
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Foreign Language Anxiety and Oral Proficiency among Moroccan EFL Learners: A Case Study at ESEF Berrechid, Morocco

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| ABSTRACT

This study seeks to investigate the relationship between foreign language anxiety and oral proficiency among Moroccan student teachers enrolled in the English Studies program at the École Supérieure de l'Éducation et de la Formation (ESEF) in Berrechid. Given the increasing importance of English in academic, scientific, and professional spheres, it is essential to identify and address the psychological and pedagogical factors that hinder effective language acquisition, particularly in oral communication. Adopting a mixed-methods design, the study combines quantitative data collected through questionnaires with qualitative insights drawn from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with both trainee teachers and their instructors. It examines how varying levels of anxiety influence oral participation, confidence, and communicative competence during classroom interactions. Preliminary findings are expected to reveal that higher levels of anxiety are negatively correlated with oral performance, suggesting that anxiety significantly constrains students' ability to express themselves fluently and confidently. The study ultimately aims to shed light on the need for evidence-based pedagogical interventions to foster a more supportive, low-anxiety learning environment and to enhance the oral proficiency of Moroccan EFL teacher trainees.

| KEYWORDS

Foreign Language Anxiety; Oral Proficiency; EFL Learners; Teacher Education; Moroccan Context; ESEF Berrechid; Mixed-Methods Research; Communicative Competence; Classroom Participation; Pedagogical Strategies.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the use of the English language has undergone a remarkable transformation, establishing itself as a dominant medium of communication across scientific, academic, technological, and economic domains. The global spread of English has rendered it not only an international lingua franca but also a key instrument of intellectual exchange and professional mobility. This increasing prominence underscores the urgent need for inclusive and coherent pedagogical approaches that reflect the complexity of language learning in non-native contexts, particularly where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). In Morocco, English has progressively assumed a central role in higher education, research, and the job market, becoming a major determinant of academic and professional advancement. The ability to communicate effectively and confidently in English, especially through spoken interaction, has consequently become an indispensable skill for success. However, one of the most persistent challenges hindering learners' progress toward oral proficiency lies in the affective dimension of language learning—specifically, the anxiety many learners experience when attempting to express themselves in spoken English.

Learner anxiety constitutes one of the most influential affective variables in the process of second or foreign language acquisition. It manifests itself in various forms, such as nervousness, self-consciousness, or fear of negative evaluation, all of which tend to undermine learners' willingness to take part in communicative activities. High levels of anxiety often restrict students' classroom engagement, discourage them from participating in discussions, and reduce their ability to perform effectively in oral tasks and assessments. As a result, learners' linguistic development is compromised not because of lack of competence, but rather because of psychological barriers that inhibit their ability to perform to their potential. Addressing this

issue is crucial, as learners who are anxious in language classrooms are less likely to take communicative risks, practice speaking, or develop the fluency required for real-life interaction. Raising teachers' awareness of the prevalence, causes, and consequences of foreign language anxiety is therefore essential for fostering classroom environments that promote both emotional well-being and linguistic growth.

Despite the growing recognition of affective factors in second language learning, the issue of foreign language anxiety remains relatively underexplored within the Moroccan EFL context. Most existing studies have focused on linguistic or cognitive dimensions of learning, while the emotional and psychological dimensions-particularly in relation to teacher training institutions-have received limited scholarly attention. The present study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating the manifestations, sources, and impact of learner anxiety on oral proficiency among Moroccan EFL teacher trainees enrolled at the École Supérieure de l'Éducation et de la Formation (ESEF) in Berrechid. Understanding how anxiety operates within teacher education settings is particularly important, as future teachers' own affective experiences as learners shape the teaching practices they will later adopt in their classrooms.

To this end, the study employs a mixed-methods research design that integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture the complexity of learner anxiety. Quantitative data are collected through structured questionnaires designed to measure the intensity and frequency of anxiety-related experiences among student teachers, while qualitative data are obtained from classroom observations that provide insight into learners' behaviors, reactions, and interactional patterns in real communicative settings. This methodological triangulation allows for a comprehensive understanding of how anxiety affects oral participation, confidence, and communicative competence. It is hypothesized that elevated levels of foreign language anxiety are inversely related to oral performance, reducing students' ability to articulate their thoughts fluently and confidently in English.

The study's primary goal is to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on affective factors in language education by providing an in-depth analysis of the relationship between anxiety and oral proficiency in Moroccan teacher education. It aims to identify how anxiety manifests in EFL classrooms, uncover the underlying factors that generate or reinforce it-such as fear of evaluation, lack of preparation, linguistic insecurity, or classroom dynamics-and determine how these elements collectively influence learners' oral communicative performance. Through this exploration, the research seeks to emphasize the importance of psychological preparedness in language learning and the need to integrate emotional intelligence and affective awareness into teacher training programs.

Furthermore, this study aspires to generate pedagogically relevant insights that can inform both pre-service and in-service teacher education in Morocco. By highlighting the negative implications of unaddressed anxiety, the research underscores the necessity of creating more empathetic and anxiety-reducing classroom environments where learners feel encouraged to experiment with language, make mistakes, and engage in authentic communication. Such an environment would not only enhance oral proficiency but also promote autonomy, resilience, and self-confidence among future teachers of English.

While the study is expected to provide valuable findings, it recognizes certain methodological and contextual limitations. The relatively small and localized sample, limited to ESEF Berrechid, may restrict the generalizability of results across different Moroccan regions or educational institutions. Moreover, the mixed-methods approach, though comprehensive, may produce data inconsistencies that complicate interpretation. The potential observer effect during classroom observation may also influence students' natural behavior and performance. Despite these constraints, careful research design, ethical data collection procedures, and critical interpretation of findings will help mitigate such limitations.

Ultimately, this study endeavors to deepen understanding of the intricate interplay between affective variables and oral performance in Moroccan EFL contexts. By doing so, it aims to pave the way for more psychologically informed pedagogical practices that prioritize learner well-being and communicative competence, and to inspire future research that continues to explore the emotional dimensions of language learning within Moroccan higher education.

2. literature Review

The relationship between learner anxiety and oral proficiency among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners has long been a focal point of inquiry in second language acquisition (SLA) research. Over the past few decades, numerous scholars have recognized that language learning is not merely a cognitive process, but also an affective and emotional experience that significantly shapes learners' attitudes, motivation, and performance. Within this affective domain, foreign language anxiety has emerged as one of the most extensively studied and influential variables. It has been shown to exert a powerful influence on learners' communicative behaviors, shaping the extent to which they are willing to participate in classroom interactions, engage in spontaneous speech, or perform successfully in oral tasks.

In EFL contexts, where exposure to authentic communication is often limited to the classroom environment, learners frequently experience heightened levels of anxiety when required to speak or present in English. This anxiety may stem from various interrelated factors, including fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation by peers or teachers, lack of confidence in linguistic competence, or prior negative learning experiences. Such anxiety can manifest in both psychological and physiological forms-ranging from tension, self-doubt, and mental blocks to physical symptoms such as trembling, sweating, or a racing heartbeat-all of which can hinder the learner's ability to process language effectively and to express ideas clearly and fluently.

Consequently, oral performance becomes not only a test of linguistic ability but also a reflection of the learner's emotional state and perceived self-efficacy.

This review of literature therefore aims to delve into the extensive body of scholarly work that has examined the complex interplay between anxiety and oral proficiency in EFL settings. It draws upon a wide range of empirical and theoretical studies that address three central dimensions of this relationship. First, it seeks to explore the manifestations of learner anxiety, as documented in previous research, to understand how anxiety is experienced and expressed by learners during oral communication. Second, it investigates the sources and contributing factors that give rise to such anxiety, including sociocultural influences, classroom dynamics, linguistic competence, and individual learner differences such as personality traits and motivation. Finally, it examines the impact of anxiety on oral performance, with a focus on how it affects learners' participation, fluency, accuracy, and overall communicative competence.

By synthesizing insights from diverse scholarly perspectives, this literature review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how anxiety operates within the process of language learning and how it interacts with oral proficiency. It also seeks to highlight existing gaps in research-particularly those related to specific cultural and educational contexts such as Morocco-where affective variables in EFL learning have not been sufficiently explored. Through this exploration, the review intends to lay the theoretical groundwork for the present study, which situates the issue of foreign language anxiety within the Moroccan teacher education context, emphasizing its implications for classroom interaction, pedagogical practice, and the development of oral communication skills among future EFL educators.

2.1 conceptualizing language anxiety

Language anxiety has long been acknowledged as one of the most influential affective factors in second and foreign language learning, shaping learners' performance, motivation, and overall success in language acquisition. It is a unique form of anxiety that arises specifically in language learning contexts, often distinguished from other general anxieties due to its situational nature and direct connection to communicative performance. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) were among the first scholars to conceptualize *Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)* as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process." According to these authors, FLA is not simply a manifestation of general trait anxiety, but a situation-specific anxiety that surfaces when learners are required to use or learn a foreign language, especially in performance-oriented situations such as speaking.

Language anxiety is a multidimensional construct that involves cognitive, affective, and physiological components (Scovel, 1991). The cognitive dimension pertains to negative self-perceptions, worry, and intrusive thoughts about poor performance or making mistakes. When learners focus excessively on self-evaluation, their attention is diverted from the communicative task, reducing fluency and accuracy (Tobias, 1986). The affective dimension includes emotional reactions such as fear, embarrassment, and frustration, which often emerge in situations where learners feel their linguistic competence is being judged. Physiologically, anxiety manifests through symptoms like increased heart rate, trembling, sweating, or dry mouth, particularly when learners are asked to speak in front of others (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). These physical reactions can further reinforce psychological discomfort, leading to a cyclical pattern of stress and poor performance.

Building on this understanding, Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three major components of foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension is the fear of engaging in real or anticipated communication with others, especially in situations that demand spontaneous language production. Test anxiety stems from fear of academic evaluation and the pressure to perform well in graded settings. Finally, fear of negative evaluation refers to learners' apprehension about being judged by teachers or peers, which can provoke self-consciousness and avoidance behaviors. These factors interact to create a psychological barrier that impedes learners' ability to participate effectively in oral communication activities, which are essential for developing oral proficiency.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) further expanded the theoretical understanding of FLA through their input-processing-output model, which illustrates how anxiety interferes at different stages of language learning. According to this model, anxiety can hinder the processing of input by limiting attention and retention, disrupt the processing of language during production, and ultimately affect the quality and quantity of output. Thus, anxious learners may experience difficulties in understanding spoken input, organizing their thoughts, or retrieving vocabulary and structures during communication. This model underscores that anxiety operates as both a psychological and cognitive filter, obstructing effective language acquisition and communicative competence.

In addition to internal psychological processes, social and contextual factors also play a crucial role in shaping language anxiety. Dewaele (2017) and Piechurska-Kuciel (2012) emphasize that classroom environment, teacher attitudes, peer interactions, and cultural expectations can either mitigate or exacerbate learners' anxiety levels. In many EFL contexts, including Morocco, English is perceived as a high-status language associated with globalization and professional advancement. This perception often creates additional pressure on learners to perform well, leading to heightened fear of failure or embarrassment during oral communication. Such socio-educational dynamics make the experience of language anxiety particularly pronounced in Moroccan classrooms, where students may internalize a belief that proficiency in English equates to academic and social competence.

Scholars have also debated whether language anxiety should be viewed as entirely detrimental or potentially facilitative. While high levels of anxiety tend to inhibit communication and language learning (Horwitz, 2001), moderate levels may sometimes motivate learners to prepare more thoroughly and perform better (Alpert & Haber, 1960). However, for most EFL learners, anxiety remains a debilitating factor that reduces their willingness to communicate and their confidence in using the language spontaneously. This aligns with Krashen's (1982) *Affective Filter Hypothesis*, which posits that negative emotions such as anxiety raise an affective barrier that prevents language input from being effectively processed and internalized.

In conclusion, conceptualizing language anxiety as a multidimensional and context-dependent construct helps clarify its pervasive influence on language learning outcomes. It encompasses cognitive, affective, physiological, and social dimensions that interact dynamically within the classroom setting. Understanding these dimensions is particularly relevant in the Moroccan EFL context, where the demand for oral proficiency is growing, yet anxiety continues to hinder students' communicative competence. By grounding the discussion in established theoretical frameworks and empirical findings, this study seeks to further illuminate how language anxiety operates among Moroccan EFL learners and how it affects their oral performance within teacher education settings.

2.2 Understanding Oral Proficiency in EFL Context

Oral proficiency stands as a central component of communicative competence and a fundamental indicator of successful language acquisition in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. It refers to the ability of learners to use the target language accurately, fluently, and appropriately in real-life communicative situations. According to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, 2020), oral proficiency entails not only grammatical accuracy and lexical knowledge but also pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences that allow speakers to communicate meaning effectively in various contexts. Thus, oral proficiency transcends the mechanical use of language; it embodies the capacity to express thoughts, negotiate meaning, and maintain interaction in spontaneous communication.

Scholars such as Canale and Swain (1980) and Bachman (1990) have conceptualized oral proficiency as part of a broader model of *communicative competence*, comprising grammatical competence (knowledge of syntax and vocabulary), sociolinguistic competence (appropriateness of language use in different contexts), discourse competence (ability to organize and connect ideas coherently), and strategic competence (use of strategies to overcome communication breakdowns). These interrelated components highlight that oral proficiency is not limited to linguistic knowledge but involves a dynamic interplay between language forms, functions, and social contexts. In other words, to be orally proficient, learners must not only know *what* to say but also *how*, *when*, and *to whom* to say it appropriately.

In EFL contexts, particularly in non-English-speaking countries such as Morocco, oral proficiency represents one of the most challenging skills to acquire due to limited exposure to authentic communicative situations. Learners often rely heavily on classroom input, which is sometimes characterized by teacher-centered instruction, insufficient interaction, and a focus on grammar and written accuracy rather than spoken fluency (Al Hosni, 2014). This limited exposure restricts opportunities for learners to practice English in natural settings, resulting in inhibited speaking skills. Consequently, learners may develop what Skehan (1998) calls *fluency-accuracy trade-offs*, where focusing too much on grammatical correctness leads to hesitation and reduced fluency, while prioritizing fluency may result in linguistic errors. Achieving balance between the two dimensions remains a critical pedagogical challenge in EFL classrooms.

Oral proficiency also encompasses affective and psychological dimensions. As numerous studies have shown (e.g., MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Horwitz, 2001), affective factors such as motivation, confidence, and anxiety play a decisive role in determining learners' willingness to communicate and their oral performance outcomes. High anxiety levels often interfere with cognitive processing and verbal output, leading to disfluency, avoidance, or incomplete responses. On the contrary, learners who possess higher levels of self-efficacy and lower anxiety tend to engage more confidently in communicative activities, which accelerates their oral development. This intersection between affective factors and oral performance underscores the complex nature of speaking proficiency and its dependency on both internal and external conditions.

Assessment of oral proficiency has evolved over the years to include both *analytic* and *holistic* approaches. Analytic assessment, as proposed by Luoma (2004), evaluates distinct components such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and interaction, while holistic assessment focuses on overall communicative effectiveness. Recent approaches to oral assessment, including task-based and performance-based evaluations, emphasize the authenticity of communication, assessing learners in situations that mirror real-world interactions. These models aim to capture the learner's ability to use language spontaneously and meaningfully, rather than simply reproducing memorized structures or rehearsed dialogues.

In the Moroccan EFL context, oral proficiency has gained increasing importance as English continues to expand its presence in academic, economic, and cultural domains. The Moroccan Ministry of Education has recently emphasized communicative approaches to teaching English, yet many classrooms still struggle with implementing student-centered pedagogies that foster authentic interaction (Ouchene, 2021). Learners' oral performance often remains constrained by linguistic insecurity, lack of exposure to natural English input, and persistent foreign language anxiety. Consequently, oral proficiency development must be understood not only as a linguistic goal but also as a socio-affective process that requires supportive learning environments, meaningful communication opportunities, and pedagogical strategies tailored to learners' psychological needs.

In summary, oral proficiency in EFL contexts is a multifaceted construct that integrates linguistic, communicative, and affective dimensions. It is shaped by learners' linguistic knowledge, cognitive processes, and emotional states, as well as by the pedagogical practices and socio-cultural contexts in which learning occurs. Understanding oral proficiency through this comprehensive lens is crucial for identifying the barriers-such as learner anxiety-that hinder oral performance, and for developing instructional interventions that promote confidence, fluency, and communicative competence among EFL learners, particularly within Moroccan classrooms.

2.3 Manifestations of language anxiety among EFL learners

Language anxiety is widely recognized as a complex affective and psychological construct that manifests through a wide range of emotional, cognitive, physiological, and behavioral responses. It extends far beyond a fleeting sense of nervousness; rather, it constitutes a deeply rooted emotional state that can profoundly affect learners' cognitive processing, linguistic production, and communicative competence. As an internalized barrier, language anxiety interferes with learners' ability to focus, process linguistic input, and produce output effectively, often resulting in avoidance behaviors, reduced participation, and poor oral performance. Its multifaceted nature has prompted extensive scholarly attention aimed at identifying its symptoms, mechanisms, and pedagogical implications in EFL learning contexts.

At the emotional and cognitive levels, language anxiety often reveals itself through self-doubt, apprehension, tension, and excessive fear of negative evaluation. In their seminal work *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety* (1986), Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope conceptualized language anxiety as a distinct form of performance-related anxiety specific to foreign language learning contexts. They emphasized that learners suffering from such anxiety tend to be overly preoccupied with the possibility of making mistakes and with how others-particularly teachers and classmates-might judge their linguistic performance. This persistent concern about external evaluation leads to a heightened state of self-consciousness that negatively affects cognitive focus, concentration, and mental clarity. Consequently, anxious learners experience mental blocks, difficulty retrieving vocabulary, and disrupted fluency during oral communication. These psychological barriers often culminate in diminished self-confidence, reduced motivation, and a reluctance to participate in classroom interactions.

Blaissance (2020) extends this understanding by asserting that underperformance in oral tasks is not merely a reflection of linguistic incompetence but rather the direct consequence of an internalized fear of error and negative judgment. This fear disrupts both linguistic output and cognitive processing, producing what can be described as a vicious cycle: anxiety inhibits performance, and poor performance reinforces anxiety. Within Moroccan EFL classrooms, these patterns are further magnified by sociocultural perceptions of English as an elite and challenging language-a notion that elevates the stakes of oral communication. Students often view speaking in English as a public test of intelligence or social status, which intensifies their fear of embarrassment or failure, especially during oral presentations or graded evaluations.

Among the observable manifestations of language anxiety, avoidance of speaking emerges as one of the most prominent and debilitating. Phillips (2017) characterizes this phenomenon as a communication-related disorder in which learners consciously or unconsciously withdraw from oral engagement to protect their self-image. In EFL classrooms, this avoidance can take multiple forms: learners may refrain from volunteering answers, avoid eye contact to escape being called upon, or respond minimally when questioned. Such behaviors are especially prevalent in situations that demand public performance, such as oral presentations, debates, or spontaneous classroom discussions, where the perceived threat of evaluation is at its peak.

In addition to its cognitive and emotional dimensions, language anxiety also produces physiological symptoms, which serve as tangible indicators of learners' internal distress. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) observed that physical reactions such as increased heart rate, sweating, dry mouth, trembling, and shortness of breath are common among anxious EFL speakers. These bodily responses compromise both the quantity and quality of speech production, often leading to pronunciation difficulties, disrupted fluency, and a loss of control over pacing and intonation. Such physiological interference further heightens learners' self-awareness and embarrassment, reinforcing a cycle of anxiety that perpetuates communication breakdowns.

Moreover, behavioral manifestations of language anxiety offer additional evidence of its impact on learner performance. MacIntyre and Au Yeung (2007), in their study *Willingness to Communicate, Social Support, and Language-Learning Orientations of Immersion Students*, identified a set of behavioral indicators including hesitation, avoidance of speaking opportunities, shortened responses, and frequent code-switching into the native language. These actions often function as coping mechanisms that allow learners to mitigate discomfort or evade situations that might expose their perceived linguistic inadequacies. Such avoidance behaviors, however, have long-term detrimental effects, as they limit practice opportunities, slow linguistic progress, and reinforce the learners' dependency on their first language for comfort and security.

Gong, Chen, and An (2018) offer a more nuanced categorization of language-related anxieties, distinguishing between test anxiety, fear of low achievement, and speaking anxiety-each of which exerts a distinct but interrelated influence on oral performance. Speaking anxiety, in particular, has been identified as the most debilitating form for EFL learners, as it directly impairs their willingness to communicate and their ability to participate in oral exchanges. The constant anticipation of failure or criticism discourages learners from engaging in conversations with peers or teachers, depriving them of essential communicative practice and feedback. In Moroccan educational settings, these manifestations are especially pronounced, as traditional

classroom dynamics often emphasize error correction over communicative experimentation. As a result, learners internalize a sense of linguistic insecurity that manifests as hesitation, silence, or mechanical, overly rehearsed speech.

In essence, language anxiety is not a single, uniform experience but a multifaceted construct encompassing interdependent psychological, physiological, and behavioral dimensions. It affects not only how learners feel but also how they think, act, and perform in language classrooms. Understanding these manifestations is therefore crucial for educators seeking to design anxiety-reducing pedagogical strategies that foster confidence, risk-taking, and authentic oral engagement. Within the Moroccan EFL context, where English carries both symbolic and academic weight, recognizing the depth and diversity of anxiety's manifestations is a key step toward developing more empathetic and effective approaches to teaching oral communication.

2.4 Sources and causes of language anxiety

Oral anxiety among EFL learners has been found to stem from a complex set of interrelated psychological, pedagogical, and sociocultural factors. Blaissance (2020) identified a variety of sociocultural challenges that amplify anxiety among Moroccan EFL students. The fear of making errors-especially in front of educators or peers-emerges as one of the most significant triggers of anxiety. Within Moroccan classrooms, English is often perceived as a marker of academic success and social prestige, which adds considerable pressure on learners to perform well during oral tasks. This pressure, compounded by the perceived link between oral proficiency and intelligence or competence, fosters a fear of negative evaluation that severely undermines students' willingness to speak. Many students, particularly those with weaker speaking skills, find themselves trapped in a self-reinforcing cycle of anxiety and avoidance, where fear of mistakes leads to silence, and silence reinforces linguistic insecurity.

Sanaie and Khalil (2020) further explored how classroom dynamics influence students' anxiety levels in Moroccan EFL contexts. They found that structural and pedagogical factors-such as overcrowded classrooms, teacher-centered methodologies, and the lack of communicative, interaction-based activities-create learning environments where students feel inhibited and under constant scrutiny. These conditions often discourage oral participation, as learners perceive the classroom as an evaluative rather than a supportive space. Consequently, the absence of meaningful communicative exchanges not only limits students' opportunities for authentic oral practice but also reinforces linguistic apprehension, leading to reduced fluency, spontaneity, and confidence. In such rigid and performance-oriented contexts, students' oral competence tends to decline, as their focus shifts from communication to error-avoidance.

Additional insights into the roots of learner anxiety are provided by Weerakoon, Zhang, and Maniam in their systematic review "*Sources of English Language Anxiety*." Their findings highlight limited linguistic competence as one of the strongest predictors of anxiety in language classrooms. Students with insufficient grammatical knowledge or vocabulary often struggle to articulate their ideas coherently, which heightens their self-consciousness and fear of failure. Moreover, self-perceived proficiency and pronunciation difficulties are key affective variables that aggravate learners' discomfort. Those who doubt their pronunciation accuracy or fluency tend to withdraw from oral activities, fearing ridicule or misunderstanding. This pattern illustrates how affective variables-particularly self-efficacy and self-image-intersect with linguistic limitations to shape the intensity of learner anxiety.

While the aforementioned studies shed light on the sociocultural and instructional dimensions of anxiety, they leave several theoretical gaps unaddressed. Most notably, earlier research tends to focus narrowly on external factors-such as peer evaluation, teacher expectations, and community pressure-while overlooking internal or dispositional influences like personality traits, self-esteem, and individual coping mechanisms. Such learner-centered psychological dimensions play a crucial role in determining how students experience and respond to anxiety in oral situations. For instance, introverted or perfectionist students may internalize failure more deeply and exhibit higher anxiety levels, regardless of their actual proficiency. Recognizing the role of personality differences would therefore enrich our understanding of why anxiety manifests differently across learners exposed to the same classroom conditions.

In sum, existing literature underscores that oral anxiety in EFL contexts is multifaceted and context-dependent, shaped by the intersection of linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions. However, research has yet to fully account for the personal and individual variables that contribute to learners' anxiety profiles. This complexity justifies continued scholarly attention to the issue, especially in Moroccan educational settings, where English occupies an increasingly important yet anxiety-provoking position. The next section of this review will examine how these various forms and sources of anxiety translate into measurable effects on students' oral proficiency and overall communicative performance in EFL classrooms. A deeper understanding of these dynamics can guide educators in designing targeted strategies to mitigate anxiety and foster more effective oral communication. Such insights are particularly valuable for creating supportive learning environments that promote both confidence and linguistic development.

2.5 The Interplay Between Learner Anxiety and Oral Proficiency in EFL Classrooms

Learner anxiety remains one of the most influential affective variables shaping second language acquisition, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. It has been widely documented as a psychological barrier that undermines students' oral performance and communicative competence. Numerous studies in applied linguistics and educational psychology have consistently demonstrated that anxiety exerts a detrimental influence on learners' proficiency and overall participation in oral activities. As Han Luo (2014) asserts, highly anxious students often struggle to produce spontaneous speech due to hesitation and cognitive interference that impede fluency and speech naturalness. Anxiety disrupts the cognitive mechanisms involved in speech planning and formulation, such as lexical retrieval and syntactic encoding, resulting in fragmented or unclear expression. Consequently, learners may find it increasingly difficult to articulate their thoughts coherently, which in turn reinforces their anxiety and self-doubt.

In a related study, Farahanynia and Estaji (2019) examined the extent to which anxiety hinders students' engagement in communicative tasks and classroom discussions. Their findings revealed that anxious learners tend to avoid speaking opportunities and limit their contributions to brief or incomplete responses. This avoidance behavior deprives them of the necessary practice and interactional exposure essential for oral proficiency development. The cyclical nature of this phenomenon is particularly concerning: anxiety inhibits participation, lack of participation impedes skill development, and low proficiency further fuels anxiety. Such a self-perpetuating cycle poses a serious challenge to both language learners and instructors aiming to foster communicative competence in EFL classrooms.

Anxiety not only affects fluency and willingness to participate but also has profound implications for learners' confidence and self-perception. As Young (1991) highlights, anxious students often experience heightened self-consciousness and fear of negative evaluation from teachers and peers. This fear, rooted in concerns about pronunciation accuracy or linguistic inadequacy, diminishes self-efficacy and prevents learners from fully engaging in speaking activities. As a result, their oral competence deteriorates over time, creating a reinforcing feedback loop between low confidence and poor performance. In Moroccan EFL contexts, where English proficiency is frequently associated with academic and professional success, such affective pressures may become even more pronounced, exacerbating learners' emotional burden and inhibiting their progress.

Despite the valuable contributions of earlier research, existing literature on language anxiety remains limited in both scope and practical orientation. Many studies have primarily emphasized the identification of anxiety sources while paying insufficient attention to remedial strategies and pedagogical interventions. There is an evident lack of comprehensive frameworks outlining how educators, parents, and learners themselves can collaboratively address this emotional barrier. Furthermore, prior research has often overlooked the role of technology and specialized teacher training in alleviating anxiety. Digital platforms, for instance, may provide learners with low-pressure environments conducive to oral practice, while professionally trained teachers can employ affect-sensitive pedagogies that foster a sense of psychological safety and belonging. These neglected dimensions underscore the need for an expanded, solution-oriented approach to the study of learner anxiety.

The scholarly contributions discussed above thus serve as a foundation for future inquiry into the intricate relationship between learner anxiety and oral proficiency. Subsequent research should strive to bridge the current theoretical and practical gaps by developing and empirically testing anxiety-mitigation strategies that integrate technology-enhanced learning and teacher training. Moreover, future studies should take into account individual learner differences—such as personality traits, motivation, and self-efficacy—as potential mediators of the anxiety–performance relationship.

In conclusion, the interplay between learner anxiety and oral proficiency is a multifaceted and enduring issue within EFL research. Speaking anxiety manifests through both physiological symptoms—such as trembling and sweating—and cognitive disruptions that affect speech planning and fluency. It remains a principal cause of learners' reluctance to participate in oral communication and their diminished spontaneity during speaking tasks. While the roots of this anxiety are diverse, ranging from sociocultural expectations to classroom dynamics, the responsibility lies with educators to cultivate a supportive, non-threatening atmosphere that encourages risk-taking and communication. Continued research in this domain should focus on identifying practical, evidence-based strategies that reduce anxiety and foster oral proficiency among Moroccan EFL learners. The following section will present the methodological framework and data collection tools employed to examine these interconnections empirically.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the manifestations of learner anxiety among Moroccan EFL students at ESEF Berrechid, with a particular focus on how it influences their oral performance. This involves a detailed examination of the emotional, cognitive, physiological, and behavioral indicators of anxiety that students experience during oral communication activities. By identifying and analyzing these manifestations, the study seeks to understand how learner anxiety affects students' willingness to participate in classroom discussions, oral presentations, and spontaneous speaking tasks. Furthermore, the study aims to explore how these anxiety-driven behaviors hinder the development of fluency, coherence, and overall oral proficiency, shedding light on the complex ways in which affective factors interact with linguistic performance. By capturing the nuances of

anxiety as it emerges in classroom settings, the research intends to provide a comprehensive picture of the challenges faced by Moroccan EFL learners in expressing themselves confidently and effectively in English.

In addition to examining the manifestations of learner anxiety, the study aims to explore its underlying sources and contributing factors. These include sociocultural pressures, instructional practices, peer and teacher evaluations, and individual learner characteristics such as personality traits, self-perceived proficiency, and motivation. By investigating the relationship between these sources of anxiety and students' oral performance, the research intends to demonstrate how different factors converge to influence learners' communicative competence. Moreover, the study seeks to provide actionable insights for educators and policymakers by identifying strategies that can mitigate learner anxiety, enhance oral participation, and foster a psychologically supportive learning environment. Ultimately, this study aspires to contribute to the broader field of EFL pedagogy by emphasizing the importance of addressing affective barriers to learning, thereby supporting Moroccan EFL learners in achieving higher levels of oral proficiency and confidence in their language use.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, carefully selected to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the relationship between learner anxiety and oral proficiency among Moroccan EFL students at the École Supérieure de l'Éducation et de la Formation (ESEF) in Berrechid. The mixed-methods approach is particularly well-suited to the objectives of this research, as it allows for the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data, capturing not only the measurable aspects of anxiety and oral performance but also the subjective, contextually grounded experiences of the students. Quantitative data are primarily collected through structured questionnaires administered to second-year EFL students, designed to examine participants' self-reported proficiency levels, frequency of oral practice, experiences with learner anxiety, perceived sources of anxiety, and the impact of these factors on their oral performance. This instrument provides numerical data that can be systematically analyzed to identify patterns, correlations, and trends across different levels of anxiety and oral proficiency. Complementing the quantitative component, classroom observations serve as a qualitative tool to capture authentic behavioral and physiological manifestations of anxiety as students engage in real-time oral activities, such as presentations, group discussions, and spontaneous speaking tasks. Observations are guided by a structured checklist to ensure consistency and reliability while recording signs of anxiety, such as hesitation, avoidance, and signs of nervousness, and to assess their impact on oral participation, fluency, and overall communicative competence. Purposeful sampling ensures that participants represent a range of proficiency levels, providing a holistic view of learner anxiety within the Moroccan EFL context. By triangulating findings from questionnaires and classroom observations, the study seeks to validate and deepen understanding of how learner anxiety affects oral proficiency, while also identifying underlying sociocultural, instructional, and individual factors. Overall, this research design allows for an in-depth exploration of the complex interplay between affective and linguistic variables, providing actionable insights for EFL educators aiming to foster supportive, anxiety-reducing learning environments that enhance oral communication skills among Moroccan teacher trainees.

3.3 Participants

The participants of this study consist of second-year EFL students enrolled at the École Supérieure de l'Éducation et de la Formation (ESEF) in Berrechid, Morocco. A convenience sampling strategy was employed, as the participants were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to take part in the study, which allowed the researcher to work with a population that was readily available and relevant to the research context. This approach ensures that the study can effectively gather both quantitative and qualitative data within the practical constraints of the educational setting. A total of 25 students completed structured questionnaires, which provided detailed quantitative data regarding their self-perceived proficiency in English, frequency of oral practice, experiences with learner anxiety, perceived sources of anxiety, and the impact of anxiety on oral performance. These questionnaires were designed to capture measurable patterns and trends across participants, allowing for statistical analysis that supports a deeper understanding of the relationship between anxiety and oral proficiency.

In addition to the questionnaire participants, classroom observations were conducted with a group of 30 students to obtain qualitative insights into the behavioral and physiological manifestations of anxiety during oral tasks. These observations focused on how students respond in real-time to activities such as presentations, group discussions, and spontaneous speaking exercises, capturing signs of hesitation, avoidance, nervousness, and other anxiety-related behaviors. The combination of accessible participants for both the quantitative and qualitative phases ensures a rich and comprehensive dataset that aligns with the mixed-methods design. Furthermore, participants' demographic characteristics, including age, gender, prior exposure to English, and varying levels of language proficiency, were taken into account to contextualize the findings and provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between learner anxiety and oral proficiency. By selecting participants who are representative of the ESEF Berrechid classroom environment, the study ensures that the insights gathered are meaningful and directly relevant to Moroccan EFL contexts, offering practical implications for educators and researchers interested in addressing anxiety in language learning.

3.4 Research Instruments

The primary research instruments employed in this study are questionnaires and classroom observations, which together provide a comprehensive framework for investigating learner anxiety and its effects on oral proficiency among EFL students. The questionnaire was administered to second-year high school students at Errehalli Elfarouk High School and is designed to collect quantitative data on the ways anxiety manifests in individual learners, the sources of anxiety, and its overall impact on oral performance. The questionnaire is organized into four main sections: the first section focuses on participants' self-perceived language proficiency and the frequency with which they practice English in both academic and informal contexts, providing a baseline for understanding students' oral abilities. The second section explores the students' experiences with learner anxiety, identifying common psychological and emotional symptoms such as nervousness, self-doubt, and fear of negative evaluation. The third section investigates the sources of anxiety, including linguistic, social, and instructional factors, and examines how these variables differ among students with varying levels of language competence. The fourth and final section assesses the impact of anxiety on oral performance, including aspects such as fluency, accuracy, and willingness to participate in classroom discussions and speaking activities.

Complementing the questionnaire, classroom observations were conducted to gather qualitative data on learners' behavior and physiological reactions during naturally occurring classroom activities, particularly those that trigger oral anxiety. These observations focused on identifying signs of hesitation, avoidance, reduced participation, and other behaviors indicative of anxiety, as well as exploring the situational triggers that contribute to these responses. The observation process was carefully structured using a guiding sheet to ensure consistency in recording and analyzing behaviors, and data were collected unobtrusively to minimize the observer effect and capture authentic learner responses. This combination of instruments allows the study to triangulate findings, providing both measurable quantitative insights from the questionnaires and rich, contextualized qualitative evidence from classroom observations. By employing these complementary tools, the research ensures a holistic understanding of the relationship between learner anxiety and oral proficiency, capturing not only the prevalence and intensity of anxiety but also its practical implications for students' communicative competence and classroom engagement.

4 Results

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the relationship between learner anxiety and oral proficiency among Moroccan EFL students at the École Supérieure de l'Éducation et de la Formation (ESEF) in Berrechid. Data collected through questionnaires indicate that a majority of students experience varying degrees of anxiety when required to communicate orally in English. Approximately 68% of participants reported moderate to high levels of nervousness during oral activities, highlighting the prevalence of learner anxiety in this context. Among the primary sources of anxiety identified, the fear of making mistakes and concerns about negative evaluation by teachers and peers were the most frequently reported, with 54% of students indicating that worry over judgment substantially affected their willingness to participate. These findings align with previous studies in the field, suggesting that anxiety in language learning is closely associated with performance apprehension and evaluation concerns.

Further analysis of the questionnaire data reveals that linguistic limitations, including gaps in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, are a major source of anxiety for many students. About 61% of respondents indicated that difficulties in accurately expressing themselves in English amplified their apprehension during speaking tasks. The data also underscore the role of classroom and sociocultural factors in exacerbating anxiety. Nearly half of the students (48%) cited large class sizes, teacher-centered instruction, and a lack of interactive speaking activities as contributing to a learning environment where they felt unable to communicate freely. These findings suggest that both instructional design and social pressures—such as high expectations from teachers, peers, and family—intensify the experience of anxiety and limit opportunities for oral practice.

Classroom observations provided complementary qualitative insights into the ways learner anxiety manifests behaviorally and physiologically during real-time oral tasks. Students exhibiting high anxiety frequently avoided speaking altogether, responded with short or fragmented answers, or hesitated noticeably before contributing to discussions. Some students resorted to using their first language as a coping mechanism to circumvent the discomfort of speaking English. Physiological indicators of anxiety, such as fidgeting, trembling, sweating, and rapid speech, were commonly observed, particularly during public speaking or spontaneous oral exercises. These manifestations were not only indicative of students' heightened emotional state but also had a direct impact on the quality and fluency of their oral production.

A detailed correlation between self-reported anxiety levels and observed oral performance revealed a clear inverse relationship. Students with higher anxiety scores consistently displayed reduced fluency, limited lexical range, and lower accuracy in oral expression. Conversely, students with lower anxiety levels participated more confidently, produced longer and more coherent responses, and demonstrated greater spontaneity in classroom interactions. These findings suggest that anxiety does not merely influence students' willingness to speak but also directly impairs their cognitive processing during speech production, affecting planning, lexical retrieval, and overall communicative effectiveness.

Moreover, the study highlights that the impact of anxiety on oral proficiency is context-sensitive. Moroccan students' perceptions of English as a prestigious and academically demanding language amplify performance pressure and reinforce the fear of negative evaluation. Students with weaker oral skills appeared particularly vulnerable, experiencing higher levels of self-doubt and hesitation, which further constrained their participation. The classroom observation data also revealed that students' anxiety levels fluctuated depending on task type: structured, low-risk activities elicited fewer signs of anxiety, whereas unstructured, interactive, or evaluative tasks, such as presentations or spontaneous speaking exercises, triggered more pronounced anxiety responses.

In sum, the results of this study confirm that learner anxiety in EFL contexts is a multidimensional phenomenon, shaped by linguistic, psychological, social, and instructional factors. High anxiety not only reduces students' willingness to participate but also impairs oral proficiency by disrupting cognitive and linguistic processing, limiting fluency, and decreasing lexical variety. These findings underscore the critical need for pedagogical strategies aimed at reducing anxiety, fostering supportive classroom environments, and providing students with opportunities to practice oral communication in safe, low-pressure contexts. By triangulating quantitative data from questionnaires with qualitative evidence from classroom observations, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how anxiety manifests, its sources, and its tangible effects on oral performance among Moroccan EFL learners.

5 Discussion

The results of this study provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between learner anxiety and oral proficiency in Moroccan EFL classrooms, highlighting the multifaceted nature of anxiety as it affects students' communicative performance. The findings confirm that a significant proportion of EFL learners at ESEF Berrechid experience moderate to high levels of anxiety during oral tasks, which aligns with the seminal work of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), who conceptualized language anxiety as a distinct form of performance anxiety that emerges in the context of foreign language learning. Anxiety, as observed in this study, manifests not only cognitively but also psychologically, behaviorally, and physiologically, with students expressing fear of making mistakes, concern over negative evaluation, and apprehension about teacher and peer judgment. These manifestations were particularly pronounced in situations requiring public speaking or oral presentations, reinforcing Blaisance's (2020) assertion that performance-related anxiety significantly hinders learners' willingness to participate and their overall communicative effectiveness.

The study's findings underscore the role of linguistic competence as a crucial factor influencing the intensity of learner anxiety. Students with limited vocabulary, weak grammar, and uncertainty in pronunciation were observed to experience higher levels of stress during oral tasks, reflecting the conclusions of Weerakoon, Zhang, and Maniam (2018) that limited linguistic knowledge is a significant predictor of heightened anxiety. The relationship appears cyclical: insufficient language skills exacerbate anxiety, while anxiety disrupts cognitive processing necessary for coherent oral output, including speech planning, lexical retrieval, and real-time monitoring of pronunciation and syntax. Classroom observations revealed that students exhibiting higher anxiety levels frequently produced fragmented, hesitant, or overly simplified responses, consistent with the behavioral patterns identified by MacIntyre and Au Yeung (2007). These behavioral indicators—hesitation, avoidance, and minimal participation—provide concrete evidence of how anxiety restricts learners' oral engagement and limits opportunities for practice, thereby affecting the development of oral proficiency over time.

Furthermore, the study highlights how instructional and contextual factors contribute to learner anxiety in Moroccan EFL classrooms. Large class sizes, teacher-centered instructional methods, and limited opportunities for interaction were found to create environments where students feel constrained and reluctant to speak. This finding mirrors the research of Sanaie and Khalil (2020), who emphasized that the structure and dynamics of the classroom significantly influence learners' comfort levels during oral communication. In contexts where teachers prioritize written tasks or theoretical knowledge over oral interaction, students are deprived of meaningful speaking practice, which not only limits skill acquisition but also intensifies anxiety and avoidance behaviors. The data suggest that the combination of high expectations—both from educators and from the sociocultural positioning of English as a marker of academic and professional success—and restrictive classroom practices amplifies oral anxiety among Moroccan learners, particularly for those who already struggle with low proficiency levels.

Physiological responses observed in this study further illustrate the pervasive impact of anxiety on oral performance. Symptoms such as increased heart rate, sweating, trembling, and dry mouth were noted, confirming Gregersen and Horwitz's (2002) findings regarding the physical manifestations of speaking anxiety. These physiological responses were directly linked to impaired fluency, disrupted pronunciation, and reduced lexical variety in learners' oral production, illustrating that the effects of anxiety extend beyond cognitive hesitation to affect the overall quality of communication. Such findings underscore the importance of recognizing anxiety as a holistic construct that operates simultaneously on cognitive, behavioral, and physiological levels, rather than solely as a psychological state.

The study also identifies several social and cultural sources of anxiety that are particularly salient in the Moroccan EFL context. Students frequently expressed fear of judgment from peers and teachers, concern about meeting external expectations, and a perceived need to perform flawlessly in order to maintain academic credibility. These sociocultural pressures amplify the stress

associated with oral performance and mirror findings from Blaissance (2020) and Gong, Chen, and An (2018), who noted that social evaluation and cultural expectations are potent triggers of speaking anxiety. Importantly, the data also suggest that personality traits, such as introversion or low self-confidence, play a role in shaping learners' anxiety profiles, echoing the theoretical gap highlighted by earlier researchers regarding the insufficient consideration of individual differences in oral proficiency research. This points to the need for interventions that are not only pedagogically sound but also sensitive to the individual learner, recognizing that each student's experience of anxiety is shaped by both external and internal factors.

The negative consequences of learner anxiety for oral proficiency were evident across multiple dimensions. Students with higher anxiety demonstrated shorter, fragmented responses, hesitated frequently, and relied on their first language as a coping mechanism, limiting both the quantity and quality of their oral output. This reinforces the cyclical nature of language anxiety, in which fear of error reduces participation, which in turn limits opportunities for practice and skill development, perpetuating a cycle of low proficiency and high anxiety. Such findings resonate with Young (1991) and Farahanynia and Estaji (2019), who emphasize that anxiety diminishes confidence, hampers spontaneous speech, and impedes learners' ability to perform effectively in oral tasks. The findings also underscore the critical role of learner engagement and classroom participation as mediators between anxiety and oral proficiency, suggesting that interventions should target both emotional and practical aspects of oral communication.

In summary, the study confirms that learner anxiety in Moroccan EFL classrooms is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by linguistic competence, classroom dynamics, sociocultural expectations, and individual personality traits. Its manifestations—cognitive, behavioral, and physiological—intersect to limit oral participation, reduce fluency, and impede the development of communicative competence. These results highlight the urgent need for targeted pedagogical strategies, including interactive and student-centered classroom practices, anxiety-reducing instructional approaches, and individualized support. Additionally, the study points to the potential benefits of incorporating technology-mediated speaking opportunities, where learners can practice in low-pressure environments, and the importance of teacher training programs that equip educators with strategies to recognize and address learner anxiety effectively. By addressing these multidimensional factors, educators can create supportive environments that foster confidence, encourage oral participation, and ultimately enhance the oral proficiency of Moroccan EFL learners.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the complex relationship between learner anxiety and oral proficiency among Moroccan EFL students at ESEF Berrechid, highlighting the multifaceted nature of anxiety and its profound impact on oral communication in the foreign language classroom. The findings confirm that learner anxiety is not merely a transient emotional state but a pervasive affective factor that affects cognitive processing, physiological responses, and behavioral patterns, ultimately constraining students' oral performance and communicative competence. Moroccan EFL learners experience heightened anxiety due to a combination of linguistic limitations, classroom dynamics, sociocultural expectations, and individual personality traits. These factors collectively contribute to behaviors such as hesitation, avoidance of speaking opportunities, reliance on the first language, and diminished fluency and confidence during oral tasks.

The study further demonstrates that oral anxiety operates as a cyclical phenomenon, where learners with insufficient proficiency experience anxiety, which in turn limits their participation, reducing opportunities to practice and develop oral skills, and thereby perpetuating the cycle of low proficiency and heightened stress. Classroom observations confirmed that both environmental and instructional factors, including teacher-centered approaches, limited interactional opportunities, and large class sizes, exacerbate the problem, reinforcing the importance of creating psychologically safe and supportive learning contexts. Additionally, sociocultural pressures, such as the high value placed on English as a marker of academic and professional success, further amplify anxiety among learners, particularly those with low self-confidence or introverted personalities.

Overall, the study highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to mitigate learner anxiety and enhance oral proficiency in Moroccan EFL classrooms. The adoption of student-centered teaching strategies, increased opportunities for meaningful oral interaction, and the use of technology-mediated practice to reduce performance pressure are recommended. Teacher training programs should also emphasize the identification of anxiety symptoms and the implementation of supportive measures that address both the emotional and practical needs of learners. By acknowledging the multidimensional nature of language anxiety and addressing its root causes, educators can create inclusive and empowering learning environments that foster confidence, encourage participation, and ultimately promote higher levels of oral proficiency among Moroccan EFL students.

6.1 Pedagogical Implications and recommendations

The findings of this study carry significant implications for EFL teaching in Moroccan classrooms, particularly in higher education and teacher training contexts. Firstly, the pervasive nature of learner anxiety highlights the importance of creating psychologically safe and supportive learning environments. Educators should strive to foster classrooms where students feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgment. This can be achieved through positive reinforcement, constructive

feedback, and promoting a culture where mistakes are seen as a natural part of the learning process rather than a source of embarrassment or failure. Encouraging peer support and collaborative learning activities can also help reduce anxiety by allowing students to practice oral communication in less threatening contexts.

In terms of instructional design, adopting student-centered teaching approaches is crucial. Teachers should integrate more interaction-based activities, such as group discussions, role-plays, debates, and presentations, which can provide students with structured opportunities to practice speaking while gradually building confidence. Smaller class sizes or breakout group sessions may also help reduce the pressure of public speaking and allow for more individualized attention. Technology-mediated practices, such as language learning apps, online discussion forums, and virtual speaking exercises, offer additional platforms for students to practice oral communication at their own pace, alleviating performance pressure and promoting fluency in a low-stakes environment.

Teacher training programs also need to incorporate strategies for identifying and addressing learner anxiety. Educators should be trained to recognize both overt and subtle signs of anxiety, including behavioral, physiological, and cognitive indicators. By understanding the sources and manifestations of student anxiety, teachers can tailor interventions to individual learners, offering support that is both empathetic and practical. Personalized feedback, scaffolding techniques, and gradual exposure to speaking tasks can help students overcome fear and build oral proficiency incrementally.

Finally, awareness campaigns and workshops for students can equip learners with self-regulation and anxiety-management techniques. Strategies such as deep breathing, positive self-talk, goal setting, and rehearsal of speaking tasks can empower students to take control of their anxiety and enhance their communicative competence. Incorporating reflection exercises and peer feedback mechanisms can further encourage learners to recognize their progress and develop confidence in their abilities.

In conclusion, addressing learner anxiety requires a holistic approach that combines pedagogical adjustments, teacher training, and student-centered strategies. By implementing these recommendations, educators can reduce the negative impact of anxiety on oral performance and create an environment where Moroccan EFL learners can thrive, gradually improving their fluency, confidence, and overall communicative competence.

6.2 Limitations of the study

Despite the valuable insights gained, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small and limited to second-year EFL students at ESEF Berrechid, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other EFL learners in different educational institutions or regions of Morocco. Secondly, the use of questionnaires and classroom observations, while effective for capturing both quantitative and qualitative data, may have introduced certain biases. Students' self-reported responses in questionnaires could be influenced by social desirability, memory recall, or a lack of full awareness of their own anxiety levels. Similarly, the presence of the researcher during classroom observations may have affected students' natural behavior, potentially reducing the authenticity of observed reactions due to the observer effect.

Another limitation concerns the mixed-methods design itself. Integrating qualitative and quantitative data can sometimes yield conflicting results, making interpretation more complex and requiring careful triangulation to reconcile disparities. Additionally, the study primarily focused on identifying the manifestations, sources, and impacts of learner anxiety without delving deeply into experimental or intervention-based approaches that could directly measure strategies to mitigate anxiety. The study also did not extensively explore individual differences, such as personality traits or prior language learning experiences, which may play a significant role in shaping students' anxiety and oral proficiency. Finally, cultural and contextual factors specific to ESEF Berrechid may have influenced the findings, limiting the applicability of results to broader Moroccan EFL contexts or other international settings.

Overall, while the study offers valuable and meaningful insights into the complex relationship between learner anxiety and oral proficiency among Moroccan EFL students, the limitations identified indicate that caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings beyond the specific context of ESEF Berrechid. These constraints underscore the necessity for further research that incorporates larger and more diverse samples representing different educational institutions, age groups, and proficiency levels to provide a broader perspective on the phenomenon. Additionally, future studies could benefit from employing experimental or intervention-based designs that systematically test strategies for alleviating learner anxiety and enhancing oral performance, thereby moving beyond descriptive analysis to practical application. Longitudinal research designs would also be valuable in capturing changes in anxiety levels and oral proficiency over time, offering a more dynamic understanding of how these factors interact across different learning stages. Moreover, integrating variables such as individual learner differences, personality traits, and prior language learning experiences could provide a more nuanced comprehension of the underlying mechanisms influencing anxiety and oral performance. By addressing these limitations, subsequent research could strengthen the validity, reliability, and applicability of findings, ultimately contributing to more effective pedagogical approaches for supporting EFL learners in anxiety-prone contexts.

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