the qualitative methodology in this study could contribute to the FLSA literature, since it did not replicate the quantitative methods used in most of the previous research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

As elements of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), Horwitz et al. (1986) introduced three related types of performance anxiety: communication apprehension (CA), test anxiety (TA), and fear of negative evaluation (FNE).

CA refers to feeling shy and anxious about communicating with others. CA can be experienced in situations such as speaking with others (oral communication anxiety), giving a presentation (stage fright), or listening to a message (receiver anxiety). In terms of foreign language learning, CA has a significant impact on a learner's success or failure. Moreover, learners are more likely to face communicative situations during learning a foreign language that provoke their anxieties, such as feeling that their oral performances are being constantly monitored by their instructors or peers

(Horwitz et al., 1986). As a result, they become nervous and unable to understand others or make themselves understood in the FL, all of which result in negative self-perceptions.

TA is defined as the anxiety caused by a fear of failure, especially prevalent in oral tests (Horwitz et al., 1986). Test anxious students may set themselves unrealistic goals and try to always perform perfectly, resulting in a high level of anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) claimed that oral tests cause both communication apprehension and test anxiety.

Horwitz et al. (1986) used an earlier definition of FNE as "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (Watson & Friend, 1969, p. 449). Many students in foreign language classrooms are concerned not just about the instructor's evaluation but also about those of their peers. Students who are worried about negative evaluation may suffer from language anxiety related to their self-perception of their speaking ability as compared to their perception of peers' speaking ability (Kitano, 2001). In terms of evaluation, both TA and FNE are similar, but FNE is broader in scope and includes any evaluative situations (e.g., a job interview) (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Horwitz (2017) has argued that her early work (Horwitz et al., 1986) was misunderstood by many researchers who thought that FLA was simply a combination of the three related performance anxieties. According to her, this list was not exhaustive and communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation are just examples of specific anxiety to help readers to understand why FLA is experienced by some people.

Anxiety and Performance

In the early work on anxiety and its effect on performance, Alpert and Haber (1960) identified two kinds: debilitating and facilitating anxiety. Debilitating anxiety refers to the sort of anxiety that affects performance negatively. In terms of language learning, according to Horwitz et al. (1986), debilitating anxiety may play a crucial role in preventing language learners from communicating effectively in their language class. Facilitating anxiety, on the other hand, improves performance. In the language learning context, Kleinmann (1977) supported the claim that facilitating anxiety has a positive impact on second language performance.

Psychologists have found an inverted U-shaped relationship between anxiety and task performance. A certain amount of anxiety is believed to improve performance and thus an optimal level of anxiety can be said to exist (Macintyre, 1995). In contrast, with too much anxiety, performance will be affected negatively. The optimal level of anxiety for task performance may be influenced by personality traits. In his study on 100 Flemish learners who learned French as an L2 and English as an L3, Dewaele (2002) found that personality variables (i.e., extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism) were significant predictors of communicative anxiety, especially in L3 English production.

In support of this finding, Horwitz (2017) criticized the notion of facilitative anxiety, pointing out that learning a language is essentially a stressor for some people. Additionally,

she claimed that the distinction between helpful and harmful anxiety is very fine and asserted that provoking more anxiety in students is a disappointing and unethical approach. If the instructor's purpose in using anxiety is to motivate the learners, more effective strategies exist to increase learners' motivation, such as helping learners to develop realistic and personal goals for language learning (Horwitz, 2017).

The relationship between anxiety and language learning, whether positive or negative, was examined more than four decades ago by Scovel (1978). In his systematic review, Scovel (1978) tried to uncover more detail on the effect of anxiety on language learning and performance, as the available literature at that time offered conflicting and inconsistent findings. Scovel (1978) proposed that these contradictory results were due to the use of different anxiety measures (e.g., for facilitating/debilitating anxiety and test anxiety). He concluded that researchers should specifically identify the type of anxiety they want to measure first and then use an appropriate means. As Horwitz (2001) later recounted, Scovel's beneficial suggestion inspired her research team, among others. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986) was one such instrument. It has proven to be a valid and reliable measurement devised to measure a situation-specific anxiety construct.

Consequences of Foreign Language Anxiety

While various researchers have slightly different emphases and classificatory schema, language anxiety has been identified to have cognitive, physical, emotional, and social manifestations. According to MacIntyre (2002), FLA has cognitive (e.g., disruption in thinking and reasoning), social (e.g., avoidance of communication with others) and personal (e.g., learners' underestimation of themselves) effects. Horwitz et al. (1986) pointed out some symptoms associated with anxiety such as dread, sweating, feeling threatened, forgetfulness, and avoidance behavior. Moreover, anxiety affects all phases of cognitive processing (i.e., input, processing, and output), which in turn influences learning a new language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b). Anxious students may react by making jokes, laughing nervously, and avoiding direct eye contact (Young, 1992). These consequences highlight how crucial it is for instructors to consider FLA and support their students in coping with and reducing their anxiety.

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA)

Speech anxiety is a common phenomenon. In terms of foreign language learning, many researchers have found that speaking in a foreign language is regarded as the most threatening of the four macro-skills for learners (Al-Saraj, 2014; Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020; Horwitz et al., 1986; Kitano, 2001; Young, 1991). Proficiency in a language requires using it in communication. Foreign language learners tend to concentrate on improving their speaking skills in order to make themselves understood, asking questions and organizing their ideas orally which lead them to build and develop their literacy in the foreign language and accomplish different tasks related to the other language macro-skills (i.e., listening, reading and writing). Consequently, facing difficulties in expressing ideas in a new language has been considered psychologically disturbing (Guiora, 1984). In this respect, speaking a foreign language is perceived as a threat to individuals' self-identity, self-concept, and ego, each of which they have shaped in their native language as reasonable and adept communicators (Horwitz et al., 1986). According to Bennett (1998), when individuals are confronted with an external stimulus that threatens their consistent beliefs, they activate their defensive mechanisms in order to overcome such a cognitive inconsistency. In this respect, learning a foreign language inevitably leads learners to undergo constant reconstructions and modifications of such beliefs, including those about themselves.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991a) conducted a study on 31 adult learners of French as a second language. They aimed to measure learners' anxiety through four activities: essay writing, speaking production tasks, evaluation of language proficiency, and a self-report to indicate anxiety levels while performing speaking production tasks. The results revealed that 87% of anxious learners indicated they worried about speaking in the second language.

FLSA can be influenced by other psychological constructs. According to Young (1990), self-esteem, speaking, and language anxiety are related because students are more likely to perform orally in foreign language learning classes as compared to other subjects, such as history. However, FLSA might also be affected by gender. Öztürk and Gürbüz (2013) carried out a study on 225 female and 158 male students at a Turkish university to investigate the influence of gender on FLSA and learner motivation. The quantitative data was collected by using an adapted version of the FLCAS, and the results revealed that females had higher levels of FLSA as compared to males. This is in line with findings by Mohtasham and Farnia (2017) and Zulkiflee and Nimehchisalem (2022), who identified that females were significantly more anxious than males in speaking activities.

Additionally, several factors could contribute to FLSA. These include instructors' and students' beliefs and attitudes towards English language, traditional teaching methods, students' passive approach to classroom learning, an unsupportive environment, and crowded classes with large number of students (Al-Shehri, 2004; Alrabai, 2015; Alrasheed, 2012). Al-Seghayer (2015) emphasized that Saudi schools adopt an exam-oriented culture which influences the practices of English language instructors. They become facilitators of examinations in English rather than facilitators of linguistic or communicative proficiency, which is one of the crucial causes of students' low achievements in Saudi Arabia. In addition, instructors do not use interactive learning strategies such as games, role-playing, or involving students in authentic communicative activities, all of which contribute to their low speaking proficiency (Al-Seghayer, 2015).

Instructors' Awareness

The role of EFL instructors in helping to reduce students' speaking anxiety is crucial. Several studies found that when

instructors use strategies designed to alleviate students' speaking anxiety, this is effective (Alrabai, 2015; Ashraf, 2019; Rafada & Madini, 2017). Alrabai (2015) conducted a quasi-experimental study to investigate the effectiveness of Saudi EFL instructors' strategies to reduce learner anxiety. Three such strategies were found significant: helping learners to set realistic goals for their language learning, reducing the fear of negative evaluation, and increasing students' self-confidence.

However, before considering the effectiveness of such strategies, what is essential is that instructors be aware and sensitive about their students' FLSA. Horwitz et al. (1986) pointed out that the first step is for instructors to acknowledge FLA. According to these researchers, the instructor is primarily responsible for reducing students' anxiety in two main ways: concentrating on the situations that trigger students' anxiety and creating a comfortable environment in the language classroom. An instructor's lack of awareness of FLSA is considered a significant problem.

Ansari (2015) argued that before considering anxiety reducing strategies, instructors need to be more mindful of their negative behaviors towards students, such as comparing students to each other or forcing them to speak. According to Abu-Rabia (2004), instructors' attitudes and students' anxiety are negatively and significantly correlated. In other words, when the students find their instructors supportive, understanding and encouraging, they feel less anxious in the language class. This matches the results of Alrabai (2015) who found instructors' behaviors and attitudes to have a significant effect on students' anxiety.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adheres to qualitative approach. In order to obtain a more in-depth investigation of the instructors' awareness of students' speaking anxiety, semi-structured interviews with four instructors were carried out. According to Ohata (2005), anxiety is a complex psychological phenomenon that is affected by different factors; therefore, it cannot be explained linearly. Brown (2007) argued that it is extremely preferable to use interviews when trying to assess and investigate language anxiety. Young (1992) argued that language anxiety is complex and requires investigation from different perspectives. For this reason, conducting interviews with instructors will help to investigate the phenomenon intensively. Another rationale for this approach is that most research on language anxiety was quantitative (Price, 1991), and particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia (Al-Saraj, 2014). Therefore, it is hoped that the qualitative method will fill the gap in examining instructors' awareness and provide a deeper insight into FLSA based on instructors' perspectives and experiences in their context.

Participants

Participants in the present study were four Saudi EFL instructors who worked at different Saudi colleges of technology.

The participants were chosen for two reasons. First, the participants represented the population targeted by the researcher as they worked at the colleges of technology. Second, the instructors had to have a minimum of three years' experience in teaching English at the colleges of technology, so they had adequate understanding of students' FLSA triggers in the classroom. All participants were native speakers of Arabic. It is worth mentioning that students study compulsory English language courses in their first three semesters for an associate degree. For a bachelor's degree, students are required to study English language courses in their first five semesters. The four Saudi EFL instructors were given pseudonyms. Table 1 shows the demographic data of the instructors.

Data Collection Method

In qualitative research, an interview is an effective instrument that helps researchers understand the world from the participants' perspectives (Kvale, 1996). Also, it can help researchers explore phenomena that cannot be observed directly such as feelings, beliefs, and thoughts (Mackey & Gass, 2015). Interviews are effective in underpinning the understanding of human behaviors as compared with questionnaires (Bell & Waters, 2014). In the current study, semi-structured interviews were carried out to explore the instructors' awareness. Semi-structured interviews are flexible and adaptable, which gives participants the opportunity to express themselves freely and help the researcher to obtain more information (Mackey & Gass, 2015). Semi-structured interviews were completed with four Saudi male EFL instructors. These were designed to investigate their perceptions and awareness of their students' speaking anxiety. The interviews with instructors were conducted individually via Zoom.

Validity and Reliability

The interview questions were properly formulated based on the research objective of the study. Before conducting the actual interviews, a pilot study of the interview process was performed with a Saudi EFL instructor in order to ensure if the interview questions were appropriate and clear. According to Dörnyei (2007), this is an essential step to ensure that the questions convey the intended meaning. The comments suggested after this interview were taken into consideration. In order to ensure that the information collected from the interviews is accurate, member checking was conducted. During this process, the researcher sent the transcripts of the interviews to interviewees along with their analyses. The purpose of this procedure is to provide the researcher with feedback from the participants on the codes assigned to the interview

Table 1. Instructors' demographic data

Instructor	Age	Years of ELT Experience
1	32	3
2	30	4
3	28	4
4	30	4

which contribute to the validity of the data collected by the researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then thematically analyzed by the researcher. Thematic analysis is a very common approach to analyze qualitative data (Bryman, 2012). Data coding "entails looking for and marking patterns in data regardless of modality" (Mackey & Gass, 2015, p. 117). This includes a nonlinear process of asking questions, making comparisons and examining redundant words and expressions. After that, the identified codes were reviewed, and similar and related codes were clustered into broader themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section comprises a discussion of EFL instructors' awareness of their students' speaking anxiety as well as the challenges that could influence their awareness. Table 2 shows the main themes and the number of coded extracts.

Instructors' Awareness of their Students' FLSA

In order to explore instructors' awareness of their students' FLSA, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four Saudi EFL instructors to examine their understanding of their students' FLSA and their strategies to help students to cope with it.

Speaking Anxiety Levels of the EFL Saudi students

Researchers have investigated the FLSA's level, causes and effects among Saudi EFL students. In terms of the FLSA's level, several researchers have investigated it among Saudi students (Al-Saraj, 2014; Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020; Alrabai, 2015; Rafada & Madini, 2017b), showing that students have moderate to high levels of anxiety. The instructors in this study clearly reported that they observed that students experience significant amount of anxiety in the English language classes, and particularly in speaking lessons. In addition, the instructors indicated that many students show anxiety symptoms such as sweating when they have to speak English, avoiding eye contact and feeling threatened. Such symptoms have been found to be related to FLSA (Horwitz et al., 1986). It has been found that FLSA negatively impacts the speaking skills of Saudi EFL students (Al-Saraj, 2014; Alrabai, 2015).

Table 2. Main themes and frequencies of coded extracts

	Main themes	Frequency of coded extracts
Instructors' awareness of their students' FLSA	Recognizing FLSA' symptoms	5
	Causes of FLSA	12
	Use of anxiety-reducing strategies	7

Instructors' Understanding of Students' FLSA Causes

Instructors' identification and understanding of students' speaking anxiety sources is fundamental for alleviating students' anxiety and creating a comfortable environment in the language classroom. By identifying FLSA causes, instructors will be able to understand why some learners are unwilling to participate in speaking tasks in the classroom. In this respect, the participating instructors were asked the following question: "What are the reasons leading to your students' anxieties in speaking English?" The following are some examples of their responses:

The first reason is student's fear of making mistakes as he (the student) is concerned the mistakes will lead him to be embarrassed in front of his classmates. Also, he worries that when he makes mistakes this will affect his marks. [Instructor1]

I think students' speaking anxiety results from their low language proficiency. They have limited knowledge of vocabulary, which affects their ability to speak English, leading them to feel anxious in the classroom. [Instructor2]

Students do not have enough exposure to the language as well as limited opportunities to practise the language outside the classroom which, indeed, cause students' anxiety. Another reason for speaking anxiety is that students fear making mistakes. Unfortunately, there is a big misconception among students that the good and capable learner is the one who does not make mistakes. This misconception leads students to not accepting their mistakes, which makes them reluctant to speak in the classroom. [Instructor3]

In my opinion, the students' low self-confidence is one of the sources of their speaking anxiety. Also, students try hard to avoid making mistakes because they fear other students will laugh at them. I had a student who came to me after a class and told me that he wanted to participate in speaking activities, but he could not because he knew his friends in the class would laugh at him. Surprisingly, after encouraging him to participate and speak in the class, I found that he had good speaking skills. Therefore, it is important for teachers to be open with their students and try to identify the problems they face before passing judgement. [Instructor4]

These responses indicate that the instructors are aware of the sources of students' speaking anxiety in the classroom, a significant factor being students' fear of making mistakes. In addition, students' fear of receiving negative evaluation from their instructors and peers, as well as a lack of practice are causes of FLSA. The impact of instructors' awareness of these causes has been discussed (Ansari, 2015; Horwitz et al., 1986). According to Ansari (2015), the instructors' awareness of their students' FLSA is essential because it helps them to be more mindful regarding their behaviors in the classroom which results in creating positive classroom environment and motivating students to be more engaged and less anxious. In addition, it promotes instructors' understanding of their students' anxiety triggers, allowing them to address those triggers and reduce students' anxiety in the classroom.

The Use of Anxiety-Reducing Strategies

Instructors' awareness of students' speaking anxiety is reflected in their use of anxiety-reducing strategies and the creation of a comfortable atmosphere that motivates students to be engaged in classroom tasks. Instructors were asked about the strategies they use to alleviate their students' speaking anxiety. The following are examples of their responses:

I like to build good relationships with my students and break the barriers between us. I found this effective and it motivates students to be engaged and feel less anxious in the classroom. Also, I try to make learning fun in my class by using games because this makes students more relaxed and they do not focus on their mistakes. [Instructors1]

One of the strategies I use in the classroom is that before starting the lesson I talk with students about interesting topics that are not related to the lesson. This attracts students' attention and promotes the interaction between me and them, which makes them feel more relaxed before the lesson. In addition, I try to avoid overcorrecting student's mistakes because if the teacher corrects every mistake this makes the learners very nervous, especially the beginners. [Instructor2]

Helping students to set realistic goals for their learning is an effective strategy. Many students hold incorrect perceptions regarding learning the language. So, I try to discuss this issue with them and encourage them to accept that making mistakes is normal while learning a language. Also, study skills are one of the things I try to help them improve. I show them how to use the resources that are available to them such as online applications and platforms. This really helps learners to be less anxious in language class. Last semester, I explained to the students how to use the online dictionary effectively. You cannot believe it. All the students were surprised by the useful features that online dictionaries provide which help them to improve their pronunciation as well as their vocabulary knowledge. [Instructor3]

Giving students their chance when they speak in the classroom, without putting them under pressure and asking them to provide the answers quickly, is a very useful strategy that I use very often in the classroom. Students also feel motivated and encouraged when I tell them that their oral mistakes will not affect their evaluation. [Instructor4]

These responses show the different strategies instructors in this study use in order to reduce their students' speaking anxieties. Maintaining friendly behavior towards students and creating a supportive environment play a vital role in alleviating students' speaking anxiety in the classroom. In addition, encouraging students to participate in oral tasks, without fear of committing mistakes and even with imperfect speaking skills, is effective for promoting students' confidence. These results are in agreement with Young (1991) who argued that a friendly instructor who encourages students to speak and creates a friendly atmosphere in the classroom reduces students' language anxiety.

Table 3. Themes and the coded extracts

	Main themes	Number of coded extracts
Challenges affecting instructors' awareness	Curriculum design	3
	Large number of students in one classroom	5

Moreover, the findings show that starting the language class by introducing interesting topics is an effective anxiety-reducing strategy that enhances students' engagement and interaction in the classroom. This result is supported by Krashen (1981) who stated that providing interesting information to students is a useful strategy to alleviate their anxiety in classroom because it leads them to be less conscious about language learning (cited in Young, 1992). In addition, Instructor 3 suggested that changing students' misconceptions regarding language learning as well as helping them to take more control of their learning are useful strategies that could reduce speaking anxiety. Such strategies have been suggested as effective in alleviating students' anxiety (Alrabai, 2015).

Challenges Affecting Instructors' Awareness

Instructors in this study reported a number of challenges that affect their awareness of their students' anxiety as well as limiting their ability to address this issue. Table 3 shows the main themes and the coded extracts.

Instructors stated that students face difficulties regarding the curriculum delivered in colleges of technology as it is not suitable for their actual language levels. According to Krashen (1985), providing incomprehensible information that is beyond the learner's actual level triggers his/her affective filter. Furthermore, Instructor 2 mentioned that some students are too afraid to face their fears, which makes it challenging to help them. All instructors in this study reported that the large language class sizes are a crucial problem affecting their ability to address students' anxiety or to help them to cope with it. Instructor 4, for example, stated:

There are around 40 students in most of the language classes, which makes it difficult to know what problems students have. On the other hand, when I teach a class with a small number of students, I can recognize anxious students and identify the problems they have, which allows me to work with them and enhance their learning. [Instructor4]

According to Alrabai (2015), the design of the EFL curriculum is a vital factor that could contribute to students' speaking anxiety. Moreover, overcrowding in EFL classes creates very stressful environments that evoke students' speaking anxiety in the Saudi context (Alrabai, 2015; Tanveer, 2007).

CONCLUSION

Anxiety could play a negative role in preventing students from developing their foreign language macro-skills, particularly, speaking. Speaking as a basic literacy skill has a

significant role in improving and strengthening the other L2 literacy skills as students usually focus on developing their interpersonal speaking skills before being able to read or write. Therefore, FL instructors should be aware of their students' speaking anxiety triggers and help them to be less anxious in the classroom in order to promote their engagement and learning. In this study, instructors illustrated that the fear of making mistakes is a significant cause of students' speaking anxiety because of students' concern about their instructor's evaluation and their peers' negative reactions in the classroom. Limited linguistic knowledge is a primary source contributing to students' FLSA, which negatively impacts their language proficiency in the classroom and increases their anxiety. In addition, the instructors indicated that they use a number of strategies in order to alleviate students' anxiety such as creating a friendly and comfortable environment in the classroom, motivating students to speak in the classroom without being concerned about making mistakes, discussing interesting topics with students to promote their engagement and interaction in the classroom, correcting students' misconceptions regarding language learning, as well as introducing helpful tools and resources that underpin their independent learning. The fact that instructors' perceptions of students' speaking anxiety, as well as instructors' use of different anxiety-reducing strategies, indicate that Saudi EFL college of technology instructors are aware of their students' FLSA.

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