



وجهات نظر المعلمين والطلاب حول قلق المتعلم في فصول تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية

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Perspectives of Instructors and Students on Learner Anxiety in English Classroom Settings

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الملخص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على وجهة نظر معلمي وطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية حول قلق المتعلم في بيئات تعلم اللغة ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، تم استخدام تصميم بحثي مختلط بين البحث الكمي والوصفي من خلال مقابلات شبه منظمة مع 15 مدرساً واستطلاعاً عبر الإنترنت مع 30 من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية، وأظهرت نتائج مقابلات المعلمين الأنواع الأكثر شيوعاً لقلق التعلم والتحديات والاستراتيجيات الداعمة له، في حين كشفت الاستطلاع الذي أعد للطلاب أن قلق التعلم يعد عاملاً متكرراً لدى معظم الطلاب؛ وشدد كلاهما على العمل الجماعي لأنه يساعد في الفهم والقيام بالمهام والأنشطة. أكد المعلمون والطلبة أن عامل القلق داخل الفصل الدراسي يمكن تقليله من خلال عدة حلول، منها استخدام الاستراتيجيات المناسبة وضرورة جعل بيئة التعلم أكثر إيجابية وتشجيعاً للطلبة. فيما يتعلق بالتحديات، يواجه المعلمون صعوبات تتمثل في عدم توفر الوقت الكافي، وتقيد المناهج الدراسية التي تركز على الدرجات بدلا من تقليل عامل القلق، والرغبة في التدريب على كيفية مساعدة الطلاب الذين يعانون من القلق. يتفق كل من المعلمين والطلاب على ضرورة توفير الدورات والموارد التي تساعد في التغلب على قلق التعلم. يمكن أن يشمل ذلك ورش العمل والموارد عبر الإنترنت.

الكلمات الدالة: قلق المتعلم، قلق تعلم اللغة الأجنبية، طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية، الصعوبات، المناهج الدراسية.

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the perspectives of both English teachers and students on learner anxiety in language learning settings. To achieve the study objectives, a mixed research design was utilized through semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers and an online survey with 30 English language learners. The results of teachers' interviews showed the most common types of learning anxiety, challenges, and supporting strategies, while students survey revealed that learning anxiety is a recurring factor for most students. They emphasized teamwork as it helps in understanding and carrying out assignments and activities. Both instructors and students

confirmed that the factor of anxiety in the classroom can be reduced through several solutions, including the use of appropriate strategies and the need to make the learning environment more positive and encouraging for students. With regard to challenges, teachers face difficulties represented by the lack of sufficient time, limitations of curriculums that focused on grades rather than anxiety, and the desire for training on how to help students who suffer from anxiety. Both instructors and students agree on the need to provide courses and resources that help overcome learning anxiety. This can include workshops and online resources.

Keywords: Learner anxiety, foreign language learning anxiety, English language students, difficulties, curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Learner anxiety is a frequent phenomenon in language learning. It can hinder learners' improvement and negatively affect their self-confidence, motivation and language skills. The perspectives of English teachers play a central role in understanding anxiety and developing efficient strategies to combat it. Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that language anxiety is a combination of thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors related to learning a language in a classroom. In the same vein, McIntyre (1999) describes language anxiety as a feeling of mixed fear and anxiety associated with learning a second language.

Moreover, Zhao (2023) defines learning anxiety as a psychological discomfort that numerous students experience in the classroom, especially when performing certain tasks such as assignments and exams. Learning anxiety takes the form of performance anxiety or suspicion of incompetence. Anxiety may hinder students' ability to acquire a new language and use it fluently because it may affect the confidence factor and reduce motivation and desire to learn. According to Hu and Wang (2014), language anxiety occurs when an individual learning a new language feels scared or worried when they have to use that language. This anxiety is only about using the new language, not about performing in general. Language anxiety is one of the most important things that affects how well someone learns a language, no matter if they are learning in a classroom or outside of school.

Language anxiety is not limited to beginners or new learners of a language. According to Horwitz (2001), most language learners experience anxiety at some point during language learning process.

Foreign Language Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is situation-specific. That is, it is triggered by the unique challenges of language learning and use, even in individuals who are not generally anxious. It is distinct from general performance anxiety. Additionally, it is linked to the four language skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing. Speaking and listening are often cited as the most anxiety-provoking activities. It is commonly experienced in language classrooms, where learners fear embarrassment and negative evaluation. language anxiety has a strong negative correlation with language achievement and proficiency (Yan and Detaramani, 2008; Frantzen and Magnan, 2005). It can affect learners cognitively, socially, academically and psychologically. Certain teaching strategies and classroom activities can also induce anxiety.

FLA was measured by scales such as Hamilton Anxiety Scale¹ and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale¹(FLCAS) which was developed by Horwitz et al. (1986).

¹ It is a scale introduced by Hamilton (1959) which offers a method to assess the severity of an individual's anxiety symptoms by encompassing both emotional and physical manifestations of the condition.

Several studies examined the relationship between FLA and various factors that can influence language learning success. For instance, the studies of Liu and Jackson (2008) ; Yan et al., (2018) examined the relationship between FLA and willingness to communicate. Their findings showed that students with less anxiety feel more confident and motivated to use language in conversations.

Bailey et al., (1999) investigated the connection between FLA and learning styles. The findings showed a correlation between lower levels of student engagement (completing assignments and participating in cooperative learning) and higher levels of foreign language anxiety.

In addition, the studies of (Abdurahman and Rizqi, 2020; Bensalem and Thompson, 2022) revealed the link between FLA and learning strategies. These studies indicate the need for teachers to be aware of students' anxiety levels in classroom settings. When dealing with students who suffer from high levels of anxiety, teachers can adopt alternative teaching strategies to reduce learning anxiety.

Moreover, the study of Ismail and Hastings (2021), on the influence of FLA on students' motivation levels, revealed that students' motivation to learn a foreign language was negatively affected by high levels of anxiety, which indicates the necessity of recognizing useful strategies to reduce learner anxiety in classrooms.

Generally, most studies showed a positive correlation between anxiety FLA and factors of communication, learning styles and motivation. This association means that FLA has an influence (either positive or negative) on learners' abilities to communicate successfully in language acquisition.

Factors Contributing to Foreign Language Anxiety

Factors of second language anxiety were classified into three main groups: linguistic factors, internal learner factors, and external learner factors.

Linguistic Factors

It includes linguistic factors related to language and learner proficiency. The more competent the learner feels, the lower the level of anxiety, and this has been supported by the results of some studies. In addition, the level of language learning anxiety among multilingual learners is due to confidence and linguistic knowledge in general, which indicates that exposure to language is beneficial and has an effective role in reducing language learning anxiety.

The structure of language may be an obstacle for anxious learners. For example, both complex grammar and unusual verb conjugations may be confusing to students (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Likewise, the presence of unfamiliar vocabulary and others that have more than one meaning depending on the context may hinder the flow of the educational process and may result in students becoming lost, followed by anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Learning a new language involves some difficulties. These difficulties are not limited only to vocabulary, but also include the sounds of the language, which increase additional anxiety for learners. Some learners of a new language may face difficulties in pronouncing sounds correctly, as they believe that when speaking the new language they may be misunderstood or exposed to ridicule for pronouncing new, unfamiliar sounds in their first language, which increases their learning anxiety (Aida, 1994). This anxiety is more severe for learners with low phonemic awareness, that is, those with limited ability to distinguish and process sounds. Such learners have

¹ It is questionnaire that uses a Likert scale to assess three areas : communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

difficulty mastering pronunciation, which in turn increases their level of anxiety about using the language. (Dewaele, 2013).

Mastering a new language fluently is a heavy burden on beginner learners, as they fear making mistakes, hesitate to speak, or are unable to express themselves clearly, which raises great feelings of anxiety in them. (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

Therefore, teachers have vital roles in reducing learning anxiety by creating a supportive learning environment that helps learners overcome these challenges and navigate the complexities of the new language with confidence. A supportive environment for students can be created by encouraging effective communication and providing opportunities to receive constructive feedback that includes students' strengths and weaknesses. Such an environment helps language learners, especially beginners, overcome pronunciation difficulties that limit building confidence in using the new language with confidence and transparency.

Internal Factors

Internal factors have an effective role in determining the level of anxiety that learners face while learning a new language as they include psychological and personality characteristics, which in turn can be divided into three main categories: motivation, psychological characteristics, and cognitive readiness.

1. Motivation

Motivation, as an internal factor, represents the major driver for overcoming learning anxiety. This means that students who are motivated by intrinsic desires, such as the desire to communicate, are less likely to experience anxiety than those who are motivated by external pressures, such as fear of failure or ridicule (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Moreover, students who doubt their ability to master a language are more susceptible to anxiety across different learning contexts, resulting in fear and reluctance to take risks when using the language (Dewaele, 2010).

2. Psychological Characteristics

Many internal psychological factors affect the learning process. Internal factors include fear of failure, lack of self-confidence, social anxiety, and negative beliefs. Internal factors that cause a person to feel nervous and afraid when using language in social situations, which results in students experiencing difficulty expressing themselves, fearing making mistakes, or feeling anxious about interaction with the others (Oxford & Shearin, 1996).

For example, the study conducted by Amengual-Pizarro (2018) on the effect of anxiety on learning a second language showed that foreign language anxiety has a negative effect on university students, as students who showed a fear of committing errors and speaking in front of others achieved worse results in a language skills test. The results also revealed that students with learning anxiety tend to avoid speaking the target language they wish to master.

3. Cognitive Readiness

Learning, memory, and concentration skills influence a learner's ability to deal with language anxiety (Skehan, 1999). Strong cognitive skills can be an asset for foreign language learners, as they can manage anxiety and approach learning strategically, leading to more efficient acquisition.

Metacognition enhances learners' feelings of control over the learning process by helping them identify their strengths and weaknesses, and choose learning styles that are appropriate for them. In addition, cognitive flexibility can enable learners to adapt their strategies to different situations, contributing to a more positive learning experience. The effect of strong memory also plays an important role. Working memory enables a learner to retain

new information while interacting with spoken language, which contributes to reducing cognitive overload, which is a major source of anxiety.

External Factors

They are concerned with elements that are outside learners' control but can significantly affect their anxiety levels. For example, a supportive classroom environment between teachers and students plays a major role in reducing second language anxiety. While teachers' harsh strategies of correcting errors and reducing good opportunities in the classroom contribute to increasing the factor of second language anxiety. Some teachers may inadvertently contribute to second language anxiety by assigning tasks beyond students' current abilities.

Social factors are a major influence on the level of learning anxiety, as teachers judging students who perform better than their colleagues can lead them to believe their learning anxiety factor is low.

The process of acquiring a second language is a huge challenge for many, and anxiety and stress factors are common. Understanding grammar, acquiring vocabulary, and using language correctly represent a challenge for new language learners. Classroom environment is also a challenge in which traditional teaching techniques that are largely based on memorization and grammatical exercises are utilized which in turn lead to high levels of stress and anxiety. Accordingly, teachers should create a supportive learning environment for their learners as it encourages participation, interaction without fear of making errors, and promotes communication instead of focusing on memorization and exercises.

Large class sizes may be a cause of anxiety as they limit opportunities for individual attention to students, resulting in making learners feel isolated and frustrated. According to MacIntyre & Gardner (1991), a lack of providing students with appropriate personal support in classroom environments may negatively affect their progress and increase their fears due to the difficulties they may face. Conversely, providing personal support and attention may assist students overcome challenges and achieve progress in their learning.

Finally, differences between learner's culture and the target language culture may also pose an additional obstacle to master a language and lead to anxiety. Learners face difficulties in understanding customs, traditions, and rules of communication, which causes them embarrassment and fear when interacting with native speakers. Therefore, understanding the culture of a language is considered critical to communicate effectively and avoid misunderstanding (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998).

Methodology

To achieve the objective of this study, a mixed-research design utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data analysis were adopted in order to explore English instructors' perspectives on learner anxiety and their classroom strategies to address it as well as students' perspectives of anxiety management.

For qualitative data a semi-structured interview was conducted with 15 instructors from the faculty of languages at the university of Benghazi. It explored their perceptions of anxiety in terms of four factors: learner anxiety, coping strategies, challenges, and desired resources.

An anonymous online survey, as quantitative research design, was distributed to 30 students from the faculty of languages at the University of Benghazi to gather broader perspectives and quantify aspects of learner anxiety. The survey in this study was considered both quantitative and qualitative research tool as it contained both close-ended questions with predefined response options (quantitative design) and open-ended questions (qualitative design). It targeted the frequency of observed learner anxiety, typical student anxieties (i.e.

communication apprehension, test anxiety), efficiency of certain strategies in reducing anxiety, and desired resources and training for addressing this problem.

Semi-structured Interview

As previously mentioned, the interview was conducted with 15 instructors. It consisted of four sections: types and prevalence of anxiety, supportive strategies and environment, challenges, and training and desired resources. Each section had two questions. The interview with all teachers lasted two days, with 10 to 15 minutes devoted to each instructor.

Student Survey

The aim of the survey was to gather data on English learners' experiences with anxiety and their preferred learning environments. It consisted of three sections (demographic information, learner anxiety, learning preferences). Each section had three questions with participants choosing the suitable answer using Likert scale. Two questions were open-ended questions.

The data collected from the interview and survey were analyzed using Atlas.ti¹. This qualitative analysis software was utilized in two steps: coding and thematic analysis. Coding was used as an initial step to categorize segments of the interview data based on pre-defined codes (such as types of anxiety, coping strategies). In other words, codes were used to sort data into labeled boxes. Second, the coded data were analyzed in order to identify recurring patterns that emerged across the interview. It was like taking all the coded bits to provide a bigger picture that represents the collective experiences and perspectives within the data collected.

Findings

Results of Semi-Structures Interviews

1. Types and Prevalence of Anxiety

The analysis revealed that instructors most frequently observe communication apprehension (85%) (fear of speaking in front of the class) and test anxiety as the dominant types of learner anxiety. With regard to prevalence, results indicated that a large majority (80%) of instructors report observing some form of learner anxiety in their classrooms on a regular basis.

Moreover, teachers confirmed that learner anxiety appears to be more prevalent among students who are new to language learning compared to advanced learners.

2. Supportive Strategies and Environments

The results showed that most instructors seek to provide a positive classroom environment in classrooms so that stress is reduced through humor and by encouraging students to participate during the lesson and in solving cooperative activities after the lesson (88%). In addition, (55%) of instructors emphasize the importance of incorporating error correction strategies in learning process as they improve students rather than a tool of punishment.

Regarding supportive learning environment factor, most teachers (90%) indicate the need to build a positive relationship with students, and emphasize positive reinforcement that encourages students to figure out errors as opportunities to learn.

¹ Atlas.ti is a computer program specifically designed to assist researchers with qualitative data analysis. This qualitative data analysis software allows for efficient coding of the transcripts, enabling researchers to categorize interview segments based on pre-defined themes

In addition, among the most preferred strategies for teachers are low-risk activities and positive feedback that teachers utilize in the classroom.

3. Challenges Faced and Resources Needed

The results showed that 95% of instructors emphasize that limited classroom time for lectures constitutes a major obstacle in implementing more diverse strategies to reduce anxiety among students. In addition, teachers confirmed that most curriculums are restrictive as they prioritize performance, and underprovide instructional strategies that help address student anxiety. (85%) of instructors confirm that curriculums make them feel restricted in designing strategies to reduce anxiety.

The results showed that most teachers with a portion of (96%) express a desire for development opportunities to aid them acquire specific anxiety management techniques. (90%) of teachers stress the need for resources such as the internet and workshops on how to create inclusive and supportive learning environments for students with varying levels of anxiety.

4. Training and Preferred Resources

75% of teachers emphasized the use of training and educational techniques due to their importance and role in managing different types of learner anxiety. For instance, teachers may be trained to implement specific activities that help reduce anxiety in classrooms, as well as use resources that contribute to improve lesson plans or strategies particularly designed for anxious learners.

Despite (80%) of instructors expressing a desire for additional training, a majority (67%) reported receiving minimal training on addressing learner anxiety in language acquisition classrooms.

While online resources like articles and webinars were the most popular choice (73%), a significant portion of instructors expressed a preference for more interactive learning methods. Specifically, 53% favored practical workshops and 40% found textbooks or research papers valuable for learning about anxiety reduction techniques in classrooms.

Moreover, correlations between the variables instructors' experience and desire for training were analyzed in order to explore whether there was a link between the length of their teaching career and their perceived need for additional support in addressing learner anxiety.

The data revealed an unexpected positive correlation, with instructors having over 10 years of experience expressing the strongest need for additional training. Teachers reported that they need training because of the changes in teaching methodologies and the evolving nature of learner anxiety. Veteran instructors might find their existing teaching methodologies or techniques less suited to address the anxieties of today's learners. A lack of familiarity with recent student-centered approaches, which prioritize collaboration, self-directed learning, and technology integration, might limit instructors' ability to address learning anxiety. In addition, Experienced instructors may feel their past experiences aren't enough to address the anxieties of today's learners. The evolving nature of learner anxiety, amplified by pressures from social media, information overload, and the fast-paced online environment, necessitates a shift in instructor approaches. Recognizing this, some instructors are proactively seeking training to address these new anxieties more effectively.

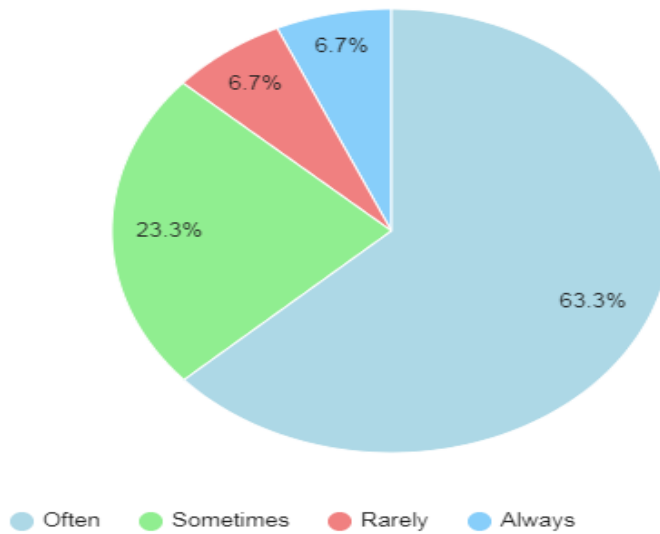
Findings of the Survey

1. Revalence of Learner Anxiety

The data showed that the majority of students (63%) reported experiencing anxiety *often* in English class. This is followed by 23% of students who reported experiencing anxiety *sometimes*, and 6% who reported experiencing anxiety *rarely* or *always*. None of the students reported *never* experiencing anxiety. The findings indicate that English class is a significant source of anxiety for many students.

Frequency of Anxiety in English Class	Number of Students (n=30)	Percentage (%)
Never	0	0
Rarely	2	6.7
Sometimes	7	23.3
Often	19	63.3
Always	2	6.7

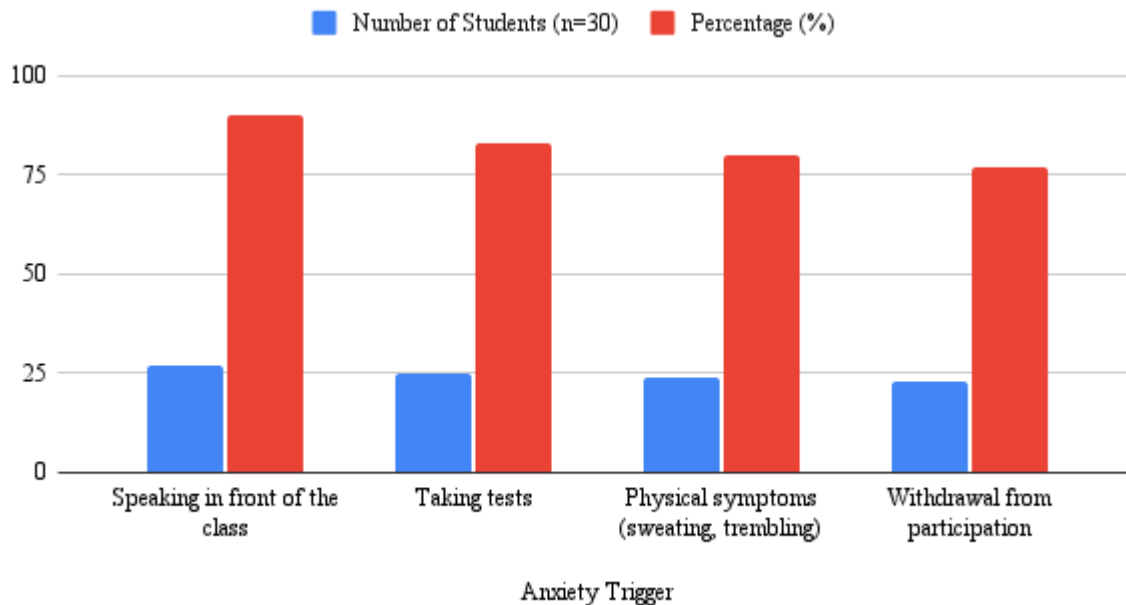
Prevalence of Learner Anxiety in English Class



2. Types and Manifestations of Anxiety

The most common cause of anxiety among students was *speaking in front of the class* (90%) and *taking exams* was ranked second with a percentage of (83%). Moreover, *physical expressions and refraining from participating in the classroom* was ranked third with a portion of (80%) as a sign of anxiety. The data showed that 77% of students prefer to withdrawal from participation in English class activities. This suggests that anxiety might be hindering student engagement and creating a barrier to learning.

Anxiety Trigger	Number of Students (n=30)	Percentage (%)
Speaking in front class	27	90
Exams	25	83
Physical expressions (sweating, trembling)	24	80
Withdrawal from participation	23	77



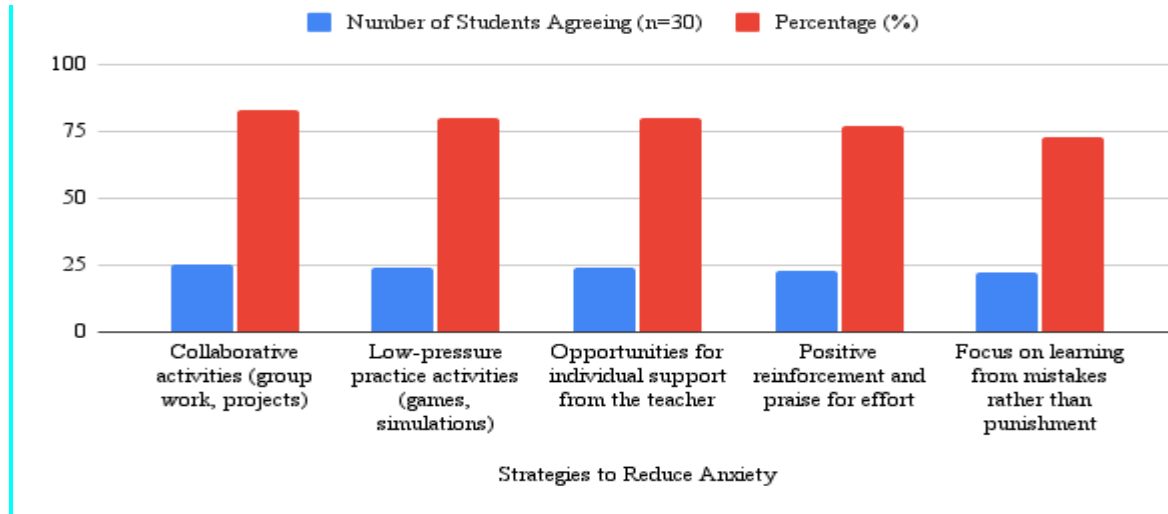
3. Preferred Learning Environments

Most students (83%) found collaborative activities, low-pressure practice, individual support, positive reinforcement, and a focus on learning from mistakes valuable factors assist in reducing anxiety.

The findings showed that the most popular strategy for reducing anxiety was

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES (83%) . 80% of students agreed that *LOW-PRESSURE ACTIVITIES* can alleviate anxiety. *INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT* (80%) from teachers ties with low-pressure activities, suggesting its significance in creating a supportive learning environment. Moreover, *positive reinforcement* (77%) and *a focus on learning from mistakes* (73%) were also considered valuable.

Strategies to Reduce Anxiety	Number of Students Agreeing	Percentage (%)
Collaborative activities (group work, projects)	25	83
Low-pressure activities (games, simulations)	24	80
Opportunities for individual support from teacher	24	80
Positive reinforcement and praise for effort	23	77
Focus on learning from mistakes rather than punishment	22	73



4.Desired resources and support

Moreover, students' open-ended questions emphasized the need for supplementary resources in addition to classroom curriculums. Resources include internet, training activities and workshops designed specifically to help them manage language learning anxiety. The findings revealed a demonstrably high requirement to combat learner anxiety. Students indicated the need for supplementary materials to help overcome learning anxiety, such as online resources and workshops to help manage anxiety, not just classroom curriculums.

Experience does not necessarily help teachers reduce language learning anxiety among their students. The evidence for this is that the experienced teachers in this study stressed the necessity of providing the necessary training to manage learning anxiety. This can include professional development workshops, online resources about learner anxiety, and even collaboration with language anxiety psychologists. To address the challenge of language learning anxiety hindering students' progress, educational institutions can adopt a comprehensive approach that includes both providing sufficient resources and creating a supportive learning environment.

Comparison between the Findings of Semi-structured Interviews and Online Survey

This study was conducted to investigate the perspectives of both instructors and students on foreign language anxiety. The data were collected through a semi-structured interviews with 15 instructor at the faculty of language

at Benghazi university and an online survey with 30 students from the same faculty . The results showed a clear picture of foreign language anxiety and suggested solutions to address it.

Both instructors with a portion (80%) and students with a portion (63%) agreed that learner anxiety was a prevalent factor among foreign language learners. The most common type of anxiety identified by both instructors and students was communication apprehension (fear of speaking in class) . Students also highlighted that exams were another major cause of anxiety. It is worth noting that the students survey showed that anxiety factor did not appear only in fear, but that other physical factors such as sweating, trembling, and refraining from participating in classrooms were signs and clear evidence of learning anxiety among students.

Teachers highlighted the importance of creating a positive classroom environment by adopting certain strategies to reduce learning anxiety, such as encouraging participation and constructive feedback, in order to help their students master a language and benefit from errors they commit by revealing the reasons behind their occurrence and proposing strategies to overcome them.

In the same context, students stressed the need to use classroom strategies such as cooperative activities, training courses, and individual support to alleviate their learning anxiety.

Moreover, instructors identified that they face some challenges in dealing with learning anxiety among their students. The most important of these were time constraints and adherence to curriculums, which emphasize improving a language and neglect the use of strategies to reduce foreign language anxiety. Additionally, instructors, even those with more than 10 years of experience in teaching English, emphasized the need for additional training in anxiety management techniques. This may be due to the evolving nature of learner anxiety and the need to adopt modern and evolving teaching strategies and techniques to address these changes.

Discussion

This study examined the phenomenon of learner anxiety in English language classrooms. The results of the interviews and questionnaire revealed instructors and students perspectives on anxiety. It was showed that fear of communication (fear of speaking in class) was the most common anxiety factor students face in classrooms, followed by fear of exams.

The results of the students survey also showed that learning anxiety among students contain physical factors, including sweating and trembling, which can be overcome by adopting strategies that reduce learning anxiety, which would not only focus on mastering a language , but also how to deal with learning anxiety in classrooms.

Both instructors and students emphasized the need to adopt similar anti-anxiety strategies that create a positive and supportive environment in the classroom through humor, encouraging participation, engaging in collaborative activities, exercises, low-stress activities, and individual support from teachers.

Instructors also encounter some challenges including limited lecture time and class duration, as well as curriculum limitations that prioritize language acquisition and do not take into account anxiety management factors.

In addition, even instructors with experience in teaching English expressed interest in training in anxiety management techniques. This means that institutions must support their instructors and students alike by providing the necessary training and developing the curriculums to include techniques that help reduce learning anxiety.

This findings of this study support Dewaele (2010) in emphasizing communication concerns as a dominant source of learner anxiety in language classrooms. The study results also emphasized the negative impact of educational environments that focus only on performance and neglect anxiety reduction strategies, as discussed by Dörnyei & Ottó (1998).

Besides, Similarly to MacIntyre (1999), this study showed that students emphasize the need to use teaching strategies that encourage team work and low-stress activities to promote a more positive educational experience and reduce anxiety.

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