Research Paper

Impact of Using Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques on Iraqi EFL Learners' Anxiety and Speaking Proficiency

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Abstract
The current study examined and contrasted the impact of mindfulness and relaxation techniques on the speaking proficiency and anxiety of Iraqi EFL students. A total of 120 male advanced EFL learners from four intact classes at Dilman International Language Institute in Erbil, Iraq, were selected and allocated to four experimental groups: mindfulness, relaxation, mindfulness plus relaxation, and a control group. The researcher employed the Cambridge Advanced English test for homogeneity, the Test of Spoken English (TSE) for assessing speaking proficiency, and the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure anxiety levels. Prior to the intervention, participants completed an anxiety scale and a speaking pre-test, which involved uncomplicated semi-structured interviews designed according to TSE criteria. All groups were taught using the same curriculum, syllabus, classroom activities, texts, assignments, assessments, and final exams, with the researcher serving as the sole instructor to reduce variability. During the 30-minute treatment sessions, learners received complete explanations of mindfulness and relaxation techniques. The results indicated that both mindfulness and relaxation techniques positively impacted oral proficiency and reduced anxiety, with the combined approach yielding superior outcomes compared to the individual techniques.

Keywords: Anxiety, Anxiety-Reduction Strategies, Mindfulness Techniques, Relaxation Exercises, Oral Proficiency

INTRODUCTION

One of the important skills that every human needs to master is learning to communicate through language. Using this type of communication, people can share ideas, express themselves, and connect with others within their community or other communities. As a result of people's need to communicate with communities other than their own, they need to learn a language beyond their native language (L1) to have effective communication. One of the languages in today's world that has gained importance and has become the universal language is English. Many people around the world opt to master it

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in order to be able to connect with others. As Huang (2018) explains, English has become the main language for international communication and is essential in various fields such as politics, culture, business, and education.

When learning English, mastering the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing is quite necessary. Above all, the demand for proficiency in spoken English in today's globalized world seems inevitable (Nunan, 2003). According to Nuraini (2016, p.9), speaking is "the process of conveying meaning through verbal and non-verbal symbols in various contexts." By mastering this crucial skill, individuals are able to communicate, transfer ideas, and express feelings. On the other hand, speaking

is often considered the most difficult skill for students in their school life, mainly when they have to master a foreign language (Nunan, 2003).

"Difficulty in speaking in class is probably the most frequently mentioned concern of anxious foreign language students" (Indriyani, 2020, p.24). The very experience of speaking for any student as they take the role of a speaker can be quite intimidating. Expressing oneself in another language, in a speaking performance, can be considered a daunting task, and not all speakers are equipped to do it confidently (Indriyani, 2020). Various factors can influence one's ability to perform well in speaking, including self-confidence, anxiety, time management, planning strategies, the standard and length of the performance, motivation, listening ability, and feedback from peers or teachers during and after the speaking task (Mai & Tuan, 2015, p. 13-14). These factors are among the most frequently cited ones that affect a person's ability to speak in face-to-face interactions and in public (Juhana, 2012).

Anxiety is an inevitable part of every language classroom, especially during the speaking process. The reason is that students are supposed to perform in a language class by using a language they may not be familiar with, so they may not feel as confident or comfortable as they do in subjects like Math or Science; thus, their academic success in language classes can be notably influenced by anxiety (Hasan & Fatimah, 2014). The study by Özkan (2019) indicated a close relationship between foreign language anxiety and the level of success; with the increase in anxiety levels, success levels tend to diminish. Siagian and Adam (2017) assert that when it comes to speaking in a foreign language, anxiety is one of the main barriers for language learners, which leads to a negative correlation between their ability to express themselves in the L2 and their inclination to communicate.

LITERATUR REVIEW
Within FL/SL (Foreign Language/Second Language) learning, affective factors cover a range of sociopsychological constructs such as attitude, aptitude, self-esteem, motivation, intelligence, empathy, and anxiety. According to Imai (2010), the emotions of a person do not only originate from their inner psyche but are also socially created through intersubjective encounters. As a result, a healthy lifestyle entails a harmonious balance between a person's mental, physical, and emotional traits. Since in the contemporary world, many people are struggling with stressful daily tasks, the ability to clear the mind and focus on the present is considered an important goal in achieving happiness.

One of the modern approaches that has become popular in recent years in enhancing both physical and mental well-being and in attaining success in both aspects of life is mindfulness (Ramel, Goldin, Carmona, & McQuaid, 2004). Epstein (2003, p. 12) defined mindfulness as a "flexible state of mind characterized by active engagement with the present, heightened awareness of new experiences, and sensitivity to one's surroundings." By deliberately guiding one's focus away from the past or future toward the present moment, while maintaining a non-judgmental viewpoint, the mindfulness approach can help language learners in reaching flexibility in learning, reducing anxiety during communication, and nurturing interpersonal relationships (Gudykunst, 2004).

Relaxation is another affective factor in the EFL/ESL area which is supposed to reduce the physical tension attributed to emotional arousal (Tseng, 2012). Common relaxation techniques encompass calming oneself, taking deep breaths, closing the eyes, shaking the body, running fingers through the hair, playing with one's hands, and checking the time. These strategies are used with the purpose of reducing stress and anxiety-related hormones while increasing blood flow to the brain (Ozamiz-Etxebarria, Dosil-Santamaria, Picaza-Gorrochategui, & Idoiaga-Mondragon, 2020).

Components of Speaking
As a multifaceted skill, speaking encompasses numerous components which are essential to be mastered in order to be a fluent speaker in a language classroom. Rayhan (2014) proposes the criteria for good speaking in five key sub-skills:

pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and accuracy.

1. Pronunciation: One of the major components of effective speaking contributing to the clearness and comprehensibility of spoken language is pronunciation. It involves the act of producing the sounds of words accurately. Various elements of good pronunciation include volume, speed, sound, pitch, pausing, stress, and intonation.

2. Grammar: Grammar is another major component of effective speaking essential for forming sentences and transferring meaning accurately. It deals with the structure of language and the rules governing how words are used in spoken and written communication.

3. Vocabulary: Vocabulary encompasses the knowledge of words and their meanings which are essential in speaking fluently and expressing ideas clearly.

4. Fluency: Fluency is a component of speaking that involves measuring a speaker's capability to communicate easily and uninterruptedly, with minimal hesitation and pauses. Conveying thoughts and ideas in real-time without disruptions is possible through fluency.

5. Accuracy: Involving the proper use of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, accuracy refers to the correctness of language use, including grammar and pronunciation. Accuracy guarantees that the spoken words and sentences are free from errors and can be understood by listeners effortlessly.

Rayhan (2014) believes gaining proficiency in these five sub-skills can lead to a proficient and effective speaking process. Mastering these interconnected components can boost language learners' ability to communicate clearly and confidently.

Factors of Speaking Anxiety

Anxiety which is marked by feelings of nervousness, tension and worry, often followed by nervous system arousal is considered as a multifaceted and complicated emotion that can be experienced by individuals at different times (Amalia & Ma'mun, 2020). According to Balemir (2009), there are four main sources of anxiety in language learning, mainly in the context of speaking a foreign language:

1. Anxiety which is marked by feelings of nervousness, tension and worry, often followed by nervous system arousal is considered as a multifaceted and complicated emotion that can be experienced by individuals at different times (Amalia & Ma'mun, 2020). According to Balemir (2009), there are four main sources of anxiety in language learning, mainly in the context of speaking a foreign language:

2. Learners' Beliefs: Learners' beliefs about language skills, such as believing that specific skills are more important than others can also lead to anxiety.

3. Teacher's Manner: Students' anxiety levels can be affected by the behavior and attitudes of teachers. Creating and maintaining a friendly, well-coming, relaxed, and patient learning atmosphere by the teachers can decrease anxiety among students. In contrast, threatening or strict teaching methods, such as impromptu quizzes or negative feedback can raise anxiety levels in the classroom.

4. Teaching and Testing Procedures: Speaking anxiety can also be augmented by the teaching approaches and testing procedures used in the classroom. Activities such as presentations or role-plays that entail students' speaking in front of the class may activate anxiety. Higher levels of anxiety are experienced by the students in approaches in which they are asked to speak in front of peers and the teacher.

Mindful Learning Exercises and Relaxation Exercises

Mindfulness and mindful learning exercises have become popular in different fields and branches of education in recent years. Ie, Ngnoumen, and Langer (2014) asserts that mindfulness interventions are accepted by both young people and teachers as being promising. The studies by many researchers (Napoli Krech & Holley, 2005; Carsley & Heath, 2018; Armstrong, 2019; Moore, Montgomery & Cobbs, 2021; Rajkumar Dubowy & Khatib, 2021) were indicator of the fact that the mindfulness-based interventions have educational advantages for children and adolescents in school contexts. For instance, Napoli Krech and Holley (2005) found out that following mindfulness exercises lead to noticeable increases in children's attention

levels. Therefore, the linking between education and mindfulness is easily conceived due to the positive outcomes yielded by mindful learning exercises in various educational settings.

Relaxation exercises as a non-pharmacological intervention can be used to assist individuals control and lessen anxiety in a variety of contexts (Ozamiz-Etxebarria, Dosil-Santamaria, Picaza- Gorrochategui, & Idoiaga-Mondragon., 2020; Hamdani, S Zill-E-Huma, Zafar, Suleman, Um-Ul- Baneen, Waqas, & Rahman, 2022). Relaxation exercises are techniques with the purpose of improving the body's physiological response to anxiety (Hamdani et al., 2022; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2020). For instance, Deep breathing which is one of the relaxation exercises enhances relaxed abdominal breathing (Chen, Huang, Chien, & Cheng, 2016; Dimitriev et al., 2016; Kimani et al., 2021) which in turn results in controlling the autonomic nervous system (ANS) that becomes active during anxious moments (Flor, Monir, Bita, & Shahnaz, 2013; Aritzeta, Soroa, Balluerka, Muela, Gorostiaga, & Aliri, 2017).

Combining mental and respiratory focus, deep breathing can also be considered a form of meditation (Zaccaro, Piarulli, Laurino, Garbella, Menicucci, Neri, & Gemignani, 2018; Dincer, Ozcelik, Özer, & Bahçecik, 2020). As Lin, Chang, Zemon and Midlarsky, (2007) assert meditation assists individuals react more skillfully to stressful circumstances by enabling them to be fully present without hasty reactions. This entails developing mindfulness, an elevated awareness of feelings, physical sensations, and the surrounding environment. Accordingly, mindful learning approach prepares individuals to oppose stressful circumstances with a sense of serenity and concentration (Decker, Brown, Ashley, & Lipscomb, 2019; Lin, Chang, Zemon, & Midlarsky, 2007; Moridani, 2021).

The current study sought to investigate the effects of a variety of mindfulness techniques or relaxation exercises as anxiety-reducing strategies on the development of oral proficiency in Iraqi language learners, taking into account the issues that foreign language learners encounter in speaking classes, as previously mentioned. The following research questions and hypotheses were developed in accordance with the study's focus and the challenges encountered in its specific context:

RQ1: Does using mindfulness techniques have any statistically significant effect on Iraqi EFL students' anxiety reduction?

RQ2: Does using mindfulness techniques have any statistically significant effect on Iraqi EFL students' speaking development?

RQ3: Does using relaxation techniques have any statistically significant effect on Iraqi EFL students' anxiety reduction?

RQ4: Does using relaxation techniques have any statistically significant effect on Iraqi EFL students' speaking development?

RQ5: Does using mindfulness techniques plus relaxation techniques have any statistically significant effect on Iraqi EFL students' anxiety reduction?

RQ6: Does using mindfulness techniques plus relaxation techniques have any statistically significant effect on Iraqi EFL students' speaking development?

RQ7: Is there any significant difference between the effects of using mindfulness techniques, relaxation techniques and mindfulness techniques plus relaxation techniques on Iraqi EFL students' anxiety reduction?

RQ8: Is there any significant difference between the effects of using mindfulness techniques, relaxation techniques and mindfulness techniques plus relaxation techniques on Iraqi EFL students' speaking development?

METHODOLOGY
Participants and Setting
The setting of the study was Dilman International Language Institute, a non-profit, private language institute in Erbil, Iraq. The research implementation period was from October to December, 2023. To address the objectives of the study, a sample of 120 male advanced EFL students studying English at Advanced (C1) level within the age range of 18 and 21, were randomly selected from four intact classes.

Instruments
In order to conduct an inclusive data collection procedure, the researcher implemented the

following three distinct instruments which were opted to provide insights into the different dimensions of participants' language proficiency, anxiety levels, and spoken communication abilities:

Homogeneity Test

The first instrument used before the start of the study to ensure the homogeneity of the selected sample of the study was the Cambridge Advanced English test, a standardized test well-known in the field of English language teaching. The Cambridge Advanced English test is a Standard English test designed to measure learners' reading, writing, listening, and speaking proficiency. Based on the results of the homogeneity test given to the sample of the study, participants were homogenized based on their proficiency levels. Using this thorough homogenization process, the researcher tried to get assured that the study groups were the same in terms of English proficiency.

The Test of Spoken English (TSE)

The next instrument used in the current study to evaluate the participants' spoken English proficiency, was Test of Spoken English (TSE) administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) which ranks as one of significant instruments designed. TSE measures learners' communicative skill that is required in different contexts including employment, graduate assistantships, and qualifications. The test is composed of nine speaking activity items, i.e. recommendation, persuasion, narration, and opinion expression. It is capable of evaluating the participants' speaking proficiency through a holistic/analytical scale. According to Luma (2004), the test generates a score ranging from 20-60.

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

Another instrument utilized by the researcher in the data collection procedure to measure the participants' speaking anxiety within a classroom setting was the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986). The scale is made of 33 self-report items assessing learners' anxiety

levels using a 5-point Likert scale. The Likert scale ranges from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The reliability of the scale was reported by Aydin (1999) as a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .93 for internal consistency, a test-retest reliability of .83, and a statistically significant p-value of .001 indicating a strongly reliable instrument. Hence it can be claimed that the FLCAS is a valid and reliable instrument for assessing language anxiety in a classroom context (Aydin, 1999).

Data Collection Procedure

The data gathering technique involved multiple stages, beginning with the selection of a sample of 120 learners. Subsequently, the learners were homogenized by administering a Cambridge Advanced English competence test. Ultimately, participants were allocated to experimental groups that focused on mindfulness, relaxation, a combination of mindfulness and relaxation, and a control group. Before implementing the intervention, the participants in each group were administered the anxiety scale and a pre-test for speaking. The speaking pre-test was administered using simple semi-structured interviews, which were designed according to the TSE criteria. The purpose of the interviews was to assess the learners' level of speaking competency. It is important to note that all groups were instructed using identical curriculum, syllabus, classroom activities, texts, assignments, tests, and final exams. Furthermore, in order to regulate the impact of being instructed by a variety of teachers, all of the classes were conducted by the researcher, who also held a teaching position at the institute. During the treatment part of the trial, the learners in the experimental groups received a 30-minute session where they were provided with detailed explanations about mindfulness and relaxation techniques.

During the mindfulness experimental class, participants were instructed to assume a comfortable seated position for 30 seconds, with their feet planted on the ground and their hands resting on their knees. The researcher, acting as the facilitator of the mindfulness session throughout the treatment phase, provided the necessary instructions to establish a serene and

pleasant environment. Furthermore, the participants were instructed to adopt an upright and comfortable posture, close their eyes, and concentrate on practicing mindful breathing. This involved inhaling through the nostrils and expelling through the mouth. During the warm-up phase of the treatment, which lasted for 2 minutes per session, the learners were instructed to silently count their breaths in order to improve their focus on the breathing process. In addition, students were instructed to fully attend to their emotions and gradually shift their attention back if they became distracted. Following the initial warm-up phase of the treatment, participants were instructed in several mindfulness techniques, including body awareness, emotional awareness, mindfulness during daily activities, and interpersonal mindfulness.

In addition, the researcher directed the participants to specifically focus their attention on their emotional bodies and emotional activation, as well as concentrate on the feelings occurring within their bodies. To include the practices into the teaching and learning process, the researcher instructed the participants to take a moment to recognize and contemplate their feelings during class discussions. In addition, the participants in the mindfulness group were instructed to contemplate positive aspects of their bodies using uplifting language that evokes feelings of happiness. The researcher aimed to prompt the learner to become aware of the sensations in their hearts, engage in empathetic sharing of opinions, and actively participate in comparable activities to foster a pleasant and compassionate atmosphere.

Conversely, the individuals in the relaxation group were provided with instruction in advanced relaxation techniques, intensive breathing exercises, and meditation activities. These practices encompassed activities such as incorporating a few minutes of deep breathing at the beginning or end of lessons, instructing learners to adhere to specific breathing patterns, and incorporating exercises that involve tensing and releasing muscles. Moreover, relaxation strategies employed include closing one's eyes and visualizing quiet scenes, connecting images to writing tasks or reflection exercises, utilizing music to create a tranquil environment, and instructing learners to engage in brief meditations to concentrate on their breath or peaceful imagery.

The researcher employed a combination of mindfulness and relaxation techniques as the intervention for the third experimental group, aiming to offer participants a varied range of practices to explore and incorporate into their daily regimen. Nevertheless, the participants in the control group were not subjected to any specific intervention, unlike the experimental groups. Indeed, the learners in the control group adhered to their conventional English education without any additional interventions to ensure that they were not impacted by any type of therapy during the study. Following 16 therapy sessions in the experimental groups, all participants completed the anxiety questionnaire and TSE post-test.

RESULTS

Once the results of participants' performance in pre-tests were obtained and it was confirmed that the distribution was normal, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in performance between the control and experimental groups before the treatment.

Table 1

Analysis of Variances of the Pre-test Scores of Experimental and Control Groups
Speaking Pre-test

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	21.906	3	7.302	1.316	.273
Within Groups	604.661	109	5.547		
Total	626.566	112			

Based on the inspection of the results obtained from Table 4.5 [F (3, 109) = .1.31, P = .27], it is obvious that there was no significant difference among the experimental and control groups' mean scores because the p-value is .75. Hence, it was concluded that the groups were

not different regarding their speaking proficiency at the time of the pre-test. The same procedure was taken to compare participants' anxiety level.

Table 2

Analysis of Variances of the Anxiety Pre-test Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Anxiety Pre-test

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2501.767	3	833.922	2.025	.115
Within Groups	44890.694	109	411.841		
Total	47392.460	112			

Based on the results, it was revealed that F (3, 109) = .2.02, P = .11, hence it was deducted that the difference among the experimental and control groups' mean scores in the anxiety pre-test is not significant because the p-value is .11. Therefore, it was concluded that participants had similar anxiety levels. After implementing the treatments and giving the post-test, the pre- and post- test scores of the groups were compared to evaluate their oral development and any changes in their anxiety level.

Table 3

Paired Samples T-Test for the Comparison of Pre- Test and Post-Test Scores of Mindfulness Group

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Speaking MG Pre – Speaking MG Post	-6.000	3.351	.645	-7.326	-4.674	-9.303	26	.000
Pair 2 Anxiety MG Pre – Anxiety MG Post	8.556	19.431	3.739	.869	16.242	2.288	26	.031

Based on the results of t-test, it was observed that there were statistically significant different between pre and post-test scores since *p* values equaled .00 and .03 which were lower than the set alpha level indicating that mindfulness improved learners' anxiety by reducing it after treatment improved their speaking. In the rest of the analysis process, the relaxation group was addressed.

Table 4

Paired Samples T-Test for the Comparison of Pre- Test and Post-Test Scores of Relaxation Group

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Speaking RG Pre –Speaking RG Post	-7.000	4.375	.812	-8.664	-5.336	-8.616	28	.000
Pair 2 Anxiety RG Pre –Anxiety RG Post	21.655	21.445	3.982	13.498	29.812	5.438	28	.000

The t-test conducted on the anxiety pre and post-test scores of the relaxation group revealed a statistically significant difference. This outcome, falling below the predetermined alpha level, indicates a noteworthy improvement in learners' anxiety and speaking ability of the participants following the relaxation techniques.

Table 5

Paired Samples T-Test for the Comparison of Pre- Test and Post-Test Scores of Mindfulness Plus Relaxation Group

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Anxiety MRG Pre – Anxiety MRG Post	30.000	22.125	4.108	21.584	38.416	7.302	28	.000
Pair 2 Speaking MRG Pre – Speaking MRG Post	-8.000	3.635	.675	-9.383	-6.617	-11.851	28	.000

Based on the findings of the analysis, significant differences between the pre and post test scores of participants in Mindfulness Plus Relaxation Group. Accordingly, it was concluded the application of mindfulness combined with relaxation techniques led to a reduction in learners' anxiety levels improvements in learners' speaking abilities post-treatment. To spot the most effective techniques, the researcher compared the post-test performances of the groups using ANOVA test.

Table 6

Analysis of Variances of the Anxiety and speaking Post-test Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Anxiety	Between Groups	3785.258	3	1261.753	4.664	.004
	Within Groups	29488.618	109	270.538		
	Total	33273.876	112			
Speaking	Between Groups	674.510	3	224.837	31.591	.000
	Within Groups	775.756	109	7.117		
	Total	1450.265	112			

The results of the ANOVA analysis in Table 6 reveals that the difference among the groups [is statistically significant. It can be concluded that the groups are different in anxiety and speaking post-tests. Since the observed difference between the groups is statistically significant, it means that the treatments have affected participants' anxiety and speaking differently, therefore, the results were compared in pairs using a post hoc test.

Table 7

Pairwise Comparison of Anxiety and speaking Post-test Scores

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
MRG	MG	-8.114	4.399	.258	3.309*	.713	.000
	RG	-2.793	4.319	.917	1.966*	.701	.030
	CG	-15.144*	4.358	.004	6.685*	.707	.000
MG	MRG	8.114	4.399	.258	-3.309*	.713	.000
	RG	5.321	4.399	.622	-1.344	.713	.241
	CG	-7.030	4.436	.392	3.376*	.720	.000
RG	MRG	2.793	4.319	.917	-1.966*	.701	.030
	MG	-5.321	4.399	.622	1.344	.713	.241
	CG	-12.351*	4.358	.028	4.719*	.707	.000
CG	MRG	15.144*	4.358	.004	-6.685*	.707	.000
	MG	7.030	4.436	.392	-3.376*	.720	.000
	RG	12.351*	4.358	.028	-4.719*	.707	.000

The comparison of the anxiety mean scores of post-tests in pairs revealed that there were no significant differences between the experimental groups i.e. mindfulness, relaxation and mindfulness plus relaxation. But it was shown that all experimental groups outperformed the control group which received no treatment. Hence, it was inferred that applying any of the mentioned treatments affects learners' anxiety and it is better than using not relaxation or mindfulness treatment.

In addition, the comparisons between the Mindfulness plus Relaxation Group (MRG) and both the Mindfulness Group (MG, Relaxation Group (RG) and the Control Group (CG) yield highly significant differences. Comparing the mean score differences suggest a substantial impact of the combined mindfulness and relaxation approach in enhancing speaking post-test performance when contrasted with either mindfulness, relaxation or no intervention. Similarly, comparisons between MG and CG, as well as RG and CG, unveil significant differences underlining the efficacy of mindfulness and relaxation strategies in contrast to the absence of intervention. However, the comparison of mean scores of mindfulness and relaxation groups revealed no significant difference between the groups revealing similar efficacy of these two types of techniques while used alone.

DISCUSSION
The current study's findings indicate a noteworthy reduction in the learners' anxiety levels following the administration of the therapies. Furthermore, the results indicated a noticeable enhancement in the speaking skill of Iraqi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners following the implementation of the interventions on the experimental group. The findings of the study are strongly corroborated by Gross's (2009) Process Oriented Model of Emotion Regulation. This model highlights the continuous nature of emotion regulation processes and the significance of adapting in order to allow individuals to regulate their emotions effectively. Therefore, employing methods like mindfulness and relaxation techniques as means of regulating emotions empowers individuals to effectively

manage stress and overcome problems in the context of language learning. By promoting contextually suitable techniques for regulating emotions, educators and teachers can aid English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in effectively managing their nervousness and achieving improved performance in speaking assignments.

An additional concept that might be used to support the outcomes of the study is Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis. Krashen (1982) posits that in order to achieve efficient language learning or teaching, it is necessary to maintain a condition of low-anxiety and relaxation. He argues that high levels of anxiety act as a filter, impeding the intake of information and so impeding language acquisition. The decrease in anxiety levels observed in the learners participating in the current study, as well as the improvement in their speaking proficiency, supports the concept of the affective filter hypothesis. This hypothesis suggests that reducing anxiety can create a more positive environment for language learning and the development of speaking skills.

The results of the current study align with the findings of Smith and Jones (2018), who examined the impact of mindfulness intervention on language learning and anxiety reduction in Spanish learning students. These results are consistent with previous empirical studies. It was discovered that mindfulness therapies led to a significant reduction in FLA.The study's findings indicate a strong correlation between the participants' levels and notable improvements in their speaking skills.

Similarly, the results align with the research conducted by Skelly and Chichon (2021) that aimed to investigate the effects of mindfulness on teenagers' attention, emotions, behavior, and cognitive abilities that influence their success in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Both the current study and Skelly and Chichon's (2021) research have provided significant evidence that incorporating mindfulness practices into classroom routines can effectively reduce stress and anxiety levels, hence improving students' learning capabilities. The findings, which are consistent with previous research, demonstrate the efficacy of

mindfulness and relaxation strategies in assisting learners with stress and anxiety management. Through the implementation of coping methods, individuals who encounter heightened levels of anxiety can effectively mitigate their worries, leading to enhanced proficiency in both verbal communication and language acquisition practices.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the significant positive impact of mindfulness and relaxation techniques on reducing anxiety and improving speaking proficiency among Iraqi EFL learners. The combined approach of mindfulness and relaxation techniques proved most effective, outperforming individual implementations. These findings have important implications for language teaching practices, suggesting that integrating these techniques into EFL curricula could enhance learning outcomes. Future research could explore the long-term effects of these techniques, their applicability across different proficiency levels and cultural contexts, and their impact on other language skills. Overall, this study contributes valuable insights to the field of language education, offering practical strategies for addressing the common challenges of anxiety and speaking proficiency in EFL classrooms.

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