Students: A Case Study at a Public University

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Abstract
In the English as a Foreign Language EFL contexts from different settings, the issue of language learning anxiety has been extensively studies and investigated. However, in the Kurdish settings a few studies carried out about this issue, specially about speaking anxiety in English classes. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to investigate the level, major factor of foreign language speaking anxiety among the Kurdish EFL students and the students' perspectives about foreign language speaking anxiety in the context of a university in Kurdistan. For achieving the study purpose, first year students (N=91) from English Department at a state university participated. The data regarding the level of EFL speaking anxiety gathered through administering a questionnaire (Foreign Language Anxiety Classroom Scale FLCAS) by (Horwitz et al. 1986), as well as through a semi-structured interview with the participants (N=18). The quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics by using the SPSS software program (version 25), and the qualitative data were analyzed by content analysis. The results of the quantitative data illustrated that the students experienced a moderate level of EFL speaking anxiety, and the qualitative data confirmed the results whilst the participants perceived speaking as the most anxiety provoking factor. It was also found that fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, fear of speaking in front of others and immediate questions were as the major causes of the students' speaking anxiety. This research contributes to the literature as it is the first to target FL speaking anxiety among Kurdish freshmen EFL learners.

Keywords: speaking anxiety, English as a Foreign Language EFL, Kurdish EFL students

التحقيق في قلق التحدث بلغة أجنبية بين طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية بِعدِّها لُغةً أجنبية
دراسة حالة في جامعة حكومية

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المستخلص :

في بيئة اللغة الانكليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية عن لغة الأم نجد أنَّ موضوع القلق من الموضوعات التي سُلِّط الضوء عليه بشكل ملحوظ بالبحث في مختلف الأماكن، في حين نجد أنَّ البحوث التي أُجريت في بيئة الطلبة الكرد قليلٌ فيما يتعل بهذه المشكلة ولاسيما في موضوع قلق التحدث في صفوف اللغة الانكليزية؛ ولأجل ذلك فإنَّ هدف هذه الدراسة يكمن في البحث عن الأسباب الرئيسية لقلق الطلبة الكرد اثناء التحدث باللغة الانكليزية وتحديد مستوى هذا القلق، وتهدف الدراسة أيضا إلى البحث في وجهات نظر الطلبة الكرد فيما يتعلق بقلق التحدثبالغة الانكليزيةفي إحدى جامعات كردستان. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف تمَّ تحديد عينة البحث المكون من (٩١) طالبا من الطلبة الكرد في المرحلة الأولى في قسم اللغة الانكليزية من إحدى الجامعات الكردستانية الحكومية، وتم جمع البيانات والمعلومات الخاصة بنسبة قلق التحدث عن طريق الاستبيان المعروف بـ (استبانة قياس نسبة قلق اللغة الانكليزية في الصف) المصمم من لدن هورويتز (١٩٨٦)، فضلًا عن ذلك فقد تمَّ إجراء مقابلة شبه المنظمة مع (١٨) طالبًا، وتمَّ تحليل فقرا الاستبانة عن طريق برنامج (SPSS) تحديث (٢٥)، كما أنَّه تمَّ تحليل المقابلات عن طريق تحليل النص. خرج البحث بعدد من النتائج منها: أنَّ نسبة قلق التحدث باللغة الانكليزية لدى الطلبة وصل لمستوى المتوسط، كما أنَّ نتائج المقابلات أثبتت أنَّ الطلبة المشاركون في هذا البحث عدُّوا التحدث باللغة الانكليزية مصدرًا رئيسًا لقلق تعلم اللغة الأجنبية، كما أثبتت النتائج أنَّ الخوف من الخطأ، وسوء التقييم، والتحدث أمَا الآخرين، والأسئلة المفاجأة تعدُّ من الأسباب الرئيسة لقلق الطلبة أثناء التحدث باللغة الانكليزية.تعدُّ هذه الدراسة أوَّل دراسةٍ تجرى على مجموعة محددة من الطلبة الكرد في المرحلة الأولى في الجامعة الذين يتحدثون باللغة الانكليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: قلق التحدث، اللغة الانكليزية لغة اجنبية، الطلبة الكرد الذين يدريسون اللغة الانكليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية.

Investigating Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety among the Kurdish EFL

1. Introduction

Anxiety in learning may have a knock-on effect on the FL learners specifically when they come to communicate in English. (Scovel,1978) describes anxiety as an indistinct negative fear. These negative feelings and detrimental effects lead the learners to act passively and stay away from classroom participations that help them to increase their language skills as claimed by (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). Hence, this could be interpreted that the anxious students would be withdrawn and silent most of the time in the speaking classes. That's to say, due to their imperfect language competence and exposure especially in relative to speaking and listening skills, students feel uncomfortable in communicating with the target in front of others. As a result, students who exhibit communication apprehension consider language errors as a threat and a source of negative evaluations by the teachers and classmates rather than considering it as a natural process of learning a FL (Ely, 1986; Debreli & Demirkan, 2016).

Despite the developments of the teaching and learning English as a foreign language, curriculum and methods of teaching in the universities at Kurdistan Region of Iraq, anxiety in speaking still exists among the Kurdish speaking learners of English specifically among the first year students at the university level. Studies in the field of FL have frequently stated, to the English learners, speaking is the most anxiety provoking language skill (Horwitz, 2001; Luo, 2015; Atas, 2015; Keramida, 2015; Sadiq, 2017; Alibec & Sirbu, 2017). Moreover, (Horwitz 2001) has also found that one-third of FL learners experience anxiety in productive skills. This, accordingly, would be an obstruction to the student to achieve a high level of speaking English more confidently and the expected learning outcomes. (Worde, 2003 & Luo, 2013) consider speaking anxiety as a potential problem that can affect the production and retention of learner's new language.

2. Theoretical Background
2.1 Foreign Language Anxiety

The literature abounds with definitions of anxiety. It has been elucidated in the *Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology* as ''A fearful mood that has a vague or no specific focus and is accompanied by bodily arousal'' (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 46.). Horwitz defined it in terms of language learning perspectives as ''perceived intuitively by many language learners, negatively influences language learning and has been found to be one of the most highly examined variables in all of psychology and education'' (2001, p.113). In addition to that, (Spielberger, 1983) acknowledged anxiety as an unpleasant emotional condition including feelings of pressure and nervousness. Concerning these negative connotations, anxiety is one of the most prominent factors in learning. As a matter of fact, it can be associated with a highly dominated by affected constants process which is foreign language learning.

The literature about language anxiety has presented many definitions of foreign language anxiety FLA. (Young, 1990) defined it as a complicated multidimensional phenomenon. Furthermore, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986:128) clarified FLA as "a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process". Likewise, (Young, 1999) illuminated FLA as the apprehension and undesirable emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language.

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) has been developed to measure and evaluate the FLA by (Horwitz, 1986:559) which is self-report measure containing thirty-three question items correlated with anxiety components. The FLCAS assesses ''the degree of anxiety, as evidenced by negative performance expectancies and social comparisons, psychophysiological symptoms, and avoidance behaviours''.

In the past few decades, learning English has become the first choice for the learners around the world due to the linguistic developments in this language (Crystal, 2003). However, there are emotional factors that influence foreign language learning such as motivation, attitudes, intelligence and anxiety. Among these, anxiety is the most influential reason. Hence, learners claim their inability in the productive skills and a ''mental block'' specifically in their oral performance and its production. Learners' anxiety and nervousness may impede their performance abilities (Horwitz et al. 1986; Ellis, 1994). The researchers have affirmed that there exists a negative correlation between the foreign language anxiety and its achievement because feeling anxious is the biggest challenge to the FL learners to overcome (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992; Aida, 1994; Horwitz, 2001; Mak, 2011; Liu, 2006; Alrabai, 2014). There exists an inevitable relation between feeling anxious and language learning that may cause poor achievement.

According to Worde (2003:3-4), there are major possible causes of FLA: non-comprehension, speaking activities and error correction. Likewise, Ying (2008) mentioned some causes: (a) personal and interpersonal, (b) learner beliefs about language learning, (c) teacher belief about language anxiety, (d) teacher-learner interactions, (e) classroom procedures, and (f) language testing. Thus, feeling anxious may prevent students to share their ideas and speak publically. There exists a clear-cut relation between high level of FLA and students' poor oral performance (Xiao & Wong, 2014). FLA can be considered as the primary reason that inhibit the students to achieve a good level of language proficiency despite of spending hours in the English classes. The possibility of having a negative experience with the foreign language increases if a student feels apprehensive in the classroom (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). Additionally, Ewald (2007) argued that language learning anxiety will lead the students to feel worried about failing in the process of learning a foreign language. According to Horwitz et al. (1986, 127-8), foreign language anxiety includes three correspondent components: communication apprehension which refers to ''*a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety*'', Fear of negative evaluation which means "*the apprehension about others' evaluation, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively*'', and test anxiety which is defined as "*a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure*". Additionally, learners who experience communication apprehension do not communicate relaxingly in the target language in front of others due to the limited linguistic knowledge. Learners who exhibit fear of negative evaluation consider the language errors as a sources of stress, threat and being undesirable by their teachers and classmates rather than considering them as a natural phase of learning a FL. Learners who experience test anxiety perceive foreign language learning process as test, specifically oral production, rather than an opportunity for improving language skills and communication (Ely, 1986). Accordingly, Young (1991) stated six types of FLCA: learner aptitudes about language learning, personal and interpersonal anxieties, teacher's perceptions about language learning, teacher-student rapport, classroom procedures, and testing.

2.2 Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Speaking with the target language in the foreign language classroom could be the most stressful experience and causing anxiety that the foreign learners face. Despite of the learners' willingness and objectives to communicate orally, their communication apprehension may constitute serious problems and impede them to reach their goals (Price, 1991 & MacIntyre 1995). According to (Young, 1990) speaking activities requiring performance in front of class and produce more anxiety to the learners than other language skills. Thus, speaking skill is the persistent skill for communicating with others. There exists a certain negative correlation between speaking ability and speaking anxiety. The low speaking skill level and the student's less speaking ability in the FL cause more anxiety. Price (1991) argued that the oral presentations are the greatest source of classroom anxiety.

Speaking anxiety is the most frequently cited impediments by the foreign language learners that affect negatively on processing information and acquiring linguistic knowledge in the target language. Many researchers have claimed that the speaking classes are the most anxiety provoking to the foreign learners compared to reading, writing and listening classes (Mak, 2011; Liu, 2006; Chaokongjakra, 2012). Moreover, having such anxiety does not only be a language barrier in terms of speaking fluency. The students attempt to avoid mistakes, produce inefficient language and being worry about the accuracy rather than the message they want to convey. Learners' language attitudes and feelings apparently may impact on motivation, language proficiency and performance. As a result, they may be quiet and reserved in their speaking classes because of they may feel anxious, their negative self-assessment, fear of making mistakes and apprehension about peers' destructive evaluation (Keramida, 2015). It is recommended, therefore, to make sure that learners are in a safe and comfortable psychological condition.

The researchers have categorized the factors of the students' speaking anxiety. A reason could be related to the students' low level of language components; grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary that may cause them a high level of anxiety and low self-esteem in their language presentation (Lui, 2006). Apart from this, some factors are related to the teachers such as teacher-student rapport, teacher's support and personal attention for learners. When the teachers, for example, are unfriendly and unsympathetic with the students, they may create a formal and stressful classroom environment. Along with this, sometimes teachers lack of information about the new communicative methods and approaches of teaching English and teacher-centred classes could be the major source of the students' speaking anxiety (Koçak, 2010). For the Kurdish EFL students at the university contexts, other major impediments need to be taken into consideration which are their educational background and teacher-centeredness classes. The traditional teaching methods are used in teaching English at the public schools such as audiolingual and grammar translation methods. Sometimes the teachers are not aware of the new communicative approaches of teaching English. In addition to this, teachers give the direct corrective feedback to the students' errors in the classes and may create a stressful environment. Consequently, it could be quite difficult to activate the students and help them to decrease foreign language speaking anxiety at the university level specifically among the freshmen. These factors may enhance foreign language speaking anxiety. In order to encourage students to participate enthusiastically in the speaking activities, teachers should create a supportive learning community and tolerate the students' mistakes (Davies & Pearse, 2000, Hedge, 2000).

3. Methodology

3.1 Design and setting of the study

This study investigates foreign language speaking anxiety in a Non-Native EFL context. Since the researchers believed that the results will be more reliable by having data from different sources, both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools were used. (Harwell, 2010, p.151) claims that mixed methods 'combine qualitative and quantitative methods in ways that ostensibly bridge their differences in the service of addressing a research question'. In the recent studies mixed methods have become more common in educational researches (Mercer, 2010). The quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire and the qualitative data were collected by using a semi-structure interview.

3.2 Research Questions

In consideration of the literature review and objectives, the present study aims at answering the following research questions:

1. Do the Kurdish freshmen university students at the English Department experience EFL speaking anxiety? If so, what is the level of it?
2. What are the students' perceptions about foreign language speaking anxiety and what are the major factors of it?

3.3 Participants

The participants of the study included 91 freshmen students, 18 males and 73 females, at English Department at the University of Raparin-Iraq during the academic year of 2018-2019. Their ages ranged between 17 to 21, and their first language was Kurdish. Furthermore, 18 volunteer students participated in the interview protocol. They were all majoring in the field of English language and literature. They studied English in school as a compulsory lesson between 8 to 12 years. Studying in the English department at the university level was the first choice for 61 (67%) students. However, it was not the first choice of 30 (33%) of them.

3.4 Data collection instruments

3.4.1 Foreign language speaking anxiety questionnaire

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) is an instrument which was developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) to measure and determine foreign language anxiety of learners by measuring responses to stressors. 19 items were selected among 33 items to measure FLCA. The relationship of the items was proved by the studies carried out by (Karatasa et al, 2016 & Toubot et al, 2018). To date, this instrument has been one of the most frequently used tool to evaluate communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation which learners experience in foreign language learning. The questionnaire included two sections. In section one, demographic information was collected and in the second section 19 question items were used. The respondents were asked to rate each item on a 5-graded Likert scale ranging from (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). In order to get validity, the items were examined by the researchers and a research assistant having a PhD in ELT.

3.4.2 Semi-structured interview

The second instrument used in the present study was a semi-structured interview questions. The purpose behind the interview was to obtain more validity and the detailed data relating to the participants' foreign language speaking anxiety levels and sources. The semi-structured interview question items give a better chance to the researchers to investigate more details regarding with the subjects (Kvale, 2007). The interview protocol consisted of two main questions including some themes. The questions gave a chance to the participants to express themselves freely. In order to encourage the participants to elaborate their ideas about FLSA, some codes were

given to them. The interview with each participant was completed within maximum 15-20 minutes.

3.5 Data Analysis

The quantitative data were collected through a 5-graded Likert scale that consisted of 19 items. The data were analysed via SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software program (version 25). Therefore, descriptive statistics, percentages, frequencies, means and standard deviations were utilized to analyse the data.

The qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with (18) students to get extensive data and understanding the main factors and causes of the students' FLSA. The data were analysed through content analysis. The common themes and significant points were identified. To insure the reliability, the themes were coded by the researchers and the frequencies were presented each interview question item.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Foreign language speaking anxiety level (Research Question 1)

Concerning with answering the first research question, the total score based on the answers of each question item given by each respondent is formulated. Therefore, the total 19 items ranged from 19 to 95 (one point for each item equals 19 points in minimum score of the total whereas 5 points for each item becomes 95 points maximum of the total score). A total score of less than 57 demonstrated a low level FLSA, a total score ranged from 57 to 76 indicated a moderate level of FLSA and participants who had a total score of more than 76 presented a high level of FLSA.

To delineate the level of foreign language speaking anxiety of the respondents, the mean score and standard deviation were computed through descriptive statistics. The statistic results presented in Table 1 and 2 show that the majority of the freshmen students experience a moderate level of foreign language speaking anxiety. The descriptive statistics illustrate that 56.04% of the respondents scored between 57 to 76 of the total score which confirms a moderate level of speaking anxiety. Moreover, students who experience a high level of speaking anxiety is 24.18% as they scored between 76 to 95. The students who experience a low level of speaking anxiety are 19.78% as they scored less than 57 of the total score. Table 2 indicated that the overall average Mean value of the level of foreign language speaking anxiety was (M= 64.64) and Standard Deviation is (SD=2.577). Confirming the results of the levels and percentages prove that the first year undergraduate students experience a moderate level of speaking anxiety at the English Department at the University of Raparin.

In other words, though more than half the respondents appeared to have a moderate level of speaking anxiety, less than one-third of them seemed to have a high level of speaking anxiety. In a nutshell, the freshmen students at the Department of English, College of Education, at the University of Raparin (UoR) experience the moderate level of speaking anxiety. In other studies conducted in EFL contexts by Liu (2006) and Toubot et al, (2018) similar results found as the participants experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety.

The reason for this result can be attributed to the students' educational background, methods of teaching English in schools and classroom atmosphere. Despite existing a communicative curriculum which is Sunrise series (from class 1 to 12), they used to study individual vocabularies and grammar in the past 10-12 years of studying English in school. The main method of teaching is grammar translation and/or audiolingual method. Their speaking skill and communicative competence have not been developed. Another reason could be related to assessment methods which are generally summative not formative. Hence, it is problematic and challenging for the

first year students to speak fluently and without being anxious at the university level while the medium of instruction is English. The low level of English speaking anxiety could be interpreted as English has become a popular language and students attempt to speak English fluently in Kurdish contexts.

Table 1: The participants' level of speaking anxiety

Levels	No. of Respondents	Percentages	Valid Percent
Low level of speaking anxiety	18	19.78	19.78
Moderate level of speaking anxiety	51	56.04	56.04
High level of speaking anxiety	22	24.18	24.18
Total	91	100.0	100.0

Table 2: Mean and St. Deviation of the respondents' levels of speaking anxiety

Mean	64.64
Std. Deviation	2.577

The descriptive analysis (Percentages, Mean and Std. Deviation) of each item were shown in Table 3. The items were categorised according to different taxonomies of foreign language anxiety. The selected 19 items relating to the speaking anxiety include factors of speaking anxiety such items (1, 5, 8, 10, 13,15 and 16) were devoted to communication apprehension, items (2,4,7,9,11,12,14,18 and 19) were dedicated to fear of negative evaluation and items (3,6 and 17) were devoted to the anxiety of English classes.

The highest percentages of scores in foreign language speaking anxiety were in item 19 ''I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance''. 58.3% of the respondents answered with either 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' with Mean score (M=3.63) and Std. Deviation (SD=1.189), item 11 ''I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English class''. 64.9% of the respondents answered with either 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' with Mean score (M=3.60) and Std. Deviation (SD=1.124), Item 9 ''I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting''. 59.4% of the respondents answered with either 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' with Mean score (M=3.59) and Std. Deviation (SD=1.095), item 8 ''I feel nervous while speaking English with native speakers''. 61.6% of the respondents answered with either 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' with Mean score (M=3.58) and Std. Deviation (SD=1.239), item 4 ''I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am''. 56.1% of the respondents answered with either 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' with Mean score (M=3.58) and Std. Deviation (SD=1.146), and item 5 ''I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class''. 57.2% of the respondents answered with either 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' with Mean score (M=3.56) and the Std. Deviation (SD=1.098).

In other words, the highest frequencies, percentages and Mean values of the items (19, 11, 9, 8, 4 and 5) indicate that the first year students experience a moderate level of foreign language speaking anxiety. The Mean range is (M= 3.58 to 3.63). The highest Mean value found in item 19 which was labelled to fear of negative evaluation. The majority of the students were worried about making mistakes in grammar and pronunciation. The main challenges for the participants were fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension, especially when they have not prepared before and the teacher immediately asks a question.

Table 3: Frequencies, Percentages, Mean and Std. Deviation

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation

Item1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class.							
	F	7	10	29	32	13	3.37	1.102
	%	7.7	11.0	31.9	35.2	14.3		
Item2	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class.							
	F	12	17	27	23	12	3.07	1.227
	%	13.2	18.7	29.7	25.3	13.2		
Item3	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English.							
	F	6	13	27	32	13	3.36	1.101
	%	6.6	14.3	29.7	35.2	14.3		
Item4	I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.							
	F	6	8	26	29	22	3.58	1.146
	%	6.6	8.8	28.6	31.9	24.2		
Item5	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.							
	F	6	7	26	34	18	3.56	1.098
	%	6.6	7.7	28.6	37.4	19.8		
Item6	In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.							
	F	7	14	28	25	17	3.34	1.176
	%	7.7	15.4	30.8	27.5	18.7		
Item7	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.							
	F	9	13	35	24	10	3.14	1.111
	%	9.9	14.3	38.5	26.4	11.0		
Item8	I feel nervous while speaking English with native speakers.							
	F	7	13	15	32	24	3.58	1.239
	%	7.7	14.3	16.5	35.2	26.4		
Item9	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.							
	F	5	9	23	35	19	3.59	1.095
	%	5.5	9.9	25.3	38.5	20.9		
Item10	I don't feel confident when I speak in English class.							
	F	8	17	22	29	15	3.29	1.204
	%	8.8	18.7	24.2	31.9	16.5		
Item11	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English class.							
	F	6	10	16	41	18	3.60	1.124
	%	6.6	11.0	17.6	45.1	19.8		
Item12	I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.							
	F	9	13	23	27	19	3.37	1.244
	%	9.9	14.3	25.3	29.7	20.9		
Item13	I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.							
	F	6	13	25	34	13	3.38	1.103
	%	6.6	14.3	27.5	37.4	14.3		
Item14	English class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.							
	F	5	10	31	30	15	3.44	1.067

	%	5.5	11.0	34.1	33.0	16.5		
Item15	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.							
	F	8	10	22	37	14	3.43	1.146
	%	8.8	11.0	24.2	40.7	15.4		
Item16	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.							
	F	11	11	16	35	18	3.42	1.274
	%	12.1	12.1	17.6	38.5	19.8		
Item17	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak English.							
	F	4	11	37	30	9	3.32	.965
	%	4.4	12.1	40.7	33.0	9.9		
Item18	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.							
	F	17	14	17	23	20	3.16	1.424
	%	18.7	15.4	18.7	25.3	22.0		
Item19	I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.							
	F	7	7	24	28	25	3.63	1.189
	%	7.7	7.7	26.4	30.8	27.5		

5.2 Students' perceptions toward speaking anxiety and major factors (Research Question2)

The first question in the interview protocol examines the first year students' perspectives whether speaking English is the most anxiety provoking factor for them in the process of learning English as a FL.

Question One: Do you think speaking English is the most anxiety provoking factor in the process of learning English as a FL?

Table 4: The participants' perceptions about the most anxiety provoking factor

	Frequency
An anxiety provoking factor	18
Not anxiety provoking factor	0

The findings from the quantitative data showed that the majority of participants had a moderate level of speaking anxiety. Correspondingly, the detailed data gathered and analysed from the interviews with more than one third of the participants (N=18); 10 males and 8 females, suggested that speaking is the most anxiety provoking factor in the process of learning English as a FL. Table 4 showed that the participants agreed that speaking English make them anxious. Participants stated their thoughts as follows (echoing the majority):

*''When I try to speaking English, I feel my heart pounding and I lose my attention because I just think of my nervousness. I try to avoid speaking in class.'' (*Interviewee 3)

*''Speaking makes me be nervous and I forget everything when the teacher calls my name. And even I believe that I do not understand the what the teacher asks because I just think about what I have to say.'' (*Interviewee 11)

*''I think when I get up on the stage to present a presentation, I am afraid of making mistakes and classmates laugh at me that's why I pronounce the words wrong.'' (*Interviewee 15)

The extractions of the participants' interviews prove that the majority of them feel anxious toward speaking foreign language, especially as a result of fear of negative evaluation, fear of making mistakes and being laugh at. The significant point is that all of the interviewees consider speaking as the most anxiety provoking factor. Hence, Horwitz and Cope (1986) argued that speaking in the TL is the most worried thing in the process of learning a FL. This results show comparability with Young's (1991) study who investigated the students' perspectives toward the most provoking anxiety skill for FL specialists. He claims, classroom activities that students need to present speaking presentation are the most anxiety provoking activities. He also presented three main factor that affect the process of learning a FL; the learners, the teachers and the institution. Furthermore, Price (1991) concluded that speaking in front of classmates is an anxiety provoking factor for the EFL students as they are anxious with being laughed at and making mistakes. Moreover, Debreli & Demirkan (2016) concluded that fear of negative evaluation and making mistakes are the major factors of the Turkish Cypriot EFL students' anxiety. Regarding the findings of the present study which are supported by the mentioned researches in literature, it can be concluded that speaking for the Kurdish EFL students is the most anxiety provoking factor.

Question Two: What are the factors of your speaking anxiety?

The third question was devoted to the factors of the students' foreign language speaking anxiety. They described several points as the factors of their speaking anxiety. The factors were categorized according to three headings as individual, educational and environmental and presented in Table 5.

Table 6. The factors of foreign language speaking anxiety

Factors	Themes	Frequency
Individual	Low self-esteem to speak English	7
	Fear of making mistakes.	15
	I cannot arrange sentences in English.	14
	I spend more time in translating words from Kurdish into English than thinking in English due to lack of sufficient grammar and vocabulary knowledge.	11
Educational	Low speaking skill because I did not use English to speak in school.	16
	I studied grammatical structures more than speaking skill in school.	14
Environmental	I do not have enough opportunities to speak.	2
	Fear of negative evaluation by classmates.	14
	Formal classroom environment.	5

The high frequencies of the results indicate that there are different reasons behind the students' speaking anxiety mainly result from individual, educational and environmental factors. Among the individual factors the theme ''Fear of making mistakes'' and ''I cannot arrange sentences in English'' had the highest frequencies (N= 15 and 14). However, the theme ''Low self-esteem to speak English'' had the lowest frequency (N=7). This means, the Kurdish EFL students have enough self-esteem and they can depend on themselves but there are other impediments that make them anxious. As Interviewee 5 stated that,

''I can trust my abilities to speak English. When I cannot arrange sentences or forget vocabularies because of my bad feeling, I cannot speak. I don't have any problems with my listening''.

Additionally, another remarkable reason for the students to feel anxious is the theme ''I spend more time in translating words from Kurdish into English than thinking in English due to lack of sufficient grammar and vocabulary knowledge'' (N=11). The results indicate that the students make efforts to speak English. Though, they think in Kurdish, translate the vocabularies and arranging the sentences in their minds, they get failure and be anxious. The next point is that when the students lapse in vocabulary and grammatical knowledge they get anxious. This results from their low communicative competence and linguistic codes. Hence, the students' communicative competence including linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences should be developed so as to the students would be able to have the tacit knowledge of English and use it effectively.

Other factors that the students described as the causes of their foreign language speaking anxiety is in the educational category. The themes ''Low speaking skill because I did not use English to speak in school'' and ''I studied grammatical structures more than speaking skill in school'' had high frequencies (N= 16 and 14). The results illustrate that the students did not have a good educational background in learning English as a FL. The main objectives of studying English in school were to learn the grammatical structures and individual vocabularies so as to pass in the exams. Sometimes at the university level the same problem exists as the teachers are over controlling the class and correct every grammatical mistake of the students. As the Interviewee 3 stated,

''I didn't learn speaking English in school because of studying grammatical structures. We used to study English in Kurdish [the structures are explained in Kurdish]. Sometimes even here [at the university level] the teachers give more attention to grammar in speaking''.

With this result, students should not be obliged to speak English fluently unless they are proficient and their grammatical competence is developed. Additionally, regarding the current topic being covered in the classroom, they should be provided sufficient vocabulary knowledge and necessary structures.

In the last category that the students reported as the causes of their speaking anxiety is environmental factors. The theme ''Fear of negative evaluation'' had a high frequency (N=14). Speaking in front of the classmates is a potential reason for the students speaking anxiety because they are afraid of the negative evaluation. Thus, creating a better social environment, small groups and rapport can be helpful for the student. The students should discuss the impromptus with a partner or in small groups before speaking to the class. In addition to that, the students should have a clear idea that the impromptus are low preparation, fun and low stress. This mindset helps students to step outside the box in terms of thinking they need to be perfect.

The last themes 'I do not have enough opportunities to speak' and ''Formal classroom environment'' had low frequencies (N= 2 and 5). It can be seen that the Kurdish EFL students are ready to speak and use English without being apprehended. However, their educational background and individual factors are the major impediments for them.

The results from the interview protocol are the most striking with the results from the quantitative data. The questionnaire revealed that the first year students experience a moderate level of speaking anxiety. Speaking is considered as the most provoking anxiety factor to the participants since the findings confirm that speaking skill makes

the first year students feel anxious. Hence, it was noted that fear of negative evaluation, speaking in front of others and fear of making mistakes were the factors of the Kurdish EFL students' foreign language speaking anxiety. When the students are required to speak spontaneously or without any previous preparations, they get more uncomfortable or anxious as they cannot arrange sentences or find the appropriate vocabularies. Therefore, they sometimes mispronounce the words and being confused to the rest of what they are going to say. From the results of the interviews, it can be concluded that the students get anxious when they cannot pronounce words correctly due to the perfectionist attitude. Consequently, they emphasize on producing correct words and sentences in English, and a probable mistake makes them feel anxious. That's to say, the instructors should give advice and change the students' attitudes toward making mistakes so as to consider it as a normal phase in the process of learning a foreign language. By the virtue of this, the students will overcome their speaking anxiety as they understand that making mistakes is not a weakness but a learning step. Furthermore, the students have a positive attitude toward learning English as they have self-confidence to speak English. However, other factors such as not being able to arrange sentences or find appropriate vocabularies make them anxious. For this reason, the instructors should give enough time to the students to arrange their ideas and get prepared to the oral activities. In addition to that, they should give the oral correction feedback indirectly to the students.

The other sources of the students' speaking anxiety emerging from the present study is having less practice in speaking English language and previous educational background. The students approximately studied English for three hours per a week (35 minutes per a day) which was not sufficient for English proficiency. Both of the mentioned sources can be linked to the students' low proficiency level. Moreover, they can be viewed in terms of getting used to making mistakes. The participants meant that they are not sure of the teachers' and classmates' reactions when they speaking English. Consequently, they pay much attention about the negative evaluation and they get anxious. The students who are attempting to produce a flawless language experience more anxiety. The low level students abandon their attempts and usually use poor strategies when they find struggles. For this reason, the instructors should give sufficient language exposure and comprehensible input to the students through the foundation courses, communicative activities, different contexts and from different speakers. Furthermore, reducing teacher talking time and increasing student talking time through making the students to be autonomous in the classroom.

5. Conclusion

The present study was carried out to investigate foreign language speaking anxiety among the Kurdish EFL students which they were first year students. The study principally intended to determine the students' anxiety level by using a questionnaire and the sources that made them most anxious via a semi-structured interview. The results of the quantitative data revealed that the participants experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety in their English classes. Among the factors that made the students most anxious, immediate questions and speaking in front of others were the most prominent ones.

The results demonstrated that the main factors that made the students most anxious were fear of making mistakes, lack of linguistic ability, lack of preparation in advance and fear of negative evaluation. The factors can be grouped under three categories as individual, educational and environmental. Individual reason such as fear of making mistakes and low proficiency level of English are the most dominant ones. The

educational factors such as their educational background in learning English has a negative correlation with FL speaking anxiety at the university level. The researchers attribute such findings to the fact of there is a lack of interaction and communication among the students in schools. The main objective of teaching English in Kurdish public schools is to teach grammatical structures and reading texts in traditional methods such as audiolingual or grammar translation method. For example, group work or using communicative activities are not familiar in school. The English classes are generally teacher-centered classes. Thus, such learning background definitely affect the students' performance at the university level as they become pre-service teachers. The students take academic courses directly rather than taking prerequisite or foundation courses. Consequently, the students feel anxious and experience FL speaking anxiety due to their lack of sufficient linguistic knowledge in terms of vocabularies, grammar and pronunciation. This result can be found clearly in both the quantitative and qualitative findings. That's to say, the students' level of speaking anxiety is high especially when they tend to speak English without preparation due to fear of making mistakes and when they speak in front of their classmates.

Furthermore, the findings of this research can be considered as a major contribution to the state of understanding on helpful techniques for overcoming FL speaking anxiety, particularly in non-English contexts. The results will be significant for the teachers, educators and the students themselves.

6. Implications

The teachers should understand that foreign language learning, and particularly oral performances, is a potentially stressful situation for the EFL students. When the students suffer from anxiety, the teachers should not see the withdrawn students as lazy, poor attitude or lack of intrinsic motivation. Instead, they should identify the anxious students, diagnose the major causes and helping them to overcome their anxiety. Thus, the first implication of the present study is that the EFL instructors and teachers should be conscious of students' anxiety and be patient and considerate in their sensitivity to learners with speaking anxiety, and should seek suitable steps to assist them. They need to work at alleviate this speaking anxiety among the first year students. Second, since the immediate questions make the students with regard making pronunciation-related mistakes, as revealed in the present study, the teachers should design practice-based and cooperative activities and make small groups of the students that would result in positive classroom environment. Further, the teachers should not concentrate on direct corrective feedback since too much correction may impediment the student to participate in the oral presentations. Third, the teachers should take the students' difficulties and challenges into consideration that they may face because of the poor educational background. They can offer foundation courses to improve the students' competence, linguistic knowledge and skills. Finally, the students should not think of accuracy and be well-prepared before the classes in order to extend their fluency and self-confidence. All those concerned in the process of FL learning and teaching should work together to minimize the impacts of FL speaking anxiety and develop friendly learning environments that will enhance the efficiency of learners in learning English as a FL.

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