Speaking Test Anxiety among Adult Saudi EFL Learners: Causes, Factors, and Suggested Solutions

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Speaking test anxiety is a pervasive challenge for adult English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly in contexts where English proficiency is tied to academic and professional advancement. This empirical research study investigates the causes, contributing factors, and potential strategies to cope with speaking test anxiety among adult EFL learners in Saudi Arabia. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative survey data with qualitative interpretations to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Sixty-eight undergraduate male students, selected through purposive sampling method, participated in this research. The data were collected via standardized instruments (a modified FLCAS, and another survey instrument prepared by the researcher). Research findings reveal that cultural expectations, fear of negative evaluation, less frequency of speaking tests, and limited speaking practice contribute significantly to "the participants' speaking test" anxiety. The study bears significance in Saudi Arabian contexts as it identifies the causes of English speaking and test anxiety among adult learners and also suggests test-taking strategies to cope with test stress and related anxiety. The study concludes with pedagogical recommendations to mitigate anxiety and enhance speaking performance.

1. Introduction

Proficiency in English language is increasingly becoming crucial in Saudi Arabia as English is an essential requirement for higher education, better job opportunities, and participation in global communication (Aljehani & Modiano, 2024; Alqarni et al., 2024). Undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia are expected to demonstrate sufficient proficiency in English to pursue advanced academic studies. Admission to several prominent institutions requires successful completion of standardized English Language Proficiency (ELP) assessments such as the IELTS, TOEFL, or Duolingo, with scores obtained to set standards (although some research studies, such as Souzandehfar [2024], raise questions on the authenticity of IELTS speaking tests). Nevertheless, despite these requirements, a significant proportion of students struggle to attain the necessary proficiency levels and consequently fail to pass these examinations. In some cases, students go through necessary preparations but experience performance setbacks owing to test-related anxiety. For instance, IELTS demographic data 2024-2025 shows that Saudi test-takers who fall in band score below 4 are 20%, at band score 4 are 13%, at 4.5 are 13%, at 5 are 14%, and at band score 5.5 are 13%. Only 3% test-takers fall in the band score 7.5 (IELTS Partners, 2025). It appears that one of the factors behind their low performance in the speaking test may be speaking-test anxiety. The same test-takers perform better in other skills, such as reading and writing (IELTS Partners, 2025). Adult students are particularly prone to anxiety since in adulthood language elements, such as accent and tone, get fossilized and bad learning is difficult to unlearn. Saudi adult

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EFL learners' speaking test anxiety has not been addressed in research, and potential solutions haven't been suggested. Thus, there exists a gap in the literature. Although anxiety may influence any or all of the four core language skills — listening, reading, writing, and speaking — speaking is commonly found to be affecting test-takers' anxiety the most, particularly in EFL contexts (Anuardi et al., 2023; Paraguas, 2025; Yamanaka et al., 2023). Research shows that speaking-test anxiety negatively affects test performance, decreases motivation, and impedes learners' long-term language acquisition goals (Tsang, 2022).

Research studies have identified foreign language anxiety (FLA) as a limiting factor in effective language learning (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Horwitz, 2001; Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu, 2018; Zhang & Liu, 2013). Horwitz et al. (1986) laid the foundation by conceptualizing FLA as a distinct construct, while Horwitz (2001) extended this foundational reference by emphasizing the pervasive influence of FLA. Liu (2018) and Zhang and Liu (2013) built upon the work of Horwitz et al. to empirically examine the construct of anxiety. Although FLA may influence multiple language domains, existing research literature seems to be focused on general anxiety or reading-related anxiety, particularly among younger learners (Chen et al., 2022; Miao & Vibulphol, 2021; Saito et al., 1999). While skill-specific anxiety is not essentially confined to a single area, learners may display intense anxiety in task-specific situations, such as test-taking or classroom reading activities. Although a good body of literature continues to grow around speaking-related anxiety, the phenomenon of speaking-test-related anxiety remains insufficiently explored, especially within the Saudi educational context. Therefore, there is a need for further empirical investigations in this academic area to better understand its implications for Saudi test-takers and to inform focused test-taking strategy interventions.

This study aims to explore the nature and impact of speaking-test anxiety among adult EFL learners in Saudi Arabia, identifying key contributing factors and potential interventions. Test anxiety is a common and widespread issue and affects adult Saudi EFL learners as it does in other EFL contexts (Alzahrani & Alshaikhi, 2023). The issue is widely discussed in research studies on foreign language anxiety among adult Saudi EFL learners, but speaking-test anxiety, which is a finer aspect of test anxiety, has received little attention. Test data shows that Saudi test-takers' oral test performance stands lower than the world average in standardized ELP tests, such as IELTS, TOEFL, and the like.

2. Review of Literature
2.1. Foreign Language Anxiety

The subconscious fear of the foreign language among the learners may arise because of, among others, factors, such as fear of failure, fear of making errors, fear of being corrected on the spot, low level of training in the language, and the feeling that the language is forced upon them (Daud et al., 2022). Anxiety is an emotion associated with stress, tension, and worry (Scovel, 1978; Spielberger, 2010). Anxiety may induce bodily changes, such as increased blood pressure and tense muscles. It is a common human trait, a mental reflex to unknown situations. In general, anxiety is not considered good, but an average level of anxiety may turn out to be good for people, as some people tend to perform better under stress and anxiety (Jerrim, 2022). However, ever-present anxiety is a pathological condition causing recurring intrusive thoughts, concerns, or worries (Kazdin, 2000). FLA is also very common, and ample research literature exists on the subject (e.g., Alghothani, 2010; Al-Saraj, 2015; Al-Sobhi & Preece, 2018; Akbar et al., 2018; Awan et al., 2010; Dewaele & Inada, 2022; Mahdi, 2024). However, if anxiety begins interfering with foreign language learners' performance, the situation needs scholarly attention (Horwitz, 2001; Oxford, 1999). Anxiety can be an individual personality trait, but someone may be anxious at a particular moment, action, or event, too, and that would be a momentary condition. It is essential that in a classroom, the EFL teacher should try to determine whether a particular student is anxious because of his personality trait or towards a particular situation. Brown and Marshall (2006) believe that anxiety is intertwined with self-esteem, self-efficacy, inhibition, and risk taking and it plays a role in second language acquisition.

There exists extensive literature on FLA. Horwitz et al. (1986) state that the core components of FLA are uneasiness in communication, test anxiety, and fear of adverse comments from peers and teachers. Speaking anxiety, a subclass of FLA, is found to be particularly dominant in oral examinations. In the Saudi Arabian context, studies (e.g., Alrabai, 2014; Al-Saraj, 2013) have highlighted the role of

cultural standards, teacher-dominated education, and assessment tension in aggravating anxiety. However, few studies have focused specifically on adult learners and speaking test scenarios.

Speaking-test anxiety is a widespread phenomenon that prevalently affects EFL learners, especially when they appear in formal tests and exams (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). Speaking-test anxiety impairs students' performance, as Krashen (1982) says that for high anxiety, learners raise affective filters preventing themselves from absorbing and producing language efficiently, especially in test situations. For instance, Ahmadi and Lofti (2025) report from an experiment on EFL learners' online self-regulated learning that test anxiety indirectly impacts learners' speaking test performance by negatively affecting their self-regulated learning. English has become a dominant force in academic, professional, and global communication, so proficiency in spoken English has become an established standard for success in every field (Leung, 2023). Consequently, speaking tests — whether in standardized tests like IELTS and TOEFL, or classroom evaluations — carry high values for learners. The tests often lead to intense psychological pressures that affect their performance negatively (Kelsen, 2019; Khafidhoh et al., 2023; Paraguas, 2025). Speaking-test anxiety is a subsection of FLA. Nevertheless, unlike general FLA, speaking-test anxiety is related to specific tasks and skills, and primarily emerges in such situations where learners are required to produce spoken language under high pressure, i.e., when they are tested (Almalki, 2023).

A number of research studies have highlighted English language reading anxiety among EFL learners (e.g., Abdullah & Rahman, 2010; Abu-Ghararah, 1999; Al-Shboul et al., 2013; Alghothani, 2010; Awan et al., 2010; Batumlu & Erden, 2007; Çelebi, 2009; Horwitz et al., 1986; Sellers, 2000), but very few researchers have paid attention to speaking-test anxiety.

2.2. Test/Speaking-Test Anxiety Research in Saudi EFL Contexts

English language speaking anxiety is recognized as a significant academic issue in Saudi Arabian research contexts (Almalki, 2023; Faqihi, 2023; Fauzi & Asi, 2023). Almalki (2023) notes that text anxiety affects the reliability of Saudi students' test of true competence, and Faqihi (2023) reports that Saudi EFL instructors know that their students have speaking anxiety and are aware of its potential causes as well. Alnahidh and Altalhab (2020) also report that the number of Saudi university students experiencing moderate to high levels of speaking anxiety is considerably high. They are particularly anxious during formal assessment sessions. Fear of negative evaluation, lack of confidence, and limited exposure to authentic speaking environments are cited as the major contributing factors. Similarly, Al-Saraj (2013) examined anxiety among Saudi female learners using Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The researcher reports that cultural expectations around public performance and gender dynamics heighten female students' anxiety in speaking tasks. Al-Hnifat et al.'s (2020) findings also align with Al-Saraj's findings, who argue that cultural factors play an important role in determining female students' speaking anxiety. In Saudi Arabia, women speaking with strangers is not considered a normal activity, and that leads to their extreme self-consciousness and a feeling of embarrassment for them (Almotiary, 2022). This feeling can be observed in intensified form as speaking anxiety during female students' English-speaking tests. Rafada and Madini (2017) have also explored the factors contributing to English-speaking anxiety among Saudi female students. Their findings showed that anxiety issues among female students are owed to the general atmosphere in English classes, treatment from teachers, and test-related tense situations. Thus, the researchers show that female students' test anxiety is a clear and strong indication of their expression of apprehensions about specifically designed speaking tasks, limits of time, and unknown conversation partners.

2.3. Test-Taking Strategies

Assessment is an important part of learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998). By way of assessment, teachers receive information to review their teaching strategies (Singh et al., 2022), while learners get the information to make decisions affecting their lives in a profound way. However, as discussed above, assessment may become a cause of anxiety among some learners. Commonly, teachers address students' test anxiety by providing informal training in test-taking strategies, but that may not happen at all, as teachers may take it for granted that all students are capable of handling test anxiety. Nevertheless, research shows that test-taking strategies (TTS) training provides the learners with essential cognitive and metacognitive tools to handle assessments effectively (Abd Elmajid, 2025; Almalki, 2023; Attia,

2012; Chang et al., 2025; Liu, 2018; Zhang & Liu, 2013). Mindfulness is a newly recognized strategy, and research establishes a positive correlation between mindfulness and lowered test anxiety (Chang et al., 2025). Test-taking strategies for written tests and multiple-choice tests encompass techniques such as time management, test analysis, elimination techniques, and educated guessing. For speaking tests, the strategies are slightly different. Time management is important there too, but more than that, learners need to be well-prepared, follow relaxation techniques, visualize themselves as winners, stay focused and grounded, and control their nervousness. Some other notable strategies mentioned in literature are fostering a supportive classroom environment, relaxation techniques, leveraging technology and gamification, social support, and interventions customised to individual needs (Abd Elmajid, 2025; Chang et al., 2025).

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) emphasized that strategic competence is a fundamental part of articulate and persuasive communication. In EFL contexts, especially in Saudi Arabia, the absence of methodological education in TTS has been identified as a major cause behind learners' low academic success rate, test anxiety, and exaggeration of actual language proficiency. Elyas and Picard (2010) say that Saudi EFL learners commonly face challenges since they have restricted exposure to test-taking strategies. Al Fraidan and Al-Khalaf (2012) also note that since Arab learners are trained to memorize and learn by rote, they are hardly aware of other test-taking strategies. Almossa's (2021) research findings are that in the Saudi higher education context, "the most common assessment instruments are written examinations" (p. 175). In other words, it means that even speaking tests are also often writing-based; they may not accurately prepare the learners for ELP speaking tests. Moreover, the emphasis on grammar and vocabulary over functional language use further marginalizes speaking-test preparedness. But there is a lack of comprehensive research literature on the impact of TTS training on speaking-test anxiety among Saudi EFL learners, and very little is known on the subject to form a definitive opinion.

2.4. Research Gap

To sum up the review, literature on difficulties of EFL learners as well as on the low performance of some EFL learners, recognizes FLA as one of the potential causes. FLA is an umbrella term, and speaking-test anxiety is identified as a subsection of FLA with its own characteristics. Research literature on potential solutions to EFL learners' test anxiety suggests test-taking strategies training as an effective approach. However, in Saudi research contexts, adult EFL learners' speaking-test anxiety as well as a potential correlation between anxiety and TTS training are not sufficiently explored in empirical research, and thus, this study aims to address this research gap. Therefore, based on the review of literature and identification of research gaps in Saudi academic contexts, the objectives of the study were determined to investigate (1) the prevalence and intensity of speaking test anxiety among adult Saudi EFL learners, (2) the potential causes and factors contributing to test anxiety among adult Saudi EFL learners; and (3) the strategies to cope with anxiety and offer some test-taking tips to help Saudi EFL learners overcome speaking-test anxiety.

Keeping in view the objectives stated above, the present study was designed to be an exploratory, correlational case-study research, working on a stated problem– that is, the researcher intended to confirm the empirical truth of a preconceived idea about test anxiety he had framed in the process of his general observation of students at his university, through analysis of data on students' feeling of anxiety in speaking English.

3. Methods

The study has employed a mixed-method research methodology. Numerical data were collected using structured questionnaires designed to measure the levels of foreign language anxiety among learners and the potential factors causing and contributing to the anxiety. The data collection was primarily quantitative in nature, while the interpretation of numerical patterns and trends involved a qualitative lens to uncover deeper insights into learners' emotional and cognitive experiences.

3.1. Participants and Setting

The study involved undergraduate Saudi EFL learners enrolled in a university English language program. Sixty-eight students participated in the study. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling process. The reason for this action was to measure the students' level of speaking anxiety in

general, and all students in the class met the predefined criteria aligned with the goals of the present study (Creswell, 2013). The participants were all male in the age range of 18 and 20 years (M = 19 yrs, SD = 1). The participants had studied English for a minimum of six years before joining the university.

The present study was conducted in a foreign language teaching/learning higher education environment where the main language of instruction is English. However, to learners, the change in medium is sudden since the medium of instruction in schools is not English, with a few exceptions. Undergraduate students learn English for communication and university education in an intensive course for a year. The course is targeted to improve students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Assessment is largely summative, though formative assessment also plays some role in it. Speaking assessment is summative, in which students are given two tasks. First, they are given a topic to speak on, and second, they work on a chosen project for months, and for the final assessment, they present the findings in the class. Students are expected to reach the B1-level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

3.2. Research Instruments

The research data were collected via three different types of survey questionnaires. The first questionnaire was the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), designed by Horwitz et al. (1986). The other two questionnaires were developed by the researcher himself. One of them — a brief survey — was used to collect participants' perceptions on the potential causes and factors contributing to their speaking-test anxiety, while the second questionnaire was a modified version of FLCAS, used to collect data on participants' anxiety level after test-taking strategies intervention.

The original FLCAS (Horwitz et al.,1986) is a 33-item, 5-point Likert scale that measures learners' FL anxiety in a classroom situation. It is widely used in EFL research to collect data on learners' apprehensions about speaking in English in front of others. For the present study, the questionnaire was adapted and modified, so the new version was a 16-item, 5-point Likert-type scale. Modifications have been carried out to make the questionnaire more test focused. Reliability and validity of the instrument were tested after modifications were carried out, and the obtained Cronbach's alpha score was .89.

The second questionnaire was a brief survey focused on the potential effects (10 effects highlighted) of speaking-test anxiety on learners, followed by respondents' reflection on its possible causes and contributing factors (8 factors included). The effects and causes included were those identified in research literature as potential causes and effects of speaking anxiety among EFL learners. Participants were asked to tick-mark as many causes and factors as applied to their condition. Reliability and validity of the instrument were ensured through seeking and incorporating expert advice from senior faculty members and researchers.

The third questionnaire, used to collect data on participants' anxiety level after test-taking strategies training for a week, was a modified and shorter version of FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986). It was a 15-item 5-point Likert-type instrument, primarily focused on recording respondents' feelings after they had just taken a speaking test in English. Reliability and validity of the modified instrument were tested in a pilot study, and the obtained Cronbach alpha score was .78.

3.3. Research Design

The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to investigate foreign language anxiety (FLA) among Saudi EFL learners. The design integrates quantitative data collection via a standardized and structured questionnaire with qualitative interpretation of numerical patterns to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue under investigation. The rationale for the design was that FLA being a multifaceted construct, a mixed methods approach involving quantitative objectivity and qualitative insight into the nuanced subjective feeling of anxiety suited the most for the purpose.

3.4. Research Procedure

The first step in the research was the selection of study participants. Then the participants were given a surprise speaking test. They were asked to work in groups of two. One participant was to play the role of interviewer, and the other was to act as interviewee. The interviewer was to ask general

questions, such as "talk about yourself; tell me about your purpose of learning English, your expectations from the English course," and so on. This was done to ensure that participants spoke without preparation. The interview session was to last for five minutes. Immediately after the test, the first questionnaire (FLCAS) was administered. The next day, the second questionnaire was administered to collect data on the potential causes of participants' speaking-test anxiety. This was followed by a one-week training of participants in test-taking strategies. The suggested test-taking strategies were: time management, note-taking, giving a structured presentation, being well-prepared, following relaxation techniques, visualizing ourselves as winners, staying focused and grounded, and controlling our nervousness. And finally, once again, a speaking test was conducted, and the third questionnaire was administered.

4. Results

The results obtained from the FLCAS survey 1 are presented in Table 1. The numbers against each statement show the number of participants in agreement with the statement. The survey items reflect test anxiety (S3, S7, S8, S12, S13, and S15), communication apprehension (S1, S2, S4, S5, S6, S10, and S14), and fear of negative evaluation (S9 and S11) in the English language classroom. The figures in Table 1 are rounded-off percentage figures of participants who agree or disagree with the statements indicative of speaking-test anxiety. SPSS 20 was used for statistical analysis.

Table 1

Percentage of Participants Who Agree or Disagree with Questionnaire Statements

No		Agree%	Disagree%
1.	I never feel confident enough to speak in English in my language class.	63	22
2.	I do not care if I make mistakes in English.	36	58
3.	I feel palpitations at heart when I am called on to speak in English.	23	44
4.	If I don't understand what the teacher says in English, I am scared.	32	41
5.	I always think that the other students speak English better than me.	45	33
6.	Speaking in English without preparation agitates me.	57	20
7.	The apprehension of failing my English-speaking tests worries me a lot	42	44
8.	I am nervous in speaking tests and, as a result, forget things I know.	57	30
9.	I don't volunteer answers in my English class for embarrassment.	10	72
10.	I can easily strike a conversation with native English speakers.	17	64
11.	I don't understand teacher's corrections, and it upsets me.	30	42
12.	Quite often I feel I cannot take the test in spoken English.	47	36
13.	Studying for English language test confuses me more and more.	11	82
14.	I am scared to speak in English thinking that the other students will laugh at me.	7	75
15.	If I am not ready with answers for questions in English, I am nervous in class.	48	35
		Mean: 35.25 SD: 17.73 Variance: 294.8 SE: 4.577	Mean: 46 SD: 18.78 Variance: 330.7 SE: 4.84

4.1. Speaking-Test Anxiety

To begin with, a cursory glance at Tables 1 shows that a significant number of participants feel they have anxiety issues. The results of modified FLCAS show that the surveyed participants are affected by speaking test anxiety. FLA may be just one aspect of the personality traits of some learners; however, personality explains only 16-32% of the variance in anxiety factors (Paraguas, 2025). Therefore, the results obtained can be largely associated with the challenges of language learning that many learners face. Participants testing high on speaking-test anxiety indicate that they feel uncomfortable in test-taking situations, especially in English speaking tests. They endorse the questionnaire statements reflecting speaking-test anxiety, such as,

"*I never feel confident enough to speak in English in my language class*." (63%)
"*I feel palpitations at heart when I am called on to speak in English*." (23%)
"*I am nervous in speaking tests and, as a result, forget things I know*." (57%)
"*Speaking in English without preparation agitates me.*" (57%)
"*Quite often I feel I cannot take the test in spoken English.*" (47%)
"*If I am not ready with answers for questions in English, I am nervous in class.*" (48%)

They also reject statements like,

"*I do not care if I make mistakes in spoken English.*" (58%)
"*I can easily strike a conversation with native English speakers.*" (64%)

4.2. Causes and Factors Affecting Anxiety

Table 2 presents the results obtained from the survey conducted to investigate participants' perceptions of the causes and factors contributing to their speaking-test anxiety. Participants attributed their anxiety to different, most often multiple, factors, so the number (and percentage) against each cause/factor show the number of participants attributing their anxiety to that particular factor.

Table 2
Results Obtained from the Perceived Causes and Factors Contributing to the Speaking-test Anxiety Survey

	Cause/Factor	Number of Participants	Percentage %
a.	Foreign language anxiety	18	26%
b.	Less occasions to use spoken English in class	56	82%
c.	Less frequency of speaking tests in class	56	82%
d.	Fear of negative evaluation	23	33%
e.	Cultural pressure	34	50%
f.	Lack of practice/ limited social opportunities to speak English	38	55%
g.	Lack of interest in English language	2	3%
h.	Negative cultural perception of English as a language	8	11%

A glance at Table 2 shows that an aggregate of 82% of participants ticked options b and c as the leading causes of their test anxiety. Options b (less occasions to use spoken English) and c (less frequency of speaking tests in class) were the highest choices of participants (82%) as compared to other options. The other major factor perceived by participants as the cause behind their speaking-test anxiety is a lack of practice in spoken English (55%), followed by cultural pressure to perform well in English (50%). It is worth noting that not many participants show a lack of interest in English (only 1%) and a negative cultural perception of English as a language (11%), which is a good sign.

The raw scores obtained from the second FLCAS survey, conducted after TTS intervention, were converted to percentage figures. For a comprehensive outlook, the number of participants (percentage figures) endorsing or rejecting the questionnaire statements indicative of speaking-test anxiety in surveys 1 and 2 are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

A Comprehensive View of the Percentage of Participants Who Endorse or Reject Questionnaire Statements Indicating Speaking-test Anxiety, Surveys 1 and 2

No	Statement	FLCAS 1		FLCAS 2	
		Endorse %	Reject %	Endorse %	Reject %
1.	I feel palpitations at heart when I am called on to speak in English.	23	44	23	64
2.	I always think that the other students speak English better than me.	45	33	22	62
3.	I was very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.	26	57	33	62
4.	I was afraid that the other students would laugh at me when I spoke English.	7	75	16	84
5.	I felt like not taking the speaking English test today.	47	36	15	73
6.	Speaking in English without preparation agitates me.	57	20	17	80
7.	I don't volunteer answers in my English class for embarrassment.	10	72	32	64
8.	Studying for English language test confuses me more and more.	11	82	23	68
9.	In the speaking test today, I was so nervous I forgot things I knew.	57	30	17	80
10.	If I don't understand what the teacher says in English, I am scared.	32	41	20	72
11.	I don't understand teacher's corrections, and it upsets me.	30	42	17	64
12.	If I am not ready with answers for questions in English, I am nervous in class.	48	35	25	72
13.	I felt quite sure of myself when I spoke for the speaking test today.	22	63	73	25
14.	I was not worried about making mistakes in spoken English.	36	58	76	18
15.	I would not be nervous speaking in English with a native speaker.	17	64	79	18
		Mean: 38.53 SD: 19.98 Variance: 372 SE: 5.15	Mean: 42.8 SD: 20.11 Variance: 377 SE: 5.19	Mean: 21.4 SD: 5.55 Variance: 28 SE: 1.43	Mean: 71.53 SD: 7.28 Variance: 49 SE: 1.87

Note. N = 68

4.3. The Impact of TTS Intervention on Anxiety

A quick glance at Table 3 reveals that test-taking strategies intervention had a favourable impact on the efforts to lower participants' test anxiety. Although participants have expressed mixed reactions to the questionnaire, and their anxiety levels differ according to different anxiety-raising situations, the overall impression is good. After the intervention (FLCAS 2), a higher percentage of participants endorsed the statements indicative of lower anxiety levels in the speaking test they had just faced, such as,

"*I felt quite sure of myself when I spoke for the speaking test today.*" (73%)
"*I was not worried if I made mistakes in spoken English today.*" (76%)
"*I would not be nervous striking up a conversation with a native speaker.*" (79%)

They also rejected the statements indicating higher speaking-test anxiety, such as,

"*I feel palpitations at heart when I am called on to speak in English.*" (64%)
"*I was very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.*" (62%)
"*In the speaking test today, I was so nervous I forgot things I knew.*" (80%)
"*Speaking in English without preparation agitates me.*" (80%)

   The raw percentage of participants endorsing or rejecting the presence of anxiety indicated in FLCAS 1 and 2 statements were statistically analysed to calculate the mean of percentage of participants endorsing or rejecting the presence of anxiety in the two surveys (statements 13, 14 and 15 were reverse-coded). The obtained values (Mean, Standard Deviance, Variance, Standard Error) were used to calculate the t-test and P values to determine the significance of difference in the percentage of participants endorsing or rejecting speaking test anxiety after TTS intervention. The results obtained from Paired-Sample t-test and P value calculations are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Paired Sample t-test and P Values for Participants Endorsing/ Rejecting Anxiety after TTS Intervention

No.	Statement	N	FLCAS1			FLCAS2			t-test value	df (n-1)	*p* Value
			Mean	SD	Variance	Mean	SD	Variance			
1.	Endorsement of Anxiety	15	38.53	19.98	372	21.4	5.55	28	3.19914	14	.001706*
2.	Rejection of Anxiety	15	42.8	20.11	377	71.53	7.28	49	-5.20152	14	<.00001**

Note. *The result is significant at p < .05. ** The result is significant at p < .05. *N* = number of statements

   The obtained results are indicative of the positive impact of TTS intervention on learners' text anxiety. The number of participants endorsing the presence of test anxiety post-intervention is lower (M = 21.4) than their pre-intervention numbers (M = 38.53). The difference is statistically significant at *p* < .05 (t = 3.19914, *p* = .001706). Similarly, the number of participants rejecting the presence of test anxiety post-intervention is higher (M = 71.53) than their pre-intervention numbers (M = 42.8). The difference is statistically significant at *p* < .05 (t = -5.20152, *p* = <.00001).

5. Discussion

   The results obtained from data analysis indicate that a significant number of participants display self-consciousness and anxiety to speak in English or to take a speaking test, especially if they are unprepared. The study findings suggest that speaking-test anxiety is experienced by a significant percentage of Saudi EFL learners, if not by a majority of learners. They feel that their self-esteem is at risk if they reveal themselves by speaking (wrong) English in the presence of others or by underperforming in speaking tests. They are apprehensive of failing their English-speaking tests. Participants also show communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation by their peers and teachers. Thus, it may be asserted that speaking test anxiety among adult Saudi EFL learners is prevalent and intense. This finding is corroborated by the findings of a few previous studies, such as Abdullah & Rahman (2010), Al-Hnifat et al. (2020), and Alnahidh and Altalhab (2020). Speaking-test anxiety is closely related to the belief that it is not normal to make mistakes in speaking English, and therefore, learners are afraid to make mistakes. For instance, participants rejected the statement "*I do not care if I make mistakes in spoken English.*" The situation needs to be normalized since making mistakes is part of learning, and correction should not be taken as a sign of failure.

   The study achieved its second objective by identifying the potential causes and factors contributing to test anxiety among adult Saudi EFL learners. The findings show that limited occasions to use spoken English and a low frequency of speaking tests in class are the major factors causing test anxiety among learners. The other major factors participants reported as the causes behind their speaking-test anxiety is a lack of practice in spoken English and cultural pressure to perform well in

English. The findings of studies by Akbar et al. (2018) and Faqihi (2023) corroborate the findings from the present study on the causes and contributing factors for speaking anxiety among EFL learners.

The third objective of the study, i.e., to investigate the potential strategies to cope with anxiety and offer some test-taking tips to help Saudi EFL learners overcome speaking-test anxiety is also achieved as a short-term TTS intervention proved effective in lowering participant's test anxiety. Mindfulness has been very helpful as a coping strategy, and the finding is corroborated by Chang et al. (2025). Time management techniques, note-taking, making a structured presentation, preparedness, mental relaxation before tests, staying focused and grounded, and controlling nervousness were found to be very effective. The studies by Abd Elmajid (2025), Al Fraidan and Al-Khalaf (2012), and Attia (2012) show similar results on the effectiveness of these strategies as are identified in the present study. The findings are also somewhat similar to the findings of a study by Rahmaty and Zarei (2021) who note that "interactionist and interventionist Dynamic Assessment (DA)" (p. 13) facilitates reduction in learners' anxiety in a foreign language environment. The positive effects of time management as an anxiety-coping strategy are indirectly supported by the findings of a study by Ariamanesh et al. (2023) who report that if test-takers are given more online preparation time during TOEFL iBT test, they perform better in speaking tasks.

6. Conclusions

To conclude, this study investigated speaking test anxiety among adult Saudi EFL learners, with a particular focus on identifying its underlying causes and examining the efficacy of a test-taking strategies training intervention. The findings revealed that a substantial proportion of participants experienced significant anxiety during speaking assessments. This anxiety was characterized by foreign language apprehension and a pronounced fear of making linguistic errors. Several interrelated factors were found to contribute to speaking test anxiety. These included limited opportunities to use spoken English in authentic contexts, resulting in diminished confidence; infrequent exposure to speaking assessments, which led to unfamiliarity with test formats; fear of negative evaluation by peers and instructors; sociocultural pressures to excel in English; and a general lack of practice and social engagement in English-speaking environments. To mitigate these challenges, the study recommends a multifaceted approach. Key strategies include increasing the frequency of speaking assessments to enhance familiarity, incorporating targeted training in test-taking techniques, embedding speaking-focused activities more regularly within classroom instruction, and fostering a psychological reframing of tests. Specifically, learners should be guided to perceive assessments as integral components of routine learning rather than as exceptional or stress-inducing events.

7. Limitations and Pedagogical Implications

The present research bears significant pedagogical implications. EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia need to incorporate low-stakes speaking activities in their teaching schedule, such as regular informal speaking tasks that build learners' confidence. EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia also need training in anxiety-reduction techniques. Awareness and empathy can improve classroom dynamics. Teachers can also organize test preparation workshops. Learners may also be encouraged to seek peer support and engage in group work. And finally, teachers can encourage more collaborative tasks in order to reduce fear of peer judgment.

Great care was taken to conduct the present research. However, there were a few points beyond the researcher's control, and are identified as limitations of the present study. First, for lack of time and resources, the study was conducted with a small number of students, and conclusions were drawn accordingly. Therefore, the study findings may not be taken as representative of a wider body of Saudi EFL learners. Second, the present study was limited to the psychological effects of only the English language, so any other foreign language was not considered for this study. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from the study may not be generalised with respect to other foreign languages. Third, the present study was conducted with a particular set of variables. It is possible that a similar kind of study can be conducted choosing a different set of variables, like participants' age, gender, teaching materials used, and their degree of exposure to English, but owing to constraints of time and resources, these variables were not taken into consideration. For instance, a similar study with both male and female participants may lead to a more comprehensive understanding of speaking test anxiety.

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Appendix: Causes and Contributing Factors Survey

Dear research participant,

This is a brief survey on the potential causes and factors contributing to English language speaking and test anxiety among adult EFL learners. The survey is part of the research study "Speaking Test Anxiety among Adult Saudi EFL Learners: Causes, Factors, and Suggested Solutions." The objective of the research is to investigate English speaking and test anxiety among adult English learners. If you feel anxious about speaking English, we invite you to share your views on its potential causes.

Read the following statement carefully and then answer the question that follows:

Statement: You may feel self-conscious and anxious about speaking English, especially in speaking tests, and may be worried about making mistakes in speaking English thinking that the other students will laugh at you when you speak English.

Question: What, according to you, may be the potential causes and factors contributing to your speaking anxiety? Tick all that apply to your condition.

a. Anxiety about English being a foreign language
b. Less occasions to use spoken English in class that leads to a lack of full confidence in its use, especially for the test purpose
c. Less frequency of speaking tests in class leading to defamiliarization with tests
d. Fear of negative evaluation, that is, fear of being judged by peers and instructors
e. Cultural pressure, that is, social expectations to perform well in English
f. Lack of practice and limited social opportunities for authentic speaking practice
g. Lack of interest in English language
h. Negative cultural perception of English as a language