

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FACILITATIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING
AND ORAL PERFORMANCE AMONG IRANIAN LEARNERS

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Dedicated to my parents, my wife, and my son.

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Although only my name appears on the cover it hardly needs stressing that many people have made this thesis possible assisting me through the journey.

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis is a response to a call for clarity in the relationship between language anxiety and oral performance. It aims to investigate the most salient facilitative factors, students' views on the integration of facilitative anxiety, and the degree to which facilitative anxiety improves oral performance. Initially, the scene is set for a reconsideration of the relatively-underexplored role of facilitative anxiety, the potential benefits for pedagogical practice and a preliminary background which paves the way for a literature review. The Anxiety Questionnaire (AQ) and the Foreign Language Oral Skills Evaluation Matrix (FLOSEM) were used to measure anxiety and oral performance, respectively and mixed methods were shown to lend themselves well to such investigation. The present study resorted to the qualitative Constant Comparative Method to derive the factors conducive to facilitative anxiety and students' views on its integration in classroom practice. The experimental designs are also discussed as the procedure through which the qualitative outcome is tested for its effects. Three 53-student groups from Azad University were randomly selected. The ANOVA and correlation studies suggest that facilitative anxiety exerted positive effect on oral performance. A moderate statistically significant positive ($r=0.634$) and a moderate to high negative correlation ($r=-0.68$) were observed in the facilitative and debilitative groups, respectively. The facilitative anxiety group mostly reported moderate anxiety whose finding was consistent with the fact that moderate anxiety exerts maximal positive effects on performance. Finally, the thesis juxtaposes these contributions in the current literature so as to highlight the directions along which future research might proceed and the possible transition from theorizing to practice stressing the importance of facilitative anxiety in any enquiry that sets out to capture the anxiety-performance relationship and the ensuing benefits.

ABSTRAK

Tesis ini merupakan respon bagi mendapatkan kejelasan tentang hubungan antara kekhawatiran mengenai bahasa dengan prestasi pertuturan. Tesis ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji faktor-faktor penggalak yang paling menonjol, pandangan pelajar terhadap integrasi terhadap penggalak kebimbangan dan sejauh manakah penggalak kebimbangan boleh meningkatkan prestasi lisan. Pada mulanya, satu peristiwa telah disediakan dengan mempertimbangkan semula peranan yang belum diteroka terhadap penggalak kebimbangan, potensi faedah untuk amalan pedagogi dan latar belakang awal yang akan membuka jalan untuk satu tinjauan literatur. Soal selidik Kebimbangan (AQ) dan Matriks Penilaian Kemahiran Lisan Bahasa Asing (FLOSEM) telah digunakan untuk mengukur tahap kebimbangan dan prestasi lisan responden dan kaedah gabungan telah diterapkan bagi mendapatkan penglibatan responden dengan baik dalam kajian ini. Kajian ini beralih kepada Kaedah Perbandingan Kualitatif Malar untuk memperoleh faktor-faktor kondusif kepada penggalak kebimbangan dan pandangan pelajar terhadap integrasi penggalak kebimbangan dalam amalan bilik darjah. Reka bentuk eksperimen juga telah dibincangkan sebagai prosedur yang hasil kualitatifnya telah diuji untuk mendapatkan kesannya. Tiga kumpulan seramai 53 orang pelajar dari Azad University telah dipilih secara rawak sebagai responden. Analisis ANOVA dan korelasi kajian menunjukkan bahawa penggalak kebimbangan memberikan kesan positif kepada prestasi lisan dengan setiap satunya mencatatkan nilai sederhana positif yang signifikan secara statistik ($r = 0.634$) dan mencatatkan nilai sederhana kepada korelasi negatif yang tinggi ($r = -0.68$) yang diperhatikan dalam kumpulan penggalak dan perencat. Kumpulan kebimbangan fasilitatif kebanyakannya melaporkan kebimbangan sederhana dengan dapataannya adalah tekal dengan fakta bahawa kebimbangan sederhana mengenakan kesan positif yang maksimum kepada prestasi. Akhirnya, sumbangan tesis ini sejajar dengan literatur semasa dalam menyerlahkan hala tuju bersama-sama untuk penyelidikan masa hadapan yang mungkin diteruskan dan kemungkinan peralihan daripada teori kepada penekanan kepada kepentingan amalan kebimbangan fasilitatif dalam mana-mana kajian yang menetapkan untuk mengungkap hubungan prestasi dengan kebimbangan dan kebaikan-kebaikan yang menyusulinya.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE
	DECLARATION	ii
	DEDICATION	iii
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
	ABSTRACT	v
	ABSTRAK	vi
	TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
	LIST OF TABLES	xiii
	LIST OF FIGURES	xv
	LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xvii
	LIST OF APPENDICES	xix
1	INTRODUCTION	1
	1.1 Introduction	1
	1.2 Background of the Study	2
	1.3 Statement of the Problem	5
	1.4 Purpose of the Study	11
	1.5 Research Objectives	16
	1.6 Research Questions	16
	1.7 Scope of the Study	18
	1.8 Limitations of the Study	18
	1.9 Significance of the Study	19
	1.10 Framework of the Study	21
	1.11 Operational Definition of Terms	27
	1.12 Outline of the Study	33

1.13	Summary	34
2	REVIEW OF LITERATURE	35
2.1	Introduction	35
2.2	Anxiety in General Works and References	37
2.3	Categories of Anxiety	39
2.3.1	General Anxiety, Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Communicative Anxiety	39
2.3.2	Trait, State and Situation-Specific Anxieties	40
2.3.3	FL-Related Anxieties: Communication Apprehension”, “Test Anxiety” and “Fear of Negative Evaluation”	42
2.3.4	Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) and Social Anxiety	43
2.3.5	Existential Anxiety	44
2.3.6	Freudian Anxieties	44
2.3.7	Greist’s Anxietal Categories	45
2.3.8	Klein’s Anxietal Categories	45
2.3.9	Input, Processing, and Output Anxieties	46
2.3.10	Other Anxietal Categories and How These Anxietal Types Relate to the Present Research	46
2.4	Sources of Anxiety or Anxiety-Generating Factors	48
2.5	Anxiety Indicators	51
2.5.1	Psychological Indicators	53
2.5.2	Physical Indicators	54
2.6	Removal or Reduction of Debilitative Anxiety	55
2.7	Language Learning Anxiety (LLA) and Facilitative Anxiety (FA) As Constructs	61
2.8	Measurement of Anxiety	69
2.8.1	A Review of Anxiety Scales and the Need for a New One	69
2.8.2	Why Is It So Hard To Measure Anxiety?	78

2.8.3	Quantitative vs. Qualitative Measures of Language Anxiety	79
2.9	Effects of and Responses to Anxiety among Individuals	80
2.10	Language Learning Anxiety: Cause or Effect	83
2.11	Language Anxiety: How It Affects the Four Language Skills	84
2.11.1	Language Anxiety and Listening	84
2.11.2	Language Anxiety and Speaking	86
2.11.3	Language Anxiety and Reading	90
2.11.4	Language Anxiety and Writing	91
2.12	Language Anxiety and the Associated Variables	91
2.12.1	Language Anxiety and Age	92
2.12.2	Language Anxiety and Gender	92
2.12.3	Language Anxiety and Period of Foreign Residence	93
2.12.4	Language Anxiety and L2 Course Status: Major, Elective or Required	94
2.12.5	Language Anxiety and Language Levels or Years of Study	94
2.12.6	Language Anxiety and Learning Styles	94
2.12.7	Language Learning Anxiety and Teaching Styles	95
2.12.8	Language Learning Anxiety and Knowledge of Other Languages	95
2.12.9	Anxiety and Attention	96
2.12.10	Anxiety and Language Learning Strategies	96
2.12.11	Anxiety and Self-Perceived Ability or Confidence	97
2.12.12	Anxiety and Achievement	97
2.13	Inadequacies, Inconsistencies and Shortcomings of the Literature and Their Possible Causes	99

2.13.1	Problems Associated with the Questionnaire, Instruments, Scales, and Interviews Employed to Elicit Data	99
2.13.2	Problems Associated with Methodologies	100
2.13.3	Problems Associated with Loose Definitions, Sweeping Generalizations and Unfortunate Terminologies	101
2.13.4	Problems Associated with Anxiety Behaviors: Linearity vs. Nonlinearity	101
2.14	Theories and Models of Anxiety Research	102
2.15	Language Learning Anxiety (LLA) in the Iranian Educational System	104
2.16	Chapter Summary	107
3	METHODOLOGY	110
3.1	Introduction	110
3.2	Research Design	111
3.3	The Three Classroom Settings	118
3.3.1	The A0 Classroom Settings	119
3.3.2	The FA Classroom Settings	122
3.3.3	The DA Classroom Settings	127
3.4	The Statistical Procedures	129
3.4.1	Experiment 1: The t-test	130
3.4.2	Experiment 2: Correlational Design	131
3.4.3	Experiment 3: One-Way ANOVA	132
3.5	Ethical Considerations	133
3.6	Development of the Instrument “Anxiety Questionnaire (AQ)”	134
3.6.1	An Introduction to Scale Development, Anxiety, and the AQ	134
3.6.2	Scoring Procedure and Rubrics for the AQ	145
3.6.3	Piloting the AQ: Objectives, Results and the Analysis of the Narrative Subscale	148
3.6.4	Validation of the AQ	158

	3.6.5 Limitations of the AQ	164
	3.7 The Procedure	164
	3.8 The Participants: Selection & Demographics	169
	3.9 Oral Proficiency Measurement: the FLOSEM	170
	3.10 Sampling and Sample Size Issues: the Sample Frame and Size and the Sampling Techniques and Execution Method	176
	3.11 Data Collection and Analysis	180
	3.12 Summary	182
4	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	183
	4.1 Introduction	183
	4.2 Qualitative Research	183
	4.2.1 Coding	185
	4.2.2 Qualitative Data Analysis	188
	4.2.3 Results for the Qualitative Research Questions	193
	4.2.4 The Necessity to Fight Postponement, Avoidance, and Quitting	195
	4.3 Quantitative Results	197
	4.3.1 Experimental Results	197
	4.3.2 The t-test	199
	4.3.3 ANOVA Studies	201
	4.3.4 The Correlations	205
	4.4 Chapter Summary	211
5	CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS	213
	5.1 Introduction	213
	5.2 The Literature in Retrospective	215
	5.3 Research Questions in Retrospective	218
	5.3.1 Qualitative Research Questions	218
	5.3.2 The Experimental Research Question	219

5.4	(De)limitations	219
5.5	Implications and Recommendations for Further Research	222
5.5.1	Theoretical Implications	223
5.5.2	Pedagogical Implications	226
5.5.3	Implications for Future Research and Recommendations	229
5.6	Summary	232
REFERENCES		237
Appendices A-E		259-271

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
1.1	Research questions as undertaken by the AQ	17
2.1	A comparison of anxiety scales	76
3.1	Visual representation of research design	112
3.2	Characteristics of the statistical procedures	133
3.3	AQ subsections & item formats	142
3.4	Levels of Anxiety	144
3.5	AQ Scoring Procedure	145
3.6	Summary of respondents' demographic data	145
3.7	Results obtained from item analysis of the AQ	151
3.8	Inferences, warrants, and assumptions in the AQ validity argument and supporting research (adapted from Chapelle, Enright & Jamieson, 2008).	163
3.9	Stanford FLOSEM	174
3.10	Stratification and distribution of the experimental sample based on gender	179
4.1	Qualia derived for Facilitative Language Learning Anxiety	190
4.2	Qualia derived for Debilitative Language Learning Anxiety	191
4.3	Qualia derived for Anxiety Removal	192
4.4	The FA oral performance statistics	199
4.5	The t-test for FA oral performance	200
4.6	Descriptive statistics	200
4.7	ANOVA for pretest OP conditions	203
4.8	ANOVA for post test OP	204

4.9	Post Hoc Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons for oral performance	204
4.10	OP-Anxiety correlations in 0A Group	206
4.11	OP-Anxiety correlations in FA Group	207
4.12	OP-Anxiety correlations in DA Group	209

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
1.1	The modules informing the conceptual framework	23
1.2	The tradeoff between facilitative and debilitating anxieties	26
1.3	The variables involved	26
1.4	The hierarchy of anxiety-performance interaction	27
1.5	The interplay between FA and DA	29
2.1	Anxietal Categories	47
2.2	The gap in the literature: a clear definition of the FA	64
2.3	Evidence in favor of FA	57
3.1	Schematic representation of the methodology	114
3.2	Research Methods	115
3.3	The Classroom Setting Implementation	119
3.4	The A0 Classroom Settings	122
3.5	The FA Classroom Settings	127
3.6	The DA Classroom Settings	129
3.7	Experiment 1	131
3.8	Experiment 2	131
3.9	Experiment 3	132
3.10	Graphical representation of instrument development	135
3.11	Anxiety and avoidance	154
3.12	Belief in Facilitative Anxiety	155
3.13	AQ approval percentages	156
3.14	AQ-related inferences	161
3.15	Claims and inferences underlying AQ score use	161
3.16	Claims and inferences in the AQ interpretive argument	162

3.17	Anxiety-alleviating teaching methods and techniques	167
3.18	The research process flowchart	168
3.19	The instrumentation employed	175
3.20	Participants and sampling procedures	178
3.21	Qualitative data analysis of the narrative subscale	181
4.1	Online views on FA Existence (N=68)	194
4.2	Online views on FA integration (N=68)	194
4.3	Scatterplot of OP-Anxiety association in OA Group	206
4.4	Scatterplot of OP-Anxiety association in FA Group	207
4.5	Scatterplot of OP-Anxiety association in DA Group	209
5.1	Theorizing congruent with the present study	225
5.2	The Anxietal Continuum	226

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AQ	-	Anxiety Questionnaire
ANOVA	-	Analysis of Variance
CA	-	Communicative Anxiety
CCM	-	Constant Comparative Method
CBT	-	Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
DA	-	Debilitative Anxiety
DOE	-	Design of Experiment
EFL	-	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	-	English as a Second Language
FLLA	-	Facilitative Language Learning Anxiety
F2F	-	Face to Face (Encounters)
FA	-	Facilitative Anxiety
FL	-	Foreign Language
FLA	-	Foreign Language Anxiety
FLCAS	-	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale
FLOSEM	-	Foreign Language Oral Skills Evaluation Matrix
G0	-	Zero-Anxiety Group
GA	-	General Anxiety
GAD	-	Generalized Anxiety Disorder
L1	-	First Language
L2	-	Second Language

LLA	-	Language Learning Anxiety
OP	-	Oral Performance
SEM	-	Standard Error of Measurement
SL	-	Second Language
SLL	-	Second Language Learning
ZPD	-	Zone of Proximal Development

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX	TITLE	PAGE
A	The AQ (Anxiety Questionnaire	263
B	Sample FA Online Questionnaire Request Letter	270
C	The Online FA Questionnaire	271
D	List of Publications Related to Thesis	273
E	Horwitz's Letter	275

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Anxiety forms an integral part of our life. We are not alone in feeling the effects of anxiety. Everyone feels anxious on some occasions and it is quite natural to feel anxious and to worry in some situations. There are various terms and expressions which share the nature of the phenomenon all human beings experience on a daily basis, i.e. anxiety. While a certain degree of overlap in the semantic field shared by some commonly-used anxiety-related words (i.e. trepidation, angst, jitters, emotionality, etc.) seems to be unavoidable by the layperson the lack of a clear-cut distinction between the cross-disciplinary terms anxiety, stress, fear, and phobia in the literature appears to be objectionable. More than that, this lack of distinction can also be searched within the terms themselves. For instance, the facilitative aspects of anxiety have largely been overlooked and discounted by the current literature let alone the ordinary public. Therefore, it seems logical to believe that any research on anxiety that does not capture this aspect of anxiety (i.e. facilitative anxiety) cannot be taken seriously as it might be focusing on a wrong absolutistic rather than relativistic trajectory. In fact, while some teachers seem to be glamoured by the creation of an anxiety-free classroom their total disregard for the possible facilitative aspects of anxiety appear unwarranted. Thus, the present study, while setting the scene for a reconsideration of anxiety in research tradition tries to come to terms with this indifferntiation and clarify the anxiety-performance relationship. In fact, this concern with “inadequate conceptualization” has been reported in the literature by

Hardy & Hagtvet (1996: v) who consider it as hampering the development of theorizing on the anxiety-performance relationship.

1.2 Background of the Study

The prime inspiration for the researcher to investigate facilitative anxiety originated many years ago when he offered Foreign Language (hence FL) courses where students were expected to deliver oral presentations in front of their peers. The researcher always regretted the fact that debilitating anxiety built up among students as they approached their presentation deadline. With the passage of time, the researcher witnessed a second type of anxiety operating somehow in tandem among some students which was diagonally opposite to the former. Although both debilitatively-anxious and facilitatively-anxious students justified the emergence of these emotions in various ways and the researcher was obviously very interested to explore these reasons at more depth the feedback received from students led the researcher to speculate that a thorough analysis of these beliefs and a fact-finding mission were in order. This natural and intuitive curiosity on the part of the researcher opened the door to a slew of unprecedented questions: Is student attrition related in any way to higher levels of debilitating anxiety? Are these occurring naturally? Were we going overboard in our academic duties by treating students predisposed to debilitating anxiety harshly? What is the ultimate fate of some otherwise talented students who simply withdraw from the program just because teachers either do not feel the responsibility are not empathetic (listeners) or worse it is not within their powers to transform the detrimental counterproductive energy hidden in debilitative anxiety into the transparent productive driving force of facilitative anxiety? Was the researcher or his teaching style responsible for the misery of the debilitatively-anxious students or the overachievement enjoyed by their facilitatively-anxious students? Has the researcher treated these two categories of students so diagonally different to induce these in their minds? Are we as teachers inadvertently discriminating among students (a hitherto-unknown discrimination)? If so, how can the researcher remedy the situation? If the debilitatively-anxious

students are destined to remain so for their entire lives would there be some intervention on the part of the researcher which would break the intensifying vicious cycle through fostering their own resolve? Deeply concerned about the fate of his students the researcher's curiosity and interest in such investigation piqued searching frantically and passionately for more and more data on the phenomenon.

On one hand, anxiety is a broad and elusive term which encompasses or is associated with numerous psychological states including (but not limited to) fear, apprehension, dread, worry, panic, nervousness, uneasiness, irritability, irritation, and anger (Doctor, 2008; Zeidner, 2011). On the other hand, the subject has attracted cross-disciplinary studies from various specializations ranging from psychology, pharmacology, medicine, psychoanalysis, philosophy, to language teaching. Meanwhile, many fields have developed anxiety types of their own (computer anxiety, mathematics anxiety, statistics anxiety, etc). It appears that necessity has been the sole *raison d'être* for all these inventions. This may also reflect the ever-increasing significance attached to this phenomenon in various disciplines.

Anxiety is a psychosomatic feeling closely intertwined and associated with uneasiness, fear, apprehension, worry, and stress (Zeidner, 2011). It is a mood state occurring without an identifiable stimulus. Thus, care is to be taken to make a distinction between anxiety and fear where, in the latter, the danger is tangible. Moreover, fear is closely associated with escape and avoidance behaviors whereas anxiety stems from perceived (real or unreal) threats that are uncontrollable or unavoidable (Ohman, 2000). Barlow (2002) also suggests that anxiety also differs from fear in that the former is "a future-oriented mood state" where the individual is ready "to cope with upcoming negative effects" (p 1247).

Freud (1936: 87) believes that anxiety is induced when there is a "threat" to "feelings and desires we cherish". Anxiety serves two functions; first as a feeling with an unidentifiable source appearing " [...] inappropriate and expedient, in response to a new dangerous situation and the other, a useful one, as a means of "giving warning of and averting such a situation" (1931: 73). Therefore, it can be observed that, contrary to public opinion, there are two sides to the story of anxiety

with one part failing to do justice to the other. In addition, it appears that the speaker feels threatened and endangered by the fact that s/he might not perform in a satisfactory manner either preparing more for the task (e.g. delivering the speech successfully) or performing the task with unnecessary levels of anxiety or averting the situation altogether.

Anxiety is a normal part of our daily lives especially when we encounter a stressful situation which merits more attention and we regard as being important. When we perform under stressful conditions (e.g. delivering presentations, taking exams, etc.) psycho-physiological/psychosomatic changes occur that may cause us to present symptoms such as a nervous stomach, sweating, accelerated breath, tremors, and/or increased heart rate. It is quite natural for a human being to present these symptoms under such stressful conditions. In fact, if someone claims not to be anxious under these sets of circumstances s/he would be considered a real exception to the norm in society. Almost everyone feels anxious prior to a class presentation even when it is a five-minute one on a very simple topic close to his/her heart. But the trick would be to turn this disadvantage (debilitating anxiety) into an advantage (facilitative anxiety) making it possible for the vast amount of energy locked up in debilitating anxiety to work for us effectively and efficiently.

Anxiety has proved to be one of the most promising areas of research in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Considerable research has shown that performance in a second language is related to measures of anxiety (Scovel, 1978, Phillips, 1992, Hardy & Hagtvet, 1996, and Derakshan & Eysenck, 2009). In the foreign language classroom, high levels of anxiety are most likely to create a variety of negative effects. It is a popular belief that anxious students fail to manage classroom activities properly. One of the many challenges in foreign language teaching is to provide such students with a low-anxiety classroom where they can possibly convey their ideas and feelings more optimally. As a result, a low-anxiety classroom would possibly promote learners' performance. In fact, there is research (Campbell and Ortiz, 1991; Liu, 2007) submitting that large proportions of language students think of the foreign language class as anxiety-provoking suffering from alarming levels of debilitating anxiety. Most students find it very hard to stand before

their peers presenting what they potentially know but fail to perform dynamically. Some even get deeply concerned when they feel they are being evaluated. Although researchers think of anxiety as one of the main obstacles in foreign language oral performance (MacIntyre & Gardner 1991), they are uncertain as to how to choose from among the various anxiety-removal strategies whereby a low-anxiety environment is created. More than that, there is no clear-cut relationship between anxiety and the Freudian Id, the Groddeck's it, and the unconscious in the associated literature. This psychosomatic relationship between language learning and language production is clearly contemplated by Young (1999: 13) who maintains that to study the language learning process is to study how the "body", "mind", and affect "fuse to create self-expression".

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Formulating a problem statement assists researchers in narrowing down their research, avoiding getting sidetracked by the wealth of literature available and creating a more coherent and cohesive product. Thus, through formulation of a problem statement, the present research intends to remain focused on research questions contemplated in the study avoiding detours.

In order to help EFL students deal with anxiety, teachers need to identify and to be equipped with facilitative anxiety strategies to create an enjoyable and productive learning environment for students who are uncomfortable and hesitant about speaking. However, many students are presently suffering from the debilitating effects of anxiety in performance-related settings in general and speaking-related environments in particular with speaking anxiety amounting to one of the most easily observable fears among students. Many talented and overachieving students find oral performance too daunting an experience to be overcome and simply postpone, avoid, or quit the task altogether. As a result, research into the nature of such suffering and the strategies whereby this arguably vast energy could be transformed into oral performance-facilitative anxiety is important in that it can

signal the directions along which undue speaking anxiety can be remedied paving the way to help students learn, understand, deal with, and move on from their past debilitating experiences in future studies. Qualitative (i.e. CCM) and quantitative (i.e. experimental) research methods are employed in the present research to identify these anxiety strategies and to assess their effect of oral performance, respectively.

Does language learning anxiety always exert a debilitating effect on oral performance? Alpert and Haber (1960) suggested that this is not the case. While submitting otherwise they subscribe to the view that anxiety may just as likely act as a facilitative factor. Therefore, it may be inferred that not all anxious individuals respond to a stressor in a similar way. In fact, some may think of a stressful situation as a challenge. Contrary to public opinion, anxiety might exert a positive effect on oral performance motivating the speaker for further or optimal practice, preparedness and performance in a highly-competitive environment such as the classroom. Thus, considering the predominantly-negative connotations associated with the term and the commonly-held views about the detrimental role of anxiety in oral performance, a heuristic data-driven reconsideration of the anxiety-performance relationship with no previous assumptions about the trends might be in order.

Accustomed as they are to public speaking, teachers are sometimes unaware of the unease, uncertainty, and anxiety they evoke among students when they call on them to perform in front of others. As an EFL teacher, the researcher has frequently observed the lack of self-confidence, self-image, self-efficacy and self-esteem of many otherwise overachieving students experiencing extremely high levels of discomfort, apprehension, and debilitating anxiety in English classes. These negative and unproductive and sometimes counterproductive feelings seem, to the researcher's intuitive experience, to exacerbate as students are required to perform what they potentially know but fail to present on face to face (F2F) encounters, or when they sit for an exam or other form of evaluation. It appears that their very sense of whole person, confidence and integrity has been challenged and called into question. The researcher's experience, the pursuit of which inspired this research, is supported by the literature on language learning anxiety. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), for instance, argue that anxiety poses several potential problems for FL students due to

its interference with foreign language “acquisition”, “retention”, and “production” (p.86). This being the case, the author has always been in search of and applying innovative methods to boost student morale to present course material in front of the class independently and with remarkable aplomb removing himself from the traditional dominant position assumed by teachers allowing them plenty of opportunity to bring their hitherto-unknown talents on the scene and not to be a copycat imitating the teacher verbatim, and to stand on their own feet cutting the apron strings. It has also been the researcher's experience that his procedure has given rise to a certain level and type of anxiety and dominance but as student testimonials suggest the type of anxiety they experienced was qualitatively and quantitatively different from what they experienced beforehand prompting them into action and F2F interaction in the course of their daily classroom work and paving the way to make them whole persons. The researcher believes that a new definition of anxiety seems to be in order here and that he has, in all likelihood, been resorting to, in his teaching career, “facilitative anxiety”(Alpert & Haber, 1960, Kleinmann, 1977, Scovel, 1978, Jahangiri, Sharif & Rajab, 2011:125), a construct which has not been clearly defined in the literature to date.

Interestingly, there have been many former students referring to the researcher narrating their experience of this so-called facilitating anxiety experience. One former student of the researcher who is presently teaching as a university lecturer states something to this effect that he was sitting in the researcher's class unaware of the fact that he might be called on to present in public. He managed to answer a question raised by the teacher when he (i.e. the researcher) handed him the board marker asking him to take his seat and assume the teacher's role which was quite unusual. He had no way out nor round it except to present, or better to say, teach in front of the class. He narrated this facilitating experience emphasizing the role this experience had played in his not assuming a passive role in any scientific discussion ever since the teacher trusted him with the board marker to teach face to face with his classmates (personal communications).

These first-hand experiences and testimonials stress the importance of defining facilitating anxiety in the classroom and the means and procedures it can be

achieved. The researcher believes that there may be optimal procedures whereby debilitating anxiety can be transformed into facilitating anxiety which is a potential asset to the learning environment. He also believes that teachers should be cognizant of the procedures and symptoms whereby facilitative anxiety and debilitating anxiety surface prior to undertaking the teaching task. It is hoped that the present research will present the literature with implications and procedures intended for the introduction of facilitating anxiety into the classroom environment. Last but not the least, it needs to be mentioned that these observations and the experiential knowledge thereof are included in the present thesis in accordance with the recommendations made by Maxwell (2004) who argues strongly in favor of this inclusion stating that one should not treat these as “bias” but as “a valuable component” of research and that should this separation of life and research take place the researcher would be “cut off from” or deprived of “a major source” from which “insights”, “hypotheses”, and “validity checks” can be gleaned (pp 37-38). In fact, the inclusion of experiential knowledge has been advocated long before Maxwell who favored the “explicit incorporation” of the researcher’s identity and experience. For instance, in a seminal and classic essay, C. Wright Mills argues that “the most admirable” members of the scholarly community “do not split their work from their lives” taking both “too seriously” to allow such dissociation utilizing each to enrich the other (1959, p. 195). By way of conclusion, the author of the present thesis is of the opinion that the supplementary role attributed to both scholars’ experiential knowledge/life and their expertise provide for the synergic effect required for novelty, originality, and innovation which are requisite components of any scientific endeavor. It seems necessary, at this juncture, to stress the fact that the author of the present thesis has been initially inspired by Mills’ proposition of inalienability of experiential knowledge (i.e. life) and work (i.e. expertise) in the constant refinement of his appreciation of the relationship between facilitative anxiety and oral performance.

When it comes to the question of better understanding the relationship between language anxiety and performance, the ideas and results advocated by Young (1986) and Horwitz and her colleagues (1986, 1991, 2000, and 2010) become of paramount importance. Their seminal articles cover various aspects of the phenomenology of Language Learning Anxiety (LLA). Identifying the gap in the literature of a definition of LLA, Horwitz et al., (1991) believe that the literature has

“neither adequately defined foreign language anxiety nor described its specific effects on foreign language learning” (p. 125). They argue that this must be regarded as a distinct phenomenon particular to L2 or foreign language acquisition, considering listening and speaking to be the major sources of anxiety. Elsewhere, Young (1991) offers strategies for reducing anxiety students experience in class. The writer admits that the list is by no means exhaustive, and that it is largely incumbent upon the teachers and students to recognize other sources of language anxiety. Later in the text, she puts forward some suggestions for removing classroom anxiety, which she finds to be the result of “unnatural” teaching styles and classroom procedures. To her, anxiety might originate from poor methodology.

There seems to be no clear-cut relationship between anxiety and achievement in the literature (Derakshan & Eysenck, 2009). Hardy & Hagtvet (1996: v), for instance, submit that “sustained research” on varying “domains of performance” has not been able to explain the relationship between anxiety and performance accounting only for small variance in the latter. Utilizing a measure of anxiety in her study, Backman (1976) found two worst English-learning speakers to score highest and lowest on the anxiety scale. Chastain (1975: 160), in a clear explication of the point argues that “some concern about a test” might be “a plus” but excessive anxiety can produce “negative results”.

Scovel’s (1978) review of the then available literature on anxiety makes an attempt to disambiguate the conflicting literature positing that different findings may be explained by the fact that different anxiety measures have been administered. He concludes that researchers should be clear about the anxietal categories they intend to measure the application of which Horwitz (2001: 114) strongly advocates. Thus, the present research is mainly concerned with the investigation of language learning anxiety (whether facilitative or debilitating) during public speaking in an oral task context.

This variation in performance would seem to be a relatively unexplored area. The present study may give further insights into the hows and whats of this relationship, demonstrating as concisely as possible the effects of facilitative and

debilitative anxiety (and nonanxiety) on speaking while focusing on facilitative anxiety effects. Research into this realm would be fruitful in that it could describe the specific effects of different anxiety levels and categories on foreign language learning.

Young (1991) examined the effect of anxiety on oral performance among prospective language teachers. The author was, before the completion of the study, of the opinion that anxiety would reduce scores on Oral Proficiency Interview. She, however, arrived at nonsignificant correlations between the anxiety scores and those of the proficiency interview. She argues that ability is the main factor governing oral proficiency and that, after the acquisition of this ability, anxiety is of little effect. The above-mentioned comments reflect the widespread ambiguity in the literature, to say nothing of the more conflicting ones.

The literature abounds in articles capturing various aspects of language learning anxiety (Bigdeli & Bai, 2009, Bailey et al., 2003, Coryell & Clark, 2009, Deb et al., 2010, Ewald, 2007, Gardner et al., 1987, Horwitz et al, 1986, 1991, 2010, Na, 2009, Scovel, 1978, Tallon, 2009, Williams & Andrade, 2008, and Wu, 2010 to name a few). This is in sharp contrast to what is the case in the literature on the relatively-unexplored and under-represented construct “facilitative anxiety” where there is a scarcity of research studies specifically dealing with the positive effects (Alpert & Haber, 1960, Kleinmann, 1977, and Jahangiri et al., 2011). In summary, despite the preponderance of data on Language Learning Anxiety (LLA), there is conflicting and sometimes inconclusive evidence and findings which are scattered and often difficult to interpret. This is hardly surprising considering the fact that most studies solely take the negative effects of anxiety (hence the term “debilitating anxiety”) into consideration. The author of the present thesis could not unearth any research project juxtaposing facilitative anxiety (as opposed to debilitating anxiety) in the general framework of Language Learning Anxiety as a means to achieve a clear-cut definition of the term. Thus, the present thesis can be considered as a response to this call for clarity and disambiguation.

The present study tackles the issue of language learning facilitative anxiety in the context of FL university classes where students are required to demonstrate their public speaking abilities subsequent to a six-week interval of intense treatment by teachers already trained to practice the treatments. It is hoped that the design contemplated in the present research may capture some salient aspects of facilitative language learning anxiety, if not in its entirety, making an earnest attempt to contribute to the current literature on anxiety-performance association filling some of the gaps thereof.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present research is to investigate the effect of Language Learning Anxiety (whether debilitating or facilitative) on oral performance in EFL contexts. Thus, it makes an attempt to provide a solid foundation for understanding language learning anxiety in foreign language speaking contexts. The author of the present research would like to clarify his scholarly motivation for following this avenue of research stressing the truism that while theorizing in the realm of anxiety has invariably been associated with verification and while he believes that most practical changes occur incrementally an attempt has been made here to elicit facilitative anxiety strategies so as to pave the way for the implementation of these techniques in pedagogical practice to facilitate the learning paths forward facing learners.

It is evident that formulation of a convincing and compelling rationale and articulation of the reasons why research is undertaken enable the researcher to set his/her research in the context of both existing theory and its practical applications. The goal of the present research was to explore the nature of facilitative anxiety with respect to the strategies involved in inducing it as well as the effect it exerts on oral performance. Affect in general and anxiety in particular have been afforded a high priority in the psychology of learning/teaching and a case can be made that teachers, managers, sports coaches, and all practitioners for whom performance matters

should be trained in anxiety management to contribute to performance of their respective institutions or subordinates. One approach would be to ensure adequate training of at an early stage in education. However, the objectives of education curricula tend to be broader than this. In addition to training individuals in facilitative anxiety strategies, education curricula should promote the pursuit of these strategies to alleviate the effects of debilitating anxiety. Although catering for students' psychological needs and coping with debilitating anxiety is often promoted, little attention is given to defining what facilitative anxiety actually constitutes and what an individual trained in facilitative anxiety strategies might be able to achieve. Thus, the prime motivation and the rationale for undertaking this study lie in the fact that characterization of these facilitative anxiety strategies may enable individuals to draw upon these strategies, independently, as the circumstances arise. In sum, the rationale for carrying out this research lies in the well documented findings in the literature that most EFL students suffer from the debilitating effects of anxiety and find coping with the DA an insurmountable task. Research into this area would be fruitful in that it can equip both the teachers and the learners with the necessary strategies whereby the vast detrimental and counterproductive energy locked up in DA can successfully be transformed into productive (oral) performance.

Research in the area of anxiety has been active, at a conservative estimate, around several decades. Nevertheless, it has varied in intensity with recent years witnessing a marked upturn in the number of researchers and the quantity and quality of research they produce (Bigdeli and Bai, 2009, Coryell & Clark , 2009, Deb et al. , 2010, Ewald, 2007, Horwitz et al. , Na, 2009, Tallon, 2009, Williams & Andrade , 2008, and Wu, 2010). Of note, is the variety of disciplines in which research on anxiety is undertaken. Anxiety-related research has been emerging increasingly from domains outside psychology which include, but are not limited to, health care, teacher education, management, psychotherapy, and nursing. As a consequence of the quantity of research and the diversity of disciplines (e.g. psychology, psychiatry, and TESL) and objectives in which anxiety has been viewed, the phenomenon appears to be fragmented and disparate. For instance, the associated literature is yet to come up with a clear-cut definition of facilitative anxiety. As such, it seems timely to present an account of the inaccuracies, inconsistencies, and issues surrounding anxiety considering the ways in which these problems may be resolved narrowing

down the realm of applicability of this research from these disciplines to foreign language speaking.

Swain and Burnaby (1976) found a negative correlation between language-class anxiety and one measure of children's ability to speak French but no significant correlations were obtained with other measures of proficiency. Likewise, Tucker, Hamayan and Genessee (1976) found a performance measure to be significantly negatively related to French-Class anxiety. Nevertheless, the other measures were not correlated significantly with this anxiety category.

Stephenson (2006) examines the relationships between foreign language anxiety and global proficiency in English and between foreign language anxiety and performance on an oral test. The author (Stephenson, 2006: 21) reports to have obtained a statistically significant negative relationship between language anxiety and oral test grades, and between language anxiety and two oral performance criteria and to have added new dimensions to the research on anxiety stating that foreign language anxiety is likely to “exert a deleterious influence” on both proficiency and oral performance while facilitating anxiety may improve oral performance “in moderately-anxious students (p. 22).

All the above-cited examples signal the fact that although studies concerning the relationship between high levels of anxiety and foreign language performance do exist to a large extent in the literature, the discrepant findings normally do not substantiate the distinction between facilitating anxiety, which promotes second language performance, and debilitating anxiety, which hinders L2 performance. Scovel (1978:137), for instance, attempts to disambiguate the situation, suggesting that ‘high anxiety’ (HA) facilitates learning when the task is relatively easy but leads to a decrease in performance when the task becomes more difficult. Lam R. W., Michalak E. E., & Swinson R. P. (2005) pinpoint some positive aspects of anxiety stating that it can focus attention and concentration to improve performance” but they also note that “excessive and/or prolonged anxiety” can damage thinking and behavior and lead to “degradation in functioning” (p. 61). MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) testify to the same ambiguity in the literature when they assert that foreign

language anxiety literature reviews reveal “a considerable amount of ambiguity arising from the conflicting results of past studies”.

In brief, the question of anxiety has too often been discussed in absolute rather than relative terms. Anxiety does not necessarily create negative effects. There may be no poles (calm vs. anxious) but degrees of a continuum.

The above-mentioned cases may reflect the tip of the iceberg of the ambiguity and inconsistency in the literature on anxiety as it is captured from various disciplines and perspectives. Thus, the present study is mainly undertaken to re-examine the claim that anxiety is detrimental to student performance. Anxiety is believed to hinder learner performance. However, research into the nature of anxiety has been largely hampered by the indiscrimination between facilitating and debilitating types of anxiety and the overreliance on some inconsistent and contradictory results obtained from the literature. More than that, no research has, to date, addressed the question of defining and measuring general language learning facilitating anxiety and differentiating it from its debilitating counterpart (It can be argued that Alpert and Haber (1960) designed the Achievement Anxiety Test to measure the two constructs but the scale is mainly concerned with test anxiety). Viewing the literature one finds it hardly necessary to stress the fact that the question of anxiety has all too often been examined in presumably negative terms rather than relativistic and probabilistic ones. It appears that the whole concept has been shrouded in obscurity which, in the author's humble opinion, is mainly the result of lack of clear-cut definitions for and discriminations between the facilitative and the debilitating types.

The researcher's interest in this project is mainly to clarify the relationship between language-learning anxiety and foreign language speaking performance, as demonstrated during oral tasks. In short, an attempt is made here to cope with the conflicting body of evidence and literature and to show that the differing experimental results could be resolved provided that the notion of language learning anxiety, its relationship with achievement and consequently the dividing line between debilitating and facilitating anxiety are clarified and disambiguated.

The area of anxiety appears to offer a viable avenue for research. Students with low communication skills are possibly prone to experience high anxiety levels. The goal of this study is to refine current understanding of communicative anxiety, manifested in Hansen's (1977: 91) terms as "an experience of general uneasiness, a sense of foreboding, a feeling of tension", thus providing a new interpretation identifying factors generating debilitating versus facilitative anxieties. To date, this avenue of research has not been formally investigated at such a scale. Although numerous studies have shown the negative effects of anxiety in the classroom (e.g. Scovel, 1978; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Saito Y et al 1999, Coryell, J. and Clark M., 2009, Kun-huei Wu, 2010) the present project intends to shed light on present-day understanding of facilitating anxiety (as opposed to debilitating anxiety) and its role in the context of the foreign language classroom. Research on anxiety in this context has to take into account many factors, such as linguistic, pragmatic, cultural as well as educational issues just to name a few. Therefore, a comprehensive study will entail controlling for many extraneous variables whereby reliable evidence is collected for qualitative and quantitative analyses.

Through the proposed study, the phenomenon of anxiety is expected to be framed into facilitative and debilitating categories in its complexity and entirety by applying an interdisciplinary approach to its analysis. The present research attempts to include the most salient aspects of facilitative anxiety, classify and determine its determining factors and its effects within the context of a foreign language classroom. The results of this research will allow the researcher to make some preliminary decisions on the role of anxiety in the foreign language classroom and to drive those decisions by evidence. Future research may be directed towards inclusion of a longitudinal qualitative study on the effects of anxiety on student performance. Moreover, findings of the proposed study will enable us to identify potential research questions for future research on the use of facilitative anxiety in the foreign language classroom. These questions could include when certain levels of anxiety can be successfully introduced and applied at different levels of language competence and at different student ages.

1.5 Research Objectives

On the basis of the purposes outlined above, the present study intends to embark upon the following objectives:

- i. to discover the most salient facilitative factors in EFL classroom environment
- ii. to find out students' views on the integration of facilitative strategies into their English course.
- iii. to investigate the extent to which facilitative anxiety influences oral performance in the context of public speaking

1.6 Research Questions

To formulate a research question one needs to review the existing literature extensively (McKay, 2006). Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (2002) maintain that a suitable research question must contribute to the body of knowledge, be researchable, be suitable for the researcher, lead to new questions, and be ethical. The author of this thesis has considered the following as research questions. Thus, as a first step, we have designed a project which will feed into a larger one and which will set the basis to address the following questions:

- 1- What are the most salient facilitative factors in EFL classroom environments?
- 2-What are EFL students' views on the integration of facilitative anxiety techniques and strategies into their English course?

3- To what extent does facilitative anxiety improve EFL oral performance in the context of public speaking?

The research questions are addressed with specific reference to two instruments, the one reported in Jahangiri & Rajab (2011) henceforth referred to as the Anxiety Questionnaire (AQ), designed to investigate the severity and types of anxiety and the Stanford Foreign Language Oral Skills Evaluation Matrix acronymed FLOSEM (Padilla, Sung & Aninao, 1995) which measures oral performance and whose detailed discussion of features and scoring procedure is dealt with in section 3.8. The analysis framework for the AQ is tabulated as follows:

Table 1.1: Research questions as undertaken by the AQ

Objectives	Research Questions	Relevant Questions	Scoring Procedure/Data Collection
i. to discover the most salient facilitative factors in EFL classroom environment	1- What are the most salient facilitative factors in EFL classroom environments?	AQ total score , items 63-73 (inclusive)	Quantitative Analysis will be performed in the case of polar yes/no items. Narrative and/or Qualitative Analysis will be conducted for open-ended /essay-type questions.
ii. to find out students' views on the integration of facilitative strategies into their English course.	2-What are EFL students' views on the integration of facilitative anxiety techniques and strategies into their English course?	Item number 130 in the narrative subscale and other responses to the narrative subscale	Quantitative Analysis will be performed in the case of polar yes/no items. Narrative and/or Qualitative Analysis will be conducted for open-ended /essay-type questions.
iii. to investigate the extent to which facilitative anxiety influences oral performance	3- To what extent does facilitative anxiety improve oral performance?	Items 63 through 73	Quantitative Analysis will be performed in the case of polar yes/no items. Narrative and/or Qualitative Analysis will be conducted for open-ended /essay-type questions.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The scope of coverage of the present research is Language Learning Anxiety (LLA) and various aspects of general anxiety to the extent that they relate to LLA. This was achieved through the development of an anxiety scale which gauges LLA and General Anxiety (GA) within the wider context of the latter. It treats LLA as falling into two major categories Facilitative Anxiety and Debilitative Anxiety, henceforth referred to as FA and DA, respectively. The present study was performed in the UTM, Malaysia (for pilot studies) and at Gachsaran University, Iran (for the mixed method research) and the research subjects were selected from among EFL students enrolling in courses designed specifically to cater for their English communicative needs. The oral performance of the students was assessed with respect to their anxietal levels and types prior to and subsequent to a 6-week period in the semester during which they received the intended treatments. Quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed to measure students' performance and to elicit their views on various aspects of language learning anxiety, respectively.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

There are definitively some aspects which may impose limitations on the accuracy of the results emanating from the present research. Firstly, it hardly needs stressing that, due to the exploratory nature of the present research, the study only covers subjects from two countries (Malaysia and Iran) and the research and conclusions thereof cannot be extended too far. Secondly, the researcher has faced difficulty gathering information of a sensitive and/or personal nature necessary to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the anxiety phenomenon. Thirdly, as convenience and purposive sampling techniques are employed for pilot studies related to the development of the questionnaire, the researcher cannot claim that the samples are fully representative of the predefined population, i.e. EFL learners, and

the results cannot be extended too far. Fourthly, because of the time constraint and meager financial resources, such research studies are of limited scale, applicability, and generalizability.

1.9 Significance of the Study

The present study may prove significant in contributing to the relatively underexplored realm of facilitative anxiety and in challenging the conventional views of present-day research to guide future research. The major significance of the study lies in the fact that no other studies, to date, have attempted to explore, extensively, the distinction between facilitative anxiety and debilitating anxiety, the strategies involved in producing the constructs, and the possible benefits to the wider community. Although the scope envisaged for the present research, i.e. investigating the effects of facilitative anxiety on oral performance in the course of public speaking in only one country, is limited the author of the present thesis is of the opinion that undertaking such investigation may signal the directions in which future research might proceed such that broader implications might be entertained. In other words, any attempt made at the derivation of facilitative anxiety strategies and the investigation of the effects emanating from these strategies will inevitably find ramifications outside the EFL community to include other neighboring disciplines.

It is evident that anxiety is a very important concept in today's society. Tallon (2009) points out that one of the most influential affective variables in learning a foreign language is foreign language anxiety. Speakers regularly experience different levels and types of anxiety in their speeches. Research on anxiety and its functioning in language has recently developed into a multidisciplinary field of study, especially since the advent of theories on language and context such as pragmatics and applied linguistics. These new disciplines have given proper attention to some aspects of language such as humorous communication which, until recently, were considered minor or secondary. The existence of "The American Association for Anxiety Disorders (AADA)" and several scholarly journals on anxiety indicate the

importance of this topic and the fact that it has developed into its own field of study. However, one cannot blink his/her eyes to the fact that the bulk of the current research on anxiety lays stress on the debilitating effects of this phenomenon often overlooking the possible positive effects of anxiety where relative scarcity of literature is felt.

Normal anxiety has always assisted mankind in preparing and adapting themselves for future events, threats, and possible or impending dangers. Without normal anxiety the human race has probably long been extinct. Normal anxiety levels serve as a warning signal indicating the directions in which our daily lives are to proceed. All of us have probably experienced extreme levels of anxiety at some stages of our lives, e. g. when we were about to enter school as a child (situation-specific anxiety), when we were meeting our future husband or wife (social anxiety), taking a difficult exam (test anxiety) such as the university final exams, the high school graduation exams, the university entrance exams, convocations, university thesis defense sessions, when taking the driving test, riding a bike, or flying on a plane, or swimming for the first time. It seems that the list is by no means exhaustive and anxiety forms an integral part of our lives. But is the anxiety we go through on a daily basis natural and normal. The question might be one of degree rather than type. Strickland (2001) makes a distinction between normal or objective anxiety and neurotic anxiety (anxiety disorders). Normal or objective anxiety is an appropriate reaction to the anxiety-generating situation. For instance, some students find it hard to attend academic evaluation sessions (e.g. final exams, viva's, etc) for a variety of reasons developing anxiety normally and trying to remedy the situation and prepare for every question in advance (hence the "fight response") or abnormally feigning sickness on the day avoiding the task altogether (the "flight response"). These students wonder how favorably raters/examiners think of them as achievers. How fair and unbiased they might be in their (pre)judgments? They ask themselves if they would judge them or be judgmental. Would they hold any stereotype views or sweeping overgeneralizations about the candidate's ethnicity, religion, country of origin, university of graduation, and city of birth? And if so, to what degree do these views affect the outcome of the evaluation? They are uncertain as to what the interview questions might be and whether they are capable of answering them satisfactorily. Some are afraid of being solely evaluated in terms of their

qualifications and GPA at the expense of the experience they have acquired after graduation. They feel apprehensive about the fact that some raters/interviewers might even cast doubt on the quality of their qualifications through posing difficult and unreasonable questions. These are only a few questions which might cross the mind of an anxious person prior to the ordeal and the harder the individual tries to find a solution to these questions the higher the magnitudes of the anxiety earthquake and the more havoc anxiety plays with the individuals daily life so much so that the whole normal phenomenon turns into an anxiety disorder disrupting every aspect of one's life. Thus, it can be seen that there are two sides to anxiety. On the one hand, it can occur as a normal and positive reaction prompting and encouraging the individual to apply himself/herself, work harder and be more energetic and useful as a member of the society. On the other hand, anxiety also assumes negative or abnormal dimensions as the individual suffers from extreme levels of debilitating anxiety which fall under the category of anxiety disorders. Meanwhile, it appears that the severity of anxiety one experiences is commensurate with the perceived significance of the task ahead of the individual.

1.10 Framework of the Study

Miles and Huberman (1994: 18) assert that a conceptual framework clarifies “either graphically or in narrative form” the subjects to be studied which may be the determining “factors, concepts, or variables” and “the presumed relationships among them”. Maxwell (2004) posits that the conceptual framework “is a theory, however tentative or incomplete it may be” stating that “the most productive conceptual frameworks [...] integrate different approaches, lines of investigation, or theories that no one had previously connected” and that it should be both descriptive and critical identifying gaps in the literature. Maxwell (2004) maintains that “an exclusive orientation toward the literature” leads one to discount one’s own experience and “speculative thinking” for which he uses the term “thought experiments” concluding that the researcher should treat the literature not as an authority to be deferred to but as a “useful but fallible source of ideas and, in doing

so, s/he should seek to arrive at ‘alternative ways of framing the issues’. In other words, he believes that the conceptual framework is to be “constructed” rather than being discovered (Maxwell, 2004: 33-34). Another prominent figure (Argyrous, 2011: 6) also considers these experiential “hunches” or “curiosity-driven research” as important as operating within a theoretical framework due to their being capable of discovering unexplored areas where no existing theories have ever ventured. The theoretical and the conceptual framework informing and framing the present research originate from and are inspired by an extensive investigation of the literature on anxiety, the researcher’s experiential knowledge, exploratory research, thought experiments and the challenges in engaging learners in the transition from the debilitating to facilitative anxiety all of which are in line with Maxwell’s recommendations for the use of modules constructing the conceptual framework. Theoretically, it can be considered as a continuation, extension and elaboration of the literature on language anxiety. As such, it draws upon theorizing conducted by Alpert & Haber (1960), Kleinmann (1977), and Scovel (1978) on Facilitative Anxiety (FA) on the one hand and Horwitz’s (1986) concept of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) whose merging forms the focus of the present research which the author the present thesis would like to term, Facilitative Foreign Language Anxiety (hence FFLA), the subject of the present thesis.

As will be further detailed in the second chapter, the literature on language learning anxiety is divided in its endorsement of facilitative anxiety. At this juncture, it certainly behooves us to refer to the pioneering and seminal works by Horwitz (1986), who first coined the term language learning anxiety, and Scovel (1978), who was the first to refer to the cooperative and complementary functioning of facilitative and debilitating anxieties. While there seems to be a consensus of opinion in the associated literature as regards the existence of debilitating anxiety prominent figures working in the field of affect seem to be widely divided in their treatment of facilitative language learning anxiety. Some (e.g. Horwitz, 1986) allow only a unitary view of the anxietal phenomenon being adamant that facilitative anxiety does not exist. Others (e.g. Alpert and Haber, 1960; Scovel, 1978) believe that a binary facilitative-debilitative approach can capture the phenomenon more appropriately. Given this dichotomy, the present research adopts the theoretical perspective advocated by Scovel (1978) who, in his seminal work, considers facilitative and

debilitative anxieties “to work in tandem” and to serve “complementary” functions. Adopting this theoretical perspective the present research treats these two complementary anxietal drives as working simultaneously with debilitating anxiety providing the negative motivation to warn and flee and facilitative anxiety to motivate and fight the learning task. The complementary nature of these two anxietal drives means that there is constant and substantial interplay, interaction, and “cooperative functioning” (Scovel, 1978) between the two drives and as such the interplay may be captured best if the two constructs are captured, measured, assayed in conjunction to each other as complementary aspects of the same affect rather than divided entities.

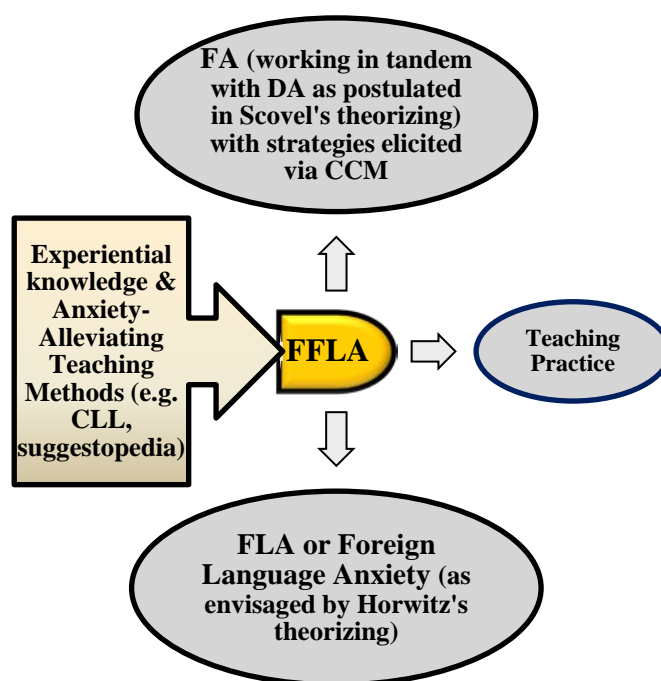


Figure 1.1 The modules informing the conceptual framework

Figure 1.1 demonstrates the manner in which, the goal, i.e. the concept of facilitative anxiety, as opposed to debilitating anxiety, will transpire and be disambiguated. The three major influential components are portrayed as contributing to the clarification process. Assuming the center of the figure Facilitative Foreign Language Learning (FFLA) connects down to the Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) because the latter forms the basis of the construct and connects up to Facilitative Anxiety (FA) because the learner is embedded in a wider affective realm within.

Eventually, FFLA is depicted as having connected up with three major fields of inquiry sharing elements with each. It goes without saying that there is substantial interaction between and among these components and the relations can be of a reciprocal reflective and retrospective nature. As for the outcome of the model, it is hoped that the model leads to a clear-cut redefinition of facilitative anxiety. A very brief explanation might seem to be in order as regards the inclusion of experiential knowledge on the part of the researcher. In a lucid explication of the point, Maxwell (2004) argues against labeling the valuable research component of researcher background and identity as “bias” quoting parts of C. Wright Mills’ classical essay where it is emphasized that the most admirable members of the scholarly community “do not split their work from their lives” taking both too seriously and using “each for the enrichment of the other”. Maxwell also points out that such a split cuts the researcher off from “a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks” (Maxwell, 2004: pp 37-38). In this vein, Glesne & Peshkin also subscribe to this view asserting that subjectivity should not be taken as an affliction but as “virtuous”. They emphasize the fact that researchers should capitalize on this aspect of their personality rather than exorcise it as it equips them with their perspectives and insights (Glesne & Peshkin cited in Maxwell, 2004: 38). In sum, these views are best represented by reference to the philosopher Hilary Putnam who maintains that, even in principle, there cannot be a single “true objective account” viewing the subject from all possible angles and that “any view is from some perspective”, and this view is therefore “shaped by the location [...] and “the lens of the observer” (Maxwell, 2004: 38-39). Considering the above, it behooved the researcher to position himself, in the course of conducting the present research, to view the anxietal phenomenon from three different perspectives: FL teacher (in the experimental subdivision of the research), FL teacher educator (to train the teachers undertaking the experimental treatments, and researcher (analyzing the output from a broader vintage point).

Qualitative perspectives also play a major part in the formulation of the theoretical framework. The popular techniques embodied in the research design of grounded theory ensures the rigour of any research undertaking through reference to a collection of seminal texts. Grounded theory is generally considered as an inductive approach. Nevertheless, claims for purely inductive approaches appear unwarranted given researchers’ interpretive background and experiential knowledge,

the way they influence data collection and analysis the primary instrument of which is the researcher himself/herself trying to elicit meaning from the data. Thus, the constructivist approach to grounded theory is contemplated in the design of the present study where the results are grounded in the experiences of the subjects from which the researcher engages in theorizing on FA strategies making sure there is integrity in the data. In the discovery of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) clarified their scholarly motivation stating that “generating theory goes hand in hand with verifying it; but many sociologists have been diverted from this truism in their zeal to test either existing theories or a theory that they have barely started to generate” (p. 2). The generation of new theory embodied in the elicitation of FA strategies, as opposed to verification of existing theory, appeared to be an integral component of the present research which, inevitably, draws upon an overtly interpretive component where FA, DA and OA strategies emerge inductively from the wealth of information-rich data provided through the medium of the AQ, the oral tasks, the direct observations, follow-up interviews, the researchers experiential knowledge and last but not the least an in retrospective review of the literature. In sum, the present research draws upon a GT procedure called the constant comparative method (hence the CCM) to derive anxiety strategies to be tested in the experimental component of the present research.

The following is a depiction of the variables studied and their hypothetical interrelationships. This includes, of necessity, a consideration of the dependent and independent variables. Figure 1.1 shows a schematic representation of the two main categories of anxiety. It is indicative of the fact that the two categories can be identified and interpreted with respect to the results obtained.

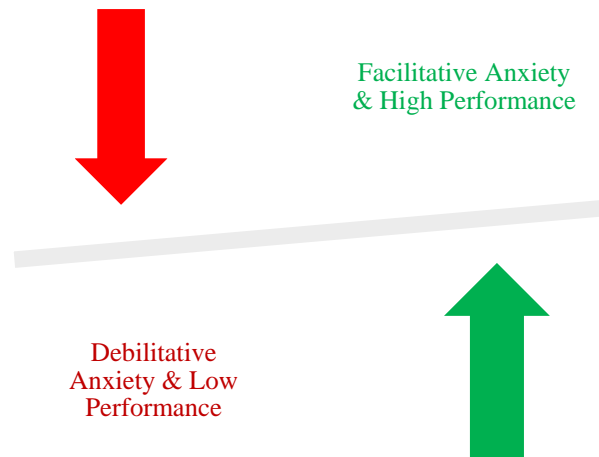


Figure 1.2 The tradeoff between facilitative and debilitating anxieties

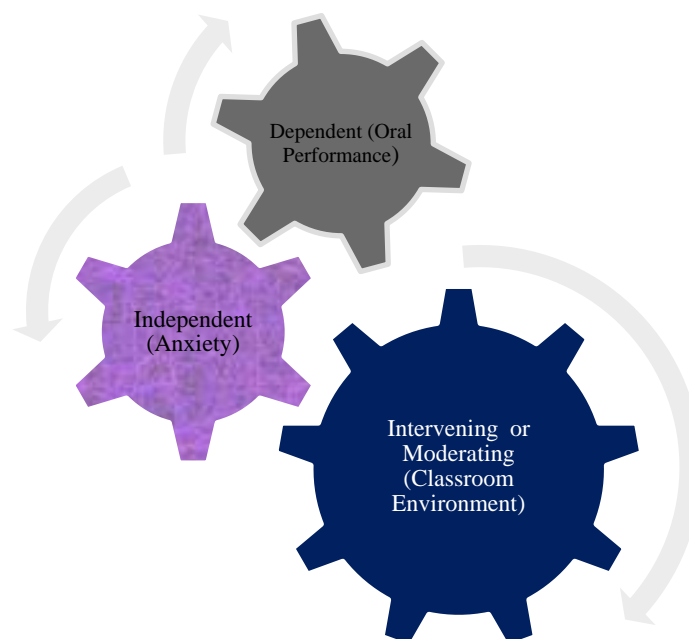


Figure 1.3 The variables involved

Figure 1-2 through 1.4 depict the two-dimensional view of anxiety, the variables involved in the study and the factors affecting anxiety, respectively. It needs to be mentioned that the adoption of repeated measures makes it possible to control for extraneous variables which can further confound the investigation of the interplay between anxiety and oral performance.

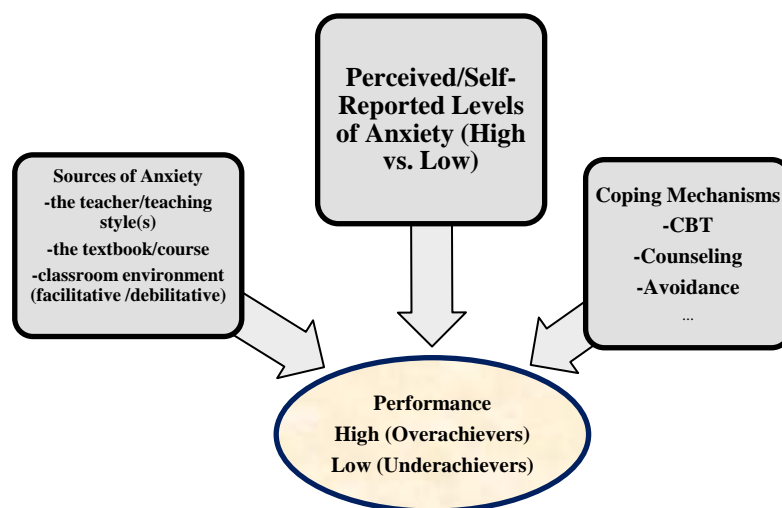


Figure 1.4 The hierarchy of anxiety-performance interaction

1.11 Operational Definition of Terms

Anxiety: Doctor et al (2008) define anxiety as “an unpleasant feeling of generalized fear and apprehension, often of unknown origin, accompanied by physiological symptoms” (p. 50). They compare and contrast anxiety and fear and anxiety and depression while Oxford (1993) associates it with uneasiness, apprehension or fear triggered by anticipation of a threat. Anxiety, whether facilitative or debilitating, was operationalized with reference to the Anxiety Questionnaire (AQ) which comprised of 125 dichotomous and 7 essay-type open-ended items. The scale is used by both the researcher and the raters to find the severity and the level of self-perceived anxiety Iranian EFL students’ experience.

EFL/ESL: Another salient issue to be clarified, at this juncture, is the distinction between EFL and ESL settings. The following differences are traditionally believed to exist between ESL and EFL. On the one hand, ESL classrooms were usually characterized by dominance of the language in an environment where the students were mostly immigrants and there were no native culture or language and students had ample opportunity to be exposed, on a daily basis, to the language outside the classroom. In typical ESL classrooms, English is taught to immigrants in an English-speaking country. On the other hand, EFL

classrooms were held in countries where English was not the dominant language with a common culture or language with exposure limited only to the teacher who might or might not be a native speaker with very few, if any, opportunities, to apply the knowledge acquired outside the classrooms. In typical EFL classrooms, English is taught to nonnative speakers in a non-English speaking country. However, most of these distinctions, in the author's humble opinion, are no longer as sharp as they used to be due to the advent of internet technology, e.g. in the form of online interactions with native speakers, and the exposure it affords the global community whose occurrence is becoming more and more common around the globe. Despite the fundamentally sharp differences once believed to have existed in this realm and the nuance that just does not come through the mainstream media setting, the author believes that these distinctions are no longer as clear cut as they used to be being blurred increasingly with the passage of time as more communication developments, such as satellite, TV, subtitled movies, field trips, Internet, Skype, language institutes, mobile communication services, online chat rooms/fora come to the scene providing the learners with a lens through which both the language and the culture can be observed in a non-distorted manner allowing them practical ways to step out into and effortlessly make bridges towards integration with the larger (global) community using English. The fact that there are many native English-speaking communities in the world who live in non-English speaking countries, e.g. the native English speaker community in Saudi Arabia, Dubai, etc who do not speak the language of the countries in which they live, testifies to the existence of this fact. Therefore, due to the substantial overlap in the characteristics of the subjects participating in the present study (e.g. lack of dominance of the language outside classroom and students not being immigrants) the author of the present thesis believes that the EFL/ESL distinction is only marginally helpful in the context of the present research and should not be discussed in crisp generalities and categories with a "two acronyms fit all learners" mentality which may, in all likelihood, prove to be delimiting and counterproductive to the vision contemplated for the present research. As a result, the acronym EFL is employed to refer to all the subjects participating in the study.

Facilitative Anxiety: For the purpose of this research, facilitative anxiety is operationally defined as the building of anxiety into the learning/teaching

environment up to a level immediately below the threshold at which debilitating anxiety surfaces with the threshold being specific to each individual as different individuals present debilitating anxiety symptoms at different levels and the set of procedures and techniques specific to facilitative anxiety. The improvement gained by the inclusion of facilitative anxiety can be measured by the difference between the posttest score and the pretest score. In simple words, facilitative anxiety refers to the generation of levels of anxiety which fall immediately short of the threshold at which individuals stop performing the task successfully this being where the symptoms of debilitating anxiety surface. The concepts of facilitative and debilitating anxiety can be clarified with reference to the results obtained and not the associated levels (Jahangiri et al., 2011). Figure 1.5 depicts the conceptualization of facilitative vs. debilitating anxieties.

Facilitative Anxiety: Towards A Definition

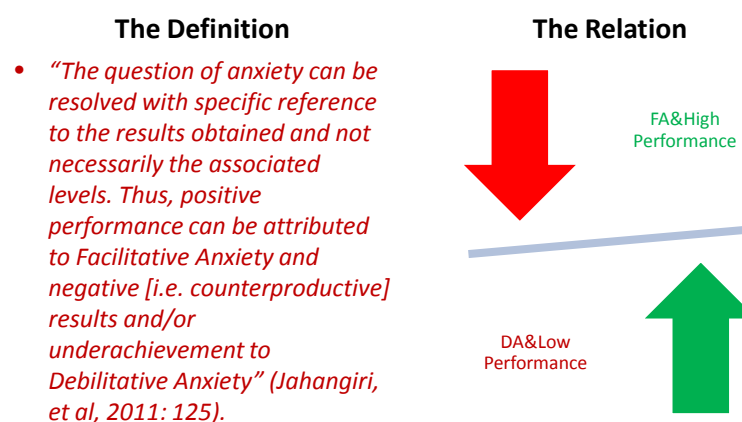


Figure 1.5 The interplay between FA and DA

Facilitative Anxiety vs. Debilitative Anxiety: The issue of delineating and disambiguating the blurred division between facilitative or debilitating anxieties has generated debate amongst researchers. Some scholars have made a distinction between facilitative and debilitating anxieties (Alpert & Haber, 1960; Kleinmann, 1977; Scovel, 1978). Alpert and Haber (1960) were among the first to refer to this

dichotomy (Bailey, 1983; Kleinmann, 1977; Scovel, 1978). Generally speaking, facilitative anxiety is considered to be an asset improving performance whereas the debilitating counterpart is invariably deemed to be detrimental to performance. Facilitative anxiety, as the term implies, enhances, encourages, and facilitates learning and thus performance while its debilitating counterpart leads to underachievement and poor performance. Early pioneering research on the affect-performance relationship dates back to Yerkes and Dodson (1908) who propose a curvilinear association to represent the relationship between arousal and performance with medium-level affect/arousal closely-associated with optimal performance. Yerkes and Dodson (1908) showed that mice learnt the most as they were administered medium-intensity electric shocks, i.e. medium/moderate arousal, whose association is graphically represented as an inverted U-curve. It is evident from this inverted U-curve that both excessive arousal/ High Anxiety (HA) in this case and non-anxiety or Low Anxiety (LA) are counterproductive to and detrimental to performance. Facilitative anxiety is closely associated and is bound to occur at medium levels of intensity along the continuum of anxiety and the creation of moderate levels of anxiety may lead to optimal performance. Other researchers believe that facilitative anxiety and debilitating anxiety may coexist simultaneously. Alpert and Haber (1960:213) submitted that individuals may experience high levels of both anxieties, “one but not the other”, or none. This is congruent with Scovel (1978) who advocated the conceptualization of these anxieties as functioning together or in his terms working “in tandem”. Among the first attempts at a definition of facilitative anxiety one can refer to Young (1986: 440) who defines facilitating anxiety as “an increase in drive level” leading to “improved performance”. In a lucid and clear-cut explication of the division between Facilitating Anxiety (Hence FA) and Debilitating/Debitative Anxiety (DA), Jahangiri M. , Sharif, H. R. and Rajab A. B. (2011) define the cusp between the two constructs in terms of the results obtained. They state that the question of anxiety may be resolved with specific reference to the results obtained and not necessarily the associated levels and that positive performance may be attributed to FA and negative or counterproductive outcomes and/or underachievement to DA (p 125). Contrarily, as the traditional literature on language learning anxiety abounds in studies citing the negative consequences of anxiety there is, currently, no shortage of theorizing on debilitating anxiety with the literature defining debilitating anxiety in

terms of its impediment of language learning and learners suffering from fear and insecurity, poor performance and avoidance behavior (Gardner, 1985).

As was stated earlier in the section on the theoretical framework, the present study subscribes to the complementary model proposed by Scovel (1978) where facilitative and debilitating anxieties work in tandem and cooperate either to warn and flee the perceived danger or to motivate and fight it. This view necessitates consideration of these two complementary drives as inseparable parts of a whole which has to be captured in its entirety. In other words, it is through the medium of contemplating this interplay, interaction, and cooperation that the two constructs form shape and meaning. As such both facilitative and debilitating anxieties are operationally defined as the total score obtained from the instrument developed solely for the purposes of the present study (i.e. the Anxiety Questionnaire) with the low, moderate, and high cutoff points representing where facilitative and debilitating anxieties exert effect.

Foreign Language: the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992) defines Foreign Language (FL) as a nonnative language in a country usually studied either to communicate with foreigners who speak the language or to read materials on the language which are printed (p. 142).

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA): Horwitz et al. (1986) define foreign language anxiety as a "distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behavior related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128) which incorporates the elements of "freezing" in class, "going blank" prior to tests, physiological indicators as shaking and/or sweating. They (1986) point to several important constructs; test anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation further explaining that foreign language anxiety is not merely a blend of these constructs (128-129).

General Anxiety: This refers to a state of apprehension, feelings of uneasiness and self-doubt, and a vague fear (Scovel, 1978; Brown, 1987).

Language Proficiency: Language proficiency can be defined as "a person's skill in using a language for a specific purpose...to the degree of skill with which a person can use a language, such as how well a person can read, write, speak, or understand language" (Richards et al., 1992, p. 204), while language achievement is "a learner's proficiency ...as the result of what has been taught...after a period of instruction" (p. 197).

Language Anxiety: MacIntyre and Gardner (1994: 284) define this construct as “the feeling of tension and apprehension” which is “specifically associated with” SL speaking, listening, and learning”. In the present thesis, Language Anxiety is operationally defined as the feeling of anxiety (whether facilitative or debilitating or the interaction thereof) reported by EFL students through the medium of the AQ and in the course of conducting the oral tasks.

Oral Proficiency/Performance: Van Lier (1989: 492) defines Oral Proficiency (hence OP) as “aspects of communicative competence” which are demonstrated and assessed in the OPI’s (Oral Proficiency Interviews). Oral proficiency, as demonstrated in oral performance, is operationally defined here as the mark obtained through the administration of the OP instrument employed in the present research in the course of conducting oral proficiency interviews. Being limited to student ability demonstrated in speaking tests (Phillips, 1992) oral performance refers to performance gauged by the FLOSEM during the oral tasks. Oral performance is operationalized with reference to the FLOSEM which is used by the raters to evaluate the oral performance of Iranian students in the course of delivering in prompt speeches in the experimental component of the research.

Second Language (SL): Second language refers to "a language which is not a native language in a country but which is widely used as a medium of communication (e.g., in education and in government) and which is usually used alongside another language or languages. English is described as a second language in countries such as Fiji, Singapore, and Nigeria (Richards et al., 1992, p. 143).

State versus Trait Anxiety: There are many classifications for the term “anxiety”. As a result, *anxiety* is of several categories. A major classification refers to the endurance of anxiety as a personality characteristic with the passage of time. On the one hand, state anxiety is a fleeting, nonenduring, transient, momentary or situational personality characteristic or condition which “fluctuates over time” (Spielberger, 1966:12). Examples include test anxiety immediately before the exam and language learning anxiety which are experienced as the condition deemed by the individual as potentially anxiety-provoking occurs. On the other hand, trait anxiety refers to a more lasting, stable and enduring predisposition or personality characteristic representing a “constant condition” which is not constrained by time (Levitt, 1980:11). It is a stable personality feature or disposition predisposing the organism to perceive numerous “nondangerous” conditions as “threatening” (Spielberger, 1966: 16). The anxiety dealt with in the present research is limited to language learning situations. Language Learning Anxiety (hence LLA) falls into the category of situation-specific anxieties.

Students: This refers to university students enrolled in EFL subjects at Azad University who volunteered to participate in the study.

Test Anxiety: Test anxiety refers to a situation-specific trait where the individual is predisposed to respond with elevated anxiety levels in performance-oriented contexts (Hodapp, Glanzmann, & Laux, 1995; Keith, Hodapp, Schermelleh-Engel, & Moosbrugger, 2003).

1.12 Outline of the Study

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter articulates the researcher's objectives and the philosophy that underlies the approach he adopts. It helps to explain the perspectives by discussing misconceptions about anxiety (e.g. anxiety always produces negative effects). The second chapter entitled, Review of Literature, takes up the question of anxiety by outlining the various aspects

associated with anxiety providing the reader with a solid background of the field. It provides an account of the theoretical foundations, concepts, constructs, definitions, and variables relevant to anxiety. The third chapter, Research Methodology, lays out a framework by means of which anxiety can be tested. Indeed, the framework presented in Chapter 3, provides the necessary foundation for subsequent discussion of results. Chapter 4, entitled Findings and Discussion, is further subdivided into three sections; the data screening processes (i.e. impossible and missing data, and the treatment of outliers and normality), the findings emanating from this data as related to the research questions, a retrospective reconsideration, discussion and analysis of the research questions. Chapter 5, Conclusion, takes up the interpretation of the results and pedagogical implications. It deals with analysis of results and includes a discussion of the importance of the topic in current literature and possible future research directions in which to proceed. It also incorporates a final retrospective evaluation to ascertain whether the goals of the present thesis, as embodied in the first chapter, have been realized.

1.13 Summary

This chapter presented a general overview of the underpinnings and the fundamental insights into the nature of anxiety and how this phenomenon affects individuals. It sets the scene for a more specific and detailed discussion of the term in later chapters. Subsequently, it continued with a discussion of the nature and the scope of the topic under investigation orienting the reader to the pertinent literature in the second chapter and hinting at the method whereby the subject is investigated. It clearly specified the directions and the perspectives from which the anxiety phenomenon should be conceptualized. Finally, terms quintessential to undertaking research in this realm were also included for clarification purposes. In doing so, abandonment of absolutistic notions of anxiety as triggering only negative effects in favor of relativistic terms such as debilitating and facilitative anxiety was inevitable.

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