

Role of Anxiety in Willingness to Communicate in the Jordanian EFL Context

EMAD AL-SAIDAT

*Department of English Language and Literature
Al-Hussein Bin Talal University, Jordan
emad.m.saidat@ahu.edu.jo*

DIPIMA BURAGOHAİN

Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

FATEN AMER

Independent Researcher, Jordan

ABSTRACT

Anxiety is understood as being worried, an emotional reaction that accompanies one's learning. In the foreign language context, it may hinder the language learning experience and lead to communication apprehension. This study investigates the role of anxiety in the willingness to communicate across Jordanian EFL eighth-grade students at a private school in Amman. Direct observations and interviews were conducted across twenty students and two teachers. The analysis of data obtained from observations showed that the majority of students were reluctant to participate in English classrooms, as only an average of 10% showed their desire to participate in all the observational categories. Firstly, the interview data showed that anxiety affected students' willingness to communicate inside classrooms. Secondly, students' level of anxiety was found to be increased by several factors such as fear of making mistakes, fear of being criticised by other people inside the classroom, including the teacher, and fear of negative teacher evaluation. Thirdly, the results also showed that some of the reasons that led to anxiety stemmed from cultural beliefs deeply rooted in the students concerning being active participants or speaking in front of other people. Finally, the study provides some recommendations for teachers in order to create an anxiety-free learning atmosphere in classrooms to reduce students' speaking anxiety.

Keywords: anxiety; cultural beliefs; fear of committing errors; Jordanian EFL learners; WTC

INTRODUCTION

Being fluent in oral communication in the target language is the ultimate goal for most second language (L2) learners. Once learners can communicate in the target language, the acquisition of that language may be considered successful (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Oral performance is one of the major difficulties that learners of a foreign language encounter regardless of learners' target language knowledge conditions. One of the pedagogical goals is to increase learners' desire to communicate in order to facilitate language learning, especially for communicative purposes; communication is not only a means of facilitating language learning but also an important goal itself (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). Therefore, emphasis should be placed not only on language competence but also on language performance. A substantial amount of research in areas of second language acquisition suggests that affective factors, including learners' attitudes towards L2 and its culture, anxiety, and motivation, play a significant role in language achievement and proficiency (Yashima, 2002). For instance, Krashen (1982) identified anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation as affective factors related to the success of second language acquisition. Similarly, Oxford (1990) listed several affective factors that are significant in the success or failure of

language learning, including self-confidence, shyness, peer pressure, motivation, and anxiety, specifically in the development of L2 learners' speaking skills. Tuan and Mai (2015) contended that several factors, such as performance situation, affective variables, and incidental listeners' feedback, affect L2 speaking.

IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH

English is used in almost every corner of the world; it is spoken by more than a billion speakers around the world. Native speakers of English constitute about a quarter of the total number of speakers, whereas the rest of the speakers use it as a second or foreign language (Alqurashi, 2022; Crystal, 1997). Therefore, it has become the world's lingua franca, a language that can be labelled as an international language. For this reason, it became a necessity for most people to be able to communicate in English since the English language is a globally acknowledged means of communication, at least in business, science, and technology. So, people from different regions with different languages could meet and communicate easily using English (Wang & Tseng, 2020; Zughoul, 2003).

In Jordan, as well as in most Arab countries, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) to students at the primary and secondary levels of public and private schools. The classroom where English is taught is the main source of language learning because students have few opportunities to practice English outside the classroom (Drbseh, 2013; Huwari, 2019). For this reason, most Arab learners of English, in general, and Jordanians, in particular, encounter big challenges in the four language skills, speaking being the most challenging (Huwari, 2019). In addition to the lack of exposure to the target language, research in this area has attributed such difficulties to several factors. For instance, Jdetawy (2011) mentioned some of the reasons responsible for students' weakness in oral communication, including L1 use and the fact that the whole process of teaching and learning is exam-oriented with little focus on oral communication. Similarly, Al Hosni (2014) found that the reason for students' poor oral performance is learners' tendency to use L1, in this case, Arabic, while communicating with one another. Moreover, Huwari (2019) and Al Batineh (2019) state that Jordanian students find it difficult to master English language skills, particularly speaking. Therefore, mastering English language skills is important for learners in general and Jordanian students, especially speaking the English language is becoming an essential prerequisite in some sectors in Jordan, such as tourism, foreign affairs, and higher education (Batiha et al., 2018), a reason motivated the researchers to conduct the present study. In addition, to the best of our knowledge, none of the previous studies investigated the relationship between anxiety and WTC from the perspectives of Jordanian private school students and teachers.

WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE

The term 'willingness to communicate' (WTC) was first introduced with reference to L1 and later brought into communication literature by McCroskey and Richmond (1987). Willingness to communicate is defined as the probability of engaging in communication (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). According to MacIntyre et al. (1998), "it is highly unlikely that WTC in the second language (L2) is a simple manifestation of WTC in the L1" (p. 546). So, they defined WTC as the learner's "readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). Willingness to communicate has been described as a cognitive process involving the decision to talk, influenced by an individual's personality (McCroskey &

Richmond, 1990). The study of WTC in relation to the first language led the path to the development of L2 WTC, which is thought to be more complex than the L1 (MacIntyre et al., 1998). MacIntyre et al. (1998) consider WTC as an essential element in modern language instruction. Students with a high desire to communicate are more likely to use the target language in authentic communication contexts; such learners make independent efforts to learn the target language, which makes them autonomous learners. With their high WTC, students will have more opportunities to L2 not only inside the classroom but also outside.

WTC AND ANXIETY

In the context of learning, anxiety is understood as being worried, an emotional reaction that accompanies one's learning (MacIntyre, 1999). As for foreign language acquisition, anxiety may be a predictor of success, and as a result, anxious students' gains may be less compared to those who enjoy learning under relaxed personal conditions. In this way, anxiety generally hinders the language learning experience (Horwitz et al., 1986), leading to communication apprehension. Research has focused on the relationship between communication apprehension and WTC in the target language and shown that it is a negative relationship in those learners who have more communication apprehension are less willing to communicate (Althubaiti & Alqurashi, 2022; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Hashimoto, 2002; MacIntyre & Clement, 1996; Shaffer, 2019).

Three common types of anxiety have commonly been reported. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), these include: 1) communication apprehension, 2) test anxiety, and 3) negative evaluation (p. 127). Communication apprehension refers to the state in which learners generally feel shy, not feeling comfortable communicating or expressing something in front of people. So, quiet students in classrooms are not necessarily good learners; they might suffer from communication apprehension. Test anxiety is generally caused by the fear of failure in examinations, tests, or assignments, a type of anxiety that involves evaluation. Fear of negative evaluation is somewhat similar to test anxiety as it generally refers to learners' nervousness caused by an expectation that others would negatively evaluate them, but this condition, as opposed to test anxiety, may involve other issues since it encompasses spoken or written activities in the foreign language. The present study aims to explore the role of anxiety in Jordanian EFL learners' WTC and how to reduce the level of anxiety if it exists. To achieve these aims, the researchers pose the following research questions:

RQ1. How does anxiety affect Jordanian EFL eighth-grade students' WTC?

RQ2. What are suitable solutions for anxiety-based difficulties encountered by Jordanian EFL eighth-grade students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, willingness to communicate (WTC) has received a considerable amount of attention in EFL/ESL research. Research in this area has focused on the different factors that play a role in learners' WTC to understand why some learners have no desire to participate in L2 communication in an attempt to find solutions for such difficulty and facilitate the process of their L2 acquisition. Studies explored several factors playing a role in the WTC of learners, such as fear of negative evaluation (see, for instance, Karnchandachari, 2019; Subasi, 2010), confidence (see,

for instance, Aksak & Cubukcu, 2020; Al-Jarrah et al., 2019; Hamouda, 2013; Peng & Woodrow, 2010), fear of committing mistakes (see, for instance, Aksak & Cubukcu, 2020; Al Nakhalah, 2016; Hamouda, 2013; Said et al., 2021), and fear of being criticised (e.g., Aksak & Cubukcu, 2020; Al Nakhalah, 2016; Yaseen, 2018), inter-alia.

Fear of negative evaluation refers to teachers' reactions when students generally commit mistakes while using L2. Researchers focused on this factor to investigate whether it has an impact on students' desire to be engaged in L2 activities. For example, Subasi (2010) explored the impact of fear of negative evaluation (FNE) on the oral communication of 55 Turkish EFL learners at Anadolu University. The findings of the study indicated that there is a strong positive relationship between students' FNE and their level of anxiety in that they are afraid of being negatively assessed by others in classrooms which, in turn, hinders them from being engaged in oral communication, so they maintained a strategic distance from speaking and preferred to stay quiet. Similarly, fear of negative evaluation was one of the factors that played a role in the WTC of the participants of Karnchandachari (2019), who investigated the factors that may influence the WTC of Thai learners of EFL. Participants were from Thai and international programmes, in addition to Thai and foreign instructors. The author used questionnaires and semi-structured interviews for data collection. The results of the study showed that the international group has more WTC in English classrooms than their Thai counterparts, which was caused by their personality, experience, interest in the topic, self-perceived competence, and motivation. As for participants' unwillingness to communicate, several factors were found to play a part, including fear of negative evaluation, anxiety, and a lack of interest. As indicated in these studies, teachers are advised to modify their teaching methods providing a stress-free atmosphere that encourages learners to be involved in L2 activities.

In the Jordanian context, Zrekat et al. (2016) examined the level of anxiety among Jordanian EFL undergraduates in oral communication at Jerash University. A questionnaire and interviews were used to collect data from 351 students and five lecturers. The results of the analysis showed that more than half of the participants (60.7%) encountered difficulty in oral communication in English caused by their anxiety. Results obtained from the analysis of the interviews suggest that having collaboration between parents, lecturers, and students, changing the teaching method, and providing a stress-free learning atmosphere may reduce students' anxiety levels. Secondly, self-confidence is found to be a factor that plays a role in EFL learners' WTC. For instance, Peng and Woodrow (2010) investigated factors affecting WTC in EFL across 330 Chinese university students majoring in non-English disciplines. The authors found that WTC was affected by students' confidence, communication anxiety, and cultural beliefs. Similar findings were reported by Hamouda (2013), who investigated the reasons behind EFL learners' unwillingness to participate in English classrooms at a public university in Saudi Arabia. The results of Hamouda's study revealed that the factors that hindered students from oral participation were the lack of self-confidence, lack of proficiency in L2, fear of using L2 in front of other students, and fear of committing errors. Thirdly, Al-Jarrah et al. (2019) examined Jordanians' practises and experiences with social networking sites as a tool for English language learning. The authors interviewed 12 participants in order to explore how these sites improve participants' English language learning and identify the factors that influence their practises. According to the results, most participants felt comfortable using social networking sites in their learning of English, and they preferred to read and observe discussions rather than play a part in them. However, among the factors that influenced participants' practises at these sites were context, audience, self-confidence, and interests.

Teachers' tolerance of errors and their choice of interesting topics increase learners' desire to communicate and become more involved in L2 activities. The role of teachers in enhancing learners' performance in L2 has been investigated in several studies. For example, Al Nakhalah (2016) investigated the reasons for speaking difficulties encountered by EFL learners at Al Quds Open University. Using class observation and interviews, the researcher collected data from 14 EFL learners. The results of the study revealed that anxiety, alongside the lack of teacher support, was one of the crucial factors that hindered students in oral communication. In many instances, teachers only highlighted students' speaking errors, which had a negative effect on learners. Lack of teacher support was also reported as a factor, *inter-alia*, that hinders students from speaking English (Aksak & Cubukcu, 2020). They examined factors that affected the WTC of 100 EFL university-level learners in Turkey. A questionnaire comprising three dimensions: i) affective factors, ii) teacher-related factors, and iii) environmental factors were used. The results of the study revealed that environmental factors were the strongest among other factors in affecting students' WTC as they attributed their hesitancy to speak in English to class size, noise, materials, and lack of teacher support. The second intense impact was caused by the affective factors, including anxiety, lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes or being criticised. Finally, teacher-related factors in which participants attributed their reluctance to teachers' attitudes, pressure, lack of support, and L1 use were weak factors in predicting WTC.

Said et al. (2021) investigated students' WTC in online learning at an Indonesian university. The authors used a questionnaire for data collection across 71 EFL learners. The results of the study showed that the most preferred activity for students was group discussion, as they did not feel nervous about expressing their feelings and thoughts. Moreover, students indicated their WTC in online classrooms, not feeling ashamed if they committed a mistake or provided incorrect answers in online discussions. Similarly, Weda et al. (2021) investigated factors affecting WTC in Indonesian higher education. A questionnaire was used to collect data from 19 male and 51 female EFL learners. Results of the study showed that the most important factor in generating greater students' interest was announcing the topic of discussion. Students may be motivated to engage in discussions if a topic is interesting.

Fear of criticism refers to students' fear of being criticised by other students in classrooms. Studies have shown that fear of criticism negatively influences learners' willingness to speak English. For instance, Yaseen (2018) investigated factors that affected EFL learners' speaking skills at two Jordanian private schools. The author used a questionnaire administered to 150 learners and conducted semi-structured interviews with six EFL teachers and six English language supervisors. The results of the study indicated that participants' speaking skills are negatively affected by their anxiety, lack of motivation, fear of being criticised by other students, and L1 use in classrooms. The results also showed that teachers required more English lessons in order to include speaking tasks. Similar results were reported in the study of Aksak and Cubukcu (2020). However, combining technology and online material may reduce learners' speaking anxiety and fear of being criticised, as reported in a study conducted by Saed et al. (2021), who investigated the use of YouTube videos in teaching speaking to Jordanian EFL learners at a Jordanian private university. The participants were 80 students of English equally divided into two groups: control and experimental groups. They administered a pre- and post-test to both groups. The results reported a minor improvement in both groups' performance, but the experimental group recorded a significant improvement. The study showed that the use of YouTube videos improved students' speaking, coherence, oral fluency, and lexical choices.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted at a private school in Amman, Jordan. Because the majority of previous studies employed public schools, this study focused on private schools that were insufficiently researched. All male students became the participants because of the male-female segregation policy beginning in fourth grade in Jordanian schools. In addition, gender differences went beyond the scope of this study. The male students as participants were native speakers of Arabic, whereas English was their first foreign language. The study included 20 Jordanian EFL eighth-grade students since, at this stage, they had completed several courses that familiarised them with English as a foreign language. In addition to the students, two English language teachers were included. In this school, as well as in other schools in Jordan, the English language is taught as a compulsory subject. Before data were collected, permission for data collection was granted by the principal of the school. The participants were briefly introduced to the study and its objectives. The issue of their consent was addressed from the very beginning, and they were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary and that the project was not graded. Also, the confidentiality of their information was protected by their anonymity. Data collection was carried out through direct observation and semi-structured interviews. The study adopted Horwitz's et al. (1986) communication apprehension and MacIntyre's et al. (1998) WTC as a theoretical framework.

Direct observation entails the observer being present at the site to take notes on what occurs with regard to the research. It is an important tool for data collection as it allows the researchers to obtain information about participants' behaviour that would otherwise be unavailable through other methods such as recordings or interviews. An observational scheme that was adapted from Cao (2009) was divided into the following categories:

1. Volunteer an answer: A student answers a question raised by the instructor.
2. Volunteer a comment: A student makes a comment.
3. Ask a question: A student asks the instructor a question.
4. Give an opinion in class: A student presents his own opinion.
5. Respond to an opinion: A student responds to an opinion.

Two of the researchers attended four English classes to observe the whole situation inside the classroom, including the behaviour of the students in relation to oral communication. Inside the classroom, the observer sat in front of the room but was small enough to avoid physically intruding on instructor-student interactions, observing participants' actual WTC behaviours. To avoid bias, nonparticipant observation was used to only observe and record WTC behaviours without engaging with participants. The WTC participants' behaviour was observed and coded in the corresponding categories.

In qualitative research, interviews are generally considered an important instrument of data collection, offering a systematic way of speaking and listening to people for certain purposes. Using interviews, the researcher explored participants' views, experiences, and attitudes in relation to the topic of the research, which might be difficult to obtain directly from other methods of data collection. Maxwell (2005) states that interviews generally provide "a valuable way of gaining a description of actions and events – often the only way, for events that took place in the past or ones to which you cannot gain observational access" (p. 94). In this study, the researchers employed a semi-structured interview approach because it allowed them to probe deeply into the topic, asking

more detailed questions with the opportunity to paraphrase and explain the questions to the interviewees when necessary. Similarly, it provided the participants with opportunities to reflect on their responses, and it gave more details about their WTC in English classrooms.

Individual interviews with the two teacher participants and all student participants were conducted over five days following signed consent forms. Interviews with teachers were conducted in English. All interviews with the students were firstly conducted in Arabic to eliminate language proficiency obstacles and secondly translated into English. Interviews lasted for about 20 to 30 minutes. The Arabic data were manually translated into English, and NVivo software was used to analyse the data yielded. The factors identified in this study were classified into three categories: 1) fear of making mistakes, 2) fear of criticism, and 3) fear of negative evaluation (FNE).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As shown in the literature, WTC is negatively highly affected by anxiety, a condition connected to individuals' experience in dealing with tension, trepidation, uneasiness, and worry (Spielberger, 1983). To get rid of such a negative feeling, one has first to uncover what causes this feeling. In this section, data were analysed in terms of the study questions. In other words, data were analysed in order to investigate factors that led to anxiety in EFL communication (RQ1) and solutions for anxiety-based difficulties (RQ2) by relying on participants' views.

RQ1. HOW DOES ANXIETY AFFECT JORDANIAN EFL EIGHTH-GRADE STUDENTS' WTC?

Based on class observations, only 10% of the participants showed interest in participating in all observational scheme categories. As for the individual categories, about a quarter of the students (25%) raised their hands to answer a question asked by the instructor, while about 20% of them asked questions usually for clarification or repetition, 5% presented their opinion in the class, but none of them made a comment or responded to an opinion. As indicated by these low percentages of the desire to speak English, it could be argued, based on observation, that most of the students were reluctant to participate in English classrooms. As for the individual interviews, the analysis revealed that several factors contributed to their being anxious that may reduce or hinder their WTC in EFL. These include fear of making mistakes, fear of criticism, and fear of negative evaluation (FNE).

FEAR OF MAKING MISTAKES

According to the data, participants indicated their reluctance to be engaged in oral communication because of their fear of committing errors inter-alia. Some participants mentioned that it was their pronunciation errors that held them back from participating in the discussions. For instance, Student 4 (S4) said, "I don't like to participate because I fear making mistakes in pronunciation, and students will start to laugh and make fun of me". Similarly, another student said, "My problem is anxiety, not only me but also other students. I fear making mistakes in pronunciation and prefer keeping silent to participating" (S2). In most of these participants' responses, fear of committing errors was mentioned simultaneously with anxiety; committing errors, it seems, is one of the central causes of anxiety. However, they linked their fear and anxiety to different variables, such as classroom situations in which speaking was performed in front of teachers and other students.

Moreover, participants also attributed their anxiety and fear of committing errors to the reactions of other students in the classrooms. For example, S5 and S1 associated their anxiety with fear of committing errors and the huge number of students inside classrooms; S1 said, “fear and shame of committing errors and also the number of the students inside the classroom is large, so these reduce our desire to participate, and even we hesitate to ask questions.” Another student associated his unwillingness to participate with how other students viewed him when committing errors; he said, “Usually, I don't participate because I don't like other students' negative view of me when I make mistakes” (S12). The above findings bear a resemblance with the findings of some of the previous studies, such as Aksak and Cubukcu's (2020) study, in which they identified class size, lack of teacher support, and fear of making mistakes as factors that hindered their Turkish participants from WTC in English. Similarly, the findings of this study seem to be consistent with Hamouda's (2013) argument that fear of using English in front of other students and fear of committing errors were among the factors that hindered Saudi EFL learners from oral participation.

In addition to the above associations of fear of committing errors, participants linked their anxiety and shyness in making errors with other factors such as student's academic level and self-confidence. As indicated in some participants' reactions: advanced education determined lower levels of anxiety and fear of making errors. For example, S6 said, "The academic level of the student is important in breaking the barriers caused by anxiety and fear of making errors; the higher the student's level, the greater the possibility of breaking the barriers and the greater his participation in the classroom" (S6). However, students' academic level is not a factor in reducing their level of anxiety and fear of making errors across some participants. According to S9 and S12, anxiety and fear of making errors outweigh the academic level; for example, students with high academic levels also avoid participation because of their anxiety and fear of making errors. In the interview, S9 said, “Even if the student's level is average or even good, anxiety, shyness and fear of errors reduce their participation in the classroom.” Similarly, S12 stated, "Some students are of average academic level; they can speak English, but because of anxiety and fear of making errors, they avoid participation.”

Participants believed that self-confidence was one of the reasons behind their avoidance of classroom oral participation. They stated that because of their fear of committing errors, their self-confidence paled; as a result, they avoided speaking in front of other people. Moreover, one of the teachers said, "fear of making errors weakened self-confidence of many students, and they refrain from speaking, so it stands as a barrier for many of them in their interests for oral communication” (T2). Likewise, student participants linked their low self-confidence to their fear of making errors, in which the latter had a negative role, resulting in their loss of desire to speak (S8 & S10). S11 believed that low self-confidence is a factor in addition to the fear of making errors that negatively contributed to his unwillingness to communicate; he said, "low self-confidence hinders us from oral communication and fear of error" (S11). The negative role of low self-confidence in their WTC has been reported in the literature (Aksak & Cubukcu, 2020; Hamouda, 2013); in these studies, it was found that lack of self-confidence was among the factors that hindered participants from being engaged in oral communication. So, their participants, similar to the participants of this study, attributed their hesitancy to speak English to a lack of self-confidence.

FEAR OF CRITICISMS

Fear of criticism is another common theme among the responses of the participants. It refers to the way other students view the one who participates. Several students indicated their annoyance with the way other students looked at them as active participants inside the classroom. For instance, S10 and S18 attributed their speaking hesitancy to the idea that other students may criticise them if a mistake was committed to pronouncing an English word; S10 said, “one of the things that makes me reluctant to participate in oral communication is my fear of being criticised and ridiculed by other students, especially when I pronounce a word incorrectly” (S10). Moreover, S7 and S13 talked about the fear of criticism among students in general. S13 said, “There is no doubt that self-confidence and lack of fear of errors help in oral communication, but the teacher and the rest of the students do not help with this.” S13 recognised the importance of being self-confident and unafraid of errors, but he implied the negative role of the teacher and students (Aksak & Cubukcu, 2020). S7 attributed students’ unwillingness to communicate to the belief that students should not appear distinguished as they may be ridiculed by other students who viewed their participation as ‘showing off’ in order to make a ‘big impression.’ S7 said, “Some students do not have the desire to participate, especially in verbal communication, because they don't want to appear distinguished and be ridiculed by others in the class” (S7). The idea that was emphasised by S7 is associated with some cultural beliefs, as explained by T2, who said,

From my point of view, I see that culture has a significant role in learning, as it does not mean only politeness and respect, but it has other aspects. For example, some students do not like to appear diligent or distinguished in front of their classmates, so they avoid participation in the classroom (T2).

Cultural beliefs may explain some of the issues concerning WTC. S19, while focusing on age groups, said, “Cultural beliefs such as respecting the elders and not talking in their presence made a barrier between the teacher and us and affected our desire to communicate verbally with him in the classroom” (S19). The influence of cultural beliefs on students’ participation, as a factor playing a negative role in students’ WTC, has been investigated in the literature (Peng & Woodrow, 2010) associated with the notion of ‘showing off’ as one of the reasons behind EFL Chinese learners’ unwillingness to communicate. As for being criticised by other students, Oxford (1990) found that ‘peer pressure’ was a significant factor in students’ success or failure in language learning. Furthermore, the negative role of fear of being criticised by other students is generally not an isolated case, as fear of criticism has also been reported by previous studies (Aksak & Cubukcu, 2020; Yaseen, 2018) involving Turkish and Jordanian EFL learners.

RQ2. WHAT ARE SUITABLE SOLUTIONS FOR ANXIETY-BASED DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY JORDANIAN EFL EIGHTH-GRADE STUDENTS?

According to the available data, most of the difficulties that students encounter, especially the ones associated with classroom situations, may be resolved by teachers who play the role of classroom supervisors. For cases involving students’ anxiety about making errors, S15 placed some part of his difficulty on the teacher; he said, “I minimise my participation because I feel anxious about making errors and the teacher does not give us enough opportunity.” The role of the teacher seems to be very important in ensuring greater and minimal student anxiety levels; this was expressed by several participants concerning a need for tolerance of errors by teachers. On the one hand, S1, S17, and S7 highlighted that teachers generally do not tolerate the repetition of errors. As a result,

this may hinder their classroom participation. On the other hand, S14 attributed his unwillingness to communicate to fear of committing errors and demanded certain levels of motivation from the teacher in order to increase his willingness to engage in oral communication. He said, "Fear of committing errors hinders me from participation. If the teacher motivates us, desire to participate will be greater" (S14). Commenting on the role of teachers in de-emphasising speaking anxiety and encouraging them to participate, S7 and S13 mentioned that being self-confident and not having any fear of error may help in communication, but in their case, the teacher did not help. By recognising the centrality of teachers' role in overcoming these difficulties, the findings are consistent with Aksak and Cubukcu's (2020) investigation.

Moreover, teacher participants recognised the effect of students' committing errors during oral conversation participation. For instance, one teacher said, "There is a barrier between the teacher and students which reduces their courage to speak because they are afraid of the consequences of making errors" (T2). Similarly, the other teacher seemed to be aware of the student's difficulty in participation, so he suggested some ways to overcome this difficulty; he said, "In my experience, on the one hand, I think there is a necessity to educate students to participate without any fear of errors, and on the other hand, to urge teachers to understand and tolerate the errors that may encourage students' participation, improving students' academic level" (T1). As seen in the above extracts concerning student and teacher interviews, several students were seen discouraged from participating in classrooms generally because of teachers.

FEAR OF NEGATIVE EVALUATION

Fear of negative evaluation (FNE) refers to learners' nervousness that stems from their negative expectations about how other people evaluate them. It includes spoken or written activity in a foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986). Students' FNE has been identified as one of the many factors that contribute to students' unwillingness to communicate, as highlighted in previous studies involving EFL learners in Turkey and Thailand (Karnchandachari, 2019; Subasi, 2010). Student participants expressed similar views about the role of FNE in their willingness to participate in English classrooms; they refrained from being participative generally due to the teacher's and students' feelings or reactions. As highlighted by S8, "I hesitate a lot and feel ashamed to participate in the discussion because of my fear of negative evaluation by the teacher and other students as well, so I prefer to remain silent."

Similar views were reported by S5, S16, and S20. For S5, feelings of negative expectations of teachers' reactions or negative evaluations seemed to be insurmountable, which discouraged him from asking questions. He said, "Because of fear of negative evaluation, I hesitate and feel anxious to participate, ask questions, or discuss anything with the teacher during the lesson" (S5). The impact of these negative feelings has also been indicated in responses across teacher participants. For example, one of the teacher participants stated this issue rather clearly concerning reasons for students' unwillingness to communicate:

The lack of student participation has several reasons, including the fear of making mistakes. This hinders learning, discussion, and making opinions heard in the classroom. Another reason is their fear of teachers' negative evaluations, as teachers' negative evaluations embarrass students in front of others. This feeling persists across many students not only while participating in English but also while using Arabic or making a presentation (T1).

As implied in the excerpt above, FNE seems to characterise students' conditions not only while learning English but also during Arabic interactions or involving in public, student-oriented activities such as making presentations. Several concluding remarks based on the analysis above are presented in the following section.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of anxiety on WTC across eighth-grade EFL students at a private school in Amman, Jordan. It aimed to investigate the role of anxiety in WTC and how anxiety was generally reduced across students. In response to the first research question, students' anxiety was influenced by several factors, as evident in the findings. However, three main factors were found to be responsible for generating anxiety in speaking, namely, a) Fear of making mistakes, b) Fear of criticism, and c) Fear of negative evaluation. The participants indicated that their fear of committing errors while using English in front of other students and teachers made them feel anxious and reluctant to engage in speaking activities in classrooms. Fear of criticism seemed to be connected with some cultural beliefs that they held in relation to the notion of "being distinguished in front of others." Fear of negative evaluation seemed to have been caused mainly by teachers, as indicated by many student participants.

In response to the second research question, the results showed that teachers play a significant role in mitigating students' anxiety levels. Teachers might better i) encourage students to participate in oral interactions and ii) inform students how this activity enhances the student learning process, especially with regard to speaking skill acquisition through pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary enrichment. Providing opportunities for increased interaction and frequency of L2 use might have a positive effect on learners' WTC in L2 (Althubaiti & Alqurashi, 2022; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Mahmoodia & Moazamb, 2014; Said et al., 202). Therefore, teachers might better create an anxiety-free learning atmosphere in their classrooms for interaction. This can be demonstrated by incorporating some interactive classroom tasks that are cognitively less demanding and psychologically safer. For example, debates or role-plays may be conducted to show how teachers tolerate errors. By motivating and encouraging students to engage in conversation, error corrections might gradually ensue as students display greater confidence.

It is hoped that the results of the present study will be valuable for use in curriculum development, the teaching and learning of foreign languages, and teacher education, especially in investigating factors influencing foreign language apprehension and providing support for L2 learners' self-confidence. As communication is the primary objective of language teaching, emphasis should be placed on developing communication skills and strategies that encourage greater learners' WTC by reducing L2 anxiety (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Rambe, 2017). By promoting minimum anxiety classrooms, learners may benefit more from language instruction. It is thus important to research WTC in other languages, such as Arabic, and compare the results with the findings of this and similar studies conducted on English learners in order to examine whether target languages play significant roles in such conditions. Furthermore, future research may focus on the role of anxiety in students' WTC in L2 outside classrooms in different situations, including public meetings and social gatherings with friends, acquaintances, and strangers.

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