Effective Solutions for Reducing Saudi Learners' Speaking Anxiety in EFL classrooms

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Abstract

Foreign language anxiety plays an essential role in language learning and negatively impacts on the whole learning process. This research aims to explore the Saudi learners' perceptions of speaking anxiety in language classrooms and provide some effective and helpful solutions for reducing it. The sample of this study involved 10 Saudi female students, studying their foundation year at the English Language Institute (ELI), King Abdulaziz University. Their ages range between 18 to 20 years old. To reach a richer insight and better understanding of the research phenomenon, a qualitative approach was conducted. For gathering data, ten semi-structured interviews with ten Saudi female students from levels 102, 103, and 104 were used and then thematically analyzed using Nvivo 10 software. The qualitative data found that Saudi female students do feel worried and anxious in foreign language classrooms when speaking the foreign language. However, they showed a positive attitude and a willingness to improve their English speaking proficiency level as a way of reducing anxiety by watching English movies, using English internet sites, traveling abroad and talking to native speakers, doing more presentations, practice reading English books and joining English institutes during summer vacation.

Keywords: foreign language anxiety, reducing speaking anxiety, Saudi EFL learners, speaking anxiety

1. Introduction

A considerable number of previous studies have proven that speaking is the most anxiety provoking skill among the four main English language skills (Young, 1992). The ability to fluently speak a new language is perceived by English as a foreign language (EFL) learners as a complex task. In terms of practicing and participating in oral tasks, it is noticed that EFL learners are reluctant to speak and show an unwillingness to share in language classrooms' discussions. Previous research on language anxiety has shed light on the most important and prominent causes that raise anxiety among EFL learners. For example, Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986) claim that there are three components of anxiety which are: communication apprehension; students' fear of negative evaluation; and test-anxiety. In Saudi Arabia, the context of the current study, there is a quantitative study conducted by Alrabai (2015) in order to investigate the level and main sources of Saudi learners' anxiety by using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) through a period of three years. His research findings reveal that the main cause of anxiety among participants is their communication apprehension due to lack of preparation before the English class. A recent study conducted by Rafada & Madini (2017), investigate the main causes of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) among female university students in Saudi Arabia. The qualitative part of the research finds that the main causes of speaking anxiety among the Saudi female students are due to their lack of vocabulary, teachers' role in raising or reducing anxiety, peer anxiety, test anxiety and the weak educational system in the Saudi schools. Whereas, the quantitative data shows that the main causes of speaking anxiety are categorized into three main domains: causes related to the EFL teachers, causes related to the classroom atmosphere, and others related to the test. Therefore, this paper aims to further investigate Saudi students' perceptions on speaking anxiety and provide some effective solutions in order to overcome this problem.

2. Literature review

2.1 Characteristics of anxious learners

Research has identified many features of anxious learners in foreign language classrooms. As an example, Burden (2004) claims that anxious students are often worried about the impressions of their peers. When confronted with a learning situation, anxious students feel uncomfortable, and sometimes they choose to withdraw from the whole activity. According to Burden (2004), some anxious learners strongly believe that they cannot perform well in the English subject, and therefore they form negative expectations, which lead to avoid any opportunities that may help them to enhance their communication abilities. In addition to their negative expectations in the language classroom, anxious foreign language students are generally less willing to participate in learning activities and perform worse than non-anxious students (Aida, 1994).

Moreover, Price (1991) describes learners who feel anxious in language classrooms as those having manifestations including panic, indecision, anger, and a sense of diminished personality. Oxford (2005) also describes other symptoms for anxiety such as general avoidance behaviors, for example, skipping classes or arriving late, physical actions or movements, like fidgeting or facing difficulties in producing the sounds of the target language, or physical ailments such as feeling tension or having a headache (as cited in Al-Saraj, 2014).

MacIntyre & Gardner (1991) further describe the anxious learner as "an individual who perceives the L2 as an uncomfortable experience, who withdraws from voluntary participation, who feels social pressures not to make mistakes and who is less willing to try uncertain or novel linguistic forms " (p.112). Some students who suffer from a high level of anxiety may have a mental block against learning a foreign language (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986).

Moreover, Worde (2003) claims that anxious students may have some physical symptoms which include "headaches"; "clammy hands, cold fingers"; "shaking"; "sweating"; "pounding heart"; "tears"; "foot tapping, desk drumming" (p. 8). She further states that avoidance is considered as one common manifestation of anxiety. One French student, in her study, reports that he often writes in his book or draws some pictures during the French class, which is a kind of avoidance.

Diagnosing the symptoms of anxious learners enables the teachers to understand the feelings of their students in order to support them and to provide them with a better learning environment. Moreover, identifying those manifestations will guide the teacher in differentiating between anxious and weak students. In order to investigate learners' anxiety, identifying their characteristics and manifestations must be considered.

2.2 The impact of FLA on learners' performance
Research has frequently revealed that anxiety can impede foreign language achievement and attainment (e.g. Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Krashen, 1985, MacIntyre & Gardener 1991; Price, 1991; Worde, 2003; Young, 1990). EFL learners often conceive the foreign language learning classroom as a stressful situation (Horwitz et al., 1986), and cite speaking as their "most anxiety-producing experience" (Young, 1990, p. 539). The cause of this feeling is due to their lack of ability to express themselves freely in the target language (MacIntyre & Gardener, 1991) and this feeling may lead to anxiety. Phillips (1991; 1992) claims that anxiety might have a negative psychological impact on learners' performance when using the target language. Price (1991) also states that anxious students could believe that all other students are more proficient than they are, and this feeling may lead to more stress. When anxiety provokes, it can affect and disturb the cognitive foreign language learning process (MacIntyre & Gardener, 1994).
According to Krashen (1985), anxious students have an affective filter that hinders the learning process and make the learner unreceptive to language input, and thus, language acquisition does not progress. Crookall & Oxford (1991) further assert that language anxiety might negatively affect students' proficiency in language acquisition. Likewise, Horwitz (2001) notes that anxiety causes the potential problems for language learners as it stands in the way of the acquisition, retention, and production of the new language.

To sum up, foreign language anxiety is considered an essential phenomenon that needs to be investigated due to its negative impact on the learners' performance. Thus, this study seeks to tackle this issue that could impede students' learning progression.

2.3 Factors that help reduce foreign language speaking anxiety
2.3.1 The teacher's role

EFL teachers can play a vital role in reducing their students' speaking anxiety. Raising teachers' awareness to avoid some inappropriate manners inside the classroom is viewed the first step for reducing students' speaking anxiety. Ansari (2015), for example, indicates that teachers should avoid comparing students to each other, forcing them to talk, and humiliating and not respecting them. Ansari (2015) further adds that teachers should be creative in finding indirect ways for correcting their students' errors.

An effective way to learn any foreign language is to use it actively by speaking. Unfortunately, speaking in the FL seems to provoke a great level of anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Young, 1992). The role of the EFL teacher, then, is to support his/her students in order to master their target language by providing them with a variety of interesting EFL activities and practices that encourage them to speak up the language. However, students quite often do not consider articulating the language as a valuable chance for them to learn, they simply feel that such practices may increase their level of anxiety (Phillips, 1991). In other words, some students view language practicing, especially speaking, as an unfavorable situation that tests their abilities and associated with unnecessary emotions. An example of these activities is making presentations in front of the class. In fact, teachers should understand that language learning is a stressful situation for some students, and that they sometimes have a fear of negative evaluation from their teacher or peers. Kitano (2001) mentions that those students who have the sense of fear of negative evaluation are really in a great need of some positive reinforcement, such as positive comments. Ansari (2015) further suggests that teachers should make interventions in the classroom environment and create a supportive learning classroom atmosphere. This supportive atmosphere will help anxious students perceive it as uncompetitive. Moreover, pair and group work can also be incorporated (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009) which fosters a non- threateningly classroom atmosphere and gives a chance to anxious students to participate in the speaking tasks.

In addition, using technology is one of the 21st century aspects that most of the students like to maintain nowadays. So, it would be a great help for them if teachers would use such technology and integrate it into their teaching as a kind of coping mechanism with modernism as well as supporting EFL learners to get rid of their anxiety. As an illustration, an Iraqi case study has been conducted in order to assess how EFL students can take benefits of technology to learn English as a second language (Nomass, 2013). The results shows that most of the students preferred the use of technology, especially computers, in developing their second language learning. Thus, Nomass (2013) recommends that English language teachers should encourage their students to use technology in developing their language skills. Another study by Juana & Palak (2011) indicates that using the podcasting technology in a language classroom is very useful in supporting EFL students and improving their speaking skills. Therefore, it is the teachers' duty to stand by their students' side and try their best to release this fear and make those anxious students feel more relaxed.

2.3.2 Classroom activities' role

Research in the field of language anxiety seeks to prove that by providing interesting activities and utilizing new strategies, EFL students will be encouraged to communicate using the target language and therefore improve their speaking abilities. For instance, Alrabai (2014) has conducted an experimental study in Saudi Arabia, in which he investigates the effects of

anxiety-reducing strategies utilized by FL teachers on Saudi anxious learners. The researcher divides his study into two steps. In the first step, he investigates the main sources of FLA using the Foreign Language Anxiety Classroom Scale (FLACS). In the second step, 465 learners are divided into two almost equal groups, (experimental and control). A group of 12 teachers has been assigned to the study in order to practice some anxiety- reducing strategies with the experimental group. After 8 weeks of practice and observation, the results reveal that the intervention led to significantly decreased levels of FL anxiety for learners in the experimental group comparing to the control group. As a result, Alrabai's study proves that classroom activities could play an important role in increasing the learners' motivation and progress.

Moreover, Ansari (2015) recommends some activities that help reducing students' anxiety such as role-plays. These kinds of activities were useful because students are given a "new persona with pseudo names" (p.43), which give them a chance of getting a new identity and protecting one's image. Therefore, the fear of negative evaluation is reduced by creating new and interesting activities in the language class, which in turn improves the learner's speaking abilities and language proficiency as well.

2.4 Gap in the literature
Foreign language anxiety has a debilitating factor, which negatively affects a language learner. Research on language anxiety has related students' speaking anxiety to elements encircling communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation from the teacher or their peers, classroom anxiety and test anxiety. Few Saudi researchers have investigated the Saudi students' perceptions of foreign language anxiety (FLA) and its effect on the learning process (Alrabai, 2015, Alsaraj 2014). The prime goal of this research is to examine Saudi learners' perceptions of speaking anxiety in order to give them a chance to express their hidden feelings towards the unfavorable emotions that appear in language classes especially during speaking tasks. Then, providing them with valuable solutions to reduce their anxiety will be beneficial.
This study aims to answer the following two research questions:

1) What are the Saudi students' perceptions of foreign language speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms?
2) What strategies can be devised to help Saudi students reduce their foreign language speaking anxiety?

3. *Methodology*
3.1 Theoretical framework
3.1.1 Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis
In the past, foreign language researchers' main concern was language itself, for example, the methods of teaching and language pedagogy. In the late 1970s, they started to investigate the affective variables that may affect the language learning process. Krashen (1985) argues that affective variables are one of the most important factors which may impede the learning process and that there is an "affective filter" or a "mental block" that is associated negatively with learning. When this block or filter is high, learning will be low and vice versa. Thus, learning can successfully happen when the degree of this affective filter is low. As a result, EFL teachers are

advised to lower this affective filter or block it. Otherwise, student's learning will be affected or even impeded.

3.2 Research design

The qualitative design was applied in this research to gain an in-depth understanding of students' perceptions of speaking anxiety in EFL classes and to help on providing some effective solutions for overcoming this problem. In this study, ten Saudi female students were randomly selected from the elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate levels (levels 102,103, and 104 respectively) were interviewed. For validity and reliability purposes, the semi-structured interviews were conducted in Arabic to overcome the language barrier and then translated into English. The interviewees were allowed to speak broadly on the phenomenon and to develop ideas on the issues raised by the researcher during the interview (Denscombe, 2014). Therefore, utilizing semi-structured interviews enhanced the researchers' knowledge of the research problem and overcame their biases.

3.3 Data collection procedure

The researchers used semi-structured interviews with ten students studying their foundation year at the English Language Institute (ELI), King Abdulaziz University. Based on the themes generated from the interview and the literature review, the researchers were able to identify the Saudi female learners' perceptions of speaking anxiety inside the EFL classroom and elicit some of the effective solutions that could help the Saudi female students overcome this problem. The data were thematically analyzed using Nvivo 10 qualitative package.

3.4 Participants and Sampling

A total of (N= 10) participants were randomly sampled from different levels (102,103, and 104) and from different campuses (Women's Main Campus and the Women's colleges) of the ELI , King Abdulaziz University. The ELI follows an integrated skills program of four modules, two in each academic semester. The program consists of four levels correlated to the Common European Framework References for Languages (CEFR). It is an international standard that describes language ability. All contributors in the study were Saudi female students who were native speakers of Arabic, aged from 18 up to 20 years old. They all placed at different proficiency levels at the ELI and were informed about the research topic and its aims before accepting to join the study.

4. Results

Analysis of the qualitative data was undertaken to explore students' perceptions of speaking anxiety in the Saudi EFL context. It also aimed to elicit some effective strategies suggested by the participants as possible solutions to overcome EFL speaking anxiety.

Ten face to face interviews were conducted with ten participants studying their foundation year at the ELI, King Abdulaziz University. Six of the interviewees were from level 102, one was from level 103, and the other three were from level 104. During the interviews, eight semi- structured interview questions were asked in order to investigate students' perceptions on speaking anxiety in EFL classes especially during their speaking sessions, , and the aspects that should be present in the English teacher in order to reduce their speaking anxiety and what strategies do they use to reduce their speaking anxiety in the EFL classroom.

4.1 Research question 1 (What are the Saudi students' perceptions of foreign language speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms?)

To answer the first research question of the present study, the researchers asked the interviewees: What is the most difficult skill in English? Six participants confirmed that speaking is the most difficult skill in English. For instance, student A (level 102) said: "Speaking is the most difficult skill in English because I do not have enough words that can help me express myself clearly".
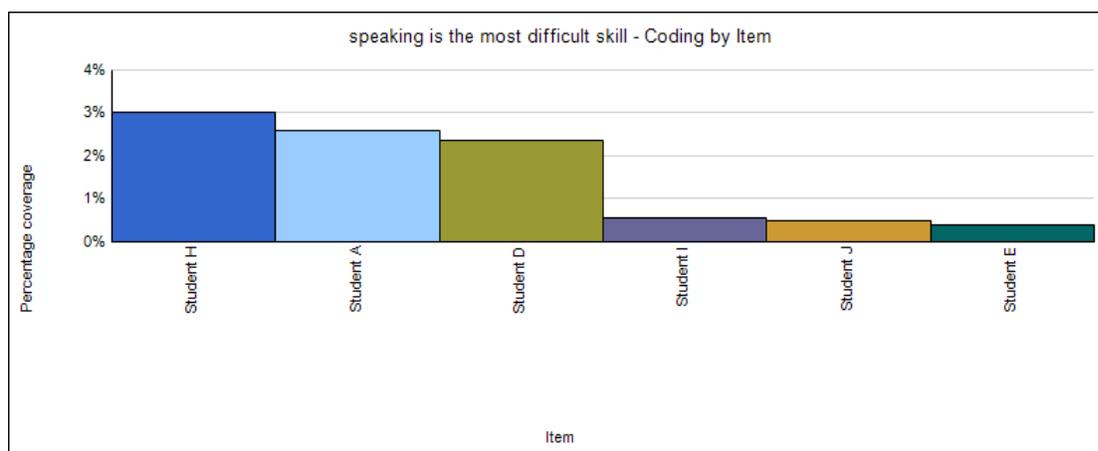The following figure shows the interviewees' perceptions on the most difficult skill in English.

Figure 4.1 Speaking is the most difficult skill.

Figure 4.1 shows that Saudi learners view the speaking skill as the most difficult skill in English. Students A, D, and E were from level 102 and students H, I and J were from level 104.

The researchers then asked the participants: How do you feel when you speak English in front of the class and among your classmates? Six participants said that they feel embarrassed, and five expressed that they are not confident while speaking the target language. For example, student E (level 102) said: "I feel extremely embarrassed because my classmates might laugh at my language. In Saudi Arabia, we only speak in Arabic. It is a pure Arabic culture, so I feel myself strange when I talk in English". Student B also reported: "I feel embarrassed if I speak English in front of my classmates because if I make a mistake or mispronounce a word, they may laugh at me. Although I might know the answer, I prefer not to speak". In addition, student J (level 104) stated: "I feel embarrassed if I make a mistake in front of my classmates because they may laugh at my way of speaking".

The figure shows the number of participants who felt embarrassed while speaking the English language.
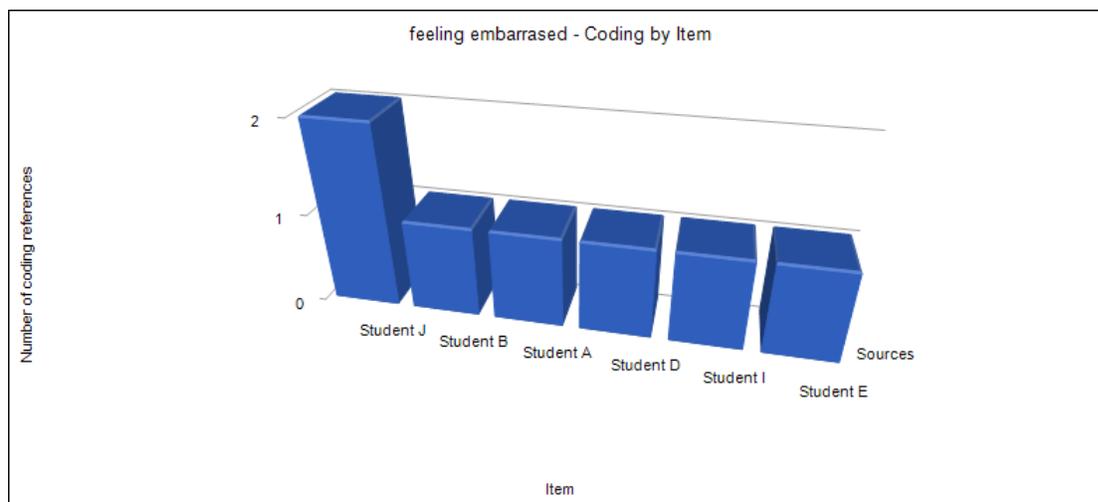
Figure 4.2 Feeling Embarrassed

The figure shows the number of participants who feel unconfident while speaking the English language.
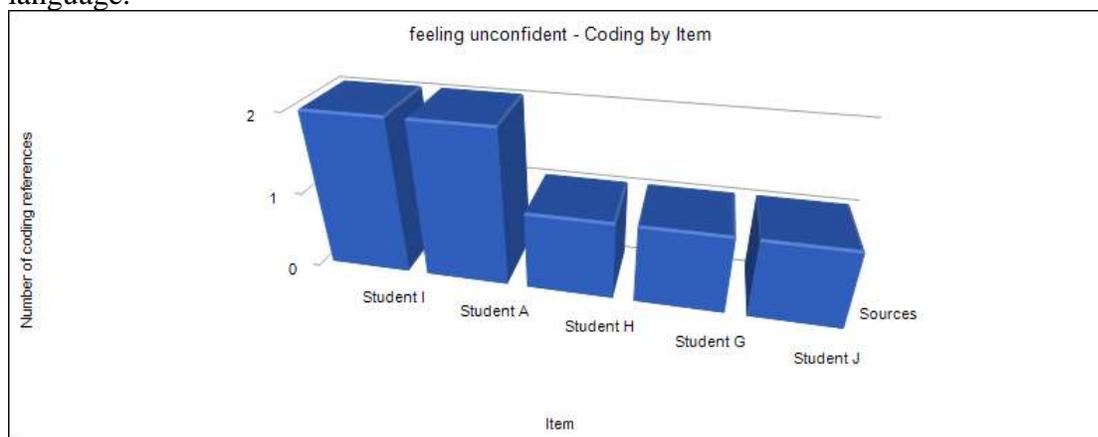

Figure 4.3 Feeling unconfident

        To conclude, it is apparent from figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 that Saudi EFL learners view speaking English as a difficult and embarrassing situation inside the classroom. This negative thought has made them unconfident while speaking the target language in EFL classrooms, which consequently creates their speaking anxiety.

4.2 Research Question 2 (What strategies can be devised to help Saudi students reduce their foreign language speaking anxiety?)

        The second concern in this study is recommending some useful strategies that may help Saudi students reduce their foreign language speaking anxiety in the classroom. Thus, participants' interview was also held in order to answer the second research question and to identify the coping strategies for speaking anxiety. The study data declared that the participants' coping strategies for speaking anxiety were associated with language improvement. That is, all participants mentioned their willingness to work on improving their vocabulary by watching

English movies, using English internet sites, traveling abroad and talking to native speakers, doing more presentations, practice reading English books and joining English institutes during summer vacation to reduce experiencing speaking anxiety. These strategies are illustrated by the following participant comments:

"I will try to watch English movies a lot because I feel if I travel abroad I will not be able to communicate". (Watching English movies)
"I need to learn more vocabulary and see educational YouTube videos to improve my speaking skill". (Following educational websites)
"I think I should travel abroad to learn English better and to communicate with native speakers more because the culture here is not helping us to learn". (Traveling abroad)
"I need to practice speaking English more and do many presentations. I also need to talk to native speakers in order to improve myself". (Practicing the language by talking to native speakers)
"I need to practice reading English books more. I also need to use Instagram, Twitter or any English social media sites that could teach me English in order to improve my language". (Reading books, and exposing to English social media)
"I need to read a lot in order to increase my vocabulary". (Enhance reading skills)
 "I need to study more and be prepared before any lesson". (Being prepared prior to the lecture)
"I need to help myself be better in English by joining English institutes in summer vacations and watching English movies". (Joining English institutes)
"I need to read a lot. I will also learn how to pronounce words correctly". (Pronouncing English words correctly)

4.3 Summary of interview findings data

To sum up, the interview findings of the 10 semi-structured interviews answered the two research questions of the current study. That is, it indicated that Saudi EFL learners do experience foreign language speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms. In addition to that, in order to cope with anxiety, participants themselves were encouraged to provide some solutions for their anxiety. For example, they recommended improving their vocabulary by watching English movies, using English internet sites, traveling abroad and talking to native speakers, doing more presentations, practice reading English books and joining English institutes during summer vacation to reduce experiencing speaking anxiety.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to examine students' perceptions of foreign language classroom anxiety, with specific reference to speaking, among Saudi EFL learners. The following two research questions were tackled in this research:

1)   What are the Saudi students' perceptions of foreign language speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms?
2) What strategies can be devised to help Saudi students reduce their foreign language speaking anxiety?
5.1 What are Saudi students' perceptions of foreign language speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms?

The first research question this study seeks to answer is the participants' perceptions of foreign language speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms. The semi-structured interview findings revealed that Saudi EFL learners studying at the ELI were anxious in their speaking classes.

The qualitative study indicated that six participants out of ten confirmed that speaking is the most difficult skill in English. In addition to that, the participants uncovered that they feel embarrassed and unconfident while speaking the target language. Consequently, this embarrassing situation leads them to be anxious in the EFL classroom. In fact, this is an expected finding due to the relationship between anxiety and second language learning. For instance, Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) provided a specified definition for language anxiety when they described it as " the apprehension experienced when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully proficient" (p. 5). Additionally, they pointed out that foreign language anxiety is different from other kinds of anxiety, and that there is a relationship between anxiety and learning proficiency. Moreover, within the context of language learning, (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986, p. 128) defined anxiety as "a distinctive complex of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process". Therefore, in the case of the Saudi learners', who learn English as a foreign language, and whose mother tongue is Arabic, it is expected to feel anxious while speaking the target language because it is a unique experience that requires the learners to communicate using a language that they have not mastered perfectly.

5.2 What strategies can be devised to help Saudi students reduce their foreign language speaking anxiety?

One of the aims of conducting the 10 semi-structured interviews in this study was to answer the second research question and to identify the coping strategies for speaking anxiety. Since female Saudi learners feel anxious to participate in EFL classrooms, as this study found out, the researchers provided some recommendations for teachers, curriculum designers, and classroom practice to cope with foreign language speaking anxiety and to enhance the learning process in the ELI.

As mentioned before in the theoretical framework of the current thesis, Krashen (1985) claimed that the learning process might be impeded by some affective variables. He also argued that there is an "affective filter" or a "mental block" that is associated negatively with learning. If the affective filter is high, learning will be low and vice versa. Therefore, learning a foreign language can successfully happen when the degree of this affective filter is low. Hence, it is essential for teachers to take the first step to help students reduce their affective filter and cope with anxiety-provoking situations in the EFL classroom.

The study data indicated that participants' coping strategies for speaking anxiety were associated with language improvement. All interviewees reported that they are willing to work on reducing their speaking anxiety by watching English movies, using English internet sites, traveling abroad and talking to native speakers, doing more presentations, practice reading English books and joining English institutes over the summer vacation to reduce experiencing speaking anxiety.

A first step to restrict speaking anxiety is to highlight the role of the instructor in eliminating language anxiety among learners. EFL teachers should remind their students that speaking anxiety is not only common among Saudi learners but is a universal phenomenon among foreign language learners (Alrabai, 2014). Moreover, raising teachers' awareness of the importance of establishing a good rapport with their students is very crucial. They should tolerate their students' mistakes and create a supportive and positive classroom environment. This understanding and helpful atmosphere will help boost the students' self-esteem and alleviate anxiety.

In order to enhance learners' opportunities to practice the target language, English clubs should be introduced to them. For example, students may share their daily routines with their classmates (Alrabai, 2014). In order to improve the Saudi students' proficiency level, it is essential to expose them to English culture. This goal is going to be attained, as the participants recommended, by utilizing the internet as a strong and effective source of practicing speaking inside the classroom. For instance, they should be encouraged to listen to the news in English and come to class the next day and retell it in the classroom discussion. This way the student can be more prepared before class and speak in class enthusiastically.

Another way to reduce students' anxiety in class is to choose some topics of their interest and suitable for their proficiency level. For example, they may discuss some topics related to their religion and culture. Encouraging them to discuss such interesting topics is likely to motivate them to talk freely without feeling worried about making any language mistakes. One of the most direct ways to mitigate anxiety is to ''make the message so interesting that students forget that this is in another language'' (Krashen as cited in Young, 1991, p. 433).

In terms of the difficulties that Saudi learners experience in understanding the teacher, Saudi students' mother tongue is Arabic, and they have a little background in English. Therefore, it is difficult for them to understand the teachers when they speak only in the target language. Thus, it is highly recommended by the researchers of the current study that the teacher should use her body language in order to give a chance to the learners to follow her instructions. Tai (2014), in his article, " The application of body language in English teaching'', encouraged all English teachers to use their body language in the English classrooms. He stressed the importance of the body language for keeping the interaction between the teacher and the student, enhancing teaching effectiveness and improving the reading, listening and speaking skills.

Instead of attending long hours in English classrooms, that lasts from three to four hours every day, practicing old teaching methods and focusing merely on the textbooks, one hour from this long lecture can be devoted to speaking practice in a lab. This solution will not only reduce the long boring hours of English instructions but also will give the students the opportunity to practice the language more. Concerning the limited time for speaking the target language inside the EFL classrooms, students must be given more chances to utilize the language by involving them more in the learning process through interesting and attractive activities.

With regard to the weak education Saudi learners acquire at schools, it is advised that they start teaching English intensively at schools from grade one. It is highly recommended to train students from an early age how to present a presentation in front of the class, encourage

them to share in class discussions, and involve them in the whole learning process. Abdan, 1991 (as cited in Al Harbi, 2015), emphasized the importance of starting teaching the English language from the first grade in Saudi Arabia. Krashen, Long, & Scarcella (1979) argued that learning the target language at an early age is conceived better than learning it when one becomes an adult because adult learners may fail to reach a native-like proficiency in the target language (as cited in Oyama, 1976). Moreover, Oyama claimed that adult learners could experience "fossilization" in which their progress stops at a certain level. Therefore, Saudi curriculum designers must put the aging factor into consideration when designing the Saudi curriculum. This is because the aging factor plays a crucial role in affecting the adult learners' propensity for speaking the target language fluently and naturally.

Implementing some new learning approaches that focus on helping the students to be the center of the learning process will be really effective, and students will be encouraged and motivated to learn. The flipped learning approach, for example, is considered one of the instructional strategies which boost the learner-centered approach in which the students are encouraged to be autonomous learners. In the flipped classroom, students can get benefited from class time " by spending it on practical application, not on inactive lecture" (Cole, 2009, as cited in Arnold, 2014). Herreid & Schiller (2013) asserted that the flipped classroom is attractive in terms of ''the availability of internet resources including audio and video on virtually any subject''. They added that this approach ''seems to have singular appeal to students in this electronic age where videos, in particular, have found a special place in the heart of the awesome generation'' (p. 62). They further recommended the flipped classroom as it gives the opportunity to the learner to listen to lectures or watch videos at home. Therefore, they come to class well prepared and ready for any discussion.

In the ELI, teachers have access to blackboard, a Learning Management System, which may help in implementing the flipped learning in their teaching. Students may watch some online lectures and videos sent by their teacher via blackboard. Consequently, they have the material prior to the lecture in order to prepare themselves for the class discussion with the guidance of the instructor. Therefore, more time can be spent in class on improving their language skills with the help of their teacher and peers. In one way or another, the teacher should work as a facilitator who responds to questions while students refer to the teacher for only guidance and providing feedback. The significance of using the flipped classroom is that it intentionally shifts instruction from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered model in which class time explores interesting topics that match students' needs in order to engage them in the content. Communicative approaches to teaching and learning are also encouraged which foster the interaction between the learner and the teacher. This is supported by Khan & Mahrooqi (2015) who recommended using the communicative approaches inside the class to reduce Omani tertiary students' anxiety. As a matter of fact, if these approaches are applied in language learning, the students will be highly motivated to learn, participate and evaluate their learning progress. Moreover, their speaking skill will improve, as they are prepared before class and ready to speak in class.

In order to curb students' peer anxiety, pair and group work activities are preferable, and it is also advised to avoid competitiveness among students. According to Tsiplakides & Keramida (2009), pair and group work can be incorporated in order to foster a non- threateningly classroom atmosphere and gives a chance to anxious students to participate in the speaking tasks. Another

research conducted by Ansari (2015), aims to provide EFL teachers with practical strategies for reducing foreign language speaking anxiety stemming from students' fear of negative evaluation from their peers and perception of low ability. His study indicated that teachers should avoid comparing students to each other, forcing them to talk, and humiliating and not respecting them. It has been noticed in the current research that eight out of ten of the interviewees prefer to work in pair and group work during speaking tasks. Therefore, EFL teachers should help students feel comfortable and relaxed inside the classroom by joining them in pairs and group work tasks so that they get encouraged to participate.

5.3 Limitations of the study
        The results of the current study are not generalizable to all Saudi EFL learners as they are restricted to specific levels in ELI, King Abdulaziz University. In addition, the study is focusing only on females, as the researchers could not have male participants due to certain social regulations in Saudi Arabia.

5.4 Recommendations for future study
        In view of the findings and the limitations of this study, the following suggestions are provided for further research in the field of foreign language anxiety. Future studies may observe several classes to record EFL learners' speaking anxiety. Additionally, this study encourages future studies to explore foreign language anxiety with the rest of the English skills, such as writing, reading, and listening. It was clear from the semi-structured interviews conducted in this study that Saudi students also view writing as one of the most difficult skills in English. Therefore, future studies that encompass the difficulties that Saudi students face in writing will be beneficial.

6. Conclusion
        In conclusion, the current study further investigated foreign language speaking anxiety among Saudi female learners. It explored the perceptions of 10 Saudi female students who were studying their foundation year at the English Language Institute (ELI), King Abdulaziz University. By using a qualitative approach, data was gathered by means of 10 semi-structured interviews. The study findings uncovered that the majority of the Saudi female learners feel worried and anxious while speaking the target language. The main aim of conducting this study was to provide some solutions for teachers and curriculum designers in order to support students in coping with their foreign language speaking anxiety and thus improve their language learning proficiency.

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