

Speaking Anxiety in an Afghan EFL Setting: A Case Study of an Afghan University

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Abstract

Speaking anxiety is a significant phenomenon which is experienced by the majority of learners, specifically Afghan EFL learners in their speaking. This qualitative study aimed to explore the reported experiences of seven Afghan EFL students studying in English Department of Takhar University with their speaking anxiety. For collecting the data, a semi-structured interview was designed. After collecting the data, the data was transcribed verbatim, and three important themes were drawn: (a) students' perceptions of anxiety in speaking (b) reasons for speaking anxiety (c) the effects of speaking anxiety on students' performance and the ways to overcome anxiety. The results showed that students' perceptions toward speaking anxiety are both positive and negative. The findings also revealed that correcting students' mistakes by teachers on the spot is a big cause for experiencing anxiety in speaking. The students reported that watching videos of English speakers of different English speaking countries and doing some physical exercises like, breathing deeply before taking part in classroom activities, using body language, and showing more eye contact while doing oral practices were core strategies they had used to reduce speaking anxiety.

Keywords: speaking anxiety, Afghan EFL learners, English videos, reported experiences, effects

1. Introduction

Speaking as an interactive skill is the most important course in acquiring a language. It is often believed to be one of the skills which may create more aspects of anxieties while being used by the learners. The majority of students are afraid of speaking while learning the language as a foreign language in their own context. Clearly, anxiety as a negative factor can easily be appeared in speaking when it is used by students. Anxiety itself is a feeling that may appear in different situations, such as getting ready for a job interview, giving speech to audience, or participating in an exam. This is considered important in education especially in learning process. Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that anxiety is experienced as an affective factor in all studies and it impacts the learning process. Besides, Horwitz (2001) asserted that anxiety is a kind of feeling that learners may create positive attitudes while taking it serious. He also noticed

that these types of emotions and feelings help learners to evaluate what threats come to them and respond carefully to them in a proper way.

Anxiety obviously hampers speaking skill along with the ease or difficulty with which is acquired by learners. A research regarding this feeling indicated that anxiety decreases when the individuals get more experiences and proficiency (Gardner, Smythe & Brunet, 1977). On the contrary, other studies have conducted and showed that upper-level students with more experiences have had more anxiety (Kitano, 2001). We may then understand that, as a general and irrefutable fact, and regardless of some situations which are exceptional, the more the learners are proficient in a language, the lower their anxiety becomes. However, the influence of anxiety is not overlooked above proficiency of many other learners with more abilities who avoid speaking.

Moreover, it is clear that the main purpose of learning a foreign language is to be able speak it properly and fluently. Nonetheless, it is very hard for foreign language learners to become communicatively competent because of being influenced by some factors including affective ones. To add more, mastering speaking skill as productive is very important aspect compared with other skills which are in a language. Rechards and Renandya, (as cited in Griffiths, 2008) claimed that many learners study a language to improve their language proficiency or they want to become more competent in communicating while speaking the language.

Among these affective factors which affect the learning process particularly foreign language learning, anxiety is very significant factor that has a weak effect on students' performance in speaking. The feelings like worries, nervousness and apprehension are backing up the anxiety or they are the elements that the anxiety appeared by when learning a language. They also indicate that learners may be good in other language skills, but they may have a 'mental block' when speaking a foreign language in the public (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Similarly, Tanveer (2007) emphasized that these feelings seem to be negative and affect the learning process of the learners in the target language. Speaking anxiety prevents students from speaking. Students whose learning process affected by anxiety may face difficulties and challenges in concentrating on and achieving their targets for education more than other students who have results in poor performance (Brown, 2004; Gani et al., 2015; Yalcin & Inecay, 2014).

As anxiety plays an important part in people's life, particularly in educational settings. It is impossible for learners to show no anxiety while learning a language. The teachers sometimes express their concerns over the anxiety of their students in language learning. Some of the teachers may suggest good ways of overcoming anxiety and some may be looking for useful and helpful strategies in order to help their students get rid of anxiety, especially mastering speaking

skill. For example, a teacher asks students to express themselves or says something related to the lesson then the student get anxious too much what to say or how to say in a foreign language because of having more anxiety in their speaking. The teachers are always looking for solutions for their students and I am sure some of them try to help them not feel anxiety in their learning process. As the experiences have shown, many teachers with their helpful and instructive feedback and comments could help their learners to overwhelm anxiety in order to have a better language learning process.

However, anxiety is commonly felt among EFL learners, this qualitative report is going be about the experiences of students with their speaking anxiety. Besides, every research paper is conducted to seek solution for the problems being in a community and suggests that teachers may have to look for helpful and effective ways to decrease anxiety that learners might have while learning a language. I hope this paper can be helpful for those learners who are struggling with anxiety in their learning process and I hope to provide concrete understanding regarding the role of anxiety in speaking skill and address the issue more successfully in Afghan EFL context.

There will probably be a rich body of literature on speaking anxiety by other research writers, but there is also a gap in literature on this topic in Afghanistan educational context. Therefore, this qualitative paper seeks the reported experiences of Afghan English students concerning speaking anxiety. I know the topic anxiety seems crucial for some EFL in educational centers, particularly in schools and universities of Afghanistan. A big number of students are coping with speaking anxiety in the Afghan teaching context and this is a dire need for conducting further research in order to understand the root and effects on Afghan EFL learners' speaking skill. I selected this topic to conduct a qualitative study as to raise the voices of students, especially those who are feeling that anxiety is an important part of their life's affairs. This study is also significant to investigate the experiences of students suffering from speaking anxiety when asking to start speaking in front of their partners or audience in a public place. It would be also a chance for teachers and educators to deeply realize the perceptions of their students towards anxiety in speaking and renew their teaching philosophy until they meet the needs of their students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Language Anxiety

Generally speaking, anxiety comes as subjective feeling, apprehension, nervousness and worry connected with the nervous system (Spielberger, 1983). Although Scovel (1978) make some arguments that it may have to be born in mind and even most of the learners know what language anxiety is and they all have the already experiences of strange feelings like anxiousness, and anxiety itself is not easy to make definition based on in a few simple sentences. To think about it further, anxiety can be wholly associated with "threats to self-efficacy and

appraisals of situations as threatening” (Pappamihiel, 2002, p. 331). To add more, Gregersen (2005) argues that learners who feel anxiety in their language learning process may find their lesson not much enjoyable. According to Abu-Rabia (2004), the foreign language learners with a high level of anxiety are always worried about their learning process physically and emotionally (p. 712). There are some characteristics in the formal foreign language learning to provoke anxiety in learners in order not to speak freely and without any obstacles. For example, language learning anxiety is generally related to the inability to deliver one’s ideas and opinions very well in the target language, which lessen self-esteem and put one’s self-image at risk.

Astonishingly, there were a total lack of relationships recognized between anxiety and Speech Skills (Hamayan, Genesee & Tucker, 1976; Swain & Burnaby, 1976). After doing a survey on a group of English children attending a full immersion of French, Swain and Burnaby found that there is a negative correlation between anxiety and children’s proficiency of French although they could not find any connections with any other proficiency measures. Therefore, there are two interesting definitions of anxiety have been found through the investigation. First, the term facilitating anxiety, is mostly described as positive force which may lead the learners to become more motivated and proactive in the process of their language learning. Clearly, the subject is related to the task can be in a more rational way, attempting more interpretive messages. Alpert & Haber (1960) clarified in one of their papers that the key point was the “description of a new achievement-anxiety scale which has been devised to indicate not only the presence of or absence of anxiety, but whether the anxiety facilitates or weakens the learners’ performance.

To compare with, debilitating anxiety pushes the learner to withdraw from the language task and lead him or her to accept avoidance behaviors (Alpert & Haber, 1960; Scovel, 1978). As Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that highly anxious learners avoid conveying complicated messages in the foreign language, or spend more time to learn vocabulary items. Additionally, although anxious students tend to study a lot, their grades that they take in a particular course often do not reflect their endeavors (Price, 1991). On the contrary, Steinberg and Horwitz (1986) emphasize that persons who usually perceive and realize themselves like sociable and remarkably clever may experience challenges when they are asked to communicate basic concepts in the foreign language learning. Thus, the facts indicate that anxiety itself plays a crucial psychological role as EFL learners are much concerned.

2.2 Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Anxiety appears in individuals’ emotions in a negative way which is not welcomed by them. Tobias (1986) stated that we may experience worry, fear and nervousness when we are anxious. Anxiety is may be in any fields of learning, particularly in speaking skill which most of EFL learners suffer from while they are speaking. Students who believe that no one has to say

nothing in EFL language until it can be said accurately may ever speak (Abdullah & Abdullah Rahman, 2009). Moreover, Young (1990) asserts that speaking anxiety is associated with social anxiety and self-esteem. According to Basic (2011), learners who are dealing with speaking anxiety are mostly very quiet and passive. They do not pay more attention than active students. Therefore, they may receive less attention from their instructors in comparison with noisy and aggressive children (p. 10).

Regarding anxiety, many researchers have investigated and did a rich body of literature review and finally identified several types of anxiety. Dörnyei (2005), for instance, distinguishes two kinds of anxiety: 1) 'facilitating' and 'debilitating' and 2) 'trait' and 'state' anxiety. Facilitating anxiety is very good because it seems helpful while debilitating anxiety is harmful and hinders learners' achievements. Trait anxiety comes in special situations and is considered as an intrinsic feature of individuals, whereas state anxiety is quite damaging to EFL learners. Consequently, Cassady (2010) stated the term 'academic anxiety' as a number of anxieties come together that learners experience while being in the classrooms. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), students may experience anxiety while they like to start acquiring a foreign language in their own institution.

It is seen that a person with trait anxiety can always be anxious when he or she faces different situations. Although this approach to anxiety has been criticized that trait anxiety itself would be meaningless when it is not considered important in interaction with the situation, a specific condition may be recognized an anxiety-provoking by some. Those learners who have similar trait anxiety will score the same in their performance. Similarly, EFL learners who experience anxiety in general (i.e., who have high level of anxiety related to trait) will show an increase in the level of state anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

However, speaking in the foreign language both socially and academically involves risk taking and appears to be a challenging activity in which learners who are not fluent enough in the target language may experience that they cannot completely express their own personality, or their intelligence. Students who are attempting to acquire a foreign language may feel difficulties in relating to others, experiencing in some cases a sense of strange or "cultural shocks" (Crookal & Oxford, 1991). Because of this, the need for a proper study of how people learn a foreign language has occurred with the roots in the second half of the 20th century. In addition, researchers who previously conducted many researches stably described that learning a foreign language is very complex process which implies the study of new grammar, pronunciation, memorization of new words, but first and foremost it may test the students' ability in terms of their flexibility to be risk takers and making mistakes in front of audience or those who they address.

Young (1992) illustrated that speaking anxiety is probably considered the most worrying skill among the four skills of a language from the point of views of EFL teachers and learners. Regarding the anxiety of oral production, a rich body of research has been conducted, but only a few studies have concentrated on the sources of it (Kitano, 2001). According to Kitano (2001), a fear of negative evaluation as a personality trait and self-perception of speaking ability in the foreign language are two possible sources leading to FL speaking anxiety. If both fear of negative evaluation and self-perception of speaking ability have any effects on foreign language anxiety, these two variables probably interact to influence learners' anxiety level

2.3 Sources of Speaking Anxiety

In the foreign language classrooms, there will be several sources of speaking anxiety. Some will probably be connected with the students' personality, the specific context where foreign language is acquired, the teacher, or the instructional practice. Anxiety will also be appeared from a variety of speaking activities experienced by learners. In this qualitative study, there will be a number of variables concerning speaking anxiety provided. One of the variables which can indicates speaking anxiety is gender. The relationship between gender and foreign language anxiety is a factor referring to certain speaking activities in an EFL context. Campbell and Shaw (as cited in Krohne et al., 2001) reported that obvious disparities between men and women in relation to 'cognitive responses' to an aversive situation show the individual differences. They also found out that women showed more 'vigilance' in their attitudes that men did, while men manifested more avoidance behavior in anxiety-provoking situations.

Campbell (1999) analyzed that gender as one of the sources of anxiety in the foreign language classrooms caused that there are no important differences between men and women in connection with speaking anxiety at the beginning of their two-week language course. The only thing found by Campbell (1999) was concerning percentage at the end of the course. Because of this, for speaking, females' anxiety got higher less than 1%, whereas males' anxiety rose approximately 13%. The same study done by Campbell in the classes of reading and listening in which the listening activities were the most fearful ones by both male and female learners. Comparable results were also received by Campbell and Shaw (as cited in Campbell, 1999) that gender itself is something which is not related to anxiety at the beginning of an EFL class. Gender differences were only appeared in correlation to the time that the researchers would administer the survey. That is to say, some remarkable differences were arisen in the level of anxiety between men and women when 60 hours of instruction have been passed. When the survey was done, the study finally showed that men were completely turned out to be more anxious and they were afraid of speaking than the women did.

The result of a study conducted by Aida (1994) shows that gender had a significant impact on the achievement of EFL learners. Clearly, the findings revealed that women scored higher than men. The only important thing was an effect on the course grades, but there was not

any remarkable gender-anxiety interaction impact on the achievement of EFL learners. That is, learners who felt anxiety in speaking classroom were highly anxious and did receive a lower grade than those learners who were relaxed and comfortable enough in the language speaking classrooms.

Bailey (1983) reported that competitiveness can also result in anxiety. Her research analysis found that there are tests and learners' relationship with their teacher leads them to anxiety. These three aspects recognized by Bailey were mostly backed up by subsequent studies, particularly in Young's study. Young (1991) stated that there are some possible causes of speaking anxiety, such as personal and interpersonal anxieties, learners' perceptions towards language learning, teachers' attitudes towards language teaching, teacher-student interactions, classroom procedures and language testing. Young (1994) further expressed that these sources of anxiety are interrelated.

Another source of speaking anxiety is negative self-perception and low self-esteem in which learners may experience this through cognitive interference created by self-related cognition (Tobias, 1986). Students sometimes, because of having more anxiety in their language learning, may not be able to manage themselves to the tasks provided by their teachers in language classrooms. Learners who highly feel anxiety in speaking class will have poor performance which is not good enough to themselves and their teachers. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), learners limit their abilities to elaborate on the information received in the class. Daly (1997) pointed out that students with high level of anxiety tend to have more negative self-perception and may underrate the quality of their speaking ability. A survey conducted by both MacIntyre and Gardner and based their analysis they found that 87% of students perceived speaking as the most anxiety-provoking experience and it hinders the learners from moving forward. The result of the survey also indicated that there is an important difference felt in the self-rated speaking ability of learners and was more anxiety-arousing than any other group of students in the language classrooms that they were better and did not feel uncomfortable.

For these reasons, the role of negative self-perception is much felt in the language classrooms among learners and it is teachers they may have to encourage the students in order to have a decrease in the level of their anxiety. The teachers may also encourage them to change their negative attitudes towards speaking into positive until the level of their good performance gets higher. Similarly, the low self-esteem which is felt among learners in the foreign language classroom (Young, 1999) could be another source of speaking anxiety. Relating to this issue, Horwitz et al. (1986) states EFL language learning process may be an ever-provoking threat to the personality of EFL learners. For this reason, the learners' possibility to express their statements is justly limited in comparison with their mother tongues. The research result of

Horwitz' investigation shows that 38% of the learners agree with the statement (Horwitz et al., 1986).

2.4 The Effects of Anxiety on Students' Performance

Anxiety as an obstacle will hinder the learners from speaking in class, delaying their assignments, and going forward. According to McCroskey et al. (1977), learners with "high apprehension" have the lowest self-esteem and do not have good performance in their language classes. Students with even high apprehension of communication may avoid the situations in which communication is a must to have and finally face the failure to get the rewards related to interaction. Xiuquin (2006) reported that anxiety is considered as a very negative factor in the process of language learning, particularly in speaking classrooms. The following are some of the negative factors which hamper the learners from doing their tasks in classrooms.

Speaking anxiety caused that students will have more problems in acquiring the target language. According to Xiuquin (2006), learners having anxiety will have more difficulties and challenges in focusing on and processing their input inside the teaching classrooms. Therefore, when the time of performing comes, the students will be affected by their inputs. As Tobias (as cited in MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994) presented a model which clarify the effect of anxiety on learning, (i.e., Tobias model) draws the differences among the learning stages, input, processing learning, and output as to elaborate on some of the effects of anxiety in each stage.

The input stage is related to the items represented from students' memories. Therefore, this stage, the level of anxiety acting as a function in students' ability to receive, focuses, and encodes the external stimuli. For example, in foreign language learning, anxiety may appear if the language is spoken very fast, and then the learners will ask for repetition of the same sentences mentioned by the teacher. The same problems may be found in other skills of language. Based on Krashen's point of view (1985), the affective filter hypothesis is incorporated which leads to the factors filtering the mount of inputs in learners' memory, i.e., there are four affective factors which may affect foreign language learning. In the long run, the learners with high affective filter will have a remarkable decrease in their intake, and students will low affective filter will allow more input into their language acquisition process (Due, 2009).

Another effect of speaking anxiety which affects the students' performance is the processing stage. According to Tadjouri (2017), this stage covers many cognitive operations including organizing, storing, and assimilating the materials. Similarly, the learners in a foreign language learning classroom manipulate the unseen and internal items which are derived from the first stage. Thus, latency is the primary sign of an activity at the second stage. Anxiety worsens the cognitive processing on the tasks that are harder, reckon on memory, and is poorly

organized. These latter are time consuming, i.e., the time spent to get a message or acquire a new lexis will be the indicator of activity at this stage for foreign language learners.

Tadjouri (2017) further elaborates on the third stage of the effects of speaking anxiety which is the output stage. In this stage, the target language is likely to be appeared while the learners are communicating. This stage is something refers to the performance of students which has been processed. That is to say, it is probably related to the aforesaid stages from the organization of the output the time spent on receiving the information. In this stage, the students may obviously demonstrate their abilities to use the foreign language. Clearly, the students' performance is measured and it reflects their learning as well. These three stages are much interdependent because at each stage something happened which is the result of the previous one. Tadjouri (2017) explained that a difficulty in performing at the output stage is probably the result of the surplus existed in the input or processing stage. This is the reason that a negative correlation between foreign language production and language anxiety denotes problems at any of these three stages.

2.5 Students' Attitudes Towards Speaking Anxiety

Many researchers have conducted research studies regarding the students' beliefs about foreign language learning process along with speaking anxiety. Findings from researches show that students of foreign language learning bring a variety of preconceived beliefs to their foreign language classrooms, according to unrealistic expectations which may produce and increase the tension and worry levels (Ellis, 1994). Horwitz (1988) reported that students show up to the classrooms with prior conceptions that languages are much difficult to learn. Similarly, Ellis (1994) stated that speaking in a foreign language classroom helps students to learn a new language without gender distinctions.

On the other hand, a small group of fresh university students participated in the study of Horwitz (1988) and they showed their disagreement with the statement "I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak this language very well" and in a short time ranging from one to two years. Therefore, the learners showed their positive attitudes towards language learning. Horwitz (1988) also stated that "language learners must go through a sort of psychological preparation or "deconditioning" to be rid of preconceived notions and prejudices which would likely interfere with their language learning."

Concerning the speaking task itself, Horwitz (1988) reported that it is perceived as more difficult than reading, writing, or listening. Kim (as cited in Horwitz, 2001) stated that learners may show their anxiousness and embarrassment when they participate in a conversation rather than to participate in a reading class. Furthermore, in Ellis's study, ninety-four students

participated in the study and they believed that they are able to speak English well and this is a precondition to understand something about English speaking cultures.

In addition, Young (1990) reported from his study, the possibility of making mistakes in the foreign language classrooms and the method which has been used by the teachers is the primary reason for learners' reticence while the students doing a speaking activity. During the speaking activity, a considerable number of students have been worried about making mistakes in their language learning classroom (Horwitz et al., 1986). Young (1990) attested that students were more inclined to give answers voluntarily if they were not too afraid of saying something which was wrong. Learners also said statements such as "If you are allowed to make mistakes at the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them later" (Horwitz, 1988). On the other hand, learners showed a general optimism regarding their participation and they realized that it may be possible to acquire and foster language achievement when they say something in a foreign language even if that is not completely right. Besides the expectations, it may be inferred that students have in deed expressed the highest level of their concern related to making mistakes in foreign language learning. Students may be afraid of putting their self-esteem at risk in front of their partners (Horwitz, 1988; Young, 1990; Price, 1991).

Moreover, there are students who get nervous when they are corrected by their partners. 41%, 47%, and 31% of the learners got interviewed by Young (1990) and they agreed with the questionnaire item "I feel uncomfortable when my classmates are asked to correct my mistakes in the classroom." However, if learners have anxiety over foreign language errors, they also become aware of the importance and value of error correction. Language learners would not be comfortable if their language instructor never correct their errors in the classroom. 87, 68, and 49 of Young's students (1990) showed their disagreement "I would enjoy the class if we weren't corrected at all in class." Therefore, it seems clear that beliefs and attitudes of students towards foreign language learning and speaking activities may have to be considered by teachers because it is teachers who can shape their students' expectations, creating a real life environment for their learning and increase the level of their achievement and performance in their language classes.

2.6 Strategies for Overcoming Speaking Anxiety

Sadeghi, Mohammadi, and Sedaghatgoftar (2013) suggested a variety of strategies for coping with this phenomenon which has many different aspects. One of the strategies for overcoming the speaking anxiety is the kind and friendly behavior of the teacher and his role in teaching classroom to create a friendly and great learning atmosphere where the learners make mistakes without getting afraid of being asked or evaluated. Similarly, Occhipinti (2009) stated that for improving the oral practice of learners the teachers may have to foster an in-class environment where the students can express themselves freely and understand their own positions. The learners must be supported by their teachers and both learners and teachers need

to observe the mutual respects in their classrooms to have a friendly and acceptable learning process.

Moreover, Young (1999) reported that problems may occur when many language teachers realize and step forward for improving their learners' oral performance by practice because anxiety itself is caused by the oral performance of students throughout the activities which foster students' competence in the foreign language learning classrooms. Sadeghi, et al. (2013) also stated that it is teachers who can lead their students to a variety of tasks in order to make learners participate in classrooms activities passionately. The teachers have to be enthusiastic and motivated to motivate their students about what the students supposed to do in the class. This, for sure, can give an inspiration to students as to reduce the level of their speaking anxiety while being in the language learning classrooms.

In addition to creating a friendly learning environment for learners of foreign language, another strategy to overcome the speaking anxiety is scoring the learners' performances without considering the minor problems as they are giving speech in the class because it would break their concentration and make them so worried and it would cause that they lose track of their speaking (Sadeghi, et al., 2013). Toubot, Seng and Abdullah (2017) also asserted that the errors come from students are as a natural art of the learning process. The spot correction is also very harmful to students because it can stop the students' speaking flow and it would make students more anxious about language learning process. Similarly, Nerlicki (2011) stated that when the students are stopped while they are doing an oral activity, it may discourage the students and it may also cause that they feel more anxious to the language learning process.

According to Riasati (2011), a very good technique which could reduce the anxiety of students in a foreign language speaking classroom is applying pair/group work activities. The pair/group activities will provide more chances of participation and encourage students to speak more and express their likes and dislikes as to get rid of language anxiety which is a big obstacle in language learning process. Related to the issue, Lee (2002) pointed out that when students participate in a group work activity, they feel that they are not assessed because in the group work they think they are on communication. They do not think that they are on accuracy and they will also be less concerned with the errors even if the errors are noted down by their teachers. Furthermore, when the group work activity is applied in the foreign language classroom, one of the advantages is that learners have an active role and responsibilities regarding the implementation of the activity. In the course of the time, the more students participate in group activity, the more decrease will be felt in the level of students' language anxiety.

3. Methodology

To explore the real and grounded experiences of seven Afghan English language majors concerning speaking anxiety, this research uses the qualitative research design. As Seidman (2006) argued, the questions which are open-ended and pertaining to perceptions and reported experiences could only be investigated through qualitative research design because it is the qualitative method by which the researcher can collect more personal details about a particular issue (p.9).

The participants that they participated in this study were seven Afghan English language majors; four males and two females. The writer used purposeful sampling in order to choose the participants. The participants who were recruited in this study were all EFL learners at the English Department, Faculty of Language and Literature, Takhar University. They all had the experience of taking at least one speaking course in their program. The following table briefly demonstrates the demographic information of the participants from Takhar University.

Table1. Demographic Information of Participants

Participants (Pseudonym)	Gender	Class	Age
Mohammad	Male	Junior	24
Laila	Female	Junior	21
Ahmad	Male	Junior	22
Lima	Female	Junior	22
Rafi	Male	Junior	23
Mahsa	Female	Junior	21
Massoud	Male	Junior	23

To collect data from the participants, semi-structured interviews were employed. The reason for using the semi-structured interviews is that there were probes and follow-up questions asked during the interview to have a full description about students' speaking anxiety. After the interview, the researcher transcribed the data verbatim. To have the research questions in hand, the researcher read the transcripts several times to code the data. When the coding finished, the researcher grouped the codes into several categories, and three major themes were coming out of the categories. To make sure of the validity of the data, the researcher shared the findings of this research with the participants to check that they were accurate and true. Besides, the researcher used HyperResearch (version 2.8) for coding the data whether the same themes are appeared. This paper was also given to two colleagues that they have had years of conducting researches to do a full review of the research study to highlight the weaknesses and strengths of the paper. In the next section, the researcher discusses the three main topics.

4. Results and Discussion

This research paper tried to explore the real and reported experiences of the participants with their speaking anxiety. After the data coded by the researcher, the codes were analyzed and divided into three major topics: (1) Students' perceptions of anxiety in speaking (2) Reasons for speaking anxiety (3) The effects of speaking anxiety on students' performance and the ways to overcome anxiety.

4.1. Students' Perceptions of Anxiety in Speaking Class

The seven Afghan participants who participated in this study reported that speaking is one of the very important skills of language by which every learner can express themselves freely. They, moreover, reported that while experiencing anxiety in English speaking class, their performance is poor due to the evaluation and monitoring of their teacher. Learners who experience and feel anxiety in their speaking may have poor performance than those who already have low results in their performance (Brown, 2004; Gani et al., 2015; Yalcin & Inecay, 2014).

The same like other research studies conducted by other researchers in different contexts; these Afghan participants expressed their concerns about anxiety in English speaking class. They reported that anxiety is something happening naturally and it is out of their control. Some of that participants like Lima, Rafi, and Laila reported that having anxiety is good because of some activities and any tasks given to students as assignments in English speaking class. The reason, they said, is that when having the anxiety, it sort of pushes them to be very careful about their performance and it causes that they have to get much ready for the appointed task given by their teacher to do outside and inside the classroom. Other participants like Mohammad, Mahsa, Ahmad, and Massoud are much worried about anxiety in speaking while getting involved in classroom activities. They reported that anxiety causes not to have good performance in the class. They further said that while being asked by their teacher to talk about related issues in English, they forget everything to start communicating in English. Therefore, what they think is that anxiety and pressures play a negative role and affect their language learning process. Related to the issue, Xiuquin (2006) reported that anxiety is a negative factor which affects learners' speaking and it can hinder from putting input into practice.

Regarding the attitudes of participants about anxiety in English speaking, they think about anxiety differently. Some of them agreed to feel and experience anxiety in their performance while others resisted to get rid of such negative element because it causes that they have low performance in their speaking classroom. Lima and Ahmad reported that speaking is a significant language skill and everyone is easily judged and evaluated by their speaking without consideration of the three other language skills: reading, writing, and listening. They, further, reported that when interacting in English, they think a lot and are very careful about the accuracy rather than fluency. They think about grammar structures, phrases, and vocabulary and that is

why experiencing anxiety as a negative factor hinders from improving in their speaking skill. One of the participants said, “I used to think a lot about speaking when I went to bed. I did not know what to do to have more confidence as to show good performance in speaking classroom.”

Laila and Mohammad as other participants of this study reported that while experiencing anxiety in speaking, we get anxious about speaking and the low performance we do in the class. This finding adds more support for Kim (as cited in Horwitz, 2001) argument when getting anxious and worried feeling anxiety in speaking. Kim (as cited in Horwitz, 2001) stated that learners may show their anxiousness and embarrassment when they participate in a conversation rather than to participate in a reading class.

Perceptions of Rafi, Mahsa, and Massoud are the same like other participants. They reported that the only skill they can freely share their ideas, concerns and worries regarding a particular topic is speaking. Considering the anxiety, they like speaking in order to communicate with others comfortably. Moreover, they reported that there are more students who strive a lot to overcome their anxiety in their speaking class. For instance, Riasati (2011) noted speaking one of an important skill accompanied with anxiety whether students with high and low proficiency will feel anxiety in their speaking. The students can reduce their anxiety when they participate in pair/group activities because these types of activities provide more chances and opportunities to increase the level of their participation and encouragement as to get rid of speaking anxiety.

4.2 Reasons for Speaking Anxiety

Melouah (2013) discovered in her study that anxiety appears in students when they are corrected on the spot by their teachers. They lose their self-confidence when they are asked or stopped until the errors they mad recovered. The finding of this study adds more to support Melouah’s research findings that some of these Afghan participants feel anxiety in their speaking when they are stopped during speaking because the error correction or they requested to change their position and go to in front of the class to start giving speech orally to the whole class. Lima, one of the participants, reported she gets anxious when she is requested to be in front of the class to talk in English or being stopped while speaking. She, further, reported while participating in speaking classroom activities, fears, worries and a lot of stress mentally appeared on her face and she cannot have good performance in the class.

To follow Melouah’s findings, there is another factor which hinders the learners to feel and experience anxiety in their speaking class. Low proficiency of students can be another factor which increases anxiety in students. Melouah (2013) reported that 43 % of her students because of low proficiency prefer to be silent rather than to say something in speaking classroom. That is, when the teachers asks students to answer or say something related to the issue, some of the students do not understand what their teacher is saying or they get stuck to say some words

because they do not have enough knowledge of the subject and have less ability to produce words orally. The findings in this study can be supportive to Melouah's findings. Mohammad, one of the participants, acknowledged that some students coming to speaking classroom without prior conception and preparation. When they are invited to participate in speaking classroom activities, they prefer to use L1 or to be silent and say nothing in response to their teachers' questions. When it comes to evaluating students' performance, the students who have low language proficiency will possess low achievement and poor results.

Another factor the participants of this study reported is the length of time given for each activity. All the participants complain about the time which is assigned for each classroom activity. They postulated that the teachers may have to think over this issue and give enough time to students until the students can comfortably do what they are supposed to. According to Rai (2010), the length of time assigned for each activity is not enough because it affect the quality of communication among the learners. Talking too much time and too little time both are not enough and it is better to allocate suitable opportunity for students until they can freely do what they have to do. The participants of this study reported that if the time allocated for their speaking activities is appropriate, then each student can finish the task on time and have enough time to think on the points and give a reliable answer.

4.3 The Effects of Speaking Anxiety on Students' Performance and the Ways to Cope with

The finding in this study indicates that all the participants except Rafi and Laila believe anxiety as a negative factor in their speaking prevents them from communicating with other partners in the class. Based on their points of views, they strive a lot but still feel the signs of anxiety in their speaking. Regarding this, Tanveer (2007) emphasized those who are showing strange feelings while speaking. Indeed, they are experiencing the anxiety and stress. Students whose learning process affected by anxiety may face difficulties and challenges in concentrating and achieving their targets for education (Brown, 2004; Gani et al., 2015; Yalcin & Inecay, 2014).

Rafi and Laila, the two participants of this study, believe that feeling anxiety is good to be in speaking classroom. They think that when they experience anxiety they can work hard to have good performance and results. Moreover, they said, "If there is nothing we feel as an obstacle, we may not understand in which part of the skill we have problems and we will not work to cover those gaps we have." These two participants think that anxiety is a positive factor for speaking improvement which pushes them to strive a lot and come up with a good result in their conversation. According to Boyce et al. (2007), understanding the deep meaning and nature of language anxiety can provide more insights on how to cope with it. It can also help teacher to better encourage their students who feel anxiety in a high level and ensure them a relaxed low-anxiety environment for the development of students' fluency.

In addition to the effects of speaking anxiety, all the participants of this study reported that they practiced speaking daily to remove anxiety from their speaking. Mohammad and Lima, two of my participants, expressed watching the videos of English native speakers for those who are dealing with speaking anxiety is good to overcome anxiety and it will help not to feel anxiety communicative activities. Regarding this, He (2017) discovered that for reducing anxiety from speaking, the learners listened to English radio and watched English videos and programs. That is, learners found watching English videos useful and helpful to feel not much pressure and stress in their speaking.

Laila, Rafi, and Massoud mentioned that creating relaxed and friendly atmosphere for practicing speaking is another good way of lessening the anxiety. They reported, “When we are participating in some situational conversations designed by teacher, we feel relaxed and pretend that we are in a real life condition practicing English with others.” According to Occhipinti (2009), to improve the fluency and oral practice of learners, the teachers create an in-class environment where the students feel comfortable and can express themselves freely without any obstacles. That is to say, the learners need to think that the teachers give values to their performances although they have poor performance in some oral and communicative activities. The teachers need to motivate and encourage their learners and do not take their mistakes as serious as it affects their speaking.

Mahsa, one of the participants, stated that there are some negative factors appeared when she participated in some classroom activities. Those signs of negative factors are: fear, nervousness, worries, afraid of making mistakes, and a lot of sweat seen on the forehead coming down. She suggested different ways of overcoming the anxiety from her speaking. “Before saying something, I several times breathe until I can feel well and then stick to the activity.” Another way to overcome the anxiety is that she shows some eye contact and body language while speaking. Based on her views, she is comfortable while doing those strategies for removing their worries and stress. The finding discovered by Hasibuan and Irzawati (2019) indicated that EFL learners can get rid of fear, shyness, afraid of making mistakes by encouraged self-reflection activities until they can identify their weaknesses and strengths to increase their self-confidence to show some remarkable achievements in their speaking classroom.

5. Conclusion and Implication

This research study explored Afghan junior students’ experiences with speaking anxiety. The challenges of speaking anxiety of students, their attitudes along with the impact of speaking anxiety were investigated in this paper. Some strategies of students for overcoming their anxiety in speaking skill were also described. Moreover, the students’ recommendations regarding their speaking and speaking anxiety described in this paper as well.

In the light of the findings, there are a few recommendations related to teaching, higher education and research. Clearly, teachers need to create a real life condition for teaching their students. That is, the teacher should avoid correcting their students on the spot because the students feel insecure when they are pointed directly. The teachers need to delay correcting the errors and do it at the end of the session or activity. The teachers help students with speaking anxiety through creating group work because the students participate in such activities as a group and do not feel anxiety in their speaking. The more activities created for students the more capable they can become in their speaking. Furthermore, the teachers need to individually talk to their students about the challenges and problems students feel in their speaking and making sure that making mistakes is part of learning process. As this paper explored, the teachers do not cover the mistakes and errors in the next session. The teachers can list all those gaps students faced during their speaking and prepare another lesson for their students the next session. For reducing speaking anxiety of students, there should be a public speaking event held biweekly in English and participating in such event should be mandatory for students in order to help student with speaking and speaking anxiety.

Currently, this study conducted qualitatively and limited the number of participants (seven Afghan EFL students). The scope of this study only included the reported experiences of students' speaking anxiety from one university. It did not investigate the perceptions and recommendations of teachers regarding speaking anxiety. Therefore, the future research study will be wider and it will cover a remarkable number of participants employing a variety of research instruments from different contexts. The research paper will include the attitudes of students and teachers toward speaking anxiety in terms of gender, prior knowledge of the subject and their physical states as well.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocols with Participants

This research study aims to explore the reported experiences of Afghan EFL learners with their speaking anxiety. Here I prepared some open-ended questions divided into three main sections. There may some follow-up questions and probes be asked during the interview. This interview will take 15 to 20 minutes. I will be much grateful to have your answers related to these questions. For collecting and transcribing the data, I need to record your voice. Would you allow me to record your voice while answering the questions?

Section 1: Students' Background Questions

- How long have you started learning English? Where?
- How many speaking courses have you taken before? When and where did you take?

Section 2: Reported experiences and perceptions of Afghan EFL learners regarding speaking anxiety

- Do you find speaking course difficult and challenging when you are in the classroom?
- Do you believe speaking anxiety affects your abilities in speaking? If yes, why?
- What does your instructor do to increase any anxiety you may feel in your speaking classes?
- What factors do you think negatively contribute to your perceptions toward speaking English?
- What kind of speaking activities do you think will cause more anxiety when you are in speaking classroom?
- Do your teacher and others have any roles to help with your anxiety? How?
- Do you get anxious when your teacher asks you questions that you cannot answer? What did you do to get rid of your anxiousness?
- Did you mind if your teacher asked you to correct your mistakes you faced during speaking?
- Do you get worried when your classmates speak English better than you?
- Have you ever faced any challenges and obstacles during the speaking courses you have taken before? How?
- Have you ever experienced anxiety or any difficulties in your speaking courses?
- What were the reasons or causes behind the anxiety you experienced in your speaking courses?

- What were the signs of your anxiety while you were speaking in speaking classes? Would you please tell me some of them?
- What strategies did you use to overcome to your anxiety in speaking courses? Were they efficient and useful? Why? Do you still continue those strategies?

Section 3: Recommendations and suggestions of students dealing with speaking anxiety

- Are you still interested to take more speaking courses? Why?
- Do you like to encourage other students to take speaking courses outside the university?
- What is your advice for those who want to take speaking courses in the future?
- What do you expect from your teachers to do to help you overcome your speaking anxiety?
- What do you say for those students who are still suffering from speaking anxiety?
- Do you have any other extra comments on the topic you want to add?

Thank you for your time and participation in this study!

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