

Original Research

Interplay of Motivation, Attitude, and Anxiety Among Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners in Task-Based Speaking Classes

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Abstract

This study was to uncover the interplay of motivation, attitude, and anxiety in Iranian intermediate EFL students' task-based speaking classes. For this purpose, 120 male and female Iranian intermediate EFL students from Safir-e-Andisheh Language Institute in Isfahan, Iran, who were homogenized using the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT), were selected via convenience sampling. The data were collected using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), Motivation Questionnaire (MQ), and Attitudinal Questionnaire (AQ) and analyzed using standard multiple regression. The findings demonstrated that behavioral and cognitive attitudes predicted the changes in anxiety, and in terms of motivation, attitude toward learning languages, pragmatic benefits, and English for the workplace explained variances in anxiety. Furthermore, interest in foreign languages, attitude toward learning languages, obligation to learn English, and English for the workplace predicted variations in EFL learners' attitudes. Concerning anxiety, the fear of negative evaluation explained variances in their attitude. This study revealed the complex interactions among motivation, attitude, and anxiety in shaping the speaking performance of Iranian intermediate EFL students, emphasizing the crucial role of positive attitudes and motivation in mitigating anxiety during task-based speaking activities. Therefore, educators should focus on fostering positive attitudes and motivation among EFL students through engaging activities and supportive environments to enhance language learning outcomes and reduce anxiety in speaking contexts.

Keywords: Anxiety, Attitude, EFL Students, Motivation, Speaking

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1. Introduction

Speaking is among the skills that should be mastered in the language learning process. Shofi (2020) asserts that oral communication constitutes a method of transmitting information through the utilization of verbal expressions or structured sentences. In other words, oral communication entails employing diverse languages depending on the discourse context. This indicates that oral communication requires language that varies according to the conversation's objectives. Consequently, speaking encompasses numerous intricate dimensions, including the capacity to articulate a message, comprehend the information presented, and process the data to grasp its significance. Furthermore, oral communication is integral to language acquisition, as it equips learners with the skills to articulate their thoughts in the target language—a critical competency for achieving linguistic proficiency (Thornbury, 2005). Hence, oral communication is one of the fundamental components learners must master to attain substantial and effective language proficiency.

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is one efficacious method for teaching speaking. In TBLT, learners exhibit heightened engagement with instructional materials because of their intrinsic relevance to the educational process (Pinter, 2015). Nunan (2004) explicates tasks as activities that constitute essential units, encompassing authentic language comprehension, manipulation, and interaction, with a primary emphasis on meaning rather than on grammatical forms. This indicates that instead of merely concentrating on the acquisition of grammatical structures or linguistic forms in isolation, the TBLT approach prioritizes the application of language in substantive and pragmatic contexts. Moreover, Van den Branden (2006) emphasizes the importance of employing tasks to stimulate language production, interaction, and the negotiation of meaning, in addition to input processing and a focus on form, all of which are theorized to enhance second language acquisition .

TBLT redirects the emphasis of education toward the fulfillment of specific tasks (Ellis, 2002). Furthermore, it promotes a student-centered paradigm, in which English educators facilitate tasks by introducing essential terminology and supervising student engagement while learners use their native language during initial orientation and task execution (Willis, 2006). Consequently, through participation in inventive tasks that mirror

real-life situations, students are expected to enhance their fluency more effectively, as their focus remains on content generation rather than the process of language teaching itself.

In general, TBLT is an effective pedagogical approach that promotes language proficiency through engaging, real-life tasks; however, its success is closely intertwined with students' motivation, attitude, and anxiety (Dörnyei, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Research indicates that motivation significantly influences learners' willingness to participate in speaking activities, as a positive attitude towards tasks can enhance engagement and persistence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Conversely, speaking anxiety can hinder performance and lead to avoidance of oral communication, emphasizing the need for instructors to create a supportive environment that mitigates stress and fosters confidence (Horwitz, 2001). By addressing these affective factors alongside TBLT, educators can ensure a more effective learning experience that promotes linguistic skills and nurtures learners' emotional well-being, thereby facilitating a more holistic approach to language acquisition (Littlewood, 2007).

Integrating task-based speaking instruction with attention to motivation, attitude, and anxiety not only enhances language development but also fosters a collaborative classroom atmosphere conducive to meaningful communication. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory, which posits that social interaction and collaborative learning are crucial for cognitive development. When learners engage in group tasks, they can support one another, share ideas, and negotiate meaning, thereby significantly reducing anxiety levels (Wang, 2019). Furthermore, designing tasks relevant to students' interests and experiences can boost intrinsic motivation, making language learning more appealing and accessible (Schunk et al., 2008). By creating a classroom environment that values peer interaction and enriches student attitudes toward speaking, instructors can transform anxiety into a motivating force that encourages proactive engagement in language use (Tanveer, 2007). Consequently, addressing these affective dimensions, which is the focus of the present study, is vital to unlocking the full potential of task-based instruction in speaking classes.

2. Literature Review

Motivation plays a crucial role in the development of English-speaking skills, as it significantly influences learners' engagement and persistence in language learning.

Theories surrounding motivation, such as Gardner's (1985) Socio-Educational Model and Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivational Self System, highlight how both intrinsic and extrinsic factors shape learners' attitudes and behaviors toward speaking English. Intrinsic motivation, driven by personal interests and the enjoyment of language learning, fosters a deeper commitment to practicing speaking skills, whereas extrinsic motivation often revolves around pragmatic benefits such as career advancement and social integration (Alrabai, 2022). Additionally, learners' positive attitudes toward the English language and the associated cultures can further enhance their motivation, leading to improved speaking proficiency (Papi & Hiver, 2020). Understanding the complex interplay among these motivational factors is crucial for educators seeking to create effective and engaging English-speaking environments that promote student success.

Zabidin et al. (2023) investigated EFL learners' perceptions of their motivation to learn English and its impact on their fear of learning. The findings indicated that while fear of learning a foreign language was prevalent among EFL learners, their motivation was not directly affected.

In educational contexts, motivation significantly influences students' participation in speaking activities, with intrinsic factors, such as personal interest, proving more effective than extrinsic pressures (Ha, 2024). Furthermore, research indicates that intrinsic motivation correlates positively with EFL students' speaking proficiency, highlighting the importance of self-determination and the use of supportive teaching strategies (Heriyanto, 2024; Zhang, 2024). As stated by Ha (2024), Intrinsic motivation, such as personal interest and self-improvement, significantly enhances students' participation in English-speaking activities. Extrinsic factors, such as grades and social recognition, also influence engagement, but their impact often depends on an individual's commitment to language acquisition. Additionally, motivation has a significant impact on EFL students' speaking performance by enhancing their oral competence. Intrinsic motivation fosters autonomous learning, reduces anxiety, and increases classroom participation, while motivational strategies based on self-determination theory can effectively improve students' spoken English abilities (Zhang, 2024).

Heriyanto (2024) reported a significant positive correlation between students' motivation in learning English and their speaking proficiency, indicating that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors play a crucial role in enhancing speaking skills among students at Shafta

Senior High School. Vu and Nguyen (2024) also found that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations significantly influence the speaking skills of English-major students. Factors such as the learning environment, limited knowledge, and teachers' pedagogical strategies also play crucial roles in enhancing students' motivation to speak English fluently.

2.1. English Speaking and Attitude

Attitude is a fundamental factor influencing English speaking proficiency, as it shapes learners' perceptions, participation, and overall engagement with language learning. Positive attitudes toward the English language and its associated cultures can lead to increased motivation and willingness to practice speaking skills (Gardner, 1985). Research indicates that learners who hold favorable attitudes toward English-speaking communities tend to exhibit greater enthusiasm and confidence in their speaking abilities, which directly contributes to enhanced fluency and communicative effectiveness (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002). Conversely, negative attitudes, often stemming from previous language learning experiences or cultural stereotypes, can hinder learners' performance and result in higher anxiety levels in speaking situations (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Understanding the pivotal role of attitude in English language learning is essential for educators, as creating a supportive and positive learning environment can significantly improve learners' attitudes and, consequently, their speaking outcomes.

Alzubi et al. (2025) investigated EFL learners' attitudes toward speaking and found that EFL students exhibit positive attitudes toward enhancing their speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment that provides support, constructive feedback, and opportunities for real-world conversations. Male students demonstrated higher attitudes than female students across all study levels. Pineda and Cerna (2023) found that ESL students exhibited a highly positive attitude toward English, which significantly influenced their speaking skills. Key motivational factors included practical purposes, teacher corrections, communication-focused activities, and a positive classroom atmosphere, enhancing their overall engagement in learning.

The findings of Wong and Ismail (2023) indicated that students generally hold positive attitudes toward TBLT and its perceived impact on their speaking abilities. However, a weak positive correlation was found between these attitudes and actual speaking performance. This suggests that while attitudes are important, they may not

directly translate into improved performance, underscoring the need to further explore other influencing factors. Finally, the study by Kurniarizki and Prasetyarin (2023) showed that vocational students generally have a positive emotional and behavioral attitude toward learning English. However, their cognitive attitude, which relates to their confidence and understanding of the language, is not as strong. This suggests that while students enjoy speaking and feel positively about it, they struggle with the knowledge and skills required to express themselves effectively in English.

2.2. English Speaking and Anxiety

Anxiety is a prevalent issue that significantly impacts learners' ability to speak English effectively, often hindering their communicative competence and confidence. Language anxiety, specifically speaking anxiety, can create a fear of negative evaluation, leading to a reluctance to engage in oral communication (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). This apprehension can significantly reduce learners' participation in classroom discussions and speaking activities, ultimately impacting their language acquisition and proficiency (Horwitz, 2001).

Pae (2013) studied the relationships among the four skill-based anxieties and their relation to general foreign language classroom anxiety. The findings demonstrated that all four skill-based anxieties were statistically distinguishable from each other, and they made an independent contribution to general classroom anxiety.

Recent studies have shown that students with higher levels of speaking anxiety often struggle with fluency and spontaneity during conversations, which can perpetuate a cycle of avoidance and underachievement (Aubrey, 2022). Understanding the interplay between anxiety and English speaking is crucial for educators, as it emphasizes the need to create supportive environments that reduce anxiety and foster improved speaking performance among learners.

Que et al. (2024) found that speaking anxiety significantly hindered EFL students' learning, manifesting as nervousness, tense body language, and fear of negative evaluation. Contributing factors include lack of vocabulary, fear of grammatical errors, and low self-confidence, necessitating targeted interventions to support students. Zou (2024) reported that the overall level of English-speaking anxiety among the 246 students surveyed was high, indicating that many students feel considerable anxiety when required to speak

English in class, and classroom anxiety had the highest average score among the students, suggesting that the classroom setting significantly contributes to their feelings of anxiety.

Despite the growing body of research examining factors that influence language learning, a significant gap remains in understanding the intricate relationships among motivation, attitude, and anxiety, particularly in the context of task-based speaking classes among Iranian EFL students. Most existing studies have separately investigated these constructs, often overlooking their interactions and the impact they have on speaking performance. This oversight limits the applicability of findings to real-world classroom settings where these elements coalesce. Furthermore, while previous research has addressed anxiety in language learning, the specific dimensions of motivation and attitude in relation to task-based speaking remain underexplored. Addressing this gap is essential, as it can provide educators with a nuanced understanding of how to create effective instructional strategies that can simultaneously enhance motivation, cultivate positive attitudes, and alleviate anxiety, thereby improving overall speaking proficiency in EFL contexts. Therefore, the present study sought to answer the following questions.

1. Do Iranian intermediate students' motivation and attitude predict their anxiety in EFL task-based speaking classes?
2. Do Iranian intermediate students' anxiety and motivation predict their attitude in EFL task-based speaking classes?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design and Context of the Study

A descriptive correlational design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) was adopted for this study, as the researcher did not manipulate the variables and no treatment was administered to the participants. In fact, the degree of relationship among the variables was the major concern here. In this study, the Iranian intermediate EFL learners' language motivation and attitude were the predictor variables for anxiety in the first research question, and anxiety and motivation were the predictor variables for attitude in the second research question.

3.2. Participants

The participants in the study included 120 intermediate Iranian male (N = 41) and female (N = 79) EFL learners, selected by convenience sampling from those studying English at

Safir-e-Andisheh Language Institute in Isfahan, Iran. The Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was administered to select intermediate-level learners (a score range of 40-47). The participants' ages ranged between 18 and 24, and they were native Persian speakers. None of the participants had experience living or studying in an English-speaking country.

3.3. Instrument(s)

3.3.1. Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT; Allan, 2004)

The OQPT was administered to a selected group of intermediate EFL learners. The OQPT serves as a multi-faceted instrument for the assessment of English language proficiency, consisting of 60 multiple-choice items that evaluate vocabulary (30 items) and grammar (30 items); learners who achieve scores between 0 and 10 are classified as beginners, whereas those with scores in the range of 11 to 17 are categorized as breakthrough learners; individuals attaining scores from 18 to 29 are designated as elementary, while pre-intermediate learners are identified with scores between 30 and 39; intermediate learners are awarded scores from 40 to 47; advanced learners are classified with scores ranging from 48 to 54, and proficient learners are acknowledged with scores spanning from 55 to 60. The reliability of the test, estimated via Cronbach's alpha, was .79.

3.3.2. Motivation in Foreign-Language Learning Questionnaire (Dörnyei, 1990)

It is a 30-item questionnaire to assess foreign language learning motivation. The questionnaire comprises nine sub-scales: interest in foreign languages, attitude toward learning languages, broadening the view, obligation to learn English, attitude toward the Anglo-Saxon world, pragmatic benefits, English for the workplace, English for professional reputation, and new challenges and a bridge to a culture. The responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Three university professors of TEFL were requested to review the questionnaire's content for congruence with the research objective and the participants. Their feedback indicated that this instrument was appropriate for the present study. The reliability of the questionnaire, estimated via Cronbach's alpha, was .82.

3.3.3. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS; Horwitz et al., 1986)

This 33-item scale measures the extent to which students feel anxious in a foreign language classroom. FLCAS comprises three sub-scales: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Three university professors of TEFL were requested to review the questionnaire's content for congruence with the research objective and the participants. Their feedback indicated that this instrument was appropriate for the present study. The questionnaire's reliability, as estimated by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.78.

3.3.4. Students' Language Learning Attitudes Questionnaire (Soomro et al., 2018)

It is a 30-item questionnaire designed to assess students' language-learning attitudes across the behavioral (1-10), cognitive (11-20), and emotional (21-30) facets of attitude. The responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Three university professors of TEFL were requested to review the questionnaire's content for congruence with the research objective and the participants. Their feedback indicated that this instrument was appropriate for the present study. The reliability of the questionnaire, estimated via Cronbach's alpha, was .79.

3.3.5. Task-Based English Speaking Test

A prompt (a role-play task) was given to pairs (one partner is a robbery suspect and the other is their alibi), who were required to complete it about 20 times. The prompt is as follows: "Imagine that you are a suspect in the robbery, and your partner is your alibi. You have five minutes to invent a story about where you were and what you did yesterday afternoon. The other students will then question you while your partner leaves the room. Then, you will leave the room, and they will question your partner. If your answers to their questions are the same, you can go free; if they are different, you'll be 'doing time' in prison." The prompt was taken from American English File-Book 2 for intermediate-level English learners (Latham-Koenig et al., 2020). The reliability of the speaking post-test, estimated by Cronbach's alpha, was .8. It is noteworthy that the total score of the speaking test was 10.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

After administering the OQPT and selecting participants, the researcher explained the research objectives and the right to voluntary participation or withdrawal at any stage of data collection. The participants were also informed about the potential benefits of the study, such as gaining insights into their speaking abilities and receiving feedback on their performance. To ensure clarity, the researcher used simple language and provided examples of what participation would entail. Additionally, participants were informed that their information would be treated with utmost confidentiality and used exclusively for academic research purposes. As mentioned earlier, the institute conducts 10 training sessions on speaking tasks in intermediate-level English classes, where EFL learners are taught using the American English File book series. These sessions were designed to provide a structured learning environment, focusing on practical speaking skills that could be immediately applied in real-life situations. The topics of speaking tasks — i.e., job, finding an address, personality factors, and appearance — were selected from American English File Book 2, as they are relevant to everyday communication and align with the learners' proficiency level. The tasks were also chosen to encourage meaningful interaction and to reflect the learners' potential real-world language needs.

Data collection took three weeks, and the instruments (i.e., Motivation in Foreign-Language Learning Questionnaire, Students' Language Learning Attitudes Questionnaire, and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) were distributed in a package to 120 intermediate Iranian EFL learners. The participants were instructed to complete the questionnaires at their earliest opportunity. Moreover, the contact details of the first researcher, including his phone number and e-mail address, were provided so participants could reach out with any inquiries about these instruments. This open line of communication helped address concerns and misunderstandings promptly, ensuring participants felt supported throughout the process. It is important to note that all participants signed the consent form included in the instrument package, and the study's aims and objectives were articulated to them both verbally and in writing (in print and incorporated into the instrument package). Ultimately, the participants were presented with small tokens of appreciation for their time and effort, which also fostered goodwill and encouraged future participation in similar studies.

Regarding the task-based English speaking test, the researcher requested that the classroom teachers give the aforementioned prompt to the students to complete in pairs. The prompt was designed to elicit spontaneous, natural conversation, allowing students to demonstrate their ability to use English in a communicative context. Then, the students' interactions were recorded and analyzed for vocabulary, grammar, intonation, pronunciation, and fluency by three trained raters with experience in rating speaking performance. After the initial scoring, the raters discussed any discrepancies in their evaluations and reached a consensus to ensure the reliability of the results. The recorded interactions were also transcribed for further qualitative analysis, enabling the researchers to identify specific patterns and challenges in the students' speaking abilities.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

The data from the motivation, attitude, and anxiety questionnaires were analyzed using standard multiple regression, which enabled the researcher to assess the relationships among the variables.

4. Results

The first research question aimed to find whether Iranian Intermediate students' motivation and attitude predicted their anxiety in EFL task-based speaking classes. In so doing, a standard multiple regression was run to compare the nine sub-scales of motivation (interest in foreign languages, attitude toward learning languages, broadening the view, the obligation for learning English, attitude toward the Anglo-Saxon world, pragmatic benefits, English for the workplace, English for professional reputation, and new challenge and bridge to a culture) and the three sub-scales of attitude (behavioral attitude, cognitive attitude, and emotional attitude) with the anxiety scores of EFL learners .

Table 1.

Model Summary for Predicting Anxiety by Attitude and Motivation Sub-scales

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of th
				Estimate
1	.96	.93	.93	4.56

As shown in Table 1, the model's R-squared value is 0.93, indicating that the attitude and motivation sub-scales account for 93% of the variance in anxiety among EFL learners .

Table 2.

Analysis of Variance Results for Predicting Anxiety by Attitude and Motivation Sub-scales

Model	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	33116.82	12	2759.73	132.23	.00
Residual	2233.09	107	20.87		
Total	35349.92	119			

The model as a whole was statistically significant ($F(12, 107) = 132.23, p = .00$) (Table 2). In other words, the motivation and attitude sub-scales could significantly predict foreign language classroom anxiety of EFL learners. Standardized and unstandardized coefficients of the components of attitude and motivation are presented in the following table (Table 3).

Table 3.

Coefficients of Attitude and Motivation Sub-scales Predicting Anxiety

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
behavioral attitude	.4	.19	.08		2.12	.03
cognitive attitude	.36	.17	.07		2.09	.03
emotional attitude	-.27	.22	-.11		-1.2	.22
interest in foreign languages	-.66	.5	-.14		-1.31	.19
attitude toward learning languages	-.69	.34	-.13		-2.02	.04
broadening the view	-.53	.43	-.12		-1.24	.21
obligation for learning English	.17	.58	.02		.3	.76
attitude toward Anglo-Saxon world	-.41	.28	-.12		-1.44	.15
pragmatic benefits	-.37	.17	-.07		-2.1	.03
English for workplace	-.82	.38	-.18		-2.15	.03
English for professional reputation	-.37	.34	-.05		-1.09	.27
new challenge and bridge to a culture	-.45	.3	-.09		-1.48	.14

Regarding the role of attitude sub-scales in predicting anxiety of EFL learners, behavioral and cognitive attitudes respectively explained 8% and 7% of the changes in anxiety. As for the motivation sub-scales —attitude toward learning languages, pragmatic benefits, and English for the workplace —respectively, these explained 13%, 7%, and 18% of the variance in anxiety. In general, English for the workplace was the strongest predictor of EFL learners' anxiety.

The second research question was to uncover whether Iranian Intermediate students' anxiety and motivation predicted their attitude in EFL task-based speaking classes. Another standard multiple regression was run to compare the anxiety (communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation) and motivation (interest in foreign languages, attitude toward learning languages, broadening the view, obligation for learning English, attitude toward the Anglo-Saxon world, pragmatic benefits, English for the workplace, English for professional reputation, and new challenge and bridge to a culture) sub-scales with the attitude of EFL learners.

Table 4.

Model Summary for Predicting Attitude by Anxiety and Motivation Sub-scales

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.89	.8	.78	3.94

As presented in Table 4, the R-squared value of the model is 0.8, indicating that the anxiety and motivation sub-scales predict 80% of the changes in attitude among EFL learners .

Table 5.

Analysis of Variance Results for Predicting Attitude by Anxiety and Motivation Sub-scales

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	6890.99	12	574.24	36.93	.00
Residual	1663.67	107	15.54		
Total	8554.66	119			

The model as a whole was statistically significant ($F(12, 107) = 36.93, p=.00$) (Table 5). In other words, the motivation and anxiety sub-scales could significantly predict EFL learners' attitudes. Standardized and unstandardized coefficients of the components of anxiety and motivation are presented in the following table (Table 6).

Table 6.

Coefficients of Anxiety and Motivation Sub-scales Predicting Attitude

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
interest in foreign languages	1.13	.42	.49	2.65	.00
attitude toward learning languages	.58	.29	.23	1.95	.04
broadening the view	.69	.37	.32	1.88	.06
obligation for learning English	-.95	.48	-.28	-1.94	.04
attitude toward Anglo-Saxon world	.29	.24	.17	1.2	.23
pragmatic benefits	.13	.15	.05	.84	.39
English for workplace	.68	.32	.31	2.07	.04
English for professional reputation	-.01	.29	-.00	-.05	.96
new challenge and bridge to a culture	-.31	.26	-.13	-1.19	.23
communication apprehension	-.11	.21	-.08	-.53	.59
test anxiety	.36	.33	.07	1.07	.28
fear of negative evaluation	.26	.13	.29	1.91	.03

Four motivation sub-scales —interest in foreign languages (49%), attitude toward learning languages (23%), obligation to learn English (28%), and English for the workplace (31%) —predicted variance in EFL learners' attitudes. Concerning anxiety, the fear of negative evaluation explained 29% of the variance in their attitude. Generally, interest in foreign languages was the strongest predictor of EFL learners' attitudes.

5. Discussion

This study was to uncover the interplay of motivation, attitude, and anxiety in Iranian intermediate EFL students' task-based speaking classes. The findings demonstrated that behavioral and cognitive attitudes predicted the changes in anxiety, and in terms of motivation, attitude toward learning languages, pragmatic benefits, and English for the

workplace explained variances in anxiety. Furthermore, interest in foreign languages, attitude toward learning languages, obligation to learn English, and English for the workplace predicted variations in EFL learners' attitudes. Concerning anxiety, the fear of negative evaluation explained variances in their attitude. These findings are discussed below.

The findings of the first research question indicated that behavioral and cognitive attitudes predicted changes in anxiety. In terms of motivation, attitudes toward learning languages, pragmatic benefits, and English for the workplace explained variance in anxiety.

Behavioral attitudes, particularly the desire to practice English like a native speaker and cultivate good relationships with peers, have a significant impact on learners' anxiety levels. Engagement in speaking tasks and social interactions often reduces anxiety and promotes language acquisition. Our findings align with Dörnyei's (2014) assertion that a commitment to communication and genuine practice in speaking can alleviate feelings of insecurity and fear when using the language. Learners actively seeking opportunities to converse in English reported feeling more comfortable and confident, suggesting that practice is a critical mediator in reducing speaking anxiety.

Additionally, maintaining positive relationships with peers can foster a supportive learning environment that helps mitigate anxiety. Studies have shown that collaborative learning enhances language skills and fosters a sense of belonging among learners (Huri et al., 2024). In our research, participants who had strong friendships and supportive interactions in the classroom experienced lower anxiety levels, supporting the notion that social connections play a crucial role in language learning (Peirce, 1995).

Cognitive attitudes—specifically, the perception of gaining new knowledge and becoming more knowledgeable—also emerged as significant predictors of anxiety in speaking contexts. Learners who view speaking as an opportunity for personal and intellectual growth tend to feel more motivated and less anxious. This finding aligns with Zimmerman's (2000) work, which emphasizes that focusing on mastery and personal growth can enhance self-efficacy and reduce anxiety. EFL learners who value knowledge acquisition may experience less pressure to perform flawlessly, allowing them to approach speaking tasks confidently.

Moreover, having a growth mindset regarding language learning influences learners' attitudes toward challenges and mistakes. Dweck (2006) posits that individuals who embrace challenges as opportunities for growth are less likely to experience debilitating anxiety. Our study results suggest that learners who adopt a cognitive framework that views the classroom as an opportunity to acquire new knowledge may be better equipped to manage anxiety, especially in high-stakes speaking situations.

The findings of this research question also indicated that attitudes toward learning languages, perceived pragmatic benefits, and the importance of English for the workplace are significant predictors of anxiety in speaking classes among EFL learners .

A positive attitude toward learning languages is crucial for language acquisition and can significantly impact students' anxiety levels. Research has consistently shown that learners who approach language learning enthusiastically and with a positive mindset tend to experience lower anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). In our study, participants who expressed a favorable attitude toward learning English reported feeling more confident in their speaking abilities, which, in turn, led to reduced anxiety during speaking tasks. This supports Dörnyei's (2001) model of motivation, which emphasizes that learners' dispositions toward language learning directly influence their emotional responses in the classroom.

Conversely, learners with negative attitudes—those who feel compelled to learn a language due to external pressures rather than intrinsic motivation—presumably experience anxiety, which aligns with findings from Gregersen and Horwitz (2002), who noted that learners' emotional attitudes toward language learning can profoundly affect their anxiety levels. Therefore, fostering positive attitudes through engaging and meaningful learning experiences is vital for mitigating anxiety in speaking contexts.

The perceived pragmatic benefits of learning English, such as improved job prospects and enhanced communication skills, also emerged as a significant predictor of speaking anxiety. Learners who recognize the practical value of English in their professional lives may feel pressured to perform well, which can increase anxiety in speaking situations. Our findings resonate with Pae's (2013) research, which found that learners' beliefs about the utility of the target language significantly influenced their anxiety levels and willingness to communicate.

Finally, the importance of English for professional settings notably influences anxiety among EFL learners. In an increasingly globalized workforce, English proficiency is often considered essential. This can create a high-pressure environment in which learners must demonstrate competence in speaking (Clement & Murugavel, 2018). Our findings reflect that learners who perceive English as vital for their professional advancement may experience heightened anxiety, particularly in speaking classes where their skills are tested.

The findings of the second research question indicated that interest in foreign languages, attitude toward learning languages, obligation to learn English, and English for the workplace predicted variations in the attitudes of EFL learners. Concerning anxiety, the fear of negative evaluation explained variances in their attitude.

A strong interest in foreign languages has been shown to enhance learners' motivation and engagement in language learning significantly (Dörnyei, 2001). In our study, learners who expressed a keen interest in foreign languages demonstrated more positive attitudes toward speaking classes. This finding supports the notion that intrinsic motivation, cultivated by genuine interest, fosters a greater willingness to participate in speaking activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When learners are intrinsically motivated, they are more likely to engage actively with the language, which reduces anxiety and enhances their communicative competence.

Moreover, research by Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) shows that learners with a strong interest in languages are more likely to seek out opportunities to practice speaking, thereby improving their skills and confidence, implying that fostering an interest in foreign languages should be a key component of language education, as it can directly influence learners' attitudes toward speaking classes.

Attitudes toward learning languages are crucial predictors of learners' classroom experiences. A positive attitude can enhance learning outcomes and reduce feelings of anxiety associated with speaking (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). This study found that EFL learners with favorable attitudes toward language learning were more inclined to view speaking classes positively. Furthermore, positive attitudes toward learning languages are often accompanied by an openness to communication, which is essential for success in speaking tasks. As noted by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), fostering an environment that

promotes positive beliefs about language learning can significantly enhance learners' experiences and their willingness to participate actively in speaking activities.

The sense of obligation for learning English, often stemming from socio-cultural and professional pressures, was also identified as a predictor of attitudes toward speaking classes. While such obligations may initially motivate learners, they can also create anxiety and resistance when the learning experience feels imposed rather than chosen (Zheng, 2008). In our findings, those who felt a strong obligation to learn English exhibited mixed attitudes toward speaking classes, indicating that external pressures can sometimes lead to negative feelings about the learning process.

Lapadat and Lapadat (2023) suggested that when learners perceive language learning as an obligation rather than an opportunity, their intrinsic motivation decreases, negatively impacting their attitudes and performance in speaking tasks. Hence, educators must balance these obligation perceptions, facilitating a more autonomous learning environment where learners recognize the value of English for both personal and professional growth.

The relevance of English for career advancement emerged as a significant factor influencing learners' attitudes toward speaking classes. In today's globalized job market, English proficiency is often considered essential for professional success. As suggested by Perin (2011), contextualizing language learning within real-world professional settings enables learners to connect their studies to future career opportunities, thereby fostering a more positive learning experience.

The last finding of the second research question revealed that fear of negative evaluation significantly predicted attitudes toward speaking classes among EFL learners, indicating that learners' concerns about being negatively judged when speaking can heavily influence their overall experience and attitudes in a language-learning context.

Fear of negative evaluation refers to the apprehension that one will be judged unfavorably by others (Rapee & Lim, 1992), and it has been well-documented as a source of anxiety in various contexts, including language learning. In speaking classes, EFL learners who experience high levels of negative evaluation are often preoccupied with thoughts of peer and instructor criticism, which can lead to reluctance to participate and a diminished attitude toward speaking tasks (Yılmaz & De Jong, 2024). This study's findings align with earlier research by Zabidin et al. (2023), which identified fear of negative evaluation as a significant factor contributing to language anxiety among learners.

Finally, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) noted that learners with a high fear of negative evaluation tend to avoid communication situations in which their abilities are tested, thereby hindering their language development. This avoidance behavior directly impacts their attitudes toward speaking classes, contributing to a cycle of anxiety that further diminishes their willingness to engage with the language. Our findings suggest that addressing the fear of negative evaluation is crucial for improving learners' attitudes and participation in speaking classes.

6. Conclusion

This study elucidates the intricate interplay among motivation, attitude, and anxiety in task-based speaking classes among Iranian intermediate EFL students. The findings indicate that both behavioral and cognitive attitudes significantly impact learners' anxiety levels, while various aspects of motivation, particularly those associated with pragmatic benefits and attitudes toward language learning, also play a crucial role in shaping students' classroom experiences. By identifying these relationships, the research provides valuable insights that enable educators to understand the dynamics of language acquisition better and refine their instructional practices. Ultimately, fostering positive attitudes and intrinsic motivation can mitigate anxiety and improve speaking performance among EFL learners.

The study used a convenience sample of 120 intermediate EFL students from a single language institute, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or populations. The reliance on self-report questionnaires to measure motivation, attitude, and anxiety may introduce bias, as participants may not accurately reflect their true feelings or experiences. Besides, the study's design limits the ability to infer relationships among motivation, attitude, and anxiety, as it captures data at a single point in time.

Future research can employ longitudinal designs to examine how motivation, attitude, and anxiety evolve in response to specific teaching interventions or changes in learning contexts. Investigating these relationships across different cultural or educational settings can provide broader insights into the dynamics of motivation, attitude, and anxiety among EFL learners. Additionally, incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews, may enhance students' awareness of their subjective experiences and provide deeper insights into how these constructs interrelate during task-based speaking activities.

The findings suggest that curriculum developers should integrate strategies that foster positive attitudes and intrinsic motivation, thereby creating a more supportive language-learning environment that minimizes anxiety. Educators should also receive training on the importance of addressing students' attitudes and motivation in their teaching practices, equipping them with tools to create engaging and anxiety-reducing classroom experiences. Last but not least, the study emphasizes the importance of implementing task-based speaking activities that focus not only on language proficiency but also on cultivating positive attitudes and motivation, thereby contributing to a comprehensive approach to language education.

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