

Levels and Major Causes of Saudi Students' Speaking Anxiety (SA) in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract—The current study examined students' levels of English SA and its major causes. It adopted a mixed-method approach that included both quantitative (structured questionnaire) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) data. Fifty first-year female Saudi secondary school students completed a structured questionnaire and 8 of them were interviewed. The findings revealed that students experienced a moderate level of anxiety when speaking English in the classroom. Moreover, students' SA was caused by several causes, such as communication apprehension, low self-confidence, linguistic barriers, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of making mistakes. The study recommends that teachers should learn to detect and recognize the signs of students' SA, motivate their students and help them to be more self-confident. Furthermore, they need to assure their students that making mistakes is an important part of the learning process and stress the significance of respecting classmates when they make mistakes. They also need to work on enhancing the linguistic components that cause hesitancy and anxiousness among students. Finally, teachers can consider requesting additional support, for example from the school principal, beyond what is available in the classroom.

Index Terms—anxiety, causes, EFL, levels, speaking

I. INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is one of the most common disorders that many people have suffered from or experienced to some degree in their lives while coping with stressful events or changes around them. "One of the most well documented psychology phenomena that occur in everyday life is known as Anxiety" (Sinaga, 2020, p. 45). It is an instinctive warning signal that activates when people are feeling stressed or are confronted with a stressful situation. Anxiety affects many aspects of people's lives, including education, in which it has a detrimental effect on learning and achievement.

Language anxiety has been identified as a major barrier to students' willingness to communicate. Students' discomfort in communicating with others in academic settings can have a cascading effect, negatively impacting their performance and the process of learning a foreign language (FL) (Manipuspika, 2018). EFL students struggle with speaking in the target language and consider it a challenging task. SA is "the feeling of shame, embarrassment, afraid of making errors during speaking" (Al-Hnifat et al., 2020, p. 12). Previous research shows that the effect of SA on EFL students works as a powerful predictor of their unwillingness to communicate and their poor performance in oral activities. Some students may experience anxiety related to a particular language skill, rather than general FL anxiety. EFL students' SA is "a separate phenomenon other than general foreign language anxiety and it should also be investigated in other contexts" (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014, p. 14). Unfortunately, SA and its causes in the Saudi context have not been well-defined and deeply investigated yet. Moreover, there is still a vague idea of EFL SA levels among Saudi learners. Thus, the current study investigates the levels and major causes of Saudi students' SA in EFL classrooms, which would help in raising teachers' awareness in order to cope with the problem, mitigate the causes of SA, and create a supportive learning environment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Foreign Language SA

Speaking involves oral production through which language is communicated. It is a necessary activity to produce a language in order to communicate with others in a group or society, and is a manifestation of one's language competence. It is therefore fundamental for English language learners to master speaking skills since they are the primary channel of communication. Despite the importance of speaking English as a primary language competence that students should strive for, mastering it is not easy. Sartika (2016) highlights that students' primary goal in learning English is to be able to speak and use the language in everyday communication. However, for many students, speaking is a difficult task, and they feel constantly under strain, anxious, and terrified of speaking in the target language. Hanifa (2018) agrees with Sartika (2016) that developing communicative competence is difficult, particularly for FL learners.

This is because it is influenced by a variety of factors, including nervousness and anxiety, which appear to be crucial factors that have a debilitating effect on the oral performance of students. For some students, speaking a FL in public can create feelings of intense nervousness, discomfort, worry, and anxiety. Fadlan (2020) points out that speaking a FL in public usually triggers anxiety. Excessive anxiety can occur especially when EFL students are terrified of delivering their ideas in unexpected circumstances. These feelings can cause students embarrassment and lead to slips of the tongue.

B. Causes of English Language Speaking Anxiety

Many factors have been linked to SA. Sadeghi et al. (2013) state that each language learner brings to the classroom a unique set of characteristics that are situational, context-sensitive, and divergent. As a result, the causes of anxiety can be as diverse as the students. According to Sadeghi et al. (2013), these causes are associated with three domains: interpersonal-related causes, linguistic-related causes, and classroom-related causes.

(a). Inter-Personal-Related Causes

Communication Apprehension

CA is the fear of engaging in genuine communication with others, and it occurs among students when they lack mature communication skills despite having mature ideas and thoughts (Shabani, 2012). Learners' discomfort communicating with others may hinder them from developing effective communication skills. Sari (2017) added that students with CA are often embarrassed to speak English, whether to the teacher or their peers. These students believe that someone is critically observing them and looking for errors, which causes them to be anxious when speaking English as they believe their English skills are inferior to those of their peers. The correlation between anxiety in FL classrooms and CA appears to be positive. The findings in Manipuspika's (2018) study revealed a significant positive relationship between students' willingness to communicate and FL classroom anxiety. This means that learners who were more anxious in the classroom appeared to be more apprehensive about communicating in the L2.

Regarding students' CA levels, they might experience high levels of it in FL classrooms. Jalleh et al. (2021) aimed to examine the levels of oral CA among 23 first year Japanese EFL students. The results revealed that most of the students exhibited a high level of oral CA in EFL classrooms in two specific communication contexts: group discussions and conversations. Likewise, the data obtained from the questionnaire in the Sari (2017) study revealed that CA was the factor causing the highest level of anxiety among students when speaking English in classrooms, with a high percentage of students (71%) experiencing CA when speaking English.

Lack of Confidence

Confidence can be defined as having strong beliefs, solid trust, clear expectations, feelings of certainty, full assurance, successful experiences, and so on (Siagian & Adam, 2017). The value of a student's self-confidence should not be underestimated. Students with a healthy sense of self-confidence can develop effective social skills, become more resilient, perform better, and realize their full potential both inside and outside of the classroom. However, some students in English classes might have a high proficiency level in speaking English, but they prefer to remain silent due to their lack of confidence. Siagian and Adam (2017) argue also that some students may have excellent pronunciation and be at a high proficiency level, but they still prefer to remain reticent due to a lack of courage. In oral classes, many students experience anxiety due to their lack of confidence. Melouah (2013) investigated the nature of anxiety that Algerian students experience when performing orally. The findings suggest that English language SA was pervasive and appeared to stem from several factors, including low self-confidence. These students tended to rank their speaking abilities lower than their peers. Furthermore, Toubot et al. (2018) investigated 300 fourth-year Libyan EFL students' levels of SA, looking at the main three factors that contribute to increasing SA. The Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale was adapted to collect quantitative data on SA. The findings revealed that the low self-confidence factor had the highest average score; followed by the fear of negative evaluation and then the communication apprehension factor.

(b). Linguistic-Related Causes

Linguistic Difficulties

It has been widely noted that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, no matter how much they understand the language, still face many speaking difficulties (Al Hosni, 2014). Students' poor linguistic ability contributes greatly to FL anxiety. For instance, students' owned vocabulary might have a significant impact on their oral language production. Rafada and Madini (2017) explained that students' lack of vocabulary raises their SA in EFL class discussions because they do not have sufficient English words to produce. Students see their insufficiency of word power as a stumbling block in their achieving fluent speech. Moreover, students' limited grammatical knowledge might lead them to experience SA in English classes. Kayaoğlu et al. (2013) argued that students' lack of grammatical knowledge and practice, in addition to the perceptions of their low pronunciation ability, made them feel markedly apprehensive when speaking English. Furthermore, students' fear that words will deceive them and vanish from their memory at a critical point might be a linguistic-related source of anxiety in classrooms. Shabani (2012) clarified that the anxiety learners experience in EFL classrooms originates from certain sources, such as the fear of forgetting vocabulary and structures and forgetting what they know. Furthermore, SA might arise due to the concern about one's non-native accent. A study

by Mulyono (2019) examined the factors that contribute to SA among international Indonesian students. Seven international students studying at three universities were interviewed. The results revealed that a common issue leading to the students' FLSA relates to their perception of their inappropriate English accents. Learners were not satisfied with their accents and wanted to sound more like native speakers. This is in line with Coppinger and Sheridan's (2022) findings on non-native accents as a source of SA among EFL Students. They concluded that one's accent is a potential source of SA among students, as their anxiety towards how they sound may cause them to avoid speaking.

(c). Classroom-Related Causes

Fear of Negative Evaluation

Learners typically experience social tension as a result of their dread of negative assessment. Mazidah (2020) clarified that the fear of negative evaluation arises when FL learners feel incapable of making the proper social impression. They are apprehensive about being evaluated by others and therefore tend to avoid evaluative situations. A judgmental classroom environment also might play a vital role not only in students' SA but in their overall academic achievement as well. Samad et al. (2021) explored classroom-related sources of English language SA in Pakistani university students. The sample for the questionnaire comprised 170 postgraduate students while 20 students were interviewed. The findings revealed that learners experienced anxiety when required to speak in front of their peers who were evaluating them and who might form a negative perception about them due to their poor performance. Alternatively, Rafada's (2017) study revealed that more than half of the participants do not experience the fear of negative evaluation from their classmates (peer anxiety), but rather they experience it in relation to their teacher, who often forces them to answer questions immediately and without any prior preparation. This finding concurs with Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014), who emphasize the importance of students being prepared to respond and conclude that learners are more comfortable and relaxed when speaking English if they are prepared to speak or have planned what they want to say.

Fear of Making Mistakes

The fear of making mistakes while producing a language is one of the foremost anxieties among EFL students. Ahmed (2016) argues that the fear of making language mistakes is strongly highlighted by EFL learners as an essential cause of SA. Learners' levels of SA in classrooms vary as a result of their fear of making errors and being laughed at by their classmates. The interviewees in Samad et al.'s (2021) study stated that they prefer to sit silently, avoid answering questions, and refrain from participating in oral activities due to their fear of being laughed at. Moreover, the interviews conducted by Kayaoğlu and Sağlamel (2013) revealed that a significant number of EFL learners were afraid of making mistakes; in contrast, others believed that making mistakes while producing the language plays an important role in enhancing their learning. Some students consider making mistakes as a fundamental and natural part of their learning process. Mobarak (2020) investigated the sources of English language SA from 20 Bangladeshi university students' perspectives. The results revealed that some participants did not have the fear of making mistakes in front of their teachers or peers and considered making mistakes a natural process in learning. This contradictory finding around the fear of making mistakes in front of teachers and peers was related to the students' feelings. Since anxiety is a fluctuating emotion that varies from one person to another, different perspectives may occur.

C. Levels of English Language SA

In EFL classrooms, students exhibit varying degrees of SA. Fitri and Novriewani (2022) divided anxiety into three categories: low, moderate, and high levels. Some students might be highly anxious, while others may be moderately affected, and still others completely unconcerned. Handayani et al. (2019) investigated SA of 30 secondary school students. They emphasized the level, the causal factors, and the strategies to reduce the anxiety. The results revealed that there are three levels of anxiety when it comes to speaking English: anxious, mildly anxious, and relaxed. Over 26.7% were at a relaxed level speaking English, 40% of the students were at a mildly anxious level, and 33.3% were at the anxious level. This indicates that, generally, students are at a mildly anxious level when speaking English. The study conducted by Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014) investigated the level, major causes and determining factors of foreign language SA and students' perceptions of it in a Turkish context. The results revealed that students generally experience a low level of SA.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Questions

The current study examined the following questions:

- 1) What are the levels of Saudi students' SA in EFL classrooms?
- 2) What are the major causes of Saudi students' SA in EFL classrooms?

B. Participants and Setting

Fifty female first-year Saudi EFL students at a secondary school participated in the study. The participants' ages ranged between 16 and 17. The questionnaire was distributed using a random sampling technique, and its completion was entirely voluntary. Furthermore, 8 students were interviewed.

C. Research Instruments

(a). Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was designed by the researchers based on the research questions. The translated version was examined by two Saudi English language teachers. The questionnaire consisted of 37 closed-ended items and divided into four parts. The first part contained 12 items that dealt with the interpersonal-related causes of English SA. The second part consisted of eight items that dealt with its linguistic-related causes, the third part contained seven items that dealt with the classroom-related causes, and the final part contained four items that dealt with the levels of English SA. The questionnaire measures on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from ("strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"). Furthermore, the participants were given straightforward instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. In order to encourage them to give truthful responses, they were informed that there were no correct or incorrect answers. In addition, they were informed that the questionnaire was completely anonymous in order to maintain confidentiality.

(b). Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as an additional data collection instrument to deeply explore the participants' perceptions of English SA. Eight participants were interviewed online. The interviews were conducted in Arabic to allow the participants express themselves more effectively. The interviews were translated into English and then checked by two Saudi English language teachers.

D. Pilot Study

The research instruments were pilot tested by administering them to three randomly selected female first-year Saudi secondary school students, who were not included in the final sample. This would help to identify design issues, assess the time needed to accomplish the questionnaire, familiarize with the instruments used in collecting data, gain insight into the potential results, and spot any flaws or confusion in the questionnaire items provided to the participants. The researchers considered students' suggestions and feedback regarding the questionnaire items and consequently applied some modifications and improvements. Piloting the questionnaire was followed by piloting the online semi-structured interview in order to determine the questions' clarity and appropriateness for the participants.

E. Procedure

The data collection was organized in two phases. In the first phase, the questionnaire was distributed to 50 female Saudi secondary school students. The first researcher attended the participants' classes, introduced herself, and clarified the study objectives. In the second phase, 8 students agreed to participate in the online interviews. The interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes.

F. Data Analysis

(a). Questionnaire

Quantitative data analysis methods were used in this study. The data collected through the questionnaires were processed and analyzed by means of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), and the following statistical tools were used:

- In the description of the study variables, descriptive statistics, such as percentage, mean, and standard deviation, which are used to determine the categories of variable frequency from the researcher's point of view, are given.
- Pearson correlation. The coefficient was used to check for consistency among the questionnaire items and to determine the relationship between the variables.
- Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of the questionnaire items.

(b). Interviews

The interviews were online and conducted in Arabic and then translated into English in order to avoid any confusion. The data were analyzed using the thematic analysis in which data are coded based on common patterns and then thematically analyzed. During the process, the data were coded, grouped, and labeled according to the various themes before summarizing the results.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Quantitative Results

(a). The Levels of Saudi Students' SA in EFL Classrooms

Table 7 shows that the levels of SA among Saudi students in English classes were moderate, with an arithmetic mean of (2.82±0.76), indicating a "neutral" degree. To express anxiety levels, four different statements were used. Three had a "neutral" mean, and one had a low "disagree" score, which influenced the overall mean of anxiety levels.

TABLE 1
THE LEVELS OF SAUDI STUDENTS' SA

Items		Strongly agree	agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	SD	Degree	Rank
1. English speaking classes make me anxious and uncomfortable.	N	5	20	15	10	0	3.40	0.92	neutral	1
	%	10.0	40.0	30.0	20.0	0.0				
2. I consider speaking English as the most stressful of the four English language skills.	N	5	9	12	15	9	2.72	1.23	neutral	3
	%	10.0	18.0	24.0	30.0	18.0				
3. My anxiety from speaking English causes me to skip some classes.	N	2	0	9	15	24	1.82	0.99	disagree	4
	%	4.0	0.0	18.0	30.0	48.0				
4. My anxiety about speaking in English classes prevents me from participating in oral activities.	N	4	19	17	9	1	3.32	0.93	neutral	2
	%	8.0	38.0	34.0	18.0	2.0				
Mean							2.82	0.76	neutral	

(b). *The Major Causes of Saudi Students' SA in EFL Classrooms*

Students' opinions were surveyed through three different sections that dealt with the main causes of Saudi students' SA. All the causes had a mean that indicated a "neutral" degree. First, classroom-related causes had a mean of (3.31 ± 0.78) , followed by personal-related causes had a mean of (3.17 ± 0.74) and finally linguistic causes had a mean of (3.11 ± 0.87) .

Interpersonal-Related Causes

Table 2 shows that interpersonal-related causes had a mean score of "neutral," with a mean of (3.17 ± 0.74) . These causes were expressed through twelve different statements ranging from (2.39 to 3.68 out of 5). Five of them had an average of "agree," six had averages of "neutral," and only one had a low score of "disagree," which influenced the overall average of the personal causes dimension.

TABLE 2
INTERPERSONAL-RELATED CAUSES

Items		Strongly agree	agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	SD	Degree	Rank
1. When I'm called on to speak English in class, I can hear my heart pounding.	N	3	24	14	8	1	3.40	0.89	neutral	6
	%	6.0	48.0	28.0	16.0	2.0				
2. When I'm called on to speak English in class, my hands get clammy.	N	1	7	12	21	9	2.39	1.00	disagree	12
	%	2.0	14.0	24.0	42.0	18.0				
3. When I'm called on to speak English in class, my voice starts to quiver, and my mouth dries, which makes it difficult to utter even simple words.	N	7	20	11	11	1	3.42	1.04	agree	5
	%	14.0	40.0	22.0	22.0	2.0				
4. I'm afraid of speaking English in front of my teacher and classmates.	N	1	21	10	15	3	3.04	1.02	neutral	8
	%	2.0	42.0	20.0	30.0	6.0				
5. I start to panic when I'm asked to speak English in class.	N	2	11	16	11	10	2.68	1.14	neutral	11
	%	4.0	22.0	32.0	22.0	20.0				
6. I Forget the main points of the speech I'm about to deliver when I'm called to speak English in class.	N	8	21	10	9	2	3.48	1.08	agree	2
	%	16.0	42.0	20.0	18.0	4.0				
7. I get nervous when my English language teacher calls my name as the first one to speak in front of the class.	N	6	29	10	3	2	3.68	0.90	agree	1
	%	12.0	58.0	20.0	6.0	4.0				
8. I prefer to sit silently rather than speak in English classes.	N	9	15	11	12	3	3.30	1.19	neutral	7
	%	18.0	30.0	22.0	24.0	6.0				
9. I feel embarrassed of speaking English, whether with my teacher or my classmates.	N	2	9	18	17	4	2.76	0.97	neutral	10
	%	4.0	18.0	36.0	34.0	8.0				
10. I avoid participating in group discussions and conversations in English class.	N	4	14	14	12	6	2.96	1.15	neutral	9
	%	8.0	28.0	28.0	24.0	12.0				
11. I hesitate to respond and participate in English communications.	N	10	18	13	3	6	3.46	1.22	agree	4
	%	20.0	36.0	26.0	6.0	12.0				
12. When I'm about to say something in English, I decide in the end against it.	N	9	18	15	4	4	3.48	1.12	agree	2
	%	18.0	36.0	30.0	8.0	8.0				
Mean							3.17	0.74	neutral	

Linguistic-Related Causes

Table 3 shows that linguistic-related causes had a mean score of "neutral," with a mean of (3.11 ± 0.87) . These causes were expressed through eight statements ranging from (2.8 to 3.44 out of 5). Two of them had an average of "agree," and six of them had averages indicating a "neutral" score, which affected the overall average of the linguistic reasons dimension.

TABLE 3
LINGUISTICS-RELATED CAUSES

Items		Strongly agree	agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	SD	Degree	Rank
1. I get nervous when I speak English in class because I don't have a sufficient English vocabulary.	N	8	21	9	9	3	3.44	1.13	agree	1
	%	16.0	42.0	18.0	18.0	6.0				
2. I feel anxious when I speak English in class due to my lack of grammatical knowledge.	N	5	15	12	11	7	3.00	1.22	neutral	5
	%	10.0	30.0	24.0	22.0	14.0				
3. I feel nervous when I speak English in class due to my struggle with pronouncing English words correctly.	N	6	13	12	13	6	3.00	1.22	neutral	5
	%	12.0	26.0	24.0	26.0	12.0				
4. When I am about to speak English, my mind goes blank.	N	5	19	11	9	6	3.16	1.19	neutral	3
	%	10.0	38.0	22.0	18.0	12.0				
5. I get nervous when I speak English in class due to the way I sound.	N	3	16	10	14	7	2.88	1.18	neutral	7
	%	6.0	32.0	20.0	28.0	14.0				
6. It is frustrating for me to speak English because of my accent.	N	3	13	14	11	9	2.80	1.18	neutral	8
	%	6.0	26.0	28.0	22.0	18.0				
7. I feel anxious when I speak English in class because I lack the necessarily English words to express my opinions and ideas.	N	4	27	9	7	3	3.44	1.02	agree	1
	%	8.0	54.0	18.0	14.0	6.0				
8. My struggle with the correct use of grammar and structure prevents me from speaking English in class.	N	4	15	18	9	4	3.12	1.05	neutral	4
	%	8.0	30.0	36.0	18.0	8.0				
Mean							3.11	0.87	neutral	

Classroom-Related Causes

Table 4 shows that classroom-related causes had a mean score of "neutral," with a mean of (3.31 ± 0.78) . These causes were expressed through seven statements ranging from (2.78 to 3.94 out of 5). Three of them had an average of "agree," and four of them had averages indicating a "neutral" score, which affected the overall average of the classroom causes dimension.

TABLE 4
CLASSROOM-RELATED CAUSES

Items		Strongly agree	agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	SD	Degree	Rank
1. My classmates' perceptions of me when I speak English frighten me.	N	7	19	11	10	3	3.34	1.12	neutral	4
	%	14.0	38.0	22.0	20.0	6.0				
2. I prefer to remain silent in English classes to avoid negative comments from my classmates.	N	3	12	10	21	4	2.78	1.08	neutral	7
	%	6.0	24.0	20.0	42.0	8.0				
3. My teacher's perceptions of me when I speak English frighten me.	N	5	14	13	13	5	3.02	1.16	neutral	5
	%	10.0	28.0	26.0	26.0	10.0				
4. I get nervous when my teacher asks me to answer questions immediately without and any prior preparation.	N	17	19	9	4	1	3.94	1.01	agree	1
	%	34.0	38.0	18.0	8.0	2.0				
5. It bothers me when my English teacher suddenly shifts in turns between us.	N	14	19	3	12	2	3.62	1.23	agree	2
	%	28.0	38.0	6.0	24.0	4.0				
6. I avoid participating in English oral activities due to my fear of making mistakes and being laughed at.	N	4	15	13	13	5	3.00	1.13	neutral	6
	%	8.0	30.0	26.0	26.0	10.0				
7. I am usually concerned about the impression I make in English speaking classes.	N	7	21	13	6	3	3.46	1.06	agree	3
	%	14.0	42.0	26.0	12.0	6.0				
Mean							3.31	0.78	neutral	

B. Qualitative Results

(a). *The Major Causes of Saudi Students' SA in EFL Classrooms*

Linguistic Barriers

Five interviewees (Students A, B, C, E, and G) revealed that the main reason for their SA is linked to the linguistic barriers they experience. They agreed on the specific linguistic causes that contribute to their anxiety, for example memorizing and forgetting vocabulary, mispronouncing words, using words inappropriately, and a lack of vocabulary. For instance, Student A stated: *"What concerns me the most is my struggle with pronouncing words correctly. In addition, memorizing English vocabulary, particularly those words with multiple definitions, and trying to remember them."* Student B added: *"When I speak English, I believe that my teacher and classmates do not understand me. I have difficulty expressing myself in an understandable manner. Moreover, some English letters and words appear difficult or confusing to pronounce. For example, the silent letters in some words, such as (g), usually confuse me."* Furthermore, student D claimed: *"Perhaps because I don't have sufficient vocabulary. I keep forgetting new English words no matter how much I memorize. I believe this is because I do not have the opportunity to practice them in my daily life."* Student G remarked: *"Mainly, my lack of English vocabulary, as sometimes it takes me time to recall or find the appropriate words to share my ideas and answers; it always concerns me whether the word fits the context or not"*.

Low Self-Confidence

The second theme that emerged from the interviews was students' low self-confidence. This problem, as some of the participants revealed, may contribute to their SA. For instance, student F said: *"I usually doubt what I'm going to say. It takes me time to finally share something in English, and that's if I ever do"*. Student H also reported: *"I sometimes hesitate to speak because I don't consider myself a good English speaker"*.

Communication Apprehension

One of the interviewees described her SA as an apprehension about speaking in front of the class. When she attempts to speak English, certain symptoms appear that prevent her from doing so. Student E elaborated: *"When I decide to share or discuss something in English, my heart begins to pound. I get confused and simply forget what I want to say"*.

(b). *Feeling While Speaking English in Class*

The findings showed that 6 out of 8 interviewees (Students A, B, C, E, G and F) clarified that they feel pressure, anxious, terrified, nervous, and uncomfortable while speaking English. For instance, Student B commented: *"The feelings of anxiety and fear usually prevent me from speaking English in class"*. Student C added: *"Speaking English in class puts me under a lot of pressure. I usually prefer to set silently rather than speak."* Student E declared: *"I become terrified and begin to panic to the degree that I forget what I want to say."* On the other hand, two of the interviewees stressed that regardless of how they feel, they keep persisting in English speaking classes. For example, student D mentioned: *"Sometimes speaking English in class is challenging for me, but that doesn't stop me from trying to speak and share my thoughts"*. In addition, Student H reported: *"Speaking in English classes is not something I'm comfortable doing, but I occasionally force myself to do so in order to practice and learn the language"*.

(c). *Feeling While Making Mistakes in Speaking*

Six respondents spoke with one voice that they feel embarrassed and disappointed when they make mistakes while speaking in English classrooms. For instance, Student A reported: *"I feel embarrassed when making mistakes in front of my classmates"*. Student B added: *"When I make mistakes, I feel bad."* Student C commented: *"It embarrasses me, sometimes I avoid speaking because I don't want to make mistakes"*. On the other hand, 2 respondents had different views about making mistakes. For example, Student D clarified: *"It is uncomfortable for me, but at the same time, making mistakes doesn't stop me from sharing my answers."* Student H reported: *"For me, it's an opportunity to learn from my mistakes"*.

V. DISCUSSION

The results showed that female Saudi students were moderately anxious about speaking in English in the classroom. Several previous studies on SA conducted similar investigations in various contexts, such as that presented by Alnahidh et al. (2020) in the context of Saudi university students, Akkakoson (2016) in the context of Thai university students, and Sinaga et al. (2020) in the context of Indonesian secondary students. This highlights the importance of this issue in EFL research which should not be overlooked. Ahmed (2016) stated that SA may lead students to be reticent and have uncomfortable and negative feelings when they communicate in the target language. In addition, Ghorbandordinejad and Ahmadabad (2015) elaborated that SA limits students' ability to achieve positive learning outcomes. The findings of both the quantitative and qualitative data revealed that students' anxiety is driven by a variety of causes. The first domain consists of interpersonal-related causes, which contain communication apprehension and low self-confidence. The second domain consists of linguistic-related causes such as insufficient vocabulary; forgetting words, phrases, or specific ideas before sharing something; lack of grammatical knowledge; and poor pronunciation. The third domain comprises classroom-related causes, which include students' fear of negative evaluation and fear of making mistakes.

The first cause of SA was fear of communicating with other individuals (communication apprehension). The findings of the quantitative data indicate that participants suffer from communication-related issues that lead them to avoid speaking during class time. This result accords with Jalleh et al. (2021) and Sari (2017), who concluded that communication apprehension is a significant factor affecting students' willingness to participate in English speaking classes. Moreover, a high percentage of participants get nervous when they are chosen to be the first who speaks in front of the class. This might be due to students' shyness, fear of embarrassment, or their dissatisfaction with being the center of attention. Several studies (e.g., Sultana & Jamin, 2021) have stated that fear is provoked when learners are asked to speak in front of the class, because of the risk of social embarrassment, shyness, and the fear of being the center of attention, as they feel that everybody is looking at them.

The quantitative data revealed that students' communication apprehension causes specific symptoms that appear when they are asked to speak, such as heart pounding, mouth dryness, voice quivering, panicking, forgetfulness, and avoidance of speaking. This result supports Kasap and Power's (2019) findings that teachers have observed that anxious students have adopted certain behaviors in English speaking classrooms through signs of visible discomfort, panicking, avoidance of speaking, trembling, and change in voice tone. The overall communication apprehension that participants experience might be related to the FL classroom itself. According to Manipuspika (2018), there is a significant positive relationship between students' willingness to communicate and FL classroom anxiety.

Participants in the current study clearly experienced SA due to their lack of self-confidence. This was evident in the qualitative data, in which two of the interviewed students showed hesitation when they were about to respond and participate in English communication. Furthermore, the quantitative data revealed that more than half of the participants (54%) decide in the end not to share in English. This result ties in well with Toubot et al. (2018), who tackled the three main causes that contribute to increasing SA among EFL learners. They found that students' low self-confidence in English speaking classes had the highest average in arousing their SA. Students' lack of self-confidence can be triggered by various factors. Al-Hnifat et al. (2020) elaborated on these reasons, such as past negative experiences, authoritative instructor, previous failures, learners' lack in speaking proficiency, unreasonable anticipations about performance, and negative beliefs towards English could impact their confidence. Furthermore, linguistic difficulties, as reported by the participants in both the qualitative and quantitative data, play an important role in evoking SA. For instance, the participants are thought to struggle greatly in expressing their opinions and ideas due to their limited owned vocabulary. The findings showed a positive correlation between students' lack of vocabulary and their SA, as indicated by the high percentage of students. This result agrees with Rafada (2017) as well as Kayaoğlu and Sağlamel (2013), who clarified that students' lack of vocabulary raises their SA in EFL class discussions because they do not have sufficient English words to produce.

Moreover, according to the quantitative data, the participants struggled with a lack of grammatical knowledge. They were concerned about producing grammatically incorrect sentences and structure. This finding is in accordance with Kayaoğlu and Sağlamel (2013), who investigated students' SA through interviews and found that the lack of grammatical knowledge and practice made them feel markedly apprehensive when speaking English. A further key finding was that students appeared to be anxious about their pronunciation during class time. This corresponds with Kayaoğlu and Sağlamel (2013), who argued that students' perceptions of their low pronunciation ability make them feel markedly concerned when speaking English. Students' SA was evoked by the fear of negative evaluation. This was evident where more than half of the participants were frightened of their classmates' perceptions of them when they speak. They were therefore concerned about the impression they make in front of their classmates. This result ties in with Handayani et al. (2019), who indicated that one of the main sources of English speaking anxiousness among students is the judgmental classroom environment and the fear of negative evaluation from their peers, which have been frequently reported as SA contributors. Furthermore, this finding supports what Samad et al. (2021) found, which is that learners experienced anxiety when required to speak in front of their peers who were evaluating them, and who might form a negative perception about them due to their poor performance.

Surprisingly, the participants' teachers contributed to raising their fear of negative evaluation and as a result, to their SA. They were concerned about answering questions immediately, without any prior preparation. A high percentage of respondents reported that they feel anxious when they are required to answer or share something before they are fully prepared. They feel irritated when the teacher unexpectedly switches in turns between them. Studies such as Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014), Humaera and Pramustiara (2022) have highlighted the importance of students being prepared before responding, explaining that learners are more comfortable and relaxed when speaking English if they are prepared to speak or have planned what they want to say. They need time to understand and think of the question, write points for answers, relax, think positively and confidently, and calm down before responding. The fear of making mistakes was the last SA evoking cause experienced by the participants. The findings revealed that most of the interviewees have experienced the feeling of embarrassment and disappointment when they made mistakes while speaking. This corresponds with the interviewees in the Samad et al.'s (2021) study, who stated that they prefer to sit silently, avoid answering questions, and avoid participating in oral activities due to their fear of making mistakes.

VI. CONCLUSION

The current study confirms that students' moderated levels of SA were driven by different causes, such as communication apprehension, low self-confidence, linguistic barriers, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of making mistakes. Based on this, future research could explore these findings in different directions. Researchers could resume investigating the three domains of causes (interpersonal, linguistic, and classroom) to determine if there are additional related causes that provoke anxiety among EFL students. Moreover, researchers could go beyond the causes and investigate how students perceive and deal with anxiety in EFL classrooms. In order to better address this issue, it is suggested that researchers pursue whether students' SA is specific to the English language or if they experience it when speaking their native language as well.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be offered:

- Teachers should gain an in-depth understanding of how to detect and recognize the signs of students' SA and deal with its symptoms.
- Teachers should motivate their students to speak up and participate in class. They should help to alleviate their anxiety, boost their self-confidence, and provide a comfortable environment for them to feel more at ease.
- Teachers should emphasize to their students that making mistakes is not only allowed and acceptable but also an important part of the learning process. Most importantly, they should remind their students to respect their classmates when they make mistakes.
- Teachers should concentrate on enhancing the linguistic components that cause students to be hesitant and anxious when speaking English.
- Teachers should provide their students with the time and opportunity to understand and think of the questions, prepare their answers, and organize their ideas before sharing them in front of the class.
- Some very anxious students may require additional support other than what the teacher can provide; in this case, teachers should approach the school principal for additional assistance beyond what is available in the classroom.

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