

Perceived Foreign Language Anxiety in Online EFL Classes During the Pandemic Era: A Contemporary Analysis

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Abstract: Online education can be challenging for inexperienced learners. Through the appearance of the COVID-19 pandemic, education temporarily shifted from traditional classes to online classes causing numerous challenges encountered by learners. The condition drastically popularized online education which ultimately drew researchers' attention to study the alternative learning pathway. The research targeted to primarily investigate the prevalence and the underlying reasons of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) among English as a foreign language (EFL) learners throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of online education. A survey using convenience sampling was conducted to collect data from 233 EFL learners in KRI. The findings highlight that various forms of anxiety are prevalent but the intensity from one aspect to another is different; communication anxiety and fear of evaluation remained critical while test anxiety and general foreign language anxiety were relatively moderate. Educators are recommended to tailor classes to help students mitigate any form of anxiety and ultimately succeed in their language-learning endeavours.

Keywords: Foreign Language Anxiety, Online Classes, Communication Anxiety, COVID-19

1. Background Information

Being multilingual in a world connected by the advent of technology offers many opportunities, making it a popular pursuit for many. To achieve that, many people turn to online platforms to achieve the desired goal as they provide consistent content to the users mostly at their time and pace. It is vital to notice the vast changes in the current era, learning and teaching a foreign language has experienced a fundamental transformation. Online platforms, including social networks, have received enormous attention as language learning platforms. However, not everyone has a smooth and easy learning experience in mastering a new language, many individuals experience language anxiety when learning a new language hindering the mastery of the target language.

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Anxiety is a concern of unease, tension, and dread that non-native speakers suffer from learning a foreign language. The most common causes of language learning anxiety are psychological ones that must be overcome to instil self-confidence in the learner. It can also come from poor writing, speaking, reading, or listening skills. A large percentage of language learners encounter foreign language anxiety, and researchers wonder what happens in the classroom. However, this question has different responses, and language anxiety can cause issues for learners. Anxious language learners may find their courses less engaging, feel uncomfortable in class, and perform poorly (Dewaele et al., 2016).

Due to the breakout of Covid-19 in March 2020, instruction had to be suddenly transferred online. Unfortunately, neither the lecturers, the learners, or the university administrators were fully prepared for online education due to the sudden shift. Refer to this spontaneous, seemingly temporary transfer as instant distance learning, unlike existing online courses that take a long time to create. Thus, urgent distance learning was referred to as an in-hand solution to the new challenge (Hodges et al., 2020). They further reiterated that any such situations call for new ways of doing things. They needed to create new technology-enhanced learning experiences and to change the way they taught, and the students learn. In a longitudinal study, Müller and Goldenberg (2021) explored undergraduate students experiences in emergency online learning and showed that, in the beginning, students had unprecedented challenges. Similarly, the same results were obtained: students faced serious difficulties in the initial period of web education, by Rapanta et al. (2020) and Schober et al. (2020a, 2020b). As urgent online teaching is adopted, particularly during times of crisis, the initial phases are marked by augmented tension, anxiety, and feelings of solitude that have a detrimental effect on learning and teaching (Morgan, 2020; Müller & Goldenberg, 2021; Rapanta et al., 2020; Schober et al., 2020b). The unexpected move to online learning, the overall uneasiness in this crisis, and the spring 2020 lockdowns may have intensified feelings of isolation and disconnectedness, which have been extensively reported for traditional online classes (Exter et al., 2009; Bolliger & Inan, 2012; Bollinger, 2017). Regarding this problem, there were several sets of recommendations, including flexible deadlines, have been recommended to enable students to cope with the stress of distant urgent education (Barzani, 2021). Likewise, in learning environments, students must have friendly communication and interaction with their mentors, supervisors, and lecturers. Students' well-being is supported by university settings wherein they can practice achievement and express competence, autonomy, and engagement. Additionally, educators and learners both should communicate dependably, supplemented by mentoring collaborations across formal and informal online platforms. According to previous research, the impressions of a remote student's psychological presence held by instructors, undergraduate peers, and the educational organization are critical indicators of their performance in online education (Shin, 2003). In crisis mode, it can be claimed that it is equally important to secure consistent online class attendance. This includes cognitive presence, essential for critical thinking; collective existence, related to the previous and learners' emotions; and teaching presence. Overall, presence fosters social cohesion and reduces feelings of loneliness. During the COVID-19 global epidemic, urgent virtual teaching was like a life savior for students who found themselves in an emotional place they did not anticipate. As Barzani (2021) mentioned, it was already known that learners do not adapt well to dynamic, ambivalent, complicated, and indefinite circumstances in emergency remote teaching, these factors can generate negative feelings and disrupt positive emotions, which are often regarded as essential motivators for mastering a foreign language. During the pandemic, all student attitudes were reduced in online EFL classrooms. Scholars attributed this to the emotional dematerialization of online communications (Resnik

& Dewaele, 2021; Liu et al., 2020). Understanding the underlying causes and coping mechanisms for such challenges is the key to better and more effectively planning and delivering online education in any given circumstance.

1.1 Problem of the Study

The ultimate consequences of anxiety cannot be undermined since anxiety can hinder learning and spell trouble for any long-term goals. Undergraduate EFL students are not exempt from foreign language anxiety (FLA) and encounter plenty of difficulties concerning psychological issues, particularly in the context of novel and unanticipated experiences such as online learning as it requires individuals to perform many tasks in various forms causing anxiety. Hence, understanding the level of anxiety among EFL undergraduates and identifying the detrimental factors leading to Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety is worth investigating in the context of online learning and language learning.

1.2 Aim of the Study

This research seeks to assess the level of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) among university-level EFL learners who experienced online education in the Kurdistan Region, Northern Iraq. It also seeks to identify the detrimental factors causing FLCA among Kurdish undergraduate EFL students deriving from the imposed experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3 Research Questions

- To what extent do EFL Students in Kurdistan Universities experience language anxiety during online education?
- What are the underlying causes that intensify undergraduates' foreign language classroom anxiety in the context of online learning?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This paper impressions valuable insights to the body of existing literature by presenting cutting-edge findings and studies conducted on FLCA. Moreover, the study is particularly valuable due to the scarcity of research on FLCA in English classrooms in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This study thus establishes the most and least influential elements of FLCA among university students studying English as a foreign language to contribute to the research of FLCA in different cultures and online learning environments. In addition, this study sheds light on how undergraduate EFL learners cope with FLCA from students' perspectives during the coronavirus pandemic, which may contribute to generic FLCA coping strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Anxiety in The Scope of Foreign Language

There are various conceptualizations of foreign language anxiety revealed throughout the literature, as mentioned by (Ortega, 2009). Among those conceptualizations, Horwitz's 1986 description explains extending our comprehension of language anxiety. He defines it as a unique, uncommon, detrimental self-perception, feelings, and beliefs of a student within the boundaries of a classroom that comes from the

language learning experience. MacIntyre (2017) explains that Gardner's socio-educational framework (1985) provided grounds for examining language anxiety as a distinct form, requiring unique understanding separate from other established anxiety types in psychology.

The literature is replete with anxieties effects on various aspects of life, and language education is no exception to this norm. Within education, anxiety is identified as a considerable challenge for some learners. Anxiety also affects students' performance and achievement of desired learning outcomes. Krashen's Affective Filter hypothesis identifies that anxiety has deterring effects on language learning processes, stipulating that motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence have a great influence upon language learning and acquisition, according to the postulation by Oteir and Al-Otaibi (2019). In support, another study, led by Han et al. (2022), tested the effect of foreign language classroom anxiety on the academic success of Chinese university students during the pandemic era. The authors confirm a direct link between high levels of anxiety and poor performance. They indicate that the classroom environment and emotional intelligence communication play a leading part in mitigating anxiety caused by foreign language anxiety. This means that stakeholders must work in concert to design and construct a positive learning environment with no single space allowed to dominate anxiety.

2.2 Factors Underlying Language Anxiety

Understanding the leading causes of language anxiety helps teachers create an environment that is free from negative perceptions of oneself and helps learners not only thrive and enjoy the learning process but also helps stakeholders develop coping mechanisms that mitigate any form of anxiety. Furthermore, it helps the learner to notice how to manage their anxiety when they speak in front of other people. The studies discuss and investigate various factors that trigger anxiety within the context of foreign language learning. For example, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) investigate stresses that graduate to causes language anxiety. There are three stages when the human body reacts to speech anxiety. The first stage is known as the Alarm stage. The human body has two (alarm stages) two types of reactions. The first reaction is a physical reaction which is called a physiological reaction. The second type is cognitive, which is known as a psychological reaction. The second stage is resistance when the human body adapts to physical reactions. The last stage is the exhaustion stage which happens when people adapt to the situation or after an extended period of years or months. Additionally, three main factors of language anxiety that are claimed in the literature, which are: fear of negative evaluation, communication anxiety, and test anxiety. Studies highlight numerous factors causing elevated levels of discomfort and unease when learning a foreign language. A study on the causes of foreign language anxiety identifies multiple factors including high stakes testing culture, teaching methods focusing on memorization, and pressure to achieve academic perfection (Xiang, 2024). The study also highlighted that these factors ultimately cause academic performance to decline—moreover, another research conducted by Jawas (2019) concluded that several factors trigger classroom anxiety in the context of writing skills including in-class assignments with time constraints as well as the lecturers' approach to teaching. There are various strategies proposed to mitigate levels of anxiety including allowing students to choose their coping techniques to deal with anxiety such as brainstorming, collaboration tasks, and discussions. Understanding and identifying the factors can be the first step to lessening the effects of the forms of anxiety in language classrooms.

2.3 Foreign Language Anxiety in Classroom

Scholars and researchers have identified Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) as a detrimental factor hindering the learning and the acquisition of a foreign language. FLCA is described as a "unique complex of self-perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and actions connected to classroom language learning stemming from the distinctiveness of the language learning process" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). FLCA is assessed using the context-specific FLCA scale utilized by (Horwitz et al., 1986). In this respect, Spielberger (1983) agreed that anxiety is a circumstance of feeling uncomfortable emotions marked by tension and apprehension. Regarding those negative effects, anxiety is among the most powerful factors in learning. Furthermore, it is related to the process dominated by impacted constants: foreign language learning. More and more, however, researchers have been realizing that it is a context which is paramount, not only in the social and interpersonal dimensions but also within the psychological topography of every learner. The latter form of context involves such factors as motivation and self-esteem, central in determining the learning environment. (Kakabra et al., 2015; MacIntyre, 2017; Anwar & Louis, 2017; Ali & Anwar, 2021). A more balanced view on attribution has emerged, recognizing that while FLCA (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety) may indeed hinder performance, and elevate struggles in performance can also hallway to into and reinforce FLCA. This holistic view is further supported by MacIntyre (2017), who asserts that "learners' experience of language and communication is both continuous and integrated" (p. 27), claiming that only debilitating fear is a factor in this process. Conversely, several internal and external learner characteristics have been found to relate to FLCA, according to Botes et al., (2020), Teimouri et al. (2019), and Celik (2019). The findings of Dewaele and Dewaele (2017) showed that FLCA increases during early adulthood and gradually decreases with age. It appears that education level interacts with gender. However, the overall effect size was small, with significantly more female respondents displaying FLCA than male ones. Previous research indicated that FLCA is indeed more strongly linked to factors internal than external to the learner. Most importantly, students with very rigid and less desirable instructors showed higher FLCA.

FLCA has been extensively studied in face-to-face EFL courses, but its significance in regular online sessions has received comparably less attention. The varying anxiety levels between on-campus studies and courses are different compared to classes taken online as per a study by Hurd (2007). Hurd conducted her longitudinal study on FLCA in distance learning where the participants were tertiary-level French students. Results from this research indicated that anxiety-triggering factors are somewhat particular in online class contexts. They include the lack of immediacy in providing feedback, feelings of isolation, and learners' difficulty, coming from various sources such as lack of speaking practice and confidence particularly when the learner works alone, and there is value in providing more clear instructions in this context. Hauck and Hurd (2005) revealed it is not easy to compare oneself to a peer during online classes causing a certain level of anxiety. Conversely, it is necessary to note this assumption is questioned by a number of studies. For example, in the study by Pichette (2009), 186 adult French-speaking students of English and Spanish were surveyed but no statistically noteworthy differences were revealed between traditional and online foreign language programs regarding overall anxiety, reading anxiety, and writing anxiety. Another contextual difference was given by Bollinger (2017), who, in a study of 147 students attending a community college in Middle Georgia, compared on-campus class students with those registered in online courses and determined that the former had significantly lower levels of FLCA. A

recent study of undergraduate students' positive and negative emotions in in-person and virtual classrooms during the pandemic also reported a decline in enjoyment and worry, respectively (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021). In addition, scholars guess that it is a lack of the emotional impact of conventional interactions when instructors and classmates interact in two dimensions on a computer screen. Instead, three-dimensional classroom volume cannot be turned down; the sheer physicality of the experience can stir learners to inspire them and build a sense of community (Celik, 2019; Bollinger & Inan, 2012). Therefore, deeper investigation into the psychological backgrounds of the learners would be relevant for pinpointing accurately the causes of this decline in FLCA within an emergency remote teaching context. Moreover, the identification of anxiety-provoking factors in diverse settings, and further development of the literature on the prevalence of FLCA, will be highly useful in order to give stakeholders the conditions to make students thrive and succeed in learning.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Objectives

This study adopts a quantitative survey design aimed at investigating the impact of the Coronavirus on anxiety among undergraduate students in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) who studied English online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were gathered using online questionnaires, which included a revised Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) adapted to the online learning context, and were prepared in Kurdish, Arabic, and English for broad accessibility. The questionnaires were distributed to 233 EFL students (both from public and private universities), capturing demographic details as well as anxiety-related data in four key areas: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and general foreign language anxiety. The collected responses were analyzed using SPSS (version 22), providing insights into how COVID-19 influenced anxiety levels, identifying factors that contribute to foreign language anxiety, and measuring the severity of these anxieties among students engaged in online English learning.

This study further aims to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on foreign language anxiety by examining how the pandemic influenced anxiety levels among undergraduate students who studied English online in the KRI. It also seeks to identify contributing factors—such as communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety—most strongly associated with heightened anxiety in online learning contexts. Lastly, it endeavours to assess the intensity of anxiety and its sources by using the revised FLCAS to measure the severity of foreign language anxiety and pinpoint its primary sources within the online learning environment.

3.2 Instrument and Procedure

The FLCAS was originally developed by Horwitz et al. in 1986. In this study, the scale was revised to an online foreign language classroom anxiety scale to measure the intensity of foreign language anxiety and its sources in online classes. Each of the 35 items on the FLCAS is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree. The instrument separated into two major sections: the first part aimed at collecting demographic information of the respondents, and the second part attempted to measure the attitude and perception applicable to foreign language anxiety of

learners in four key sub-areas, namely: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and general foreign language anxiety.

Causes of Language Anxiety	Items
Communication Anxiety	1,9,14,18,24,27,29,32
Fear of Negative Evaluation	3,7,13,15,20,23,25,31,33,34,35
Test Anxiety	2,8,10,19,21
Foreign Language Anxiety	4,5,6,11,12,16,17,22,26,28,30

3.3 Participants

The respondents in this study were selected through a convenience sampling procedure, resulting in a total of 233 university students from varying academic levels across universities in the Kurdistan-Iraq Region. Of these, 152 were male and 81 were female. Most participants were aged between 22 to 25 years, followed by those aged 18 to 21. The majority were undergraduate students attending online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. More than half of the students came from public universities, while 36.6% were from private universities.

Items	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	152	65.2
	Female	81	34.8
Age	18-21	75	32.2
	22-25	90	38.6
	26-29	52	22.3
	30-33	11	4.7
	34-Above	5	2.1
Education level	Undergraduate Student (BA)	215	92.3
	Postgraduate Student (MA)	9	3.9
	Graduate Student (PhD)	9	3.9

Type of Education	Public University	148	63.5
	Private University	85	36.5

3.4 Reliability and Validity

The data collection instrument was analyzed by SPSS. The result shows that the Cronbach's Alpha was .813 for fear of negative evaluation, .768 for communication anxiety, and .676 for test anxiety which the items were 5 and it is the relevant score for 5 item domains, and it was .773 for foreign language anxiety. Likewise, the normality test also has been done for the data collection and sampling of the participants according to the Shapiro-Wilk test the data is highly significant in normality.

3.5 Reliability Test Results

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Communication Anxiety	.768	8
Fear Of Negative Evaluation	.813	11
Test Anxiety	.676	5
Foreign Language Anxiety	.773	11

3.6 Data Analysis

Once all data had been collected, responses from the questionnaires were systematically arranged for sorting, counting, and tabulation. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 22, calculating percentages, means, and standard deviations for each item and anxiety domain to determine the general level of foreign language anxiety among EFL students during online classes conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Normality distribution was assessed, and the results indicated a highly significant dispersion in data collection.

4. Results

This study aims to investigate the main causes of FLCA and its prevalence among undergraduates in the KRI online education experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of this study point towards four major and intertwined themes which are: anxiety in communication, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and foreign language anxiety.

The following section presents the findings based on the domains and themes mentioned:

4.1 Communication Anxiety

One of the domains of the scale was communication anxiety, exploring learners' experiences through 8 items related to the association between communication tasks in the target language online performed by students and anxiety presented in Table 1 which unveils a tendency to have feelings of unease and insufficient confidence experienced by the respondents.

Table 1: Communication Anxiety

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Item 1	% 23	% 37	% 29	% 06	% 03
Item 9	% 15	% 33	% 32	% 15	% 06
Item 14	% 13	% 39	% 28	% 16	% 4
Item 18	% 24	% 33	% 26	% 14	% 03
Item 24	% 19	% 36	% 36	% 08	% 02
Item 27	% 19	% 32	% 30	% 16	% 03
Item 29	% 16	% 27	% 35	% 16	% 05
Item 32	% 18	% 34	% 36	% 09	% 03

The findings relevant to this domain show that communication anxiety was notably prevailing as per the undergraduates' responses. The majority of the participants showed a lack of agreement with the items confirming their confidence while communicating during the online classes. Item 1 "I feel comfortable when I learn a foreign language online" received 37 percent as disagreed followed by Item 9 "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language online class" with 39 percent from the disagreement category. These results reveal an overall discomfort felt by the participants during their online learning experiences. Moreover, the students showed neutral perceptions toward their fellow students' competence in language learning as indicated the Item 24 "I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am" which ultimately shows that they are not sure of the language competence and ability of their friends. It is important to highlight that there was a tendency of low agreement towards some of the anxiety-related statements as in Item 27 "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language online class" with 14 percent agreeing to the items. This shows that it is inevitable that communication anxiety is prevalent among the participants, but it is not as overwhelming as the item represents.

4.2 Fear of Negative Evaluation

The second domain focused on a critical aspect of foreign language classroom anxiety, which is the fear of negative evaluation. The component was explored through 11 items. The results reveal that this type of

unease and discomfort was also prevalent; however, as per the analysis of the responses presented in Table 2, it was not overwhelming and tremendous.

Table 2: Fear of Negative Evaluation

Statements	Strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
Item 3	% 13	% 36	% 34	% 15	% 02
Item 7	% 19	% 32	% 32	% 13	% 04
Item 13	% 18	% 32	% 36	% 09	% 04
Item 15	% 16	% 33	% 33	% 12	% 05
Item 20	% 23	% 31	% 36	% 08	% 01
Item 23	% 25	% 21	% 28	% 18	% 07
Item 25	% 18	% 35	% 29	% 14	% 05
Item 31	% 19	% 33	% 33	% 13	% 02
Item 33	% 20	% 26	% 32	% 13	% 09
Item 34	% 18	% 34	% 37	% 09	% 09
Item 35	% 19	% 36	% 30	% 09	% 06

A considerable number of respondents tended to disagree with items representing the fear of negative evaluation. For instance, Item 7, "It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in a foreign language online class," shows that a fair number of students consider misunderstanding an important issue that can create anxiety when taking part in online classes. On the other hand, 36 percent of students showed neutrality to items related to fear of evaluation, such as Item 20, "I often feel like not attending my language online class," revealing a neutral stance on attendance in online classes. Moreover, in this domain, there were few positive responses to statements related to fear. For example, only 13 percent of participants agreed with Item 33, "Language online class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind," indicating that extreme feelings of fear do not dominate the learning process for these participants.

4.3 Test Anxiety

The third domain of the survey delves into test anxiety, one of the phenomena being intensively studied by researchers in the context of education. The domain consisted of five items to explore test anxiety. The findings confirm its prevalence at different levels among the participants during the imposed online education in KRI during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3: Test anxiety

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Item 2	% 20	% 36	% 30	% 12	% 02
Item 8	% 17	% 33	% 37	% 10	% 03
Item 10	% 18	% 36	% 32	% 11	% 03
Item 19	% 16	% 30	% 35	% 13	% 05
Item 21	% 21	% 25	% 38	% 14	% 03

The majority of the participants expressed either agreement or neutral category in respect to being anxious about tests during classes. For instance, 37 percent of them chose neutral to Item 8 "I am usually at ease during tests in my language class", highlighting the fact that some of the participants are indeed uncertain about tests, but testing is apparent as a critical issue for the majority of the students as they have not vividly expressed their agreement with the mentioned item. Moreover, items relevant to test anxiety only received very low rates. For example, only 14 percent agreed with Item 19, "I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language online class," which means that test anxiety is not a serious problem for the students.

4.4 Foreign Language Anxiety

The intensity of Foreign Language Anxiety was explored through eleven items as one of the domains of the survey. The results indicate that this type of anxiety is prevalent to some extent but is not as critical as one can imagine.

Table 4: Foreign Language Anxiety

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Item 4	% 16	% 29	% 34	% 15	% 06
Item 5	% 19	% 28	% 36	% 12	% 05
Item 6	% 19	% 34	% 31	% 11	% 05
Item 11	% 19	% 38	% 30	% 10	% 03
Item 12	% 16	% 35	% 37	% 09	% 03
Item 16	% 25	% 33	% 35	% 0	% 07

Item 17	% 20	% 40	% 31	% 09	% 0.4
Item 22	% 16	% 32	% 35	% 11	% 06
Item 26	% 14	% 33	% 36	% 14	% 04
Item 28	% 15	% 29	% 34	% 18	% 05
Item 30	% 29	% 27	% 38	% 05	% 0.9

Similar to the previous domains, the participants showed a mixed level of agreement with this type of anxiety by choosing either agreement or neutral with items representing anxiety. For example, 38% of the students remained neutral to Item 34: "I feel more tense and nervous in language online classes than in my other classes," showing a neutral level of discomfort and unease expressed by the participants towards general foreign language anxiety. Although some respondents also showed agreement with Item 28: "I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language," which reflects the level of difficulty in learning the language under study, making students anxious due to this complexity, this was not a condition shared by most participants.

5. Discussion

The study sought to investigate the leading causes of FLCA and its prevalence during the COVID-19 pandemic among undergraduates learning the English language in the KRI. The findings of the study reveal that the students experienced a level of communication anxiety, reporting from the learners' responses. This finding co-ordinate with previous studies conducted on FLCA as Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) identified communication anxiety as one of the major leading factors to anxiety. The revealed data also aligns with the study which it has been conducted by Surji and Surji (2024), students' speaking anxiety in English language classes is influenced by several factors, including fear of negative evaluation and a lack of language proficiency. The fact that online classes lack instant person-to-person interaction may contribute to anxiety as confidence can be boosted by constructive feedback from peers in the context of language learning (Hurd, 2007). It can also be linked to the absence of non-verbal cues during online classes as Hurd further explained. Another study conducted by Bollinger (2017) emphasized that students feel less anxious compared to traditional classes. Another leading factor in the realm of anxiety investigated was the fear of negative evaluation. This type of anxiety was not as predominant as communication anxiety as per the analysis. The majority of responses to this type of anxiety fell into the neutrality category, indicating an uncertain concern about discomfort toward negative evaluation, but not intense anxiety. Studies align with the findings of this aspect of anxiety. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) emphasize that there is a direct association between this type of anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and the student's self-esteem along with the student's competency in the target language. It is necessary to acknowledge that there is a delay in/lack of immediacy of teacher and peer evaluation in online classes as compared to traditional classes as per the steps an evaluator should go through such as unmuting oneself to speak up. Even though the fear of evaluation is not as severe as expected, teachers still provide a welcoming learning environment that is free of negative judgments and is encouraging.

The prominent type of anxiety was testing anxiety, though it was not as critical for the majority of the students just like the previous domain with students choosing neutral or disagreeing to items related to the domain. The results contradict the experience of regular classes as (Spielberger, 1983) identified tests as a dominant reference to discomfort and anxiety. This possibly correlates to the fact that pupils can take exams with the flexibility of accessing resources and timing. Another moderate aspect of anxiety was general foreign language anxiety. Similar to the previous domain, many students selected neutral for the statements about feeling anxious when taking foreign language classes online, indicating that this type of anxiety is not dominant in the general experience. This result aligns significantly with the findings from Dewaele et al. (2016) scholarly work, stressing that foreign language anxiety is a critical matter in many language classes but the severity of FLCA can rely on the nature of the learning environment and individual differences. The fact that online classes are done remotely may help mitigate the level of anxiety as highlighted by Pichette (2009) and Bollinger (2017), discussing that online classes are famous for being flexible and anonymous but may also contribute to experiences of loneliness due to the lack of physical presence required in traditional classes. The findings which were revealed in this study add value to the existing literature as provides evidence on the mentioned aspects of FLCA and in the context of EFL online classes during a pandemic.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the leading causes of FLCA and its prevalence during the COVID-19 pandemic among undergraduates learning the English language in the KRI, emphasizing the prevailing difficulties encountered as the result of online education. The results stress that different types of anxiety are prevalent but the intensity from one aspect to another is unique. The following are the key findings of the study:

- Communication Anxiety was one of the most critical forms of anxiety experienced by the students as many students expressed various levels of unease and discomfort when undertaking a communication task during online classes, causing low confidence in their competence. This type of discomfort can be linked to some of the characteristics of online classes such as lack of physical presence and instant feedback.
- Fear of Negative Evaluation as a factor of anxiety was relatively low as may be affected by the fact that online classes mitigate peer pressure and teacher evaluation in terms of immediacy of the evaluation as compared to traditional classes.
- Test Anxiety, a phenomenon in the education realm popular to contribute to anxiety was moderate as the participants of the study expressed moderate feelings to test anxiety items. This might be affected by the nature of online tests with flexibility and open-source tests that seem less frightening.
- Foreign Language Anxiety, another factor linked to anxiety is general foreign language anxiety with a low intensity but was indeed prevalent. There are inevitably some challenges with respect to FLCA but there is relief to the nature of online classes.

This research points out the effects of the COVID-19 imposed online education on foreign language class anxiety in KRI. It is significant to note that anxiety is problematic in foreign language learning especially with respect to communication and apprehension of being negatively evaluated. Stakeholders in education should continuously work in harmony to better plan and deliver classes by creating supportive and welcoming classes regardless of the setting to help learners mitigate any form of anxiety. These insights

are particularly important for EFL teachers who seek to help students flourish in their EFL educational endeavours as online classes have become more convenient for many in this era where technology is dominating learning settings.

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