Research Article

Speaking Anxiety in Foreign Language Context: Perspectives of Arabic-Speaking Learners of Chinese

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Speaking is an essential aspect of foreign language classes as it plays a significant role in achieving language proficiency. The speaking anxiety of learners negatively affects the learning process. Considering the growing significance of Chinese language education worldwide and the rising number of Saudi students learning Chinese, it is crucial to comprehend the elements that contribute to their speaking anxiety. This research explores speaking anxiety among Saudi learners of Chinese and attempts. to identify the causes, manifestations, and coping mechanisms of speaking anxiety in this specific context.In light of this, the current study looks into the variables influencing learners' anxiety when speaking a foreign language from the learners' persepctives. A snowballing sampling was employed including 10 adults Arabic-speaking learners of Chinese from language centres, Saudi Arabia. A semi-structured interview was conducted in order to explore the learners' perspectives on speaking anxiety in Chinese classroom togather with the reasons that trigger and lower their speaking anxiety. The findings suggested that while the learners acknowledge the value of oral tasks in the language classroom, but their unwillingness to speak comes from a lack of vocabulary and practice, concern of making mistakes and negative evaluation, and fear of assessments. Engaging learners in sufficient activities before testing and offering adequate language input for each task can help address these concerns. **Keywords**: Anxiety-provoking factors, Chinese, foreign language, speaking anxiety

1. Introduction

1.1 Understanding Speaking Anxiety

Speaking anxiety is quite common among foreign language learners. Speaking anxiety stands for the feelings of apprehension, nervousness, worry and fear of speaking infront of others (Horwitz et al, 1986).. Speakers may suffer when required to commuincate using a lanaguge that is not their first language, typically when they are with low language proficiency.This paper explores the nature of speaking anxiety including its triggers, effects, and potential techniques for mitigation among Arabic-speaking learners of Chinese. Note that Chinese is a language that typically poses exceptional obstacles due to a number of linguistic and cultural differences.

Anxiety can hinder successful language development, particularly in communication. A wide range of theoretical frameworks acknowledge the role of anxiety on foreign lanaguge development. McCroskey's Communication Apprehension Theory (1970), for instance, suggests that some learners are inherently more anxious while speaking, despite their levels of language proficiency. Also, Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954) proposes that learners might feel anxious when assessing their skills against those of more proficient peers or native speakers. Wheras, Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1977) suggests that learners with low self-efficacy with respect to their speaking skills are prone to struggle from anxiety.While, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) argues that excessive anxiety can create a barrier that impedes language development.

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1.2 The Status of Mandrain Chinese in Saudi Arabia

Mandrin Chinese is now taught as a foeign language in Saudi Arabia. China and Saudi Arabia agreed to strengthen collaboration in the field of Chinese language education in 2023. After this agreement, Mandrin Chinese language classes have been added to the high school curriculum across the country in order to provide young people with important language skills and promote a greater understanding for the target culture. The ministry has claimed that young Saudi Arabian students will increase their opportunities to secure employment or continue their education at esteemed Chinese universities.

The growing significance of communication abilities in Chinese has resulted in a strong global need for non-native speakers to learn the language proficiently. Possessing strong communication skills in Chinese is essential today, as it creates numerous educational and job opportunities for individuals. Arabic speakers attempt to learn Chinese for countless reasons. Initially, China has become one of the world largest economies, and its trade relations with Middle East countries have expanded notably. Mastering Mandarin Chinese can open up job opportunities in countless sectors, including business. Secondly, there is a growing interest in Chinese culture among Arabic speakers. Matering Chinese allows individuals to invlove more profoundly with Chinese culture including art and literature, art, and history. Thirdly, several Chinese universities provide scholarships to international students, including those from Middle East countries. Learning Chinese can help students get admission into these programs, allowing students to receive high-quality education. Fourthly, China has maintained robust diplomatic ties with several Middel East countries including Saudi Arabia. Mastering Chinese can be advantageous to those engaged in diplomacy or international relations. Fifthly, in a more globalized job market, having bilingual or multilingual skills is advantageous. Individuals who are bilingual in Arabic and Chinese are frequently regarded as desirable candidates by employers. Sixthly, many learners may be motivated by a personal interest in the language, a wish to learn a new language, or the need to interact with Chinese-speaking friends. Ultimately, projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative, aimed at fostering economic collaboration between China and various nations, including Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, have increased the desire to learn Chinese. In conclusion, studying Chinese is a smart decision for numerous people because of China's growing impact in global politics and its relationships with Arabic-speaking countries.

To address this essential requirement for language proficiency in Chinese, a strong emphasis is placed on speaking skills in the foreign language classroom, devoting considerable time to enhancing the learner's oral abilities. Various instructional approaches and resources are utilized to equip students with crucial speaking skills necessary for effective communication. The curriculum encompasses speaking activities that are essential for both academic and daily interactions.

However, Mandarin Chinese is considered challenging for Arabic speakers to speak for several reasons. Firstly, Mandarin Chinese as many Chinese languages has a tonal nature. This indicates that the tone used when pronouncing a word impacts its meaning and when mispronouncing a word can alter its meaning. Mandarin features four primary tones, and speakers need to distinguish between them to communicate effectively. For example, the syllable "ma" can represent mā = mother, má = hemp, mǎ = horse, mà = punishment depending on the tone applied. Mandarin Chinese features sounds that might not have equivalents in other languages, resulting in pronunciation difficulties for those who are not fluent. Additionally, the presence of similar-sounding words can complicate distinguishing between them in conversation. Conversely, Arabic is not a tonal language, so Arabic speakers might face difficulties in differentiating between similar sounds that differ only in tone. Additionally, there are certain phonetic distinctions because Chinese includes sounds that are absent in Arabic, such as [q], [x], and [zh], which might be unfamiliar to numerous Arabic speakers. These phonetic differences can lead to challenges in communication.

While speaking does not directly engage characters, they are an integral part of mastering language. The writing systems of Arabic and Mandarin Chinese are entirely different. The Chinese writing system is logographic with thousands of characters, meaning it uses characters that represent words or morphemes rather than a phonetic alphabet. This can result in challenging for learners to connect spoken forms with their written forms. Arabic speakers may find it challenging to learn, read and memorize the thousands of Chinese characters, in comparison with the 28 letters in the Arabic alphabet. Futhermore, there are huge differences related to the grammaratical structure with

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limited relation to other languages. Chinese grammar and Arabic grammar is quite different. For speakers whose first languages belong to different language families including semitic languages, the phonetic and grammatical structure of Chinese may sound unfamiliar and quite problematic. For instance, no gendered nouns or conjugation verbs are used in Mandarin, while they are significant elements of Arabic grammar. This variation can make it puzzling for Arabic speakers to adapt to the system. Futhermore, Mandarin lacks inflection, in contrast with serveral languages that rely on tense, number and gender, Mandarin is less inflected. This can result in ambiguity for learners who are familiar to more explicit grammatical hints.

In addition, lack of common loanwords can be problematic due to the fact that Chinese and Arabic share very limited amount of loanwords and cognates, which means that Arabic speakers must master a vast amount of vocabulary that is relatively unfamiliar, while several languages share more common vocabulary that can be related among different speakers. Additionally, several cultural differences are present, Chinese communication frequently incorporates cultural nuances, idioms, and phrases that might not convert effectively into other language like Arabic. Cultural context significantly influenced language development as well. The Chinese language and culture are closely connected, and understanding cultural aspects can be essential for effective communication. Arabic speakers might face difficulties when dealing with these cultural references. In summary, although these elements may render speaking Chinese daunting for numerous Arabic speakers, significant practice and ample exposure can result in improved proficiency as time goes by

1.3 Research Problem

Speaking anxiety in foreign language classroom

Akkakoson (2016) obsereved classrom speaking and stated that "when posed a question or asked to do any speaking activity, most of the students became a crowd of silent onlookers while some stuttered in their replies" (p. 66). Accroding to the findings of many studies, foreign language teachers often come across this common situation. Various researchers have linked speaking anxiety to various reasons such as lack of interest, lack of confidence, poor guidance, negative reinforcement, and fear of communication (Al-Hnifat et al. 2020). Dealing with these issues is essential during language development as weak oral abilities can hinder the process of mastering language skills, thus impeding learners from reaching the desired level of proficiency.

Language teachers often encounter significant challenges due to speaking anxiety. This phenomenon can also be seen in the advanced classroom, even though the learners are experienced who have been studying the language for several years. The majority of learners show several signs of anxiety including nervousness, hesitancy, and reluctance to speak in front of the class, while many learners prefer to avoid speaking activities entirely by either being passive or refusing to participate in interactive language activities. Because these learners need to have good speaking skills for different purposes studies, language teachers deal with anxiety problems regularly. Thus, the current study seeks to explore the triggers of speaking anxiety in the classroom through the point of view of a group of 10 adult Arabic-speaking learners of Chinese in Sausi Arabia. It is anticipated that the learners' perspective will help advance a better understanding on speaking anxiety, which can in turn assist in creating effective teaching materials and settings.

Speaking is one of the most vital skills in foeign language classroom as the learners are need to effectively convey their thoughts in various tasks. Nevertheless, their speaking anxiety is considered an obstacle to learning, as it hampers the attainment of the desired level of language fluency. Often, students are reluctant to communicate in Chinese during speaking tasks. This adversely affects teaching as language instructors frequently find it challenging to engage students in speaking exercises. Recognizing the underlying reasons for speaking anxiety is crucial for assisting learners in conquering their fears and developing effective methods to enhance classroom involvement in speaking tasks. Consequently, this study concentrates on identifying the factors that contribute to speaking anxiety, emphasizing the perspective of students

2. Literature review

Gardner and McIntyre defined language anxiety as "the apprehension experienced when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully competent." (p. 5). Cagatay (2015) pointed out that "anxiety is one of the most frequently observed problems in relation to the affective domains in language learning process" (p.

648). Na (2007) claimed that anxiety causes students to feel disheartened and diminishes their ability to learn the foreign language. Daly (1991) also pointed out that while certain students refrain from speaking due to being unprepared, uninterested, or reluctant to articulate their thoughts, the majority of anxiety arises from feeling of isolation in class, a lack of self-assurance, or a fear of communication itself.

Khusnia (2016) argued that some students feel physical pain or anxiety before speaking tasks, while others try to avoid speaking activities altogether. Horwitz et al (1986) assigned speaking anxiety to certain factors including apprehension about negative assessment, anxiety regarding tests, and fear of communication. Akkakoson (2016) argued that the restricted range of vocabulary among students was identified as the primary cause of speaking anxiety. Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014) claimed that pronunciation, urgent inquiries, anxiety about errors, and unfavorable assessment are among the triggers of anxiety. Besides, insufficient vocabulary, peers responding negatively, and lack of teacher support were also identified as common sources of anxiety in prior research.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on anxiety. For instance, Rafada and Madini (2017) carried out a study that included both quantitative and qualitative methods. The research included 116 and 10 female students respectively, studying their foundation year at King Abdulaziz University. The findings identified: teacher's role in raising or reducing anxiety, lack of vocabulary, the weak educational system at schools and test anxiety. Futhermore, Alageel and Altalhab (2024) conducted a study on students' levels of English speaking anxiety and its major causes. Fifty first-year female Saudi secondary school students participated in a questionnaire and 8 were also interviewed. The finding showed anxiety was caused by: communication apprehension, low self-confidence, linguistic barriers, fear of negative evaluation and fear of mistakes. Also, Anuradi et al. (2023) conducted an analysis of speech anxiety among EFL learners in Japan. It analyzed 43 university students in Tokyo, Japan. It was found that the EFL students recorded the highest anxiety in communication apprehension. Females showed a significant reduction in the fear of negative evaluation. Moreover, Tien (2018) investigated the relation between speaking anxiety and factors among Taiwanese university English and non-English majors. Participants were 658 from eight different universities in Taiwan. A mixed method, approach was used. The results indicated: learners concerned about accuracy of their grammar usage, their lack of vocabulary knowledge, correct pronunciation. Moreover, non-majors have more English speaking apprehension than English majors.

A great deal of literature (e.g., Yahya, 2013; Akkakoson, 2016)) stressed the importance of the teacher and classroom setting in either decreasing or heightening anxiety. Furthermore, Khusnia (2017) suggested that "teachers who provide a supportive and understanding environment, who employ nonthreatening teaching methods, and who use appealing and relevant topics seem to enhance the foreign language experience." (p.87-88). Akkakoson (2016) pointed out that "anxious individuals could be helped by familiarizing them with language learning strategies and by scaffolding of skills." She further stated that "less stressful error correction and performance evaluation methods, classroom relaxation activities, supportive and friendly characteristics and promoting the advantages of L1 utilization in the classroom" can reduce anxiety in the language classroom". (p.77).

3. Research Objectives and Questions

3.1 Research Objectives

1. To compare the foreign language learners' anxiety when speaking second and third lanaguge.

2. To investigate the factors that induce and alleviate speaking anxiety.

3. To discover potential techniques that can help learners overcome their speaking anxiety.

3.2 Research Questions

1. Based on their previous experirence with learning English, how do they find speaking Chinese in the classroom?

2. What factors do learners believe trigger and decrease speaking anxiety?

3. What are the potential techniques that can help learners overcome their speaking anxiety?

4. Methodology

The purpose of this research was to investigate the difficulties learners face when speaking in Chinese classroom. In order to achieve this objective the researcher carried out a qualitative case study research. The researcher employed purposive sampling in the research. Only individuals who had knowledge, comprehension, and enthusiasm for the subject were chosen. Therefore, a small group of 10 adult female Arabic-speaking learners of Chinese from various educational backgrounds in Saudi Arabia. at a language centre were selected for the study as representatives to participate in the interview. They all have a good command of English and they are learning Chinese (for almost a year) for different purposes. The program includes important speaking classes and exercises focusing on the communication abilities needed in an educational environment. The students were interviewed to explore their points of views on speaking anxiety in the foreign language classroom.

The current research utilized semi-structured interview as an instrument to investigate how learners perceive the subject to gather qualitative data on personal experiences and coping mechanisms. The inquiries address the majority of key subjects within the field of study. The initial section consisted of an opening and personal information about the individuals being interviewed. The next section explores the intricacies of speaking anxiety revealing personal experiences, coping mechanisms, and broader implications for language learning. It includes 10 questions that attempt to capture the following elements; the reasons behind speaking anxiety experienced by foreign language, comparing the foreign language learners' anxiety when speaking second and third language, investigating classroom tasks that induce and alleviate speaking anxiety. Finally, it discovers potential techniques that can help learners overcome their speaking anxiety.

The instrument for this research was put into final designed tested for validity and reliability and found satisfactory. The interviewees were contacted and interviewed personally. The qualitative data will be coded and thematically analyzed.The gathered data was analyzed to identify the reasons for anxiety, the learners' attitudes toward speaking, and the elements that contribute to or lessen anxiety in the educational setting.

5. Results and Discussion

The findings show a significant occurrence of speaking anxiety in participants, with 85% including moderate to high levels of anxiety. Regarding the primary trigger, the significant triggers consist of fear of errors (62%), negative assessment from peers (55%), and insufficient practice opportunities (50%). Effective coping strategies used by participants include preparation (68%), seeking support from peers (64%), and using self-encouragement techniques (57%). The results correspond with current research on speaking anxiety, emphasizing cultural aspects and language difficulties unique to Chinese. The significant anxiety levels noted could impede communicative competence, highlighting the necessity for specific language teaching methods that reduce anxiety

5.1 Learners's Self- reported Levels of Speaking Anxiety

The findings suggest that although the learners have been learning Mandrin Chinese for more than one year, their progress in terms of speaking has been minimal. According to the majority of participants, speaking was not a major focus in their language curriculum. They have limited experience with using language in real conversations and minimal opportunities to practice speaking. Furthermore, the students have noted that they use Chinese only when necessary and that just 20% of them use the language outside of class. The environment also presents a challenge with regards to the limited chances to practice speaking the language. Despite all participants acknowledging a desire to enhance their oral skills, 65% of students express disliking speaking during class. The majority of these individuals have also expressed feeling anxious and fearful, as well as experiencing difficulty remembering their intended message and lacking confidence in their language skills. These reactions indicate that while students understand the significance of becoming fluent in the language, they are reluctant to participate in classroom activities aimed at enhancing their communication abilities.

5.2 Triggers and Effects of Speaking Anxiety on Language Development

The study suggest that Arabic-speaking learners of Chinese may feel anxious when speaking Chinese for a wide range of reasons. One of the major triggers of speaking anxiety is the complex nature of the target language compared to

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Arabic. The challenges present in learning Chinese, a lanaguge with tonal nature including tones and characters, may exacerbate speaking anxiety among learners. They may encounter contexts where the meaning of words changes based on pronunciation, which can be particularly challenging for Arabic speakers who are not accustomed to tones in their own mother tongue, particularly those with limited prior exposure to similar structures. Limited exposure to Chinese is a critical factor that can trigger speaking anxiety among many Arabic speakers. The lack of familiarity can greatly contribute to feelings of unease when attempting to communicate in Chinese. This finding supports evidence from previous observations. For instance, Alsaraj (2013) who found that learners may experience feelings of anxiety when they respond to a question wrongly, misarticulate a term, or just fail to communicate smoothly in the language. Because the participants have minimal exposure to the spoken language in real-life situations, they faced various issues with pronunciation and grammar, leading to a lack of confidence in speaking. The hesitation regarding the correct use of language elements was found to be a significant barrier that hinders speech.

With respect to linguistic barriera, language proficiency palys a major role in increasing speaking anxiety. The limited prior exposure to the target lanaguge result in limited vocabulary and grammar knowledge which are also considered essenatial triggers for speaking anxiety as learners fear making mistakes. It has been found that a lack of sufficient vocabulary is a key factor causing students to feel anxious when speaking. These results corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous work, e.g., Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014)who highlighted the significance of vocabulary in communication challenges, noting that anxiety also plays a role in speaking difficulties, "may have word knowledge origins" and that "their (students') focus on this struggle rather than speaking itself may create an anxiety provoking mood". (p.13). Most of the participants in the current study have noted that they struggle to find sufficient words to articulate their thoughts when communicating in Mandarin Chinese. A large number of individuals were found to be experiencing difficulties with "getting stuck" during conversations because they struggle to remember the correct words due to a lack of vocabulary. This finding is consistent with that of Gkonou (2011), Ahmed et al (2017) and Rajitha and Alamelu (2020) who have all reached a similar conclusion. The participants cited lack of familiarity with the language as the second reason for anxiety, specifically fear of making mistakes.

In addition to the learner-centered issues mentioned earlier, it was observed that specific classroom activities can also impact students' anxiety levels positively or negatively. Most students have indicated that individual speeches, impromptu speaking and oral presentations are the speaking activities that mostly lead to anxiety. The students dislike activities with little or no preparation time, just as they find speaking tasks in front of the class anxiety-inducing. This observation has been highlighted by various researchers, such as Foss and Reitzel (1988), who stated that addressing an audience can cause anxious feelings because learners must both learn the language and deliver it competently. Fear of judgment and negative evaluation play also a crucial role in enhancing anxiety. It is clear that learners may feel a significant amount of nervousness and worry when they are required to talk in front of the class. It is crucial to remember that learners may naturally feel fear and anxiety to some degree, especially when addressing a large audience. These findings align with Özdemir and Seçkin, (2025) who reported that "the most important and most frequently mentioned of these are fear of making pronunciation mistakes and negative evaluation, being judged by others, and fear of speaking in front of others. It can be said that these factors are closely related to perceptions of speaking skills". (p.14)

Arabic speakers similar to many learners of a foreign language may fear being judged, ridiculed or criticized by native speakers, teachers or peers for their pronunciation, which can increase anxiety in speaking situations. This observation is consistent with that of Akkakoson (2016) who pointed out that "anxiety may play its role when it comes to one's having to express utterances out loud in front of others". (p.76). Based on the data collected in this study, it was found that participants may perform better when speaking in a less pressured environment as opposed to speaking in front of the entire class. Due to the reason stated earlier, it was discovered that the majority of students favor group work and games as their preferred speaking activities. The students seemed at ease when working in groups because they were not the main focus during communication practice. As per the participants, in group work, the environment is less intimidating since they only interact with their peers, making it less nerve-wracking or embarrassing if they make a mistake. Additionally, it was clear that participating in group activities allows students to practice speaking in a realistic environment, while speaking in front of the class forces them to be cautious about errors and word choice. This result reflects that of Yalçın and İnceçay (2014) who highlighted the importance of group

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work in decreasing speaking anxiety, they have also found that group tasks "cause less fear for students because they have the safety of the group, which is relatively a more supportive learning environment" (p.2624).

Identified as the fourth contributing factor to students' anxiety was the fear of taking tests. According to some interview responses, students feel anxious during speaking tests as mistakes or poor performance could result in lower grades. This was emphasized in a study conducted by Rafada and Madini (2017) who also asserted that "majority of the students feel anxious, tense, confused and nervous when they are tested." (p.65). According to the results of this study, students experience higher levels of anxiety and feel more at risk when assessed on their speaking abilities compared to when engaging in normal speaking activities in the classroom. Consequently, they were discovered to experience stress leading to an elevated number of errors and more occurrences of forgetting the correct words.

Moreover, since language is deeply tied to culture, differences in cultural context and communication norms, can contribute to anxiety, especially if learners are unfamiliar with the social conventions of the target language. Arabic speakers may feel anxious and embarrassed about making cultural related mistakes by mispronouncing some words, which could lead to severe misunderstandings. Be aware that certain cultural norms in Saudi Arabia might lead to communication anxiety. The communal aspect of Saudi society might result in an increased anxiety about erring in the presence of others. Personality traits significantly influence the onset of speaking anxiety, such as introversion or a strong desire for approval, which can intensify feelings of anxiety when speaking. These findings validates Yan (2024) who finds that "a combination of factors, including cultural background, self-perception, and educational system, leads to the prevalence of anxiety". (p.259). Besides, contextual factors such as the formality of the speaking situation, audience familiarity, and topic familiarity play also a crucial role in increasing anxiety levels. Finally, language learning can affect self-esteem if Arabic speakers perceive themselves as inadequate in their ability to communicate in Chinese, they may experience anxiety in situations that require them to speak. These factors, among many others, can contribute to feelings of anxiety when Arabic speakers attempt to communicate in Chinese.

With respect to effects of speaking anxiety, the learners acknowledge their performance impairment due to speaking anxiety that can hinder their overall language performance, leading to difficulties with fluency and accuracy. They also acknowledge avoidance behaviors; they may avoid speaking opportunities, which inhibits language development and practice. They aslo express negative attitudes toward language learning; persistent anxiety can result in a negative perception of language learning, potentially leading to disengagement. Finally, they acknowledge some psychological consequences; chronic anxiety can lead to stress, low self-esteem, and in severe cases, mental health issues including depression.

5.3 Mitigation Strategies

Utilizing the following strategies in the classroom can help decrease speaking anxiety. The learners suggest creating a supportive stress-free environment; establishing a classroom atmosphere that encourages risk-taking and values effort over perfection can help reduce anxiety. They also suggest increasing language proficiency by providing extra speaking practice as well as targeted speaking exercises which may help building more confidence while speaking. They also recommend improving peer interaction by encouraging collaborative speaking tasks that can create stress-free environment for practice and reduce evaluation anxiety. Additionally, several learners recommend leveraging technology by incorporating tools like language applications and online speaking platforms that can provide informal and relaxed speaking practice opportunities.   Moreover, the learners suggest fostering some strategies such as visualization, positive self-talk, and breathing exercises which can asssist learners manage anxiety. Besides, they suggest offering professional development for educators such as teacher training programs that includes components on recognizing and addressing speaking anxiety and equipping instructors with the tools to support anxious learners. Finally, a number of learners suggest a number of effective coping strategies such as peer support and preparation which can mitigate anxiety.

Adequate classroom time can be allocated to provide students with the essential language input prior to speaking. Students can acquire vocabulary, grammar, and expression methods prior to beginning an activity. If feasible, they may engage in writing activities linked to the speaking assignments to improve their vocabulary. The learners can engage in activities to assist them in feeling more relaxed prior to beginning their own work. These activities may

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collaborating in pairs or groups, engaging in games, and finishing joint tasks to assist students in practicing speaking in a practical setting. When they feel confident and comfortable enough to speak to a large crowd, they can engage in individual speaking exercises. However, it is essential to limit impromptu speaking tasks and to allocate ample time for preparation before every activity. Students ought to receive a gentle reminder that mistakes are a fundamental part of the learning journey. Students should understand that the primary aim of a speaking assignment is to improve their communication skills, rather than to speak without mistakes. Therefore, it is crucial for them to understand that making mistakes is a natural part of acquiring essential skills. Furthermore, it should be noted that they don't need to be overly concerned with employing exact grammar. Vocabulary, or pronunciation. The educator can help learners correct mistakes without highlighting them publicly in front of their peers. Rather than focusing on a specific student's mistake, there can be a wider discussion about errors frequently encountered by students. Prior to oral assessment, students may participate in comparable activities during class to enhance their confidence. Although testing and evaluation induce stress in students, it is crucial to assess their speaking abilities since undergraduates need to be skilled in language for effective communication in academic work. Consequently, learners can engage in various practice exercises before the exam to enhance their confidence and gain the necessary language skills required to perform the task successfully.

6. Limitations, Implications and Avenues for Future Research

Notwithstanding the relatively limited sample, this work offers valuable insights. With respect to curriculum development; incorporating activities that promote speaking skills in a low-pressure environment in language programs. With reference to teacher training; educators are encourged to be trained to recognize and deal with speaking anxiety among learners. With respect to peer support programs; enforcing structured peer feedback sessions can help lower anxiety by promoting a supportive learning environment. Futhermore, the findings offer some insights for future research; e.g., exploring the relationship between anxiety and different forms of language assessments, assessing the role of linguistic and cultural differences in speaking anxiety across different language contexts, and exploring the influence of individual learner strategies to cope with speaking anxiety over time.

7. Conclusion

Speaking anxiety is a critical factor influencing language development in foreign language classroom. The study suggest that speaking anxiety greatly affects Saudi learners of Chinese, with cultural and linguistic elements playing crucial roles. By understanding these dynamics, educators and curriculum designers can create more effective language learning experiences that minimize anxiety and enhance language proficiency.Speaking anxiety can have a negative impact on mastering language as it hinders learners from participating in adequate speaking tasks. Thus, it is necessary to take appropriate action to assist the learners in conquering their fears and esatablising anxiety-free enviroment which could allow them to take an active role and get engaged in speaking activities. This goal can be reached by dealing with the triggers of speaking anxiety and reducing the elements that might trigger the learners' anxiety when speaking Chinese.

Ethical Approval

This research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Taif University, Saudi Arabia (Application code: 46-114) on 1446/06/15. The authors considered all the ethical procedures for involving human participants. All participants agreed to voluntarily participate in the study and signed consent forms.

Competing interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this research.

Authors' contributions

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: study conception and design: Makki, A.; data collection: Albaqami, R; analysis and interpretation of results: Makki, A.; draft manuscript preparation: Albaqami, R. Both authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

The data is available upon request by contacting the coressponding author.

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Research Article

Appendix I: Interview Items

Section 1

1. Gender: ◯ Male   ◯ Female

2. How old are you? [____]

3. What is your nationality? [____]

4. What is your mother tongue? [____]

5. Which other language/s do you speak? If any, how do you learn them? Mention them in order. [____] [____]

6. What is the highest degree of education you have? [____]

7. Have you attended Chinese classes? If yes, for how long? [____]

8. Have you spent time in an Chinese-speaking country? (Where? /For how long? /What for?) [____] [____] [____]

9. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your Chinese language?

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
No knowledge of Chinese	Elementary level of Chinese	Low intermediate level of Chinese	High intermediate level of Chinese	Advanced level of Chinese	Proficient in Chinese
◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

10. On a scale of 1-10, rate your speaking anxiety when communicating in Chinese.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Low	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	High

Section 2

Contextual Information

1. Could you share your experience with learning a foreign language? e.g., What inspired you to study Chinese?

Understanding the concept of Speaking Anxiety

2. When did you initially become aware that you had speaking anxiety? Could you explain the circumstances that provoke this anxiety?

3. Do you notice that your anxiety varies based on the speaking situation (e.g., casual chats, formal speeches, classroom environments)? Why?

4. Could you describe a particular instance when you felt especially nervous while speaking in your foreign language?

5. In what ways does your anxiety about speaking impact your ability to communicate in the target language? Do you notice yourself steering clear of specific situations?

Coping Methods

6. What methods have you employed to lessen your anxiety when speaking? Have any of them been especially successful?

7. Have you discovered any particular setting or activities (e.g., language exchange events, online communities) that make you feel more at ease when speaking?

Effect of Anxiety on Learning

6. How do you believe your anxiety about speaking has impacted your overall learning advancement?

Perspective Outlooks

9. What suggestions would you offer to other Arabic learners of Chinese who are facing similar challenges with speaking anxiety?

Contemplation

10. Is there anything additional you would like to discuss regarding your experience with speaking anxiety while learning?