Development and Validation of Iranian EFL Learners' Preference for Anxiety Reducing Strategies Questionnaire

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Article info	Abstract
	Abstract Language learning anxiety has gained enormous attention as it has a detrimental role in foreign language learning and creating stress-free contexts for language learning has always been advised. This study intended to develop and validate a scale for measuring EFL learners' preferred strategies for reducing their language learning anxiety (LLA) via adopting an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. The participants comprised 200 Iranian EFL learners studying at different proficiency levels, selected on a convenience sampling basis. To develop the items for the scale, 30 EFL learners, randomly selected from the initial 200 ones, were asked about their perceived sources of anxiety and their preferred strategies to reduce their LLA. Content analysis of interviews led to the development of a 13-item scale for measuring EFL learners' LLA-reducing strategies. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses also revealed that the developed three-factor model, including metacognitive, social, and tactile dimensions fits the Iranian EFL learners' population. The validated questionnaire may be utilised to familiarize EFL learners with strategies for coping with their anxiety and ultimately measure their perceived use of such strategies. *Keywords:* Language learning anxiety, Learners' perceptions, Reducing anxiety strategies, Sources of anxiety

1. Introduction

Anxiety, as an affecting factor in the language learning process, refers to "the feeling of tension and apprehension related with second language learning" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 284). Spielberger (1983) defines anxiety as "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry" (p. 125). Can (2019) notes that anxiety is an affective variable which has been acknowledged as an essential research area in both foreign and second language learning settings. As Chu et al. (2015) held, anxiety may be regarded as an impeding affective factor in the process of learning. As Ewald (2007) noted, as anxiety has a detrimental role in foreign language learning, this construct has gained enormous attention. The main reason, as Ewald (2007) stated, is that anxiety is generally considered to have a devastating impact on the learning process and consequently on the learners' psychological comfort. Yang and Quadir (2018) believed that the recognition of anxiety as an important affective variable in the context of language learning coincides with developments in humanistic and cognitive psychology, in which a strong link between emotions and diverse features of language learning was recognised (Yang & Quadir, 2018). Language anxiety hampers language learning and it also adversely impacts academic performance (Amiruddin & Suparti, 2018). As Tosun (2018) notes, language learning anxiety (LLA) can have various causes and reasons.

The roots of LLA can be traced to students' characteristics, teachers' variables, and the quality of education offered to learners (Williams & Andrade, 2008). As Williams and Andrade (2008) maintain, language learners' personal problems, difficulties associated with communication, low self-esteem, fear of identity loss, rivalry, idealistic opinions, and prospects towards learning are among the sources of anxiety. Young (1992) mentions that the wrong teachers' behaviour is one of the important factors which brings anxiety to learners. As Williams and Andrade (2008) note, language anxiety is mainly interwoven with productive skills and tests and the learners' relationship with the teacher influence learners' language anxiety. Likewise, Wei (2013, 2014) found that learners experience a medium level of anxiety and dread of negative judgments, communication anxiety, and test anxiety. Abdullah et al. (2019, as cited in Zarei & Rezadoust, 2022) have identified "general anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and communication apprehension as sources of speaking anxiety" (p. 115). Although much research has so far been conducted in relation to anxiety, one of the areas which merits research is learners' use of strategies to reduce their anxiety associated with the learning process (Lukitasari, 2008; Patterson et al., 2013). Notably, a review of previous investigations evinces the non-existence of a scale for measuring EFL learners' perceived use of anxiety-reducing strategies. Accordingly, to address this lacuna, this study aimed at developing

and validating a scale for measuring Iranian EFL learners' perceived use of anxiety-reducing strategies. Therefore, the research questions were addressed as follows:

1: What are EFL learners' preferred English language learning anxiety-reducing strategies?

2: Does the newly developed model of Iranian EFL learners' preferred anxiety-reducing strategies fit the Iranian EFL learner population?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Foreign Language Learning Anxiety

Kralova and Soradova (2015, p.1) stated that "Feelings and attitudes play an important role in perceiving everyday life. It is said that we get constant reports to our minds about the world through our feelings. We scan the environment and then infer the moods, and feelings and create attitudes. As regards students, they often feel stressed or even anxious about a certain subject". Horwitz (2010) maintained that anxiety would hinder the learning of a second language. According to Horwitz (2018), for many people learning a new language can be a challenging experience. "Many language learners, and even teachers, report that learning or using their second language causes them to feel uncomfortable, and sometimes more severely like an inauthentic version of themselves" (Horwitz, 2018, p. 73). Likewise, Yan and Liang (2022, p. 1) held that "Foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been identified as a crucial affective factor in language learning".

Foreign language anxiety refers to "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language-learning process" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). Horwitz et al. (1986) further stated that LLA is a "distinctive complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). According to Horwitz and Young (1991), foreign language anxiety mainly relates to fear of communication which involves the level of anxiety of a person related to communication with others. Individuals who are afraid of communication may feel anxious at the time of communicating publicly with other people, group discussions as well as in dyadic communication circumstances. People who fear communication would probably feel anxious in an L2 classroom where they not only have to engage in communication in L2 but they also exert low control over the communicative situation. The authors also note that communication anxiety may be caused by oral communication and tests. This can result in higher-than-normal anxiety in the oral tests, leading to the reception of a mark for the oral examination that does not reflect his/her ability. Obviously, this will

negatively influence the learner's self-esteem, resulting in anxiety in future L2 learning experiences. Fear of negative evaluation involves uneasiness towards others' judgments, keeping away from evaluative conditions, and the belief that one will be negatively evaluated by others (Horwitz & Young, 1991). Brown (2014) further states that "three components of foreign language anxiety have been identified. They are communication apprehension, arising from learners' inability to adequately express mature thoughts and ideas, fear of negative social evaluation, arising from a learner's need to make a positive social impression on others, and test anxiety or apprehension over academic evaluation" (p. 151).

Trang et al. (2013) maintained that based on various research findings, language anxiety is a multifaceted, context and culture-dependent phenomenon. As asserted by Horwitz (2001, p.19), "It is entirely possible that some practices perceived by one group of learners as comfortable may prove stressful for learners from a different cultural group who are used to different types of classroom organisations". As Kim (2010) demonstrated, foreign language anxiety is not context-independent, but rather context-bound. As such, it may be concluded that foreign language anxiety may be tackled differently by learners from various cultural settings, as in diverse cultural conditions, anxiety may come from diverse sources.

2.2. Coping with Anxiety

As Lazarus and Folkman (1984) noted, "coping comprises the cognitive and behavioral efforts that individuals use to manage stressful situations" (p. 32). However, "the question of what students are actually doing to cope with their anxiety in language classrooms has received hardly any attention" (Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004, p. 259). Foreign language learning is likely to be stressful for language learners, which can consequently lead to anxiety. Thus, learners need the capability to tackle their stress during the language-learning process (Kao et al., 2017). Attempting to unravel the strategies EFL learners use to surmount their anxiety, Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004, p. 258) identified five such strategies including "preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation". Young (1992) managed to determine sixteen strategies used to overcome their foreign language learning anxiety (FLLA), some of which are encouraging learners to do pair or group works avoiding pushing learners to speak when they are not ready, and avoiding putting the individual learners in the spotlight in the class. The results of the investigation carried out by Kondo and Yang (2004) revealed seventy tactics for coping with L2 anxiety. This study was conducted on 219 EFL students in Japan, with the participants being divided into five strategies: "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,

e.g., giving up, sleeping in class)" (p. 262). Lukitasari (2008) carried out an investigation to shed light on the strategies adopted by learners to tackle speaking problems in speaking classes. The findings suggested that these learners encountered some speaking challenges such as inhibition, having nothing to say, no participation, and use of L1. The study also indicated that the learners' speaking performance was poor due to their lack of mastery over 3 constitutes of speaking, i.e., vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) have described interventions to decrease L2 speaking anxiety. For example, they put forth interventions including project work, as well as creating a supportive atmosphere in the classroom. They believe that the incorporation of project work in instruction and the foreign language learning process provide the anxious and non-anxious students with identical chances to use the L2 in a friendly atmosphere. Therefore, through building a positive atmosphere (where errors are not blamed and deemed a part of a foreign language learning process), interventions can aid FL learners to diminish their dread of negative evaluation.

Lucas (1984) has described two steps to effectively managing learners' foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) in Japan. In the first step, an easy-going and amiable context is created in the classroom as follows: students are given relaxation exercises, and they are helped to get familiar with each other at the outset of the course. Moreover, learners are introduced to social principles and dialogues and they are taught on how to overcome the barriers or embarrassing situations. Finally, each student receives instruction on how to use gambits appropriately. In her second step, students are involved in different classroom activities with the aim of providing them with more practice in the target language. However, as with other research conducted on strategies for FLSA, Lucas did not go into details, describing the efficacy or inefficacy of these methods or strategies. The results of another investigation based on empirical data on Spanish learning students in the USA showed that teacher traits (e.g. "a non-harsh view of error correction" as well as a relaxed and friendly attitude towards learners can play an important role in alleviating learners' FLSA) (Young, 1990). Hashemi and Abbasi (2013) conducted a thorough review by summarizing previous investigations. They listed several tackling techniques, which may be utilized by EFL instructors and learners. The main strategies are teachers' recognition of the presence of anxiety in L2 learners, teachers' use of formative assessment to reduce learners' uneasiness about class activities, learners' positive self-talk, and learners emboldening themselves to take risks in EFL learning.

As the review of previous investigations reveals, FLLA has been subject to numerous studies (Argaman et al., 2002; Aydin, 2008; Horwitz, 1991; Horwitz & Young, 1991; Saidi, 2014; Young, 1999). Likewise,

strategies to cope with anxiety have been subject by an abundant number of research (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013; Lucas, 1984; Lukitasari, 2008; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). Zarei and Feizollahi (2019) also suggested some techniques to overcome the writing anxiety of EFL learners including giving students time to think about the topic, as well as concept mapping and brainstorming. Nonetheless, there is a paucity of research exploring EFL learners' preference for anxiety-reducing strategies. Accordingly, the current study, in a bid for filling the lacuna in the extant empirical literature aimed at unravelling EFL learners' preferred English LLA-reducing strategies. Moreover, the study intended to reveal if the newly developed model of Iranian EFL learners' preferred anxiety-reducing strategies fits the Iranian EFL learner population.

2.3. Individual Differences

There are many factors that distinguish individuals from one another. These differences may contribute to learners' success. Brown (2014) provided an elaborate list of individual differences including strategies adopted by learners. He defined strategies as, "those specific actions that we take to solve a given problem, and that vary considerably within each individual" (p.124). He further enumerated types of strategies as "cognitive strategies, affective strategies, socio-cultural-interactive strategies, and compensatory strategies have been extensively researched" (125). The closest of these strategies to the concept of anxiety-reducing strategies may be affective strategies which are defined by Oxford (1990, as cited in Brown, 2014) as "those strategies that help the learners to employ beneficial energy, from positive attitudes toward the learning process, and generate and maintain motivation" (p.126).

Zafar and Meenakshi (2012) listed several factors related to personality that differentiate learners as extroversion vs. introversion, self-esteem, inhibition, risk-taking, and anxiety. They maintained that

> Anxiety is closely related to self-esteem, inhibition, and risk-taking and that it comes with feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, or worry. A learner's willingness to communicate has also been related to anxiety. It is often affected by the number of people present, the topic of conversation, and the formality of the circumstances. (p. 644)

Students who experience anxiety usually make an attempt to skip class, hand in their homework with delay, and avoid studying. According to Young (1999), the majority of studies conducted on L2 anxiety have discovered that language anxiety is positively correlated with L2 speaking. The study carried out by Horwitz (1991) shows that anxiety is involved in the following 2 main task requirements of L2 learning: listening and speaking.

Many L2 learners said that they had some speaking problems in class, were not successful to distinguish the sounds and structures of the L2, could not understand the content of an L2 message, and couldn't remember information they already knew during an oral exercise because of feelings of anxiety caused by the language classroom circumstances.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The total number of participants were 200 Iranian EFL learners at different proficiency levels at Kish and Safir language institutes in Tehran, Iran. Students at various proficiency levels were selected to maximize variation and increase the generalizability of the findings. Suri (2011), listing the benefits of maximum variation, maintained that, "maximum variations sampling is a research method that involves selecting participants who represent a wide range of characteristics or experiences related to the research topic". This approach aims to capture the diversity of perspectives and experiences within a population, rather than focusing on a narrow subset of individuals. They were selected based on convenience sampling from male and female learners, as only those available and agreeing to take part in the study were chosen. The researchers tried to maximize the sample size, not less than 200, to be sufficient for the apt data analyses, EFA and CFA, (Pallant, 2020). As a rule of thumb, the larger the sample in the application of the factor analysis, the more precise and more stable the estimates of factor loadings are. Winter et al. (2009) have suggested a sample size of a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 20 times the number of variables for an exploratory factor analysis. Barlett et al. (as cited in Cohen et al., 2011, p: 146) state that for factor analysis, a sample size of no fewer than 100 observations (cases) should be the general rule). Others have also suggested 5-10 samples for each item for factor analysis (Pallant, 2007)

To derive the sources of EFL learners' anxiety, 30 learners were interviewed in an iterative fashion. In means that the researchers started the interviews with 10 students initially, and after memoing their responses, theoretical sampling was conducted (Strauss & Corbin, 1988). In that stage, the sample size was increased iteratively to 30 where the researchers were left assured that the data were saturated. An expert in psychology was consulted to help with developing the interview questions and the questionnaire items regarding anxiety and ways of reducing it. The psychology expert held an MA degree in clinical psychology and a Ph.D. in counselling, with 10 years of consultation practice experience. Moreover, two Ph.D. holders in the field of TEFL with 20 years of teaching practice were also consulted for developing the interview questions for sources of LLA and the associated strategies for reducing anxiety and also item development for the questionnaires.

3.2. Instruments

Two sets of interviews were utilized as the instruments to collect the data based on which a questionnaire was developed as described below:

3.2.1. Semi-structured Interviews on Learners' Perceptions of Sources of Language Learning Anxiety

To collect data on the sources of LLA, collectively 30 learners were interviewed. A set of questions which were semi-structured in nature seeking to uncover the perceptions of Iranian EFL learners toward sources of LLA was prepared (Appendix 1). To avoid any language barriers and ambiguities in the course of interviews, the questions were asked in the learners' mother tongue i.e., Persian. To find interview questions with an acceptable degree of content validity, the following steps in line with Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) were followed:

The literature on LLA was reviewed to figure out any underlying components related to LLA and the probable sources.

The components identified were used to develop the initial questions which were then given to an expert in psychology and his comments were applied to the questions.

The revised draft of the questions was given to two experts with Ph.D. levels in TEFL and their comments concerning the appropriateness of the questions were sought. The comments of the experts were applied to the questions.

Then, the draft was administered to 5 students selected randomly from among the main participants to remove any ambiguities concerning the wording of the questions to enhance clarity and readability. It is suggested that one should test the interview questions with a small sample of respondents prior to conducting the main interviews, and revise them based on the feedback and results (Auton, 2018). The researchers conducted the accuracy check of questions with the 5 participants and came up with the conclusion that the questions did not include any ambiguity. The initial questions underwent expansion through the process of memoing and theoretical sampling. That is, more elaborations and aspects of the subject were asked as the sample size for the interviews increased.

Based on the participants' statements, the final draft of the questions was developed.

3.2.2. Semi-structured Interviews on Anxiety-Reducing Strategies

A set of interviews were also carried out to discover the strategies that learners adopt to reduce their LLA. To prepare the interview questions, the same steps delineated in the previous section were followed. The already-

interviewed 30 learners were asked again about their preferred anxiety-reducing strategies. (Appendix 2)

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

Initially, 200 language learners at various levels of proficiency selected through convenience random sampling from Kish and Safir language institutes were selected. Out of the initial 200 learners, 30 were interviewed iteratively for their perceptions of sources of LLA. Interviews were of semi-structured type to both accelerate the data collection process and better orient the students to express their ideas. Following that, these students were cyclically interviewed to talk about the strategies they used to tackle anxiety in their language learning. The interview questions were made after consultations with experts in ELT as well as psychology fields. All data collected through the interviews were transcribed and made ready for theme analysis. Following that, based on content and thematic analyses of the interview data that was done manually, a 14-item questionnaire was developed for identifying and quantifying anxiety-reducing strategies, and its reliability and validity were checked by administering it on the 200 students.

The statistical procedures of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) were run based on the collected data to carry out factor analysis and ensure the construct validity as well as to calculate the reliability of the questionnaire. The developed questionnaire sought to figure out the components of the construct of anxiety-reducing strategies adopted by EFL learners. After conducting the appropriate procedure of data collection and data analyses, the researchers arrived at 13 items under three factors as anxiety-reducing strategies (Metacognitive, Social, and Tactile). Then, the formed items were provided with 5 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 65 and the minimum could be 13 with the higher score indicating higher preference for applying the strategies to reduce LLA. Questions 3, 6, 9, and 11, related to the strategies corresponding to the tactile component, questions 2, 5, and 10, 13 were akin to the social component, and questions 1, 4, 7,8,12 tapped into the metacognitive factor. To prepare the final draft of the questionnaire items related to one factor were juxtaposed (items 1-5 = Metacognitive, items 6-9 = Social, items 10-13 = Tactile) (Appendix 3)

3.4. Data analysis

To analyze the gathered data, the researchers used both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Qualitative analysis was used to analyze the interview contents. In so doing, the researchers followed procedures of

content analysis proposed by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). According to them, six stages should be covered for analyzing qualitative data. These phases were

Getting familiar with the data: at this initial stage, the researchers gathered the respondents' statements to the first question and reviewed them all to make sure about their clarity and understandability.

Coming up with initial codes: based on the primary stage of data collection, the initial quotes were converted to codes.

Looking for themes among codes: After memoing and running through theoretical sampling, further data were collected iteratively. When the researchers felt assured that no new data could be gathered, themes were driven from the codes.

Reviewing the themes: At this stage, the derived themes were checked for their accuracy and appropriateness.

Defining and labeling the themes: The themes were labelled finally to best represent the content of the codes.

Producing the final report: Finally, the factors were formed and items comprising the factors were juxtaposed for the final stage of reliability estimation and factor analyses.

As for the quantitative analysis, Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analyses as well as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were utilized to address the construct validity and reliability fitness of the developed questionnaire, respectively.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results
4.1.1. Addressing the First Question
The first question intended to unravel EFL learners' preferred English LLA-reducing strategies. Table 1 demonstrates the results of content analysis on interview responses related to learners' perceptions of the sources of their LLA driven by 30 students.

Table 1

Results of Content Analysis on Interview Responses Related to Learners' Perceptions of the Sources of LLA

Theme number	Theme	Frequency of learners	Percentage of learners
1	Teacher's behavior	28	93.33%
2	Instruction-related factors	25	83.33%
3	Classroom atmosphere and peers	18	60%
4	Self-related	12	40%

As can be noticed in the above table, **teacher's behaviour** is regarded as the most dominant theme (mentioned by 28 out of 30 participants = 93.33%) for the sources of LLA from learners' perspective. This means that 93.33 percent of the learners mentioned teachers' behaviour as their source of anxiety. Next in the row is the **instruction-related factors** mentioned by 25 out of 30 participants, which means that 83.33 percent of the learners related their anxiety to this factor. The next emerging theme is the **classroom atmosphere and peers**. As shown in the table, 18 learners referred to this factor as their source of anxiety. Expressed in percentage, 60 percent of the learners referred to this factor. The last theme revealed is **self-related factors** referred to by 12 out of 30 participants, which means that 40 percent of the learners ascribed their anxiety to this source.

Table 2 displays the outcomes of content analysis on interview responses associated with the strategies the learners preferred to use to reduce their LLA.

Table 2

Results of Content Analysis on Interview Responses Related to Learners' Preferences of the Strategies for Reducing Their Anxiety

Theme number	Theme	Frequency of learners	Percentage of learners
1	Doing relaxation exercises	26	86.66%
2	Asking the teacher for help	26	86.66%
3	Thinking about the reasons of anxiety	25	83.33%
4	Thinking about preventive measures to tackle with anxiety	25	83.33%
5	Asking peers for help	24	80%

As shown in Table 2, **doing relaxation exercises** (mentioned by 26 out of 30 learners = 86.66% of them) and **asking the teacher for help**

(mentioned by 26 out of 30 learners = 86.66% of them) are considered the most prominent strategies learners preferred to use for reducing their LLA. The next themes were **thinking about the reasons for anxiety** and **thinking about preventive measures to tackle anxiety** with each theme being mentioned by 25 learners (83.33%). The last emerging theme was **asking peers for help** mentioned by 24 learners (80%).

Grounded in the outcomes of qualitative data analysis and the review of extant empirical and theoretical literature, the themes were identified as a) internal strategies including metacognitive and tactile strategies; metacognitive strategies include those that refer to past experiences and seeking reasons and causes of anxiety, and b) external strategies (getting help from the teachers and peers). Accordingly, a model comprising the central construct (LARS) and the components is offered. Figure 1 illustrates a visual presentation of the model.

Figure1
The LARS Model
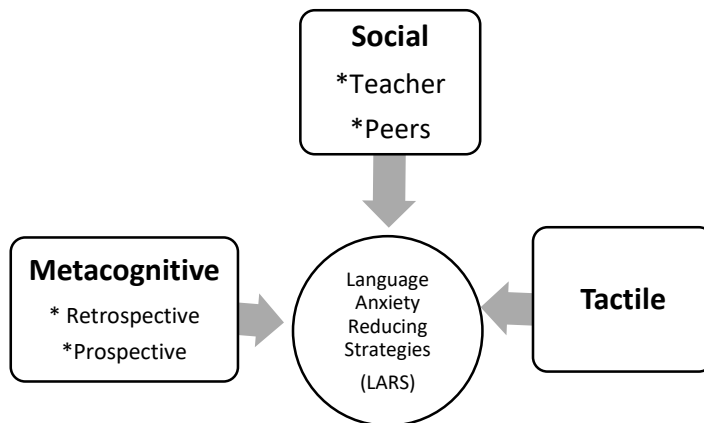
Afterwards, a 14-item questionnaire was developed with the items related to the driven themes. Table 3 displays the 14 items of the questionnaire for measuring the strategies learners prefer to use to reduce their LLA.

Table 3

The 14-items Questionnaire for the Strategies Learners Prefer to Use to Reduce Their LLA

No.	Item
Q1	I usually think about what I can do to reduce my anxiety when I feel anxious.
Q2	I always ask the teacher to explain more when I do not understand what to do.
Q3	I always have a chewing gum with me to use when I feel anxious.
Q4	I always think about why I get anxious while learning English.
Q5	I normally ask the teacher for specific strategies I can use to reduce my anxiety.
Q6	I usually do deep breathing when I feel anxious.
Q7	I use a checklist to note how many times I get anxious in my English class.
Q8	I usually stop and start thinking of a relaxing scenery when I am anxious.
Q9	I usually stretch myself or go out of the class for a short walk.
Q10	I always ask the teacher or other learners for assistance when a particular activity or learning situation is making me anxious.
Q11	I always take a tactile instrument with me to toy with while I feel anxious.
Q12	I usually think about what I can do to prevent my anxiety in learning English.
Q13	I usually ask other learners how they deal with their anxiety when learning English.
Q14	I always try to have plans for reducing my anxiety.

In this stage, the sub-constructs of Learners' Anxiety Reducing Strategies (LARS) were initially identified using the EFA (Exploratory Factor Analysis) technique.

4.1.1.1. EFA of the LARS Questionnaire Items

For the EFA the following steps were undertaken:

Step 1: Feasibility study of factor analysis on data

At this point, it should be shown whether the 14-item LARS can be reduced to fewer factors. In other words, whether the sample size is sufficient for this purpose or not. To this end, the KMO index and Bartlett's test were employed. Table 4 displays the results.

Table 4

Bartlett's Test and KMO Index Results

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy.		.732
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	4080.263
	df	91
	Sig.	.000

As it can be observed in Table 4. The value of the KMO index is equal to 0.732. The KMO value equal to 0.6 or above is acceptable to conclude about the suitability of the data set for factor analysis (Pallant, 2007). Therefore, 14 LASR items can be reduced to fewer factors. In other words, the sample size (200 learners) is sufficient for this purpose. Also, according to Bartlett's significance test, it can be said that there is a difference in significance between the correlation matrix between the 14 "LASR" items and the identity matrix at the significance level of 0.01 ($p < 0.01$). In other words, there is a significant correlation among the items of each factor, while there is no significant correlation between the factor items and other factors.

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

This step determines the variance percentage of each variable (item) explained by the set of factors desired by the researchers. This amount of variance for each variable is called pooled variance. Table 5 shows the covariance rate.

Table 5

Covariance of LARS Scale Items

No.	Percentage of variance extracted
Q1	0.925
Q2	0.967
Q3	0.767
Q4	0.938
Q5	0.940
Q6	0.777
Q7	0.913
Q8	0.950
Q9	0.803
Q10	0.917
Q11	0.655
Q12	0.825
Q13	0.836
Q14	0.331

According to Table 5, the minimum and maximum pooled variance are 33% and 938%, respectively. As a general rule, if the pooled variance of a variable is less than 50%, it should be excluded from the EFA trend. Since

the extracted variance of Question 14 is less than 50%, it should be excluded from the analysis process because it does not have sufficiently 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. For this purpose, three methods are used: Kaiser Criterion (eigenvalues method), cumulative variance, and Scree plot. In the Kaiser method, only factors with an eigenvalue of 1 and more are selected. Therefore, the output presented in Table 6 shows the three extracted factors by the EFA method. Also, in the cumulative variance method, about 82.38% of the variance of the variables can be explained by selecting three factors.

Table 6

Eigenvalues of Cumulative Variance of Extracted Factors on LARS Scale

Total variance explained

Component	initial eigenvalues			Extraction sums of squared loadings			rotation sums of squared loadings
	Total	% of variance	cumulative %	total	% of variance	cumulative %	total
1	4.547	32.477	32.477	4.547	32.477	32.477	4.545
2	4.064	29.027	61.504	4.064	29.027	61.504	3.741
3	2.923	20.882	82.386	2.923	20.882	82.386	3.413
4	.916	6.540	88.926				
5	.409	2.923	91.849				
6	.299	2.136	93.985				
7	.266	1.901	95.886				
8	.173	1.233	97.120				
9	.157	1.122	98.242				
10	.122	.874	99.116				
11	.082	.585	99.701				
12	.023	.162	99.863				
13	.014	.102	99.965				
14	.005	.035	100.000				

Note. Extraction method: Principal component analysis

Figure 2 provides a visual inspection of the extracted components. As it is shown, there is a conspicuous disruption between the third and fourth components. Components 1, 2, and 3 contain more of the variance than the rest.

Figure 2
Scree
Plot of the Components
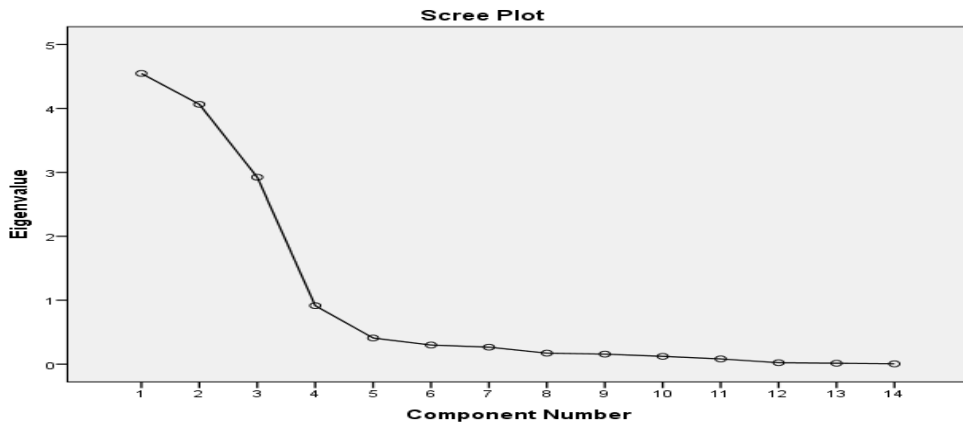
Step 4: Determining the correlation between each item with each other and with the extracted factors

The purpose of this step is to probe the correlation between the extracted factors and the questionnaire items, hence to determine which item is loaded on what factor. The factors need to be rotated finally to help reveal the loadings. Table 7 shows the factor loadings before rotation.

Table 7
Factor Loadings of the LARS Scale before Rotation

No.	1	2	3
Q1	0.961	0.029	.012
Q2	-0.010	0.829	-.528
Q3	-0.025	0.611	.627
Q4	0.968	0.009	-.010
Q5	0.013	0.829	-.502
Q6	-0.038	0.599	.646
Q7	0.955	0.035	.004
Q8	0.974	0.016	.012
Q9	-0.025	0.575	.687
Q10	-0.047	0.820	-.492
Q11	-0.068	0.497	.635
Q12	0.900	0.065	.103
Q13	0.003	0.754	-.518

As shown in Table 7, all LARS questionnaire items are placed in the form of a factor based on factor loadings before rotation. The three factors are rotated to better distinguish the questions for categorization in the form of those three factors.

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

The orthogonal Varimax rotation method is used to rotate the factors to ensure the independence of the factors from each other. Table 8 shows the factor loadings after rotation.

Table 8
Factor Loadings of LARS Scale after Varimax Rotation

No.	1	2	3
Q1	0.961	0.008	-0.021
Q2	0.002	0.981	0.074
Q3	0.020	0.113	0.868
Q4	0.967	0.005	-0.052
Q5	0.027	0.964	0.094
Q6	0.006	0.093	0.877
Q7	0.955	0.017	-0.024
Q8	0.974	-0.003	-0.029
Q9	0.021	0.049	0.895
Q10	-0.034	0.952	0.099
Q11	-0.027	0.017	0.808
Q12	0.905	-0.018	0.076
Q13	0.013	0.913	0.037

In Table 8, the classification of factors is highlighted. Accordingly, five items are loaded on factor 1 (items 1, 4, 7, 8, 12), four items on factor 2 (items 2, 5, 10, 13), and four items on factor 3 (items 3, 6, 9, 11). In fact, for each item, the highest loading under the three components is identified. The next step was to name these factors.

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

According to the questions related to each factor and the main questionnaire of this scale, the factors were named Social (related to strategies seeking help from other people), Metacognitive (those strategies related to the learners' awareness and thinking), and Tactile (related to learners' physical actions) as listed in Table 9. This table displays the model's symbols and summarizes the remainder of this paper.

It has to be noted that in preparing the final draft of the questionnaire, the placement of the items underwent a change to juxtapose the factor-related items. Hence, items 1-5 relate to metacognitive strategies, items 6-9 measure social strategies, and items 10-13 tap tactile strategies (Appendix C).

Table 9

Factor Loadings of LARS Scale after Varimax Rotation

No.	Factor's name	Model's symbol
2		
5		
10	Social	SOCI
13		
1		
4		
7	Metacognitive	META
8		
12		
3		
6		
9	Tactile	TACT
11		

Figure 3

*CFA Model of the LARS Construct*
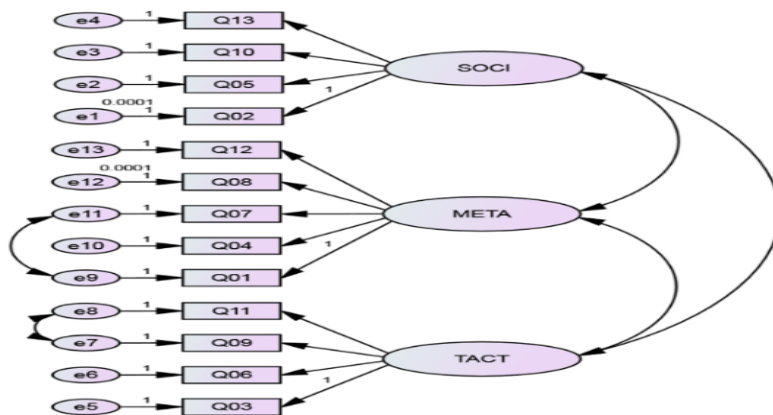
4.1.2. Addressing the Second Question

The second question sought to explore if the developed model of LARS fits the Iranian EFL learner population, hence its reliability. In this section, the results of CFA performed on the extracted factors of the LARS scale are presented.

Figure 3 depicts the CFA configuration of this construct, presented as a first-order CFA model, in which the symbols presented in Table 3 are used. Figure 4 shows this model with standardized factor loadings.

Figure 4

CFA Model of Representing the Components and Factor Loadings
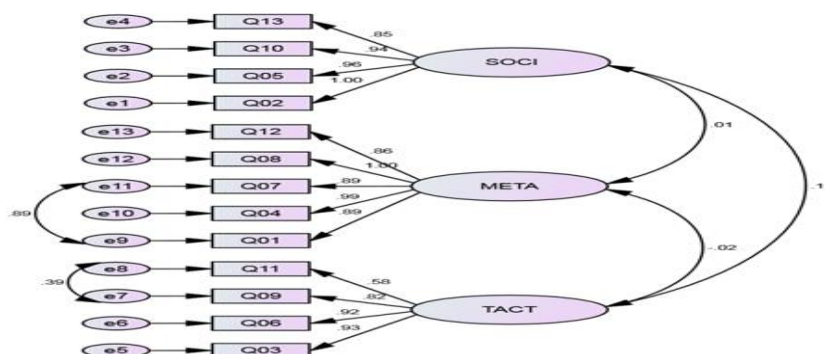
After applying the modifications, the goodness of fit of the model was probed. Hu and Bentler (1999) suggested some criteria to meet to ensure goodness of fit. These criteria, together with the values driven from the data, are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

GFIs of Factor Analysis Model of the LARS Construct

Criteria		Threshold			Evaluation
		Terrible	Acceptable	Excellent	
CMIN	167.233				
df	62				
CMIN/df	2.697	> 5	> 3	> 1	Excellent
RMSEA	.042	> 0.08	< 0.08	< 0.06	Excellent
CFI	.940	< 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.95	Acceptable
TLI	.925	< 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.95	Acceptable
GFI	.901	< 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.95	Acceptable
SRMR	.029	> 0.1	> 0.08	< 0.08	Excellent

The values indicated in Table 10 show excellent to acceptable goodness of fit. Next, the discriminant validity for each factor and the composite reliability (CR) were inspected. As exhibited in Table 11, the three components enjoyed CR values above 0.7, which means acceptable reliability. The average

variance extracted (AVE) for each component also indicated good convergent validity within each factor as all values were above 0.5. Moreover, based on Fornell and Larcker (1981), the square root of AVE (the bolded values) was above the inter-correlations of the factors, showing discriminant validity.

Table 11

Composite Reliability and Discriminant Validity

	CR	AVE	Fornell-Larcker Criterion		
			SOCI	META	TACT
SOCI	0.969	0.885	**0.941**		
META	0.969	0.864	0.010	**0.929**	
TACT	0.892	0.680	0.172	-0.018	**0.824**

4.2. Discussion

The current study aimed at discovering EFL learners' awareness of the causes of anxiety they experience in an attempt to reveal what strategies they prefer to adopt to reduce their anxiety. Ultimately, this investigation was conducted to develop a questionnaire for measuring the EFL learners' preferences for strategies to decrease their anxiety. The outcomes of the qualitative analysis revealed that learners perceived their anxiety rooted in the teacher's behaviour, instruction-related factors, classroom atmosphere, and peers as well as self-related factors. Furthermore, the results of content analysis related to learners' strategies demonstrated that they perceived using relaxation exercises, asking the teacher for help, thinking about the reasons for anxiety, thinking about preventive measures to tackle anxiety, and asking peers for help to reduce their LLA. The results of exploratory factor analysis showed a three-factor model including social, metacognitive, and personal as the strategies learners prefer to use to reduce their LLA. Moreover, the outcomes of confirmatory factor analysis unravelled that this three-factor model reliably fits the Iranian EFL learners' population.

The outcomes of this study resonate with the findings of previous investigations concerning learners' perceptions of the sources of foreign LLA. For instance, Saidi (2014) showed that test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation in teacher and peer interaction were the sources of anxiety. Similarly, the current study showed that examinations, and peers, as well as teacher-related factors, were considered as sources of LLA. Quite relevant to teachers' instructional practices as a source of anxiety found in this investigation, Aydin (2008) revealed that the manner of correcting errors by teachers is another cause of anxiety. Moreover, similar to the findings of the present investigation, Argaman et al. (2002) found that the attitudes and characters of teachers are the sources of FLLA from teachers' perspectives.

The discoveries of this investigation related to the strategies used for lowering anxiety are in congruence with the findings of previous investigations in regard to LLA coping strategies. For instance, Young (1992) asserted that encouraging learners to work in pairs or small groups and avoiding pushing learners to speak before they become ready; as well as avoiding putting the individual learners in the spotlight in the class are among the strategies that can be used for tackling anxiety. Such strategies are similar to those mentioned by teachers in the current study in relation to instructional practices that can be used to reduce anxiety.

Similarly, Kondo and Yang (2004) concluded that learners' preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, and peer thinking were the strategies learners used to cope with foreign LLA. Similarly, in the current study, it was found that learners preferred to draw on relaxation techniques and ask for help from their peers to tackle their anxiety. Moreover, Liu (2007) found that engaging in more practice and building up self-confidence are two main strategies that can reduce LLA. Such results resonate with the findings of the present study as learners mentioned that they would draw on help from the teacher and classmates when they encountered problems with learning content, which is an indication of obtaining more engagement with learning and practice.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The present findings both confirm and are supported by the findings of previous empirical investigations concerning the sources of FLLA (e.g., Argaman et al., 2002; Aydin, 2008; Saidi, 2014), and the strategies adopted to address FLLA (e.g., Kondo & Yang, 2004; Liu, 2007; Young, 1992). The results of this investigation highlight the interconnection between different factors which can give rise to anxiety such as the mentioned sources from the learners' viewpoints as well as the employed strategies to mitigate anxiety.

Since learners perceived that the teacher's behaviour was an important source of anxiety, teachers are advised to take this perception of learners into account and adapt their behaviour so as not to cause anxiety for the learners and in a way alleviate their anxiety. As learners named instruction-related factors as another source of anxiety, teachers are recommended to apply instructional activities that are least conducive to anxiety. Moreover, since the classroom atmosphere and peers were mentioned as another source of anxiety, teachers should try to provide an environment that does not cause anxiety. Moreover, teachers should provide learners with the awareness that their behaviour may cause anxiety for their classmates and ask learners to act more cooperatively for instance. Learners will need to be given awareness concerning the host of strategies they can use to address their LLA. To do so, workshops can be held in which anxiety-reducing strategies are explained,

exemplified, and clarified to the learners to reduce their anxiety. In such workshops, learners' anxiety-reducing strategies including social, metacognitive, and tactile strategies can be incorporated to enrich the repertoire of learners concerning anxiety-reducing strategies. Moreover, teachers can help learners adopt and use such strategies to cope with their LLA. For instance, teachers can adopt more tactful error correction behaviour to mitigate learners' fear of negative evaluation. Likewise, they can adapt their instructional materials to provide instruction in a more organized way in an attempt to assist low-achieving learners in tackling their LLA. Teachers can adopt such strategies as teachers' behaviour and instruction-related factors were expressed by learners as sources of learners' anxiety. It is strongly recommended that teachers create an amiable and stress-free classroom atmosphere, an encouraging and enjoyable teaching-learning situation where learners feel secure to participate in activities and enhance their social abilities, which was also mentioned as one source of anxiety by learners.

Based on the present research scope, aims, and findings as well as the researchers' observations, some suggestions for more research are recommended. The participants of the present investigation were chosen from private language institutes. Given that context may affect the conceptualization and formation of anxiety, further studies may be done with participants from state schools to further accumulate empirical evidence related to LLA. Moreover, comparative investigations can be carried out shedding light on the causes of anxiety and the adopted strategies used to diminish anxiety in different contexts to probe the possible differences.

In the current study, the researchers were not able to use observation as a data collection instrument to determine if learners apply the anxiety-reducing strategies in actuality. Thus, future research with observation as a data collection instrument is recommended. The research was limited in scope in terms of the sample selection. That is, the participants were selected on a non-random selection technique as the researcher could not include more participants due to the coronavirus pandemic during the data collection time and lack of access to other institutions. Some individual learner variables like personality types, age, and gender were not controlled in the current study. Future investigations may set out to probe if personality types determine the type and frequency of anxiety-reducing strategies. Similar to EFL learners, EFL teachers are also susceptible to anxiety. Future investigations may explore their sources of anxiety and what strategies they prefer to use to tackle their own teaching anxiety.

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Appendices

Appendix 1
Interview Questions for Sources of Language Learning Anxiety

1. What are the factors that make you anxious during learning English?
2. Do you think the factors that make you anxious are related to teachers, classmates, textbooks or other factors?
3. Which factors do you think are more important in causing anxiety for you during learning English?

Appendix 2
Interview Questions for Strategies to Reduce Language Learning Anxiety

1. What strategies do you adopt to reduce your anxiety during learning English?
2. Which strategies are more important in reducing your language learning anxiety?

Appendix 3
Questionnaire for the Learners' Adopted Strategies to Reduce Their Language Learning Anxiety

	No	Item	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Metacognitive	1	I usually think about what I can do to reduce my anxiety when I feel anxious.					
	2	I always think about why I get anxious while learning English.					
	3	I use a checklist to note how many times I get anxious in my English class.					
	4	I usually stop and start thinking of a relaxing scenery when I am anxious.					
	5	I usually think about what I can do to prevent my anxiety in learning English.					

Social	6	I always ask the teacher to explain more when I do not understand what to do.
	7	I normally ask the teacher for specific strategies I can use to reduce my anxiety.
	8	I always ask the teacher or other learners for assistance when a particular activity or learning situation is making me anxious.
	9	I usually ask other learners how they deal with their anxiety when learning English.
	10	I always have a chewing gum with me to use when I feel anxious.
	11	I usually do deep breathing when I feel anxious.
Tactile	12	I usually stretch myself or go out of the class for a short walk.
	13	I always take a tactile instrument with me to toy with while I feel anxious.