| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Anxiety as a Psychological Barrier to Students' Speaking Fluency: IELTS as a Case Study

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| **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the correlation between Foreign language anxiety and speaking fluency among IELTS test-takers at an X English Language centre in Morocco. The main objective of this paper was to examine whether there is a link between Foreign Language Anxiety (the independent variable) and English-Speaking fluency (the dependent variable). To verify whether there is an association between the two variables under investigation, to test the hypothesis, and answer the research question, two tests were used as research instruments. Students were asked to fill in a Foreign language anxiety questionnaire to estimate the frequency of anxiety and take an IELTS Speaking mock exam to measure the smoothness of their oral delivery. The data was collected in the X language centre during the academic year (2020-2021). The participants were 30 male and female students divided into three classes. In order to analyse the scores and frequency of responses that students obtained in the two tests, a Pearson correlation was used as a statistical procedure. The study results indicate a nonsignificant correlation between Anxiety and Fluency in the context under study. Therefore, the study concluded that other factors, such as fear of negative evaluation, are intervening and causing a decline in fluency among IELTS test takers, broadening the spectrum of research within language testing research.

| **KEYWORDS**

Speaking skills, IELTS, Pearson correlation, Foreign language anxiety, L2 Fluency, FLA

| **ARTICLE INFORMATION**

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, English has become a lingua franca. Therefore, learning this language has become a prerequisite. It is assumed that one of the most challenging tasks students face while they want to learn a foreign language is Speaking. According to M. Canale and M. Swain (1980, p. 23), "communication is the basic function of language." More significantly, speaking is a challenging skill for language students to master. The present study investigates whether anxiety as a psychological factor hinders fluency in IELTS test takers. From my experience as a second/foreign language instructor and as a previous IELTS test taker, solid psychological factors affect students' performance in the IELTS speaking task. Considerably, as reported by one upper intermediate student motivated to take the test for immigration purposes: "I get stuck when a native speaker asks me a question. I am not confident to communicate in English with a native speaker and afraid of making mistakes sounding stupid". Remarkably, the theme of getting stuck or my mind going blank is prevalent in IELTS exam preparation classrooms, and teachers struggle daily to help students overcome such an issue. For the study, I would reference Horwitz's foreign language anxiety, Krashen's Affective filter hypothesis, and the comprehensible input hypothesis.

Statistically, the study investigates whether there is a link between Foreign language Anxiety and speaking fluency among IELTS test takers at an English language centre. In this study, foreign language anxiety is the independent variable, and fluency is the dependent variable. This classification of the two variables is relatively arbitrary because we are not looking for the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. Instead, we are searching for a correlation between the two variables under

investigation (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991). A correlation study will be conducted to examine whether there is a relationship between the two variables.

2. Literature Review

The greater desire to sound fluent, the heavier the psychological pressure. For several decades, anxiety has been highlighted as a psychological obstacle in foreign language learning. Most experts agree that anxiety is one of the most prevalent impediments to success in the foreign language classroom. Notably, Zheng (2008, p.2) defines anxiety as a student's psychological strain when completing a learning activity. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) put together the notion of Foreign/Second Language Anxiety. When participating in language usage or doing specific learning tasks, learners may experience anxiety. In this light, this phenomenon exhibits a barrier to different aspects of learning. The current study focuses on language production and how anxiety affects fluent speech in an IELTS context.

2.1. Foreign Language Anxiety

According to Covington et al. (1986), anxiety as a psychological state can cause a significant disruption of complex cognitive performances at the level of language production, thought interpretation, and practical thinking. Throughout years of research into the causes and triggers of anxiety, researchers concluded that anxiety that arises in language classrooms is a situational type of anxiety. Learners commonly experience such a psychological state when attempting to speak a foreign language. Thus, researchers pinpointed the type of anxiety that influences foreign language learners termed by Horwitz et al. (1991, p. 27), 'Foreign Language Anxiety.' Further, MacIntyre (1998, p.27) defines anxiety as the concern and unpleasant emotional reaction elicited while learning or using a second language. On the same line, numerous symptoms of situational anxiety in foreign language courses were coined in his works through observation, such as sweating, hesitations, increased heart pulse, and many others. Similarly, the study at hand has highlighted the presence of such symptoms in addition to stuttering-like disfluencies during the speaking task.

2.2. Types of foreign language anxiety:

There have been conflicting deductions within the body of research concerning the impact of anxiety on L2 learning. Correspondingly, researchers in L2 language learning have coined three types of anxiety within the classroom setting: trait, situation-specific, and state perspectives. According to Spielberger (1983), trait anxiety highlights a stable personality disposition over time. In some cases, it holds the characteristic of permeance. Characteristically, trait anxiety is a feature of a person's personality. It can be attributed to various psychopathological conditions exemplified by constant stimuli. In contrast, Cattell & Scheier (1963) contend that state anxiety is fleeting and situational; it manifests as an emotional state to the present situation that stimulates the sympathetic nervous system without apparent pathologic conditions.

A significant number of researchers have investigated the effects of state anxiety in foreign language learning. Underlyingly, state anxiety is manifested in situation-specific times. In a sense, when an individual experiences anxiety, it will only be a short-lived event in a specific context or setting. Moreover, Spielberger (1972, p.489) explains that state anxiety is "the emotional reaction or pattern of response that occurs in an individual who perceives a particular situation as personally dangerous or threatening, irrespective of the presence or absence of objective danger." Closely related, situation-specific anxiety is defined as the chance of falling below the anxiety threshold in a particular situation. Generally, tests and foreign languages are the most commonly reported situations in which individuals experience this feeling. In this regard, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) termed situation-specific anxiety as test anxiety and speaking a foreign language as "language anxiety." Therefore, specifying the type of anxiety will allow us to attain congruous patterns in findings discerning the shade of anxiety we are treating. Since we are addressing foreign language anxiety in a testing context, the following will go through test anxiety in detail.

2.1.1. Test Anxiety

Pintrich and Schunk (2002, p. 300) define "test anxiety as a circle comprising three types of responses: behavioural, phenomenological and physiological." These responses, in turn, go along with worry about failure in an evaluative context. In a testing context, Meijer (2001) stipulates that anxiety might pose an obstacle that can hinder learners' L2 potential. Moreover, Stober (2004) illustrated a component model that lists the symptoms that accompany such a state:

- ➢ Tension
- ➢ Test irrelevant thinking,
- ➢ Bodily symptoms
- ➢ Worry Emotionality
- ➢ Interference
- ➢ Lack of confidence

To illustrate the various impacts anxiety has on cognition, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) conducted a study to clarify language anxiety's detrimental impact on L2 cognitive processing. The variables they investigated are the linguistic complexity, comprehension, and speaking skills performed by the target participant. The study's results have revealed tremendous insights underlying the cognitive issues encountered; one of the most prominent issues featured is insufficient attention to the given input since students need extended periods to perform a task in L2. The latter shows the negative impact anxiety has on the level of cognitive performance. Furthermore, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994, pp. 298-299) also have brought to the fore in their study that anxiety affects the memory retrieval of target language items. Thus, this results in a severe threat to reaching high levels of language performance. Remarkably, a similar pattern of results emerged among researchers about how anxiety influences performance during tests. Within second/foreign language education, Hembree's (1988) meta-analysis comprising 562 studies concluded that poor performance is often caused by test anxiety. Correlatively, they pinpointed that such poor performance is associated with fear of negative evaluation.

Similarly, a proposition made by Covington et al. (1986) emphasises that the component of anxiety causes hindrance to a significant level of test performance. It is done by deflecting attention from the ongoing task or activity. In the same proposition, Covington also concluded that anxiety performs a "go-in-between" role during test performance where environmental conditions are sometimes intimidating, even posing a threat to shatter evaluative testing. Later, Eysenck (1988) warns that test anxiety poses a threat to attention span, which is attributable to how anxiety as a response can dominate zones of the working memory required in problem-solving tasks.

Significantly, within foreign/second language instruction, language tests are usually utilised as a filtering tool in potential candidate selection for academic and immigration purposes. The internationally used tests are IELTS, FCE and CAE, TOEFL, and many others. Such test scores are a criterion for international admissions into English-native-speaking countries. According to Cheng et al. (2014), such tests pressure individuals whose target language is not their L1. Therefore, the characteristics of this kind of testing can cause anxiety. The latter poses a high probability of low performance, illustrated in a below-standard band score.

2.3. Fluency

Language proficiency comprises various components. Quite significantly, fluency represents a necessary element of speaking ability. Fundamentally, fluency is manifested in the speed of oral delivery with expected pausing patterns. As Chambers (1997, p. 540) states, "becoming fluent therefore is not about speaking faster (articulation rate), but about pausing less often and pausing at the appropriate junctures in an utterance." The study investigates fluency as a component of oral proficiency in international language testing. Therefore, we will review multiple researchers' perspectives and studies conducted in fluency research.

So far, research on L2 fluency has been hampered by an abundance of fluency definitions. Frequently, it refers to a speaker with a strong command of the L2 (Kormos, 2006; Lennon, 1990; Riggenbach, 1991; Schmidt, 1992). Further, Lennon (2000) defines fluency in two senses: the broad one refers to overall speech proficiency, and the narrow one refers to delivery speed and smoothness. Although fluency in the general sense is most likely the most generic way to refer to L2 proficiency, the concept is questionable since it is still ambiguous (Fulcher, 2003). The difficulty in measuring fluency is naturally mirrored by the need for more clarity in defining it. Despite the need for more consensus in the research literature on the precise definition of fluency, fluency assessment based on spoken task types continues to be a critical defining factor in many L2 language examinations.

In this light, Segalowitz (2010, p. 165) has distinctively designated three components of fluency: 1) Utterance fluency: the features of utterances that reflect the speaker's cognitive fluency can be acoustically measured. 2) Perceived fluency: listeners' inferences about speakers' cognitive fluency based on their perceptions of their utterance fluency. 3) Cognitive fluency: the efficiency of operation of the underlying processes responsible for producing utterances.

The latter is crucial to comprehend the abstract mechanisms that go hand in hand when uttering speech. The study at hand has based its fluency measuring on the features of utterance fluency and hypothesized that anxiety is a factor that contributes to the manifestation of disfluencies in a language testing context.

Subsequently, Eysenck (1979) and Schwarzer (1986) are two researchers that have described the impact of anxious thoughts on cognition. They stipulated that at the time when learners fall under the anxiety threshold, negative strings of thoughts begin to surface, such as:

➢ Thoughts of expected failures (e.g., I will never be able to succeed at this).
➢ Self-doubts and avoidance of the whole situation (e.g., I wish I could leave this place ASAP).
➢ Self-deprecation (I am just not good at this).

Once the thoughts mentioned above emerge, they will cause the consumption of cognitive resources and create various obstacles in running smooth cognitive processing of the task at hand. Consequently, language anxiety presents an obstacle for second/foreign language learners, given that learning involves the interaction of multiple cognitive mechanisms.

Similarly, Tobias (1979) has proposed a framework for the cognitive effects of anxiety on learning from instruction. Within this model, learning occurs in the following stages: 1. Input (first exposure to a stimulus). 2. Processing (new words are given meaning). 3. Output (language production). During the input stage, anxiety stimulation is a total distraction from the task. However, the messages received are comprehended during the processing phase, and new words are yielded meaning. If anxiety manifests at this phase, foreign language comprehension will be inhibited. Thus, learning will be hindered. Last is the output stage, where the input material is interpreted and produced in a written or spoken form. However, if anxiety strikes at this stage, vocabulary retrieval prohibition occurs, and grammatical rules misuse increases. The latter aligns with the affective filter hypothesis proposed by Krashen, where he foregrounds how the affective filter exhibits a psychological role in obstructing productive fluent speech. The concept of a filter sparks environmental stimuli that influence learners' psychological states and render them vulnerable to target language learning (Krashen 1982- p.83).

Purposefully, these three stages were developed to display where the learning overlap happens. Notably, Eysenck (1979) warns researchers of the potential impact of anxiety on cognitive processing, meaning that anxiety can cause a decrease in the speed of cognitive processing and operations. The claims above exemplify Horwitz et al. (1986) and Price's (1991) research, which states that most students who suffer from anxiety spend more time studying to achieve the same level of performance than those not impacted by anxiety. Moreover, Tobias (1979) confirms that anxiety's manifestation can hinder the smooth cognitive progress of three cognitive stages of language learning: input, processing, and output. Thus, we conclude that anxiety threatens effective language learning and smooth oral delivery.

Overall, a complete comprehension of the cognitive cultivations of L2 fluency is necessary to grasp the indications of L2 fluency. Successively, complete absorption of how cognitive determinants are intertwined in the social and motivational contexts of L2 learning is essential for a sound judgment of L2 perceived fluency to occur, in the sense that they are intertwined and contribute to the degree of fluency. They all form dynamic systems of linguistics interconnected, impacting speakers' fluency.

3. Methodology

This study investigates the correlation between fluency and anxiety among IELTS test-takers at an English language centre. In other words, the primary concern of this research paper is to examine whether there is an association between test anxiety and speech discontinuity during the IELTS speaking task. The following section mainly includes research questions, research hypothesis, research design, data collection procedures, research instruments, participants in this study, and operational definitions.

3.1 Research questions

The current study sets out to answer the following research questions:

  ➢   Is there any correlation between Foreign language Anxiety and Speaking Fluency among IELTS test-takers?
  ➢   Is anxiety a central psychological factor responsible for low fluency scores in the IELTS context?

3.2 Research hypotheses

The current study investigates whether there is a correlation between Speaking Fluency and
L2 anxiety among IELTS test-takers at an X Language center. The following study seeks to
confirm or disconfirm the following hypothesis:

➢ There is a significant correlation between Speaking Fluency and L2 anxiety among IELTS test-takers at X English Language Center.

3.3 Research design

According to Creswell (2012), *correlation* is best defined as "a statistical test to determine the tendency or pattern for two (or more) variables or two sets of data to vary consistently" (p.338). The current study investigates whether there is a correlation between the two variables (fluency and FLA) under investigation. Correspondingly, a Pearson correlation test will be conducted to examine and test whether there is an association between the two variables under study. It also allows us to see how significant the correlation between the two variables is Hatch & Lazaraton (1991).

3.4 Data collection procedure
The data will be collected in an English language centre specialising in IELTS test preparation. The data collection method includes two phases:

• Phase 1: Students will take a mock speaking exam administered by a certified IELTS teacher in an exam-like environment. Later on, the data will be collected and scored. The scores of students will be analysed via Excel.

• Phase 2: An adapted foreign language anxiety questionnaire will be administered to students in each class under the supervision of their teacher.

3.5 Research instruments
Two tests will be used as research tools to verify whether there is a link between the two variables under examination. Participants will be asked to answer an FLA questionnaire and take an IELTS mock speaking exam. Participants will sit for the two phases of data collection methods under the same conditions to avoid any intervening extraneous variables that may affect the study's findings.

3.5.1 Speaking mock exam
The study selected a mock speaking exam adapted from the ones used for the IELTS 2017 exam to test students' fluency. The exam highlights daily interactive topics and was administered in an exam-like environment by a certified IELTS examiner.

3.5.2 FLA Questionnaire
For the questionnaire, FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 1986) was used to collect information about FLA. Participants had to choose how often they experienced the statement in the description box on a five-point frequency scale, allowing them to rate their foreign language anxiety frequency. Notably, the FLCAS survey comprises 33 items regarding the fear of negative evaluation, cognitive anxiety, and speaking English with natives.

3.6 The sample
The participants will be selected from an English language centre in Rabat, the capital of Morocco, utilising a convenience sampling method. The majority of students in this study have been studying English for more than three years. The participants are male and female students (males = 17, females = 13). According to their enrolment form, the student's general English proficiency is CEFR B2 level (Council of Europe, 2004).

3.7 Procedure
The following illustrates the procedure of data collection. Firstly, the participants undertook the mock speaking test accompanied by the researcher and their peers. On the same note, participants were told that the test accompanied by the researcher would be graded while the peer one was a practice one. Correspondingly, a good performance will yield a bonus. However, a low performance would slightly reduce the total grade of the preparatory course. Secondly, participants were prompted to fill in the adjusted FLCAS questionnaire after the mock speaking task performance. In total, the procedure took approximately 30 min in between the mock exam and the questionnaire fill-out. Most importantly, all participants received positive feedback and reassurance right after the tasks.

3.8 Consent form
Since the participants in this study are of different age groups and nationalities, parental and individual consent was sought via the language centre. Notably, the participants and their parents were informed about the current research and guaranteed total anonymity of participants' identities. In this way, parents could inquire about the study's purpose and future benefits for their children. On the same note, they are free to object to their children's participation. Further, a consent form was embedded in speaking tasks for individuals to sign before taking the mock exam. The document illustrated that the participants participated voluntarily and that their privacy would be considered. The participants were granted cease of participation at any given time during the study. Moreover, active communication with the centre takes place throughout the whole process of collecting data.

## 4. Results and Discussion
4.1 Results
The current study investigates whether there is a correlation between the independent (foreign language anxiety) and the dependent (speaking fluency) among IELTS test takers. In order to answer the research question and test the null hypothesis, a Pearson correlation is used as a statistical procedure. This statistical test enables us to conclude whether there is an association between the independent and dependent variables. This section encompasses mainly the study results, a summary of the findings,

a discussion, and some limitations. The tables below represent students' response rates for the research questionnaire and the attendance rate for the mock speaking exam.

4.1.1 Descriptive Statistics (Anxiety Frequency)

The chart below represents students' responses to the statements highlighted in the questionnaire. The main aim of this description is to show the frequency of the students who experience anxiety at a high frequency and those enduring it at a low frequency.

Figure 1:
A chart of students' Speaking Anxiety Frequency
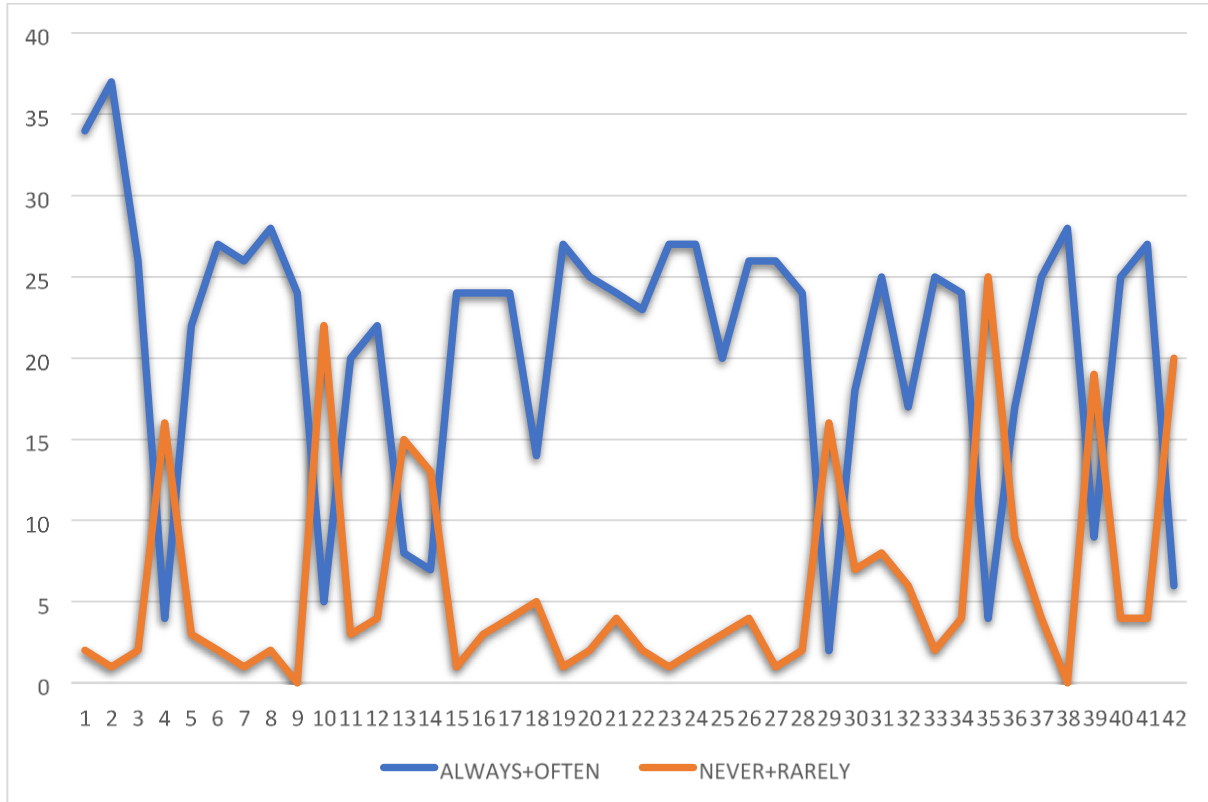
4.1.1.1 Analysis:

From the curve above, it is noticed that most students, if not all, have checked the always and often boxes. By contrast, fewer students have checked the rarely and never boxes. Hence, this may suggest high anxiety levels among IELTS test takers at the language centre. Thus, it is safe to assume that anxiety could be one of the factors that contribute to the occurrence of disfluencies in the IELTS speaking task. Therefore, a Pearson correlation test is used to investigate whether there is a significant statistical correlation between the two variables. The results of the correlation tests are displayed in table 3. It has to be noted that Microsoft Excel (2019) was used to analyse students' test scores and code the questionnaire responses.

Table 1:
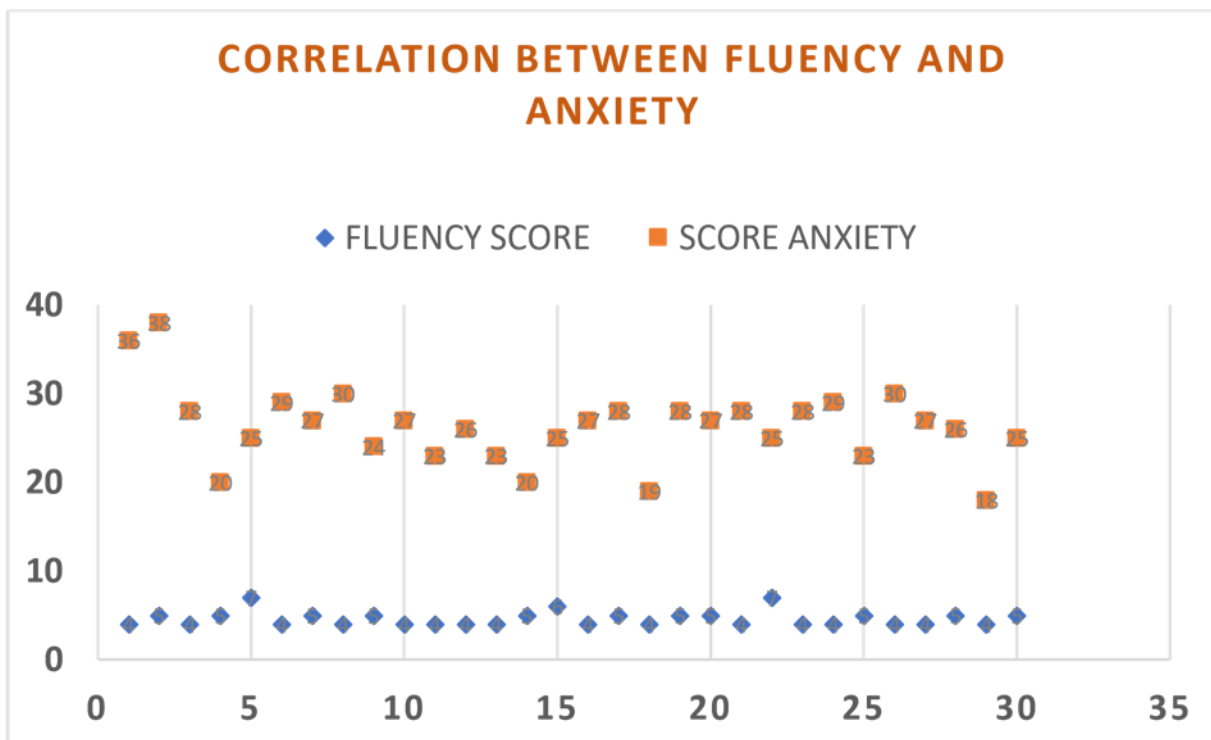*Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Anxiety and Fluency*

R-value obtained	DF	N	P.05
0.12	28	30	0.49: NON-S

Table 2:

Illustration of the results of the relationship between the two variables

Test	Independent variable
Speaking Mock exam	FLA
Pearson Correlation	0,12
Number of respondents	30

* $p > .05$

Figure 2:

Correlation between Fluency and Anxiety

4.1.1.2 Analysis:

Table 1 and figure 2 show a non-significant correlation between FLA and Fluency among IELTS test takers at the Language centre. This can be justified by the r value obtained, which is 0.12. Let us compare the critical value needed, 0.3494, at the probability level of .05 and with a degree of freedom of 28, and the r-value obtained is 0.12. We can notice that the r-value obtained is less than the critical value needed. The latter enables us to conclude the existence of a non-significant correlation between the two variables under investigation. The latter means that the research hypothesis of this study is rejected. According to the guide (Evans, 1996), the r obtained lies between .00-.19, which indicates that the correlation between the two variables is very weak.

4.1.2 Summary of the Findings

From the results shown in the tables and figures above, we conclude the following:

➢ The correlation coefficients for the two tests' results reveal a non-significant relationship between anxiety and fluency.
➢ The non-significant correlation between the two variables allows us to reject the study's hypothesis.
➢ There is a very weak correlation between Anxiety and Fluency in the IELTS context of study at an X language centre.

➢ The results suggest that other factors contribute to high levels of anxiety pinpointed by the research instruments.

4.2 Discussion

The study foregrounds a case of foreign language anxiety spur in an IELTS language setting. According to previous studies, the present study contradicts a plethora of studies conducted in FLA research. The most prominent ones are the following: (Horwitz, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Aida, 1994; Gardner, 1997; Cheng & Horwitz, 2001), who have concluded a clear association between anxiety and language performance. Nonetheless, such studies have not treated fluency as a separate component of oral proficiency nor investigated it in an international testing context. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), FLA is primarily "associated with the language class and differentiated from other contexts" (p. 297). On the field, observations detected a clear association between fluent language production and FLA. The latter is displayed in the dysfluencies that occur when students express themselves in class (long pauses, repetitions, and mild stuttering) and the expressed fear of target language evaluation by a native speaker. Field observations align with results yielded by the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to test the frequency of anxiety. Manifestly, the (FLCAS) reported great fear and worry about failing the exam, apprehension stemming from native speaker evaluation. However, the results indicate a weak correlation between the two variables when examining the correlative value. In line with the hypothesis, the study's findings disconfirm the stipulated assumption that "anxiety increases, fluency decreases, and vice versa." Thus, it indicates that other factors contribute to high anxiety among IELTS test takers.

The results attained can be best explained by the view of Goonan (2003, p. 7), who affirms that "test anxiety does not have a direct impact on academic achievement, but it may manifest differently based on many factors, including familial background, level of achievement, motivation, and intellectual giftedness." Clearly, from the pattern highlighted in students' responses to the questionnaire, such as: feeling discomfort having to converse with a native speaker and fear of a misunderstanding on the day of the exam resulting in an exam failure, we can denote a socio-cultural barrier contributing to a spike in anxiety within the IELTS context. In the same vein, this weak correlative relationship between the two variables can also be accounted for by the interference of socio-cultural factors. The latter is a crucial anxiety-producing factor. According to (Tanveer, 2007), the target language culture unfamiliarity can serve as an anxiety-provoking foundation. This fact can be illustrated by Jones (2004, p.34) in the term "losing face." Commonly, learners use such a term to express their discomfort with the unfamiliarity and uncertainty of the target language. Further," losing face" contributes to learners' self-image in front of their classmates and adds pressure to fear of negative evaluation. On the other hand, WTC, or willingness to communicate, has been coined as a socio-cultural factor affecting L2 performance in the following studies (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001). Taking the theoretical framework of this paper into account, we can expand the understanding of the presence of such a culture-bound factor through the lens of Shumman's acculturation model. Similarly, Tollefson (1991, p.23) indicates, "learners who wish to assimilate – who value or identify with members of the target language community – are generally more successful than learners who are concerned about retaining their original cultural identity." As a result, it is logical to assume that the greater the degree of acculturation, the lower the level of language anxiety. As a result, analysing foreign language anxiety via the lens of acculturation may shed light on the relationships between culture and language anxiety and yield an understanding of the factors contributing to such a phenomenon.

The Acculturation Model established by Schumann (1978, 1986, p. 381) may provide a valuable framework for investigating the impact of the TL culture on FL anxiety. As per Schumann (1986), assimilation, preservation, and adaptation are distinct integration strategies that "varied yield degrees of contact between the two groups and hence varying degrees of acquisition of the target language. When learners attempt to assimilate into a TL group and adapt to the TL group's cultural practices, this provides reasonable grounds for foreign language learning. Nonetheless, it will not be supported if learners wish to stay culturally and linguistically detached or resistant to the TL culture to preserve their cultural identity. In other words, social and psychological distances limit the quantity and quality of engagement and the optimal future for L2 progress. In this case, one could speculate that FLA may be attenuated when the socio-linguistic distance between learners and the TL community is bridged. Enhanced intercultural awareness helps assist the assimilation of the target language input, minimising learners' anxiety levels. Based on Shumman's acculturation model and the questionnaire's results, it is safe to deduce that there is a high probability of a socio-cultural factor contributing to low fluency scores.

Various foreign language anxiety studies have investigated the association between anxiety and language performance, as previously reviewed in the literature. Nonetheless, pinpointing a correlation between test anxiety and fluency does not mean a direct cause-effect between these two variables. On the same note, Cassady and Johnson (2002) have highlighted that the ambiguous relationship between anxiety and language performance is arguably indefinite. Therefore, we cannot conclude that anxiety causes dysfluent language production and vice versa. Correspondingly, future research should be conducted to determine the underlying factors contributing to high degrees of FLA and their correlation with different oral proficiency components in a separate analysis.

Similarly, our study's findings are associated with the results of Perez (2018) attained in his research. Significantly, Perez has investigated (FLA) foreign language anxiety and L2 utterance fluency in a second language context among Spanish EFL learners. Conclusively, the study highlighted a non-significant correlation between the two variables. Moreover, Yusuke (2010) has also investigated the relationship between language anxiety and proficiency in the Japanese context of the study. Accordingly, the variables examined were fluency, accuracy, and complexity. As a result, the findings highlighted that FLA is a poor predictor of English oral proficiency.

To conclude, irrespective of having anxiety as an impetus or a sequel, or regardless of its impairing or advancing effects, we have remarkable on-field evidence of its existence in L2 classrooms. The variance in correlative studies within the literature highlight that language anxiety is not the ultimate factor contributing to low proficiency in English; other factors are intervening in the process, impacting speaking fluency and coherence of speech.

5. Conclusion

The main objective of this paper was to examine whether there is a link between foreign language anxiety (the independent variable) and English-speaking fluency (the dependent variable). In order to verify whether there is an association between the two variables under investigation, two tests were utilised as research instruments to test the hypothesis and answer the research questions. Students were asked to fill in a foreign language anxiety questionnaire to estimate the frequency of anxiety and take an IELTS Speaking mock exam to measure the smoothness of their oral delivery.

The mock exam yielded band scores, while the questionnaire produced frequency responses. Later on, those scores were analysed using Microsoft Excel (2019). Consequently, the statistical analysis pinpointed a non-significant correlation between fluency and foreign language anxiety among IELTS test takers at the language centre. Accordingly, the hypothesis made at the beginning of this paper is rejected. The results attained imply that sociocultural factors contribute to low fluency rates and stimulating anxiety symptoms among IELTS test takers, which opens further prospects for future in-depth research.

This study's findings will redound the research literature on language testing and its relation to test-taker psychology, considering that English plays a vital role in career development today. The greater demand for individuals with English proficiency justifies the need for more effective, inclusive teaching approaches and specific curriculum development. Moreover, the study has revealed the research potential within international language testing. Significantly, questions emerged as a result. The connection between psychology, culture, and language is a potential spectrum of research, given that international test-takers strive to score well on the same test.

The study is corollary and interpretive, with a limited sample size from a specific context, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings beyond the current participants and into different populations. Continued studies involving individuals from other distinct settings and qualitative assessments would provide a deeper understanding of the associations investigated in this study. Further, our study allows us to refine and validate the concepts and constructs that emerged from our correlative analysis. One could investigate to what extent it is possible to identify different fluency measures in overall oral proficiency and examine the sociolinguistic factors contributing to low oral performance in the IELTS Speaking task.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.
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