Development and Validation of EFL Teachers' Preferred Use of Anxiety Reducing Strategies Questionnaire

Alireza Bekhrad * 0009-0003-6614-8454
Department of English, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
Email: alireza004616@gmail.com

Behdokht Mall-Amiri ✉** 0000-0002-7260-6656
Department of English, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
Email: Beh.malamiri@iauctb.ac.ir

Nasim Shangarffam *** 0000-0002-4014-9737
Department of English, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
Email: nshangarf@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT
This study aimed at developing and validating a scale for measuring EFL teachers' perceived strategies for reducing their learners' language learning anxiety (LLA). In this mixed-methods research, adopting an exploratory sequential design and convenient sampling, 200 EFL teachers from Kish and Safir language schools in Tehran were selected as participants. To develop the items for the scale, 30 EFL teachers, randomly selected from the initial 200 teachers, were interviewed on their perceptions of learners' sources of anxiety and the strategies they preferred to use to reduce their learners' LLA. The results of interview content analysis along with the extant theoretical standpoints and empirical literature were drawn upon to develop an 18-item questionnaire for measuring EFL teachers' preferred English LLA reducing strategies for learners. The results of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) revealed a four-factor model including learning process-related, explicit teaching of anxiety reducing strategies (ARS), materials, and presentation of instruction. The results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) also indicated that this four-factor model has acceptable reliability and validity. On the basis of the results, the developed questionnaire enjoys acceptable psychometric characteristics and can be reliably used to quantify and measure EFL teachers' preferred use of strategies to reduce their learners' anxiety.

---

* Alireza Bekhrad is a Ph.D. candidate in TEFL. He received his B.A. in Management and M.A. in TEFL. His research interests include psycholinguistics and language teaching and learning.
** Behdokht Mall-Amiri is an Assistant Professor in Applied Linguistics and a faculty member since 1998. She teaches courses such as, research methodology, teaching language skills at MA and PhD levels.
*** Nasim Shangarffam is an Assistant Professor in Applied Linguistics at IAU, Central Tehran Branch. Since 1998, she has taught courses such as, research methodology, materials development at various levels.

1. Introduction

Foreign Language Learning (FLL) is a highly demanding task which involves many variables including the cognitive and affective ones (Can, 2019). One of the affective variables in the context of FLL is language learning anxiety (LLA). As Horwitz et al. (1986) maintained, language learning anxiety is a "distinctive complex of self- perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). LLA became subject to research in the context of foreign language learning since the mid-1960s (Tosun, 2018). Since then, it has been the focus of many studies (e. g., Alamer et al., 2023; Al-Khasawneh, 2016; Amiruddin & Suparti, 2018; Baş & Özcan, 2018; Er, 2015; Gopang et al., 2018; Horwitz et al., 1986; Li & Wei, 2023; Luo, 2018; Tosun, 2018; Yang & Quadir, 2018; Yassin & Razak, 2018).

A review of the literature on foreign LLA (e.g., Ghorban et al., 2013; Mak, 2011; Na, 2007) reveals that learners experience high or low levels of anxiety in the process of language learning. Some investigations (e.g., Kim, 2009; Pichette, 2009; Hurd & Xiao, 2010) have probed the anxiety levels of the foreign language learners in different language learning settings while others (e.g., Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2010) have probed the efficiency of some approaches such as cooperative learning towards reduction of anxiety. A strand of studies has explored the go-togetherness of EFL reading with anxiety (e.g., Zoghi & Alivandivafa, 2014; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). Moreover, some investigations (e.g., Li & Wei, 2023;

Young, 1986) have explored the relationship between course achievement and language anxiety. Bahrami (2023) revealed that anxiety does not have any relationship with language level of the learners.

Trang et al. (2013) explored the extent to which foreign language teachers and learners were cognizant of aware of their anxiety and their feelings towards it. The results showed that more than half of the students suffered from foreign language anxiety and the teachers were ignorant. Trang and Moni (2015), in their study on how to manage FLA, came to the conclusion that a one –size- fits - all model for FLA management cannot be practiced. The review of the literature shows that some investigations (e.g., Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013; Kondo & Yang, 2004; Liu, 2007; Young, 1992) have probed into the strategies to cope with foreign LLA. However, there is a paucity of research concerning the strategies teachers can adopt to reduce learners' anxiety.

The related literature uncovers that there is no measurement scale for tapping into the strategies teachers perceive to employ to tackle anxiety in the course of language learning. Therefore, to fill the gap in the literature, this study was an endeavour to explore EFL teachers' preferred strategies for reducing their learners' English LLA. Additionally, the study sought to explore if the researcher's developed model of teachers' preferred strategies for reducing learners' English LLA fits the Iranian EFL teacher population. This investigation bears importance as it raises EFL teachers' awareness of the causes of learners' anxiety and strategies to reduce them. The developed

questionnaire provides a scale to measure the teachers' preferred strategies. Based on the afore-mentioned aims and objectives, the following questions were addressed:

RQ1: What are EFL teachers' preferred strategies for reducing their learners' English language learning anxiety?

RQ2: Does the developed model of teachers' preferred strategies for reducing learners' English language learning anxiety have acceptable validity?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Language Learning Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety refers to "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language-learning process" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). In general, anxiety is a complicated concept which is dependent not only on people's feelings but also on appraisals regarding particular contexts (Horwitz, 2010). Anxiety is often attributed to unpleasant feelings and it is similar to fright. When communicating in a second language, feeling anxious can have a negative effect on student's adaptation to target language and eventually their goals in education. Moreover, anxiety can exert a negative impact on learning and achievement (Gaudry & Spielberger, 1971; Tobias, 1980, as cited in Horwitz, 2010).

Young (1991) identified 6 main causes of language anxiety: Personal and interpersonal challenges which are concerned with the learner's perceptions of self- esteem and competitiveness. Krashen (1985) believed that there is a strong relationship between self-esteem and L2 anxiety so that those

learners who suffer from low self-esteem are worried about what their classmates think about them (and) are obsessed with keeping others satisfied. Learners with low self-esteem may feel anxious in the L2 classroom due to the fact that they need to be accepted and judged positively. L2 learning is concerned with making mistakes as well as risking failure and being ridiculed. This may negatively influence learners with low self-esteem.

An immensely considerable factor which affects foreign language learning has so far been recognized as Foreign Language Anxiety (Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1986). Amongst the language skills, speaking was considered to be the most anxiety generating. As a result, attention of most previous studies was drawn to speaking (e.g., Aida, 1994). Other areas of anxiety study with respect to language skills attracted the attention of researchers in 1990s since learners expressed a variety of anxiety levels which was related to different language skills. (e.g., Cheng et al., 1999; Saito et al., 1999). The term foreign language classroom anxiety was defined by Horwitz et al. (1998) in three aspects: (a) communication apprehension, (b) test anxiety, (c) and fear of negative evaluation. The three domains are described as follows: Communication apprehension originates from the need to speak in front of the group, while test anxiety comes from fear of failure on tests. Fear of negative evaluation is connected with others' judgment in any social situation such as a job interview or presentation.

2.2. Causes of Language Learning Anxiety

A close look at the literature shows that researchers have identified different causes of anxiety. Young (1991) considered lack of preparation as the first cause of anxiety. Another cause of anxiety comes from pushing the individual to cover many points within the limited period of time. Worry over the possible audience's negative evaluation of the individual is the third cause of anxiety. The fourth cause can be the prospect of failing to entertain the audience or their walking out due to the boring public speaking (Ayres et al., 1998). Comparing one' perceptions with the audience' expectations would cause anxiety as the speaker may feel disappointed to meet those expectations (Ayres, 1986). Consequently, the way a speaker perceives the audience's expectations impacts how he/she experiences anxiety. The individual's desire to emulate other speakers can be the fifth cause of stress.

Young (1991) has elaborated on six sources of foreign language classroom anxiety including personal and interpersonal anxieties, learner's beliefs regarding language learning, teachers' perspectives on language learning, teacher-student interactions, classroom procedures, and testing. A study conducted by Ayres et al. (1998) showed that learners who perceive their public speaking skill to be deficient experience apprehension and anxiety. In the same vein, Young (1991) categorized 6 potential sources of language anxiety into personal and interpersonal groups as follows: individuals' perception of language learning, teachers' perception of L2 instruction, interactions between teacher and learners, classroom practices and L2 tests. To date, the findings of the study carried out Horwitz et al. (1986) have made many contributions to the other studies as well as L2 instruction. This study has identified 3 sources of language anxiety as follows: 1-fear of communication, 2-test anxiety and 3-apprehension of negative evaluation.

2.3. Strategies for Reducing LLA

Young (1992) determined sixteen strategies used to cope with FLSA, some of which are as follows: Encouraging learners to do pair or group works; avoiding pushing learners to speak before they become ready; and avoiding putting the individual learners in spotlight in the class. The results of the investigation carried out by Kondo and Yang (2004) revealed 70 strategies for dealing with L2 anxiety. This study was conducted on 219 EFL students in Japan, with the participants being divided into five categories: 1-preparation, 2-relaxation, 3-positive thinking, 4-peer thinking, and 5-resignation (i.e., learners do not take any action to decrease their FLA).

It is worth noticing that giving up is not considered an effective anxiety reducing strategy. Hashemi and Abbasi (2013) conducted a thorough review by summarizing previous investigations. They listed 20 coping strategies, which can be used by EFL instructors and learners. The main strategies are teachers' recognition of the existence of anxiety among L2 learners, teachers' use of formative assessment more to reduce learners' worry about classroom performance and grades, learners' use of positive self-talk, learners encouraging themselves to take risks in EFL learning.

A lot of studies conducted on L2 learning anxiety have probed the effect of anxiety amelioration strategies on second/foreign language learning. Accordingly, they put forth some helpful strategies in reducing the foreign language anxiety of FL learners (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Gregersen, 2003; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). Foss and Reitzel (1988) elaborated on multiple anxiety reducing tactics linked with personal and interpersonal anxiety coming to the conclusion that if L2/FL students could realize their dread of foreign language learning, they are able to figure out stressful situations and cope with it realistically. Therefore, they have insisted that learners be asked to express orally their fears while writing them on the board. It helps the L2/FL learners feel not alone when it comes to feeling anxious in the classroom (Young, 1991). Ahmadpour et al. (2021) showed that learners' free riding reduced after getting acquainted with Choice Theory instructed by the teacher. They held that the result could be attributed to the reduced anxiety as the result of the intervention. In the present study, Young's (1991) and Kondo and Young's (2004) model were used as the theoretical framework.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The total number of participants of this study was 200 EFL teachers at Kish and Safir institutes in Tehran. They were selected on a convenience basis from among male and female participants at various ages. Teachers having three years of teaching experience and above were given information about the goals and intentions of the study, and those who

announced their content were considered as the participants. An expert in psychology (MA degree in clinical psychology and a PhD in counselling, with 10 years of consultation practice experience) was consulted to help with developing the interview questions and the questionnaire items regarding anxiety and ways of reducing it. Moreover, two PhD holders in the field of TEFL with 20 years of teaching practice were also consulted for developing the interview questions for sources of language learning anxiety and the associated strategies for reducing anxiety and also item-development for the questionnaire.

3.2. Instrumentation

The instruments utilized in this investigation included two semi-structured interviews described hereunder:

3.2.1. Semi-structured Interviews on Teachers' Perceptions of Sources of LLA

A set of semi-structured interview questions seeking to find out the perceptions of Iranian EFL teachers (Appendix A) toward sources of LLA was prepared. To avoid any language barriers and ambiguities in the course of interviews, the questions were asked in the participants' first language i.e., Persian. To find interview questions with an acceptable degree of content validity, the following steps in line with Auerback and Silverstein (2003) were followed: The literature on language learning anxiety was reviewed to figure out any underlying components related to language learning anxiety and the probable sources; the components identified were used to develop the initial draft of the interview questions; the initial draft of questions was given to an expert in psychology and his comments were

applied on the questions; the revised draft of the questions was given to two experts with Ph.D. in TEFL and their comments concerning the appropriateness of the questions were sought; the comments of the experts were applied on the questions. The raised questions were as follow:

1.What are the factors that make EFL learners anxious during learning English?

2.Do you think the factors that make EFL learners anxious are related to teachers, learners, textbooks or other sources?

3.Which factors do you think are more important in causing anxiety in EFL learners' during learning English?

The draft of this set of questions was administered to 5 teachers selected randomly from among the main participants to remove any ambiguities concerning the wording of the questions to enhance clarity and readability; the questions were revised after gaining the comments of the participants and the final draft of the questions was developed.

3.2.2. Semi-structured Interviews on Anxiety-Reducing Strategies

A set of interviews was also carried out to discover the strategies that EFL teachers adopt to reduce learners' LLA. To prepare the interview questions, the same steps delineated in previous section were followed. The following questions were asked:

1. What strategies do you adopt to reduce anxiety for anxious learners?

2. Which strategies are more important in reducing language learning anxiety?

3.3. Procedure

Two hundred English language teachers teaching at various proficiency levels selected through convenience non-random sampling from Kish and Safir language institutes were identified. Out of the initial 200 teachers, 30 teachers were interviewed for their perceptions of sources of language learning anxiety. Interviews were of semi-structured type to both accelerate the data collection process and better orient the teachers to express their ideas. Following that, these teachers were interviewed to talk about the strategies they use to deal with learners' LLA. All data collected through the interviews were transcribed and made ready for thematic analysis. Following that, based on content and thematic analyses of the interview data, a questionnaire was developed for identifying and quantifying anxiety reducing strategies, and its reliability and validity were checked through administering it on 200 teachers.

After going through the procedure of data collection and conduction of the required qualitative and quantitative data analyses, 18 items, related to the sources of anxiety, were produced under four factors (Materials, Explicit teaching of anxieties reducing strategies, Presentation of Instruction, Learning Process-related techniques) tapping into the anxiety reducing strategies from the teachers' viewpoint. The items were provided with five Likert-type alternatives: Strongly agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly disagree having values 5 to 1 respectively. As such, the maximum overall score obtainable from this questionnaire could be 90 and the minimum could be 18 with the higher score indicating more preference for applying the pertinent strategies to reduce the learners' anxiety (Appendix C). A sample of items

tapping each component of anxiety reducing strategies were prepared and initially given to the expert in psychology for comments. The comments were applied on the items. Next, two Ph.D. holders in applied linguistics were asked to pass their judgments on the relevance and appropriateness of the items. Afterwards, a tentative questionnaire was formed and given to the same expert panel to revise. Applying all their comments, the questionnaire was made ready for further empirical scrutiny. EFA was run to come up with the components of the construct of anxiety reducing strategies from teachers' perspectives. Moreover, CFA was also run to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire for its fitness in the Iranian context.

4. Results

4.1. Addressing the First Research Question

The first question, aiming at uncovering EFL teachers' preferred strategies for reducing their learners' English language learning anxiety, was answered through the analysis of the qualitative data elicited from interviews with the teachers about their perceptions of sources of learners' LLA, and the strategies they prefer to use to reduce it. As shown in Table 1, mainly five sources were indicated by the respondents among which learners' personality is considered the most salient (Mentioned by 25 out of 30 participants=82.5%) from teachers' perspective. The next source is peer-related factors (Mentioned by 22 participants=72.6%). The next emerging theme is the teacher's behaviour (Mentioned by 14 =46.2%). Another emerging theme revealed is instructional-related factors (Mentioned by 12 =39.60%). The last emerging theme is examinations (Mentioned by 8 =26.4%).

Table 1 *Results of Content Analysis on Teachers' Perceptions of the Sources of Learners' LLA*

Theme Number	Theme	Frequency	Percentage
1	Learners' personality	25	82.5%
2	Peer-related factors	22	72.6%
3	Teacher's behavior	14	46.2%
4	Instructional-related factors	12	39.6%
5	Examinations	8	26.4%

Also, these teachers expressed their preferred strategies to reduce learners' LLA, as presented in Table 2.

55

Table 2 *Results of Content Analysis on Teachers' Preferences for Reducing EFL Learners' Anxiety Strategies*

Theme Number	Theme	Frequency	Percentage
1	Materials adaptation	27	89.91%
2	Using a variety of interesting materials	25	83.25%
3	Teaching socializing skills	22	73.26%
4	Telling learners to keep an anxiety record	20	66.66%
5	Tactful error correction behavior	18	59.94%
6	Providing more assistance with low-achieving learners	17	56.61%
7	Maximizing efforts to get learners engaged	15	49.95%
8	Teaching in an organized way	15	49.95%
9	Working on lesson plans	14	46.62%
10	Administering instruction check questions	14	46.62%

As depicted in Table 2, materials adaptation is considered the most salient preferred strategy for reducing language learning anxiety (27 out of 30 participants=89.91%). The next theme was using a variety of interesting materials (25 participants=83.25%). The next emerging theme was teaching socializing skills (22 participants=73.26%). Another emerging theme revealed was telling learners to keep an anxiety record (20 participants=66.66%). The next theme was tactful error correction behaviour (18 participants=59.94%). Providing more assistance with low-achieving learners (17 participants=56.61%) was the next them. Another theme was maximizing efforts to get learners engaged (15 participants=50%). One more theme was teaching in an organized way (15 participants=50%). The last two emerged themes were working on lesson plans (14 participants=46.62%), and administering instruction check questions (14 participants=46.62%). Ultimately, the qualitative data analysis and the review of literature resulted in developing a 19-item questionnaire

After developing the questionnaire items, the sub-constructs of teachers' anxiety reducing strategies (TARS) were initially to be identified using the EFA (Exploratory Factor Analysis) technique.

4.1.1. EFA of the TARS Questionnaire Items

Exploratory factor analysis consists of the following six steps:

Step 1: Feasibility study of factor analysis on data

At this point, it was checked whether the 19 TARS items can be reduced to fewer factors. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 *Bartlett's Test and KMO Index Results*

KMO index		.822
Bartlett's test	χ²-statistic value	5695.788
	DOF (df)	153
	P-value	.000

As displayed in Table 3, the value of the KMO index is 0.822, so the number of items could be reduced. In other words, it suggests that the sample is adequate for the analysis. Also, according to Bartlett's significance test (p<.05), it is concluded that factor analysis is appropriate.

Step 2: Determining the contribution of the set of factors in explaining the variance of each item.

This amount of variance for each variable is called pooled variance. Table 4 shows the covariance rate.

Table 4 *Covariance of TARS Scale Items*

No.	Percentage of variance extracted
Q1	.916
Q2	.931
Q3	.929
Q4	.858
Q5	.836
Q6	.918
Q7	.930
Q8	.867
Q9	.935
Q10	.836
Q11	.896
Q12	.876
Q13	.734
Q14	.834
Q15	.821
Q16	.821
Q17	.882
Q18	.872
Q19	.405

As depicted in Table 4, the minimum and maximum pooled variances are 40% and 93%, respectively. As a general rule, if the pooled variance of a variable is less than 50%, it should be excluded from the EFA process. Since the average variance extracted (AVE) of question 19 is less than 50%, it has to be excluded from the analysis process because it does not have enough pooled variance with the desired factors.

Step 3: Determining the contribution of each factor in explaining the sum of the variances of all items

This step determines the percentage of the total variance of the items explained by each factor. Finally, several factors are extracted to explain the significant variance (at least 70%) and prevent data loss.

Table 5 *Eigenvalues of Cumulative Variance of Extracted Factors on TARS Scale*

Component	The variance of factors extracted		
	Eigenvalue	Percent variance	Cumulative percentage of variance
1	5.173	28.740	28.740

57

2	3.848	21.379	50.120
3	3.394	18.857	68.977
4	3.314	18.414	87.391
5	.372	2.065	89.456

As shown in Table 5, in the Kaiser method, only factors with an eigenvalue of 1 or more are selected. Therefore, four factors have been extracted by the EFA method based on the data. Also, in the cumulative variance method, about 87% of the variance of the variables can be explained by selecting four factors. Also, as shown in Figure 1, a sudden fall of the Scree plot can be observed after four factors.

Figure 1 *Scree Plot of the TARS Scale*
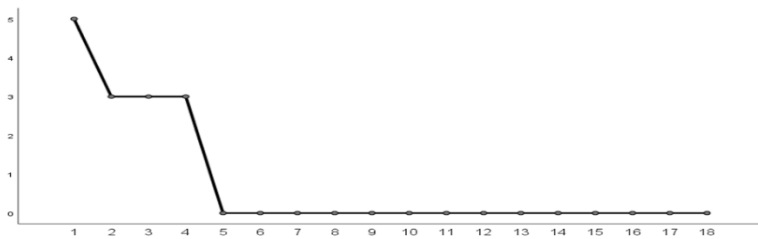
Step 4: Determining the correlation between items and with the extracted factors

This step probes the correlation between the extracted factors and the questionnaire items. The correlation coefficient determines which item is loaded on which factor, also called factor loadings, shown in Table 6 before rotation.

Table 6 *Factor Loadings of the TARS Scale Before Rotation*

No.	No. of components			
	1	2	3	4
Q1	**.871**	.009	.376	.125
Q2	**.692**	.641	-.190	.074
Q3	**.686**	-.635	-.214	.097
Q4	**.686**	-.609	-.117	.062
Q5	**.918**	.001	-.080	-.183
Q6	**.675**	.647	-.201	.068
Q7	**.695**	-.643	-.176	.051
Q8	**.874**	-.001	-.090	-.096
Q9	**.902**	.017	.335	.098
Q10	**.678**	.578	-.189	.082
Q11	**.689**	.616	-.197	.056
Q12	**.923**	.000	-.049	-.186
Q13	**.871**	.018	-.076	-.181
Q14	**.829**	.029	.367	.106

No.				
Q15	**.658**	-.595	-.183	.012
Q16	**.638**	.615	-.190	.019
Q17	**.674**	-.619	-.178	.110
Q18	**.878**	.016	.298	.108

As shown in Table 6, all TARS questionnaire items are placed in the form of a factor based on factor loadings before rotation. This is in contrast with the researchers' preliminary expectation, as only one factor is detected for the model. Therefore, the four factors are rotated so that the loadings are examined more precisely.

Step 5: Rotating the factors as needed and finally categorize the items in the form of factors

Table 7 illustrates the factor loadings after rotation.

Table 7 *Factor Loadings of Scale After Varimax Rotation*

No.	No. of components			
	1	2	1	4
Q1	.071	.060	**.952**	.000
Q2	.056	**.962**	.051	-.007
Q3	**.962**	.064	.006	.013
Q4	**.920**	.057	.093	-.030
Q5	-.031	-.035	-.020	**.938**
Q6	.042	**.957**	.034	-.010
Q7	**.962**	.052	.038	-.037
Q8	.028	.021	-.009	**.883**
Q9	.030	.029	**.966**	-.024
Q10	.091	**.908**	.046	.002
Q11	.071	**.943**	.040	-.024
Q12	-.038	-.045	.009	**.941**
Q13	-.046	-.025	-.021	**.892**
Q14	.059	.077	**.908**	-.014
Q15	**.901**	.061	.017	-.069
Q16	.033	**.904**	.027	-.054
Q17	**.936**	.060	.038	.025
Q18	.011	.010	**.933**	-.006

Table 7 evinces the factor loadings. As the analysis shows, five items are loaded on factor 1, five items on factor 2, four items on factor 3, and four items on factor 4.

Therefore, the next step was to name these factors.

Step six: Naming the extracted factors in steps four and five

59

According to the questions related to each factor and the main questionnaire of this scale, the factors are listed in Table 8.

Table 8 *TARS Scale's Factors*

No.	Factor's name	Model's symbol
Q1		
Q9	Learning process-related	LP
Q14		
Q18		
Q2		
Q6		
Q10	Explicit teaching of anxiety reducing strategies	EXTARS
Q11		
Q16		
Q3		
Q4		
Q7	Materials	MAT
Q15		
Q17		
Q5		
Q8	Presentation of Instruction	POI
Q12		
Q13		

4.2. Addressing the Second Research Question

To check the validity of the researchers' developed model of TARS, initially a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), using SEM, was performed:

Figure 2 shows the CFA model of this construct, presented as a first-order CFA model, in which the symbols presented in Table 8 are used. It demonstrates the interconnections between the items within a factor and between the factors with standardized factor loadings.

Figure 2 *CFA Model of the TARS Construct with Standardized Factor Loadings*
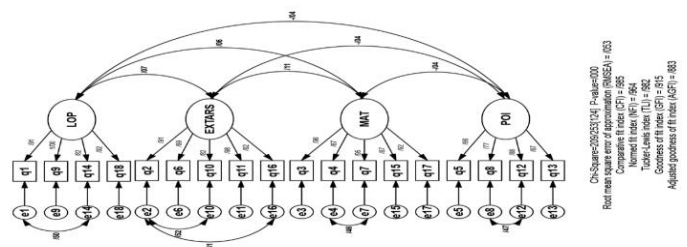
As presented in Figure 2, the standardized factor loadings for the items are all above .70, which are considered acceptable.

Tables 9 and 10 list the goodness of fit indices (GFIs) and unstandardized factor loadings along with their significance.

Table 9 *GFIs of Factor Analysis Model of the TARS Construct*

GFI type	The range for acceptable fitness	The range for good fitness	Observed GFI	Result
χ^2(df)-statistic value	χ^2.df ratio<5	χ^2.df ratio = 3	209.253 (124)	Good fitness
P-value of the χ^2 test			<0.05	Good fitness
χ^2.df ratio			1.688	Good fitness
RMSEA	χ^2.df ratio<0.08	χ^2.df ratio<0.05	0.053	Acceptable fitness
P (RMSEA<0.05)	χ^2.df ratio<0.0 5	χ^2.df ratio>0.1	0.354	Good fitness
CFI	χ^2.df ratio>0.90	χ^2.df ratio>0.95	0.985	Good fitness
NNFI	χ^2.df ratio>0.90	χ^2.df ratio>0.95	0.964	Good fitness
GFI	χ^2.df ratio>0.85	χ^2.df ratio>0.90	0.915	Good fitness
AGFI	χ^2.df ratio>0.85	χ^2.df ratio>0.90	0.883	Acceptable fitness

Considering the observed values of GFIs, this model has good fitness, and is acceptable, in terms of all GFIs and according to the data of this research.

Table 10 *Significance of Unstandardized Factor Loadings of TARS Construct Factor Analysis Model*

Path			Estimate of unstandardized factor loading	Estimate of standardized factor loading	Standard error of estimate (SEE)	t-statistic value	P-value
q18	<---	LOP	1.000	.917			
q14	<---	LOP	.889	.817	.047	19.027	<0.01
q9	<---	LOP	1.079	.998	.033	32.806	<0.01
q1	<---	LOP	1.006	.909	.040	24.944	<0.01
q16	<---	EXTARS	1.000	.818			
q11	<---	EXTARS	1.244	.976	.058	21.267	<0.01
q10	<---	EXTARS	1.020	.823	.064	15.938	<0.01
q6	<---	EXTARS	1.288	.993	.059	21.862	<0.01
q2	<---	EXTARS	1.200	.908	.051	23.620	<0.01
q17	<---	MAT	1.000	.923			
q15	<---	MAT	.917	.865	.042	21.738	<0.01
q7	<---	MAT	1.060	.951	.036	29.241	<0.01
q4	<---	MAT	.941	.870	.043	22.026	<0.01
q3	<---	MAT	1.098	.978	.034	32.444	<0.01

q13	<---	POI	1.000	.873			<0.01
q12	<---	POI	.919	.880	.047	19.537	<0.01
q8	<---	POI	.878	.772	.057	15.306	<0.01
q5	<---	POI	1.026	.961	.046	22.209	<0.01

As exhibited in Table 10, all factor loadings are significant (p=.01<0.05).

4.2.1. Evaluation of Validity and Reliability of TARS Factor Constructs

4.2.1.1. Stability Analysis of Each Construct

At this stage, to check the stability of each of the research constructs, 30 of the respondents were evaluated twice at regular intervals using the retest method. Next, the stability of each research construct was evaluated using Pearson's correlation coefficient, and intra-cluster correlation coefficient (ICC), presented in Table 11.

Table 11 *Stability Analysis of TARS Scale Constructs*

Construct's name	Construct's symbol	No. of questions	Pearson's correlation coefficient	Intra-cluster correlation coefficient (ICC)
Learning Process-related	LPO	4	0.933	0.850
Explicit teaching of anxiety reducing strategies	EXTARS	5	0.944	0.849
Materials	MAT	5	0.920	0.852
Presentation of Instruction	POI	4	0.896	0.781

As presented in Table 11, Pearson's correlation coefficient and ICC are greater than 0.60 for all constructs, indicating the consistency of individuals' responding to the constructs.

4.2.1.2. Internal Consistency of Each Construct

In this section, the reliability of conceptual model constructs is examined using Cronbach's alpha. The outcome is shown in Table 13.

Table 12 *Internal Consistency (reliability) of the TARS Scale*

Construct's name	Construct's symbol	No. of questions	Cronbach's alpha
Learning Process-related	LPO	4	0.958
Explicit teaching of anxiety reducing strategies	EXTARS	5	0.966
Materials	MAT	5	0.967
Presentation of Instruction	POI	4	0.933
Total (A.R.S)		18	0.831

As the Cronbach's alpha values listed in Table 12 are all above 0.8, it can be concluded that all TARS scale factors have good internal consistency.

4.2.1.3. Validity of Constructs

Convergent validity and discriminant validity are checked by performing CFA on each of the components of TARS and using the CFA model of all components together, respectively. To examine the discriminant validity, the indexes are tabulated hereunder.

Table 13 *Internal Consistency (reliability) of the TARS Scale*

Index	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
LPO	0.943	0.806	0.590	0.434
EXTARS	0.943	0.808	0.506	0.383
MAT	0.938	0.793	0.456	0.334
POI	0.912	0.723	0.561	0.412
Sig	0.000	0.002	.007	0.01

The indices in Table 13 demonstrate that:

1) The CR value for each component is greater than 0.7., which is considered acceptable.

2) All factor loadings are significant (p-value<0.05).

3) All standardized factor loadings are greater than 0.5; therefore, each of the questions (items) in this construct is approved.

4) All AVE values turned out to be less than 0.5 and CR>AVE.

5) AVE values for all four factors came out to be larger than MSV values for the four factors.

6) MSV values for the four factors turned out to be larger than ASV values.

In view of the above, it can be concluded that this construct has both convergent validity and discriminant validity.

4.2.1.4. Second-order CFA of TARS Construct

Figure 3 shows the TARS construct second-order CFA of the conceptual model.

Figure 3 *CFA Model of the TARS Construct with Standardized Factor Loadings*
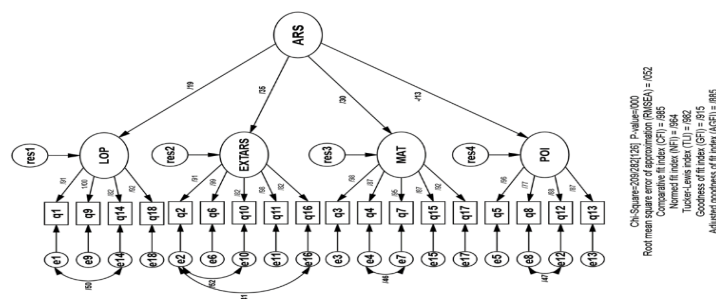
As exhibited in Figure 3, the standardized factor loadings are all above .70, which are considered acceptable.

5. Discussion

The present investigation was an endeavor to probe the EFL teachers' perceived causes of learners' language learning anxiety, to ultimately reveal the strategies that they adopt to reduce the anxiety. Additionally, this study was conducted to develop and validate a questionnaire to quantify EFL teachers' preference for strategies to reduce their learners' language anxiety.

The outcome of this investigation concerning the sources of anxiety are in line

63

with previous empirical investigations in regard to the sources of foreign language learning anxiety. For instance, Young (1991) elaborated on causes of foreign language classroom anxiety including personal and interpersonal anxiety, teachers' perspectives on learning, teacher-student interactions, classroom procedures and testing. Likewise, the current study unveiled that learners' personality as an instance of personal factors was associated with anxiety. Moreover, in congruence with Young's (1991, 1992) findings, in this study peer-related factors, instruction-related factors, and classroom atmosphere as well as examinations were shown to be the reasons of students' anxiety. Krashen (1985), likewise, correlated self-esteem, as a personal characteristic, with anxiety level since low self-esteem individuals are more worried about others' judgements, and need to be approved by others. In the same vein, Ayres et al. (1998) considered lack of self-confidence as the cause of anxiety. Also, Horwitz et al. (1998) found out that the reasons of language learning anxiety could be traced in three areas: in communication, in exams, and in negative evaluation. The fear of communication and exams (as personal characteristics) matches the finding of the present study. Although, the teachers did not explicitly mention fear of negative evaluation, they generally referred to teachers' behaviour and peer communication as sources of anxiety, which may implicitly include evaluation and ways of evaluation.

The results of the current study, concerning teachers' strategies for anxiety reduction are consistent with those of Liu

(2007) who found that creation of a comfortable, supportive and non-threatening classroom-learning environment by teachers can be an effective anxiety-reducing strategy by teachers. In a similar vein, it was shown that instructors preferred to present materials in an organized way by developing lesson plans and ensuring sound instruction to create a non-threating and comfortable learning environment. Moreover, teachers expressed their preference for the use of tactful error correction behaviour to create a psychologically-safe learning atmosphere.

The results of this study, in regard to teachers' strategies, substantiate those of Hashemi and Abbasi (2013). They found that teachers' recognition of the existence of anxiety among L2 learners, and teachers' use of formative assessment more to reduce learners' worry about classroom performance and grades, learners' use of positive self-talk, and learners encouraging themselves to take risks in EFL learning were among the strategies which can be considered for reducing foreign language learning anxiety. In the same manner, the outcome of the present study revealed that teachers would rather focus on explicit teaching of anxiety reducing strategies, which presupposes teachers' acknowledgement of the existence of anxiety among learners. Moreover, teachers' focus on unobtrusive error correction partially reveals their awareness of the influence of assessment practice on learners' anxiety.

6. Conclusion

The results driven from this investigation indicated that teachers perceived learners' personality, peer-related factors, teacher's

behaviour, instructional-related factors, and examinations as five sources of language learning anxiety. Moreover, the results of content analysis evinced that teachers preferred to use materials adaptation, using a variety of interesting materials, teaching socializing skills, telling learners to keep an anxiety record, tactful error correction behaviour, providing more assistance with low-achieving learners, maximizing efforts to get learners engaged, teaching in an organized way, working on lesson plans, and administering instruction check questions as strategies they perceived to use to reduce EFL learners' language learning anxiety. Based on the teachers' statements, items were developed for each stated strategy in the form of a questionnaire, and after applying modifications based on consultations with experts in TEFL, psychology, and counselling, the questionnaire was given to teachers to fill out for the validation purpose. The results of exploratory factor analysis revealed a four-factor model including learning process related, explicit teaching of anxiety-reducing strategies, materials, and presentation of instruction as the strategies teachers preferred to use to reduce language learning anxiety among learners.

Overall, the findings of the study both corroborate and are substantiated by the findings of previous empirical investigations concerning the sources of foreign language learning anxiety (e.g., Young, 1991, 1992), and the strategies adopted to address foreign language learning anxiety (e.g., Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013; Liu, 2007). This study disclosed the interconnection between different factors which can give rise to

65

anxiety such as the mentioned sources from the teachers' viewpoints as well as the employed strategies to mitigate anxiety. Accordingly, teachers will need to be given awareness concerning the host of strategies they can use to address foreign language learning anxiety. To do so, workshops can be held in which anxiety-reducing strategies (such as learning process related strategies, explicit teaching of anxiety-reducing strategies, materials, and presentation of instruction as the strategies teachers preferred to use) are explained, exemplified, and clarified to the teachers to reduce their students' anxiety. For instance, teachers can adopt more tactful error correction behaviour to mitigate learners' fear of negative evaluation.

It should be mentioned that this research, like other studies, faced certain limitations. The main one was that sampling was done on accessibility basis from only two institutes of Safir and Kish in Tehran. As such, the researchers could not consider teachers' instruction level, age range, and gender as factors for selection. More importantly, no particular criterion availed for specifying a certain age range pertaining to anxiety reducing strategies to consider for the selection of the sample. In future similar research projects, such features could be incorporated to delineate the strategies that teachers prefer to use to reduce their learners' anxiety.

References

Ahmadpour, L., Asadollahfam, H., & Kuhi, D. (2021). Cognizance of rational choice theory and teachers' intervention in reducing EFL learners'

free riding. *Foreign Language Research Journal, 11*(4), 728-740. https://doi.org/10.22059/jflr.2021.323340.837

Aida, Y. (1994). Examination of horwitz, horwitz, and cope's construct of foreign language anxiety: the case of students of Japanese. *Modern Language Journal, 78,* 155–168. https://doi.org/10.2307/329005

Alamer, A., Al Khateeb, A., & Jeno, L. M. (2023). Using WhatsApp increases language students' self- motivation and achievement, and decreases learning anxiety: A self- determination theory approach. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, *39*(2), 417-431. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcal.12753

Al-Khasawneh, F. M. (2016). Investigating foreign language learning anxiety: A case of Saudi undergraduate EFL learners. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 12*(1), 137-148.

Amiruddin, M., & Suparti, T. (2018). Madurese millennial students' anxiety in learning English. *ISLLAC: Journal of Intensive Studies on Language, Literature, Art, and Culture*, *2*(2), 34-41.

Auerbach, C., & Silverstein, L. B. (2003). *Qualitative data: An introduction to coding and analysis*. NYU press.

Ayres, J. (1986). Perceptions of speaking ability: An explanation for stage fright. *Communication Education, 35*(3), 275-287. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634528609388350

Ayres, J. W., Lalande, F., Chaudhry, Z., & Rogers, C. A. (1998). Qualitative impedance-based health monitoring of civil infrastructures. *Smart Materials and Structures,* 7(5), 599. https://doi.org/10.1088/0964-1726/7/5/004

Ayres, J., Schliesman, T., & Sonandré, D. (1998). Practice makes perfect but does it help reduce communication apprehension? *Communication Research Reports, 15*(2), 170-179.

Bahrami, K. (2023). The role of fear and anxiety in learning German: a field study of German language teaching in Iran. *Foreign Language Research Journal, 13*(2), 287-298. https://doi.org/10.22059/jflr.2023.353194.1007

Baş, G., & Özcan, M. (2018). Foreign language learning anxiety: A comparison between high school and university students. *Journal of Human Sciences*, *15*(3), 1584-1596.

Can, D. T. (2019). The reflections of pre-service EFL teachers on overcoming foreign language teaching anxiety (FLTA) during teaching practicum. *Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes*, 389-404. https://doi.org/10.22190/JTESAP1803389C

Cheng, Y., Horwitz, E. K., & Schallert, D. L. (1999). Language anxiety: Differentiating writing and speaking components. *Language Learning, 49*(3), 417–446.

https://doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.00095

Ellis, G., & Sinclair, B. (1989). *Learning to learn English: A course in learner training.* Cambridge University Press.

Er, S. (2015). Foreign language learning anxiety of Turkish children at different ages. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET), 2*(2), 68-78.

Foss, K. A., & Reitzel, A. C. (1988). A relational model for managing second language anxiety. *TESOL quarterly*, *22*(3), 437-454.

Gaudry, E., & Spielberger, C. D. (1971). *Anxiety and Educational Achievement.* Wiley.

Ghorban Dordinejad, F., & Nasab, A. H. F. (2013). Examination of the relationship between perfectionism and English achievement as mediated by foreign language classroom anxiety. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, *14*(4), 603-614. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12564-013-9286-5

Gopang, I. B., Bughio, F. A., & Pathan, H. (2018). Investigating foreign language learning anxiety among students learning English in a public sector university, Pakistan. *MOJES: Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Sciences*, *3*(4),27- 37.

Gregersen, T. S. (2003). To Err Is Human: A Reminder to Teachers of Language-Anxious Students. *Foreign Language Annals,* *36,* 1, 25-32. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2003.tb01929.x

Hashemi, M., & Abbasi, M. (2013). The role of the teacher in alleviating anxiety in language classes. *International Research Journal of Applied and Basic Sciences, 4*(3), 640–646.

Horwitz, E., Horwitz, M., and Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *Modern. Language Journal, 70,* 125–132. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1986.tb05256.x

Horwitz, E. K. (2010). Foreign and second language anxiety. *Language Teaching, 43,* pp. 154-167. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444809990036X

Horwitz, B., Rumsey, J. M., & Donohue, B. C. (1998). Functional connectivity of the angular gyrus in normal reading and dyslexia. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 95*(15), 8939-8944. https://doi.org/10.1073%2Fpnas.95.15.8939

Hurd, S., & Xiao, J. (2010). Anxiety and affective control among distance language learners in China and the UK. *RELC Journal*, *41*(2), 183-200. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0033688210373640

Kim, S. Y. (2009). Questioning the stability of foreign language classroom anxiety and motivation across different classroom contexts. *Foreign Language Annals*, *42*(1), 138-157. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2009.01012.x

Kondo, D. S., & Yang, Y.-L. (2004). Strategies for coping with language

anxiety: The case of students of English in Japan. *ELT Journal, 58*(3), 258–265. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/58.3.258

Krashen S. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Longman.

Li, C., & Wei, L. (2023). Anxiety, enjoyment, and boredom in language learning amongst junior secondary students in rural China: How do they contribute to L2 achievement? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *45*(1), 93-108. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S027226312 2000031

Liu, M. (2007). Anxiety in oral English classrooms: A case study in China. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching, 3*(1), 119–137. https://dx.doi.org/10.25170/ijelt.v3i1.1 32

Luo, H. (2018). Predictors of foreign language anxiety: A study of college-level L2 learners of Chinese. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics, 41*(1), 3-24. http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/cjal-2018-0001

Mak, B. (2011). An exploration of speaking-in-class anxiety with Chinese ESL learners. *System, 39,* 202-214. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.201 1.04.002

Matsuda S. & Gobel P. (2004). Anxiety and predictors of performance in the foreign language classroom. *System, 32,* 21-36. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.200 3.08.002

Na, Z. (2007). A study of high school students' English learning anxiety. *The*

Asian EFL Journal, 9(3), 22-34.

Pichette, F. (2009). Second language anxiety and distance language learning. *Foreign Language Annals*, *42*(1), 77-93. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2009.01009.x

Saito, Y., Horwitz, E. K., & Garza, T. J. (1999). Foreign language reading anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 83(*2), 202–218.

Suwantarathip, O., & Wichadee, S. (2010). The impacts of cooperative learning on anxiety and proficiency in an EFL class. *Journal of College Teaching and Learning*, *7*(11), 51. https://doi.org/10.19030/tlc.v7i11.252

Tobias, S. (1980). Anxiety and Instruction. In I.G. Sarason (Ed.), *Test Anxiety: Theory, Research, and Applications* (p.p. 289-310). Erlbaum.

Tosun, B. (2018). Oh no! Not ready to speak! An investigation on the major factors of foreign language classroom anxiety and the relationship between anxiety and age. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 14*(1), 230-241.

Trang, T. T. T., Baldauf, R. B., & Moni, K. (2013). Foreign language anxiety: Understanding its status and insiders' awareness and attitudes. *TESOL Quarterly, 47*(2), 216-243.

Trang, T. T. T., & Moni, K. (2015). Management of foreign language anxiety: Insiders' awareness and experiences. *Cogent Education*, *2*(1), 1-20. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2 014.992593

Tsiplakides, I., & Keramida, A. (2009). Helping students overcome foreign language speaking anxiety in the English classroom: theoretical issues and practical recommendations. *International Education Studies, 2*(4), 39–44. http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ies.v2n4p39

Yang, J. C., & Quadir, B. (2018). Effects of prior knowledge on learning performance and anxiety in an English learning online role-playing game. *Educational Technology and Society, 21* (3), 174–185.

Yassin, A. A., & Razak, N. A. (2018). Investigating foreign language learning anxiety among Yemeni University EFL learners: A theoretical framework development. *English Language Teaching*, *11*(10), 38-51. http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v11n10p38

Young, D. J. (1986) The relationship between anxiety and foreign language oral proficiency ratings. *Foreign Language Annals*, *19*, 439-445. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1986.tb01032.x

Young, D. J. (1991). Creating a low-anxiety classroom environment: What does language anxiety research suggest? *The Modern Language Journal, 75*(4), 426-439.

Young D. J. (1992). Language anxiety from the foreign language specialist's perspective: Interviews with Krashen, Omaggio Hadley, Terrell, and Rardin. *Foreign Language Annals*, 25, 157-172. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1986.tb01032.x

Zoghi, M., & Alivandivafa, M. (2014). EFL Reading Anxiety Inventory (EFLRAI) Factorial Validity and Reliability. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, *32*(4), 318-329. https://doi.org/10.1177/07342829135133686

Appendix

Teachers' Anxiety Reducing Strategies (TARS) Questionnaire

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
1. If I feel that a learner is not engaged in the activity, I always provide help to get that particular student engaged in the activity.					
2. I teach learners how to socialize effectively with others in class and how it can help reduce their anxiety.					
3. I usually use materials and activities which are interesting for learners.					
4. I normally use activities/tasks which are not very difficult and challenging.					
5.I usually teach different language skills in an organized manner.					

69

6. I tell anxious learners that they are let stretch their arms/or take a short break to go outside sometimes.				
7. I usually use a variety of materials and activities.				
8.The way I present the content under instruction is easy to follow for the learners.				
9. I always make sure that learners are engaged in the learning process.				
10. I teach learners deep breathing technique to help them reduce their anxiety.				
11. I usually ask anxious learners to write down about their anxiety (while in class) and try to find the roots of their anxiety and discuss them with me.				
12. I invariably develop a lesson plan for the lessons.				
13. I always use instruction check questions to ensure that learners know what exactly to do for different activities.				
14. I usually use different activities to make sure that learners with different ability levels are all involved in the learning process.				
15. I usually ask learners for their opinions about the classroom materials and activities.				
16. I usually tell those who are anxious to chew a gum.				
17. When a particular activity is boring, I adapt it or replace it with an interesting activity.				
18. I usually correct mistakes in an unobtrusive way to make sure that learners are not made anxious.				