

# The Relationship between Anxiety and Accuracy of EFL Learners' Task-based Speech

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**Abstract**—The present descriptive research study was conducted to take into consideration the possible relationship between Kurdish English as a Foreign Language learners' accuracy of task-based speech and their foreign language classroom anxiety at Cihan University-Erbil. A total of 80 female undergraduate students participated in this study. Regarding the data collection, first, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale questionnaire was filled out by the students, the IELTS test is acting as a proficiency test to test the current level of the participants before conducting the study. It is noted that their accuracy level was investigated according to the error-free t-units they produced, while answering the IELTS part one questions. The results of this study demonstrated that the Kurdish students suffer from high anxiety levels, and there was a statistically significant negative relationship between anxiety and the accuracy of the learners' speech. That is, the more anxious the students are, the more inaccurate they will be. The results of this study have implications for policymakers, syllabus designers, teachers, and students, raising their awareness about the relationships among the variables investigated in this study regarding task-based speech.

**Keywords**—Accuracy, Anxiety, English as a foreign language learners, Task-based speech.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is regarded as a crucial skill that enables people to convey their meanings in everyday activities. It aids people to indicate their images, opinions, senses, and emotions to other people. It is a communicative process that learners make use of to generate language in an oral manner (Dorgham, 2011; Shalaby and Badr, 2024). El-Baseel (2008) remarks that speaking is a fundamental proficiency beneficial for an individual's achievement in life since it covers a vast part of discourse, from taking part in normal conversation to formal public speaking. Since speaking assumes an imperative part in the communication process, it can be considered the most vital skill to acquire. Promoting speaking skills aids in making a strong association among individuals and plays a dynamic part in their daily lives. It is also "a device of learning" (Dorgham, 2011, p. 1).

Krashen (1981, p. 100) noted that "an important condition for language acquisition to occur is that the acquirer understands input language that contains structure a bit beyond his or her current level of competence (i+1)." Brown (2007, p. 295) paraphrased Krashen's i+1, for him, "the language that learners are exposed to be just far enough beyond their current competence that they can understand

most of it but still be challenged to make progress." Krashen (1984, p. 61), in his input hypothesis, stressed that "comprehensible input is the only true cause of second language acquisition." Brown (2007) also remarked about intake as a subdivision of input that, as a matter of fact, gets allotted to our long-term memory storage.

Taking into account the theories underlying speaking skills, Swain (1985) devalued input as a crucial but not sufficient circumstance for language acquisition. Her observation of the immersion program emerged that production was essential for acquisition. Thus, Swain (1985) suggested the concept of pushed output (PO), that is, apprentices are "pushed" or "stretched" in the process of producing language as a crucial part of understanding. Ellis (2003, p. 349) describes PO as an "output that reflects what learners are capable of producing when they are pushed to use target language accurately and concisely." Swain (1985) emphasizes that by the time the students are imposed to engage in production, they have the opportunity of delivering the messages which are exact, coherent, and sufficient.

The term speaking accuracy means "the extent to which the language produced conforms to target language norms" (Yuan and Ellis, 2003, p. 2); this can be regarded as true

utilization of terminology, pronunciation, and an accurate structure. Speaking is impressed by some affective factors such as anxiety. This factor has some conspicuous effects on the oral accomplishment of students learning English in different contexts. Language anxiety is initiated from an apprehension of students' inability to accomplish their objectives. As illustrated by Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 127), there exists "a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure."

Foreign language speaking anxiety fortifies diverse unfavorable learning circumstances such as hesitation to take an interest in the speaking tasks (Hanifa, 2018; Melouah, 2013). Some studies have explored characteristics of oral proficiency of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in relevance to task planning (Davaji and Ghoorchaei, 2023; Mardani and Shadbakht, 2025; Rouhi and Saeed Akhtar, 2008; Birjandi and Seifoori, 2009), and in metacognitive training (Seifoori and Vahidi, 2012; Zhang et al., 2021). Yet, to the best of the investigator's knowledge, no former research has addressed the link between anxiety and the accuracy of Iraqi EFL learners' task-based oral speech.

This study is crucial since it investigates the relationship between an affective criterion, that is, anxiety, and the accuracy of task-based speech. The outcomes revealed from this study will show the participants' anxiety levels and will be illuminating for school administration. In addition, the results considering the relationship between anxiety and the participants' accuracy of task-based speech will further widen our understanding of the criteria for offering oral performance. Then, educators and teachers will be invited to propose methodological procedures that may minimize the impacts of these criteria.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Oral Proficiency

Oral skill contains the capability of communicating verbally in a functional and accurate manner in the target language. A high proportion of oral skill infers possessing the capability of applying the linguistic knowledge to new contexts (topics) and positions (Mahdi, 2024; Omaggio, 1986). The ultimate goal of language learning is to be able to speak and have some kinds of interactions (Wang et al., 2024; Widdowson, 1978). Speaking is a dynamic or, more closely, a productive expertise (Widdowson, 1978).

### B. Accuracy

The term accuracy is one of the salient elements in second language learning in general, and the learners' proficiency level in reading and speaking is regarded as a specific term. Housen and Kuiken (2009) and Li and Sui (2025) described accuracy as an error-free articulation among EFL skills. In detail, accuracy commonly refers to accomplishing a speech as accurately as possible without any errors or even mistakes in order to meet the quantitative accuracy (Pallotti, 2009; Wang et al., 2024). Furthermore, in the second phase, accuracy points to speech standards, which means that the

sentences such as "I love sun" or "I got home" would be considered true speeches in the American accent but ignored in Britain. Finally, the standard and acceptable accent would be chosen to reach accuracy (Norris and Ortega, 2003; Sletova, 2023).

### C. Affective Factors in Classroom Language Learning

The affective filter hypothesis is the fifth notion of Krashen's outstanding Monitor Model, in which Krashen (1982) stresses some impressive variables impacting the success and failure of second language learners. Based on Krashen, in a number of unfavorable circumstances, individuals expand negative outlook, which leads to a high affective filter (mental block) that stops comprehensive input from being internalized.

Based on Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter hypothesis, affective variables contain motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety, which can possess a dynamic or hindrance part in second language acquisition. The following is a brief definition of the criteria:

### D. Anxiety

Considering the description of anxiety, Scovel (1978, p. 134) defines anxiety as "a complex affective concept associated with feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, or worry." Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128) interpret anxiety as "distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feeling and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" and Chastain (1988) considers anxiety as equal to the feelings of self-doubt, uncertainty, and insecurity.

### E. Facilitating and Debilitating Anxiety

Facilitating and debilitating anxiety are regarded as two dichotomies in the studies related to anxiety. Having some amount of anxiety can make people try more and do the provided tasks (Brown, 1994), and it can be regarded as a kind of motivation (Scovel, 1991). It is indicated by Ehrman (1996, p. 148) that "When I have a writing task, I generate a little anxiety to get me out of my natural tendency to procrastinate. Just enough anxiety, but no more than needed," and this amount of anxiety generates a sense of competition among the learners which is called positive competitiveness or facilitating anxiety (Bailey, 1983, cited in Zhanibek, 2001). On the other hand, whenever there is a comparison, which hinders the learning process or generates a kind of competition that is negative, it is called a debilitating anxiety (Papi and Khajavy, 2023; Zhanibek, 2001).

### F. Speaking and Anxiety

In general English skills, speaking is considered a productive one (Carter and Nunan, 2002; Zhang and Wilson, 2023). Within a psycholinguistic viewpoint, the data that is going to be prepared for speaking goes through a "data processing pattern" (Levelt, 1989), which is divided into four elements: "conceptualization, formulation, articulation, and self-monitoring" (Levelt, 1989). Conceptualization refers to the level before speaking, and within this phase, the speaker decides

what to utter. This very phase links schematic knowledge to the new subject matter and its circumstances. Appropriate structures of language are identified and are connected to the proper grammatical point in the formulation step. In the third step, which is articulation, the speaker pronounces sentences using articulatory organs. Finally, regarding the self-monitoring phase, the speaker analyzes the articulated speech automatically and corrects the committed mistakes immediately (Carter and Nunan, 2002; Zhang and Wilson, 2023). Shumin (1997) asserted that communicative competence is a fundamental issue for an influential foreign language speaking skill; that is, communicative competence can be regarded as the feasibility to “convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts” (Brown, 1994, p. 227). By communicative competence, it is possible to pinpoint the problematic parts of language proficiency in speaking (Shumin, 1997; Wei et al, 2023), one of which can be related to “complexity of communicative competence.”

### III. EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

Owing to the significance of speaking skills, some studies tested this oral skill in association with anxiety. Hence, to delineate the related literature, this section will review the empirical background to the study.

Dung and Hung (2020) examined speaking anxiety and its impact on proficiency in Vietnamese university EFL students. Quantitative analysis of 128 learners showed that higher anxiety correlated with lower speaking achievement. Major causes were fear of mistakes, negative evaluation, and lack of confidence. The findings reinforce the negative link between anxiety and proficiency but acknowledge that optimal facilitating anxiety may still exist as a constructive force.

Mora et al. (2023) examined the interaction between speaking anxiety and task complexity in second language learners' oral performance. The quantitative study involved 48 intermediate-level Spanish EFL university students, who completed two narrative tasks of differing complexity while their speech was recorded and analyzed for fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Results showed that higher task complexity increased cognitive load and reduced fluency, especially among learners with high speaking anxiety, whereas low-anxiety learners maintained better performance under complex conditions.

More recently, Graciano (2025) conducted action research among 58 Angolan 12<sup>th</sup>-grade EFL students. A mixed-methods approach revealed significant improvements in the experimental group's oral fluency and confidence (Who were taught through Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT)). TBLT tasks, including role plays and group discussions, led to increases in motivation and reductions in anxiety.

In the same vein, a systematic literature review by Tania et al. (2025) synthesized empirical research on ESL/EFL speaking anxiety between 2015 and 2025. Key trends identified fear of negative evaluation, linguistic deficiencies, and classroom dynamics as main anxiety triggers, negatively impacting oral engagement and performance.

Going beyond expectations, Luo and Xiong (2025) investigated the role of facilitating and debilitating anxiety among 476 Chinese EFL university students. Structural equation modeling showed that both types of anxiety positively affected motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) and EFL competence, challenging the traditional view that anxiety is purely detrimental. While facilitating anxiety provided a positive stimulus for increased effort and focus, debilitating anxiety was also found to boost motivation, contrary to expectations. However, neither form of anxiety had a direct, significant effect on measured academic performance.

### IV. METHODOLOGY

In line with the research purpose, which was the investigation of Kurdish EFL learners' anxiety and their task-based speech, the current study adopted the correlational research design. Two variables will be proposed in the current study: English Language speaking anxiety and task-based oral accuracy of the participants.

In accordance with the main purposes of the current study, the data were collected from students at Cihan University-Erbil, Erbil, Iraq. Taking the main argument of the research into account, the target population was 100 third and fourth-stage Kurdish female EFL students studying at this university. Their ages ranged from 19 to 28. The students in this university are taught in English. Eighty students whose GPA fell between +1 standard deviation (SD) and -1 SD were chosen as the research sample, and the scores above and below the mentioned standard deviation were excluded.

The English Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (Berko et al., 2004) was employed to measure the participants' anxiety. This scale incorporates six items following a Likert scale with five alternatives (5 = I strongly agree, 4 = I agree, 3 = I don't know, 2 = I disagree, and 1 = I strongly disagree). The student's score in the speaking anxiety scale ranges from 6 to 30 points. Regarding reliability, the anxiety questionnaire has been reported as having acceptable rates of 0.79, and the experts judged the validity status.

In the case of measuring grammatical accuracy, researchers can assess the ratio of error-free terminal units (t-units), or the errors per t-unit ratio can be regarded as the inaccuracy (Larsen-Freeman, 2006). Skehan and Foster (1999) defined terminal units (t-units) as the utterances or sentences that provide pragmatic or referential. These utterances may be made up of one or many finite or infinite dependent or independent clauses. For the purpose of the present study, the researcher quantified the percentage of error-free t-units to measure the accuracy of task-based speech (Ellis and Yuan, 2004; Skehan and Foster, 1999; Tavakoli and Skehan, 2005; Yuan and Ellis, 2003), in which higher accuracy measures illustrate more accuracy in the performance.

#### A. Procedure

The process of administering the instruments of the present study went through successive stages as follows:

- (1) The first stage: In this stage, the research sample was chosen based on the students' grade point average (GPA) scores. In order to ensure homogeneity, the students with very low and very high GPA scores were not included in the present study, and just those students whose mean scores or GPA were one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected as final subjects in the current study.
- (2) The second stage: At this stage, we administered the data collection instruments. The implementation procedures occurred in the first term (semester) of the academic year.

The participants were given IELTS speaking Part 1 questions. They were supposed to answer the personal questions commonly asked in IELTS. The researcher provided adequate instructions for the participants to make sure they understood the instructions. By the time the students started speaking, the researcher audio-recorded them, and their audio was transcribed; further, the transcribed data was analyzed based on accuracy criteria. Grammatical accuracy then was measured as the ratio of error-free terminal units (t-units) and in terms of inaccuracy as the ratio of errors per t-unit (Larsen-Freeman, 2006). After tabulating the raw data, they were analyzed based on the criteria proposed by Skehan and Foster (1999). As stated before, two experienced lecturers from the same university scored the transcribed data based on the scale of accuracy to report the inter-rater reliability. The inter-rater reliability was reported to be 0.87.

To investigate whether there was a significant relationship between our variables in the null hypothesis, we ran the required assumptions of continuity, whether the two variables measured at the interval or ratio level (i.e., they are continuous), linearity, the linear relationship between the two variables with no significant outliers, and normality, if the data were approximately normally distributed. Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests were used to check the normality of the distributions. Then, we conducted the descriptive statistics of the research data to answer the first research question. To answer the second research question, which tried to investigate the existence of any significant relationship between EFL learners' accuracy of task-based speech and their anxiety, the scores of two variables (accuracy of task-based speech and anxiety) were correlated with each other.

## V. RESULTS

This section presents the results of the data analyses and the discussion of the findings. First, the descriptive statistics

of the research data will be presented altogether, followed by the normality test for each data set. Table I shows the descriptive statistics for anxiety and the accuracy of task-based speech.

According to Table I, the mean, variance, and standard deviation of anxiety and accuracy were (17.7, 29.175, and 5.40) and (0.47, 0.039, and 0.198), respectively. Table II shows the tests of normality for these variables.

According to Table II, since the significance levels were above 0.05, it could be concluded that the anxiety and accuracy scores were normally distributed. The following scatterplot was created to visually check for linearity. The scatterplot is shown in the following figure.

According to Fig. 1, there was a linear relationship between the variables, and there were no significant outliers. Further, the research questions will be answered based on these descriptive statistics and tests of normality.

### A. The Participants' Level of Anxiety

The first research question addressed the participants' level of anxiety. We computed the groups' anxiety scores, and Table I showed the descriptive statistics for the variable.

According to Berko et al. (2004), the scores in the anxiety scale can range from a low of 6 to a high of 30. If one's score is 18 or above, he/she displays public speaking apprehension. In our study, the scores ranged from a low of 8 to a high of 28, and the mean score of the anxiety scale was 17.7. It was shown that 49 out of 80 participants scored higher than 18, which means that 61.25% of the participants displayed speaking anxiety.

### B. Relationship between Accuracy and Anxiety

To investigate whether there was a significant relationship between EFL learners' accuracy of task-based speech and their anxiety, we tried to calculate the coefficient of correlation between these two variables. Since the data met the required assumptions of the coefficient of correlation, namely linearity and normality, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation could be run between accuracy and anxiety. Table III shows the results of the correlation between accuracy and anxiety.

According to Table III, the two-tailed significance level for both accuracy and anxiety was 0.00, which means the correlation between the two variables was significant at the level of 0.00. Pearson correlation coefficient indicated that there was a negative correlation between accuracy and anxiety ( $r_s = -0.983$ ,  $n = 80$ ,  $P < 0.000$ ). Therefore, a strong negative relationship between accuracy and anxiety was found.

TABLE I  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE PARTICIPANTS' ANXIETY AND ACCURACY SCORES

Variables	<i>n</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. deviation	Variance
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. error	Statistic	Statistic
Anxiety	80	8.00	28.00	17.7000	0.60389	5.40136	29.175
Accuracy	80	0.10	0.80	0.4762	0.02216	0.19825	0.039
Valid <i>n</i> (listwise)	80						

TABLE II  
TESTS OF NORMALITY FOR ANXIETY AND ACCURACY SCORES

Variables	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Anxiety	0.102	80	0.337	0.966	80	0.335
Accuracy	0.112	80	0.514	0.952	80	0.504

TABLE III  
CORRELATION BETWEEN ACCURACY AND ANXIETY SCORES

Variables/Statistics	Accuracy	Anxiety
Accuracy		
Pearson correlation	1	-0.983**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
Sum of squares and cross-products	3.105	-83.170
Covariance	0.039	-1.053
<i>n</i>	80	80
Anxiety		
Pearson correlation	-0.983**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
Sum of squares and cross-products	-83.170	2304.800
Covariance	-1.053	29.175
<i>n</i>	80	80

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

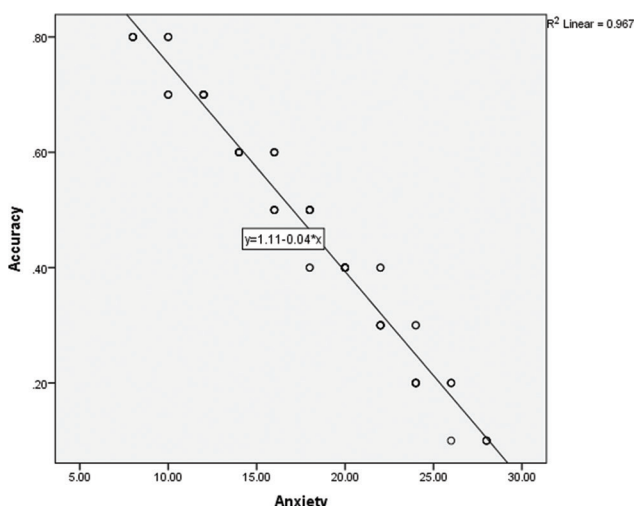


Fig. 1. Linear negative correlation between accuracy and anxiety.

## VI. DISCUSSION

In this study, there are two research questions that investigate students' anxiety levels and any possible relationships between this variable and the accuracy of the participants' task-based speech. The findings of the study indicate that Kurdish EFL learners were highly anxious and that this variable was negatively correlated with the accuracy of the students' speaking performance; The participants might have felt anxious owing to the differences in their views toward language learning that could have been based on their past experiences or to the context of learning and highly restricted exposure students have to the target language in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRG). The previously conducted research manifested that people may feel less anxious when contacting others and their cultures of the target language (Alidoost et al, 2013; Mora et al., 2023). There is a difficulty

for Kurdish learners to have direct access to native speakers or programs that have been designed for natives. They also find few opportunities to test their interlanguage systems and to consolidate their newly learned materials through communication, and to remove inaccuracies in their output. What is worse, as we observed the schools during the practical education courses for several years, is that in KRG although the books claim to be based on communicative language teaching, the teaching and learning procedures have not been implemented accordingly to enhance communication; instead, teachers have the responsibility to make use of grammar points within reading tasks to help intellectual growth of the students.

These results are also in line with the results obtained by many studies (e.g., Aida, 1994; Anaydubalu, 2010; Chiang, 2006; Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2019; Gawi, 2020; Horwitz et al., 1986; Kao and Craigie, 2010; Ma, 2022; Rofida, 2021; Sam et al, 2024) who believed in the correlation between foreign language classroom anxiety and accuracy of speaking performance.

At the same time, the results are not supported by the results obtained by Skehan and Foster (1999), Mehrang and Rahimpour (2010), Abdi et al. (2012), and Luo and Xiong (2025). They found no specific and significant correlations between the variables of the present study.

The relationship between anxiety and the accuracy of the participants' task-based speech was found to be strongly negative. This negative correlation implies that if students' anxiety levels increase, their accuracy level is likely to decrease. High levels of anxiety reduce learners' levels of accuracy (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele and Furnham, 2000; Dornyei, 2005; Gawi, 2020; Rofida, 2021; Sam et al, 2024).

## VII. CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, this study aimed to determine the possible correlation between accuracy and anxiety levels of Kurdish EFL learners' speaking skills. To this end, 80 participants were selected. The findings from the present correlational study revealed that Kurdish EFL learners were at high levels of anxiety, and anxiety was found to be negatively correlated with the accuracy of task-based speech.

Based on the research findings, we concluded that on average, the participants in this study were anxious in their English classes, and this may be generalized to learners in similar age groups. This anxiety may be partly owing to the lapses they feel in their English knowledge, and underscores the need for their teachers to take their learners' anxiety into account before attempting to enhance the features of their task-based speech and to stimulate and maintain their motivation in learning. Some suggestions will be offered on how this can be achieved in the following section of this article.

### A. Pedagogical Implications

The findings of the current study offer a number of implications for teachers, syllabus designers, learners, and

teacher trainers with regard to the content and methodology of teaching and learning English in the context of KRG. First and foremost, as we know, a weak point of the educational system in KRG is that many of our classes (schools and universities) are conducted in the relatively traditional lock-step style with teachers functioning as merely transmitters of information. With recent developments in the field and the expansion of teachers' roles (Harmer, 2014), KRG English teachers and professors are recommended to avoid using the lock-step style and create a situation in which the students can get involved and relate the teaching materials to their personal lives. This personalization and contextualization of the teaching will definitely enhance learners' involvement and thereby promote their motivation to learn. Since teachers participating in this study relied heavily on brisk presentations and encouraging students to ask questions during the teaching process, practicing teachers who are concerned with similar age group learners are suggested to create a stress-free atmosphere in the classrooms to involve the students in the learning process, to encourage students by asking questions and elicitation, and to create opportunities for interactive pair/group activities.

Curriculum developers and syllabus designers are also advised to modify their teaching materials and incorporate learning activities that are more communicative in nature. Communicative activities are assumed to share a number of features, such as containing an information gap, including an element of choice, incorporating contextual clues that can facilitate genuine use of language, and meaning-focused feedback (Chastain, 1988). Although some of these features are peculiar to naturally occurring instances of language use, others might be easily incorporated into the teaching content by either inclusion of some tasks within the course books or by providing some supplementary activities that can be assigned either at the post-view stages of teaching or as homework. Such communicative activities are assumed to help learners consolidate their newly learned knowledge into their already existing background, and through meaningful practice, while their attention is focused on meaning in contexts that resemble real-life situations.

The processes of teaching and learning are multidimensional (Stebbins, 1995), and both teachers and students are responsible for facilitating and optimizing these processes. Therefore, the results obtained from this study have implications for language learners, as well. For instance, learners' orientation, including anxiety, plays a salient role in the qualitative and quantitative performance of language learners (Souresjani, 2013). So, improving orientation may have a great significant role in helping learners to be motivated and less anxious language learners. Therefore, EFL learners should be looking for opportunities to increase their motivation and have positive attitudes toward language learning, assess their own progress, and focus on their own learning.

Moreover, syllabus designers should take into consideration the students' inclinations and orientations toward language learning while designing the courses. In the same vein, curriculum developers are better off to embed teachers' and

students' opinions so that they can design a better program to increase their motivation and decrease their anxiety. In addition, when relevant training hints or motives regarding the above-mentioned orientations are included within the programs and coursebooks, teachers have access to a powerful device to work on the optimization of activities embedded in the processes of teaching and learning, and subsequently, learners can improve their accuracy in speaking, as one of the most prominent skills.

### B. Suggestions for Further Research

Just like other studies, this study suffered from a number of limitations and delimitations, which question the generalizability of the findings. Taking these factors into consideration, the subsequent suggestions have been announced for further research.

First, in the wake of the differences among different age groups regarding the mental and personal qualities, the procedures of the present study could be implemented among other age and language proficiency groups.

Second, this study was limited to female learners. Similar studies are suggested to be replicated with male learners or mixed groups of male and female participants so that the research variables could be investigated across gender.

Third, KRG ELF learners' anxiety was studied in the present enquiry based on a standardized questionnaire with no triangulation of the research instruments by including instruments like interviews. Interested researchers are recommended to triangulate the data collection instruments in further studies to address similar questions.

Finally, the current study was focused on the relationship between anxiety and the accuracy of task-based oral speech of a small sample of female learners. Further studies might be conducted to correlate learners' anxiety with other features of task-based speech or the same features of writing as the other productive skill with larger samples.

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