

## **The Impact of Cooperative Learning on Students' Productive Skills Anxiety in Libyan EFL classrooms**

**Ibtisam Hasan Mami**

**ibtihasan8@gmail.com**

**Haneen Ali Teekah**

**b161311@art.misuratau.edu.ly**

**Hawa Mohammed Esskare**

**hmsaleh@art.misuratau.edu.ly**

**Fatima Abdalhamed Eshlak**

**Bb16196@art.misuratau.edu.ly**

**Faculty of Arts, Misurata University**

### **Abstract**

This study examines the influence of cooperative learning on decreasing university students' anxiety level, specifically in speaking and writing skills, within English as a Foreign Language classrooms (EFL) at Misurata University, Libya. Speaking and writing, as productive skills, often create high levels of anxiety in language learners, particularly when students are asked to perform the tasks individually in traditional teacher-centered classrooms. This study adopts a mixed-method approach to evaluate the impact of cooperative learning on learners' anxiety levels and their overall performance in productive skills. Two different versions of a questionnaire were designed to collect quantitative data from 105 Libyan EFL students and 16 Libyan teachers. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 9 Libyan EFL students to gather qualitative data. The results indicated that implementing cooperative learning approach has a considerable impact on the reduction of students' anxiety level and fear towards practicing the two skills. The study results have important recommendations for EFL teaching, aiming at improvement of language learning outcomes by reducing learners' anxiety.

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**Key Words:** foreign language anxiety, cooperative learning, traditional learning, productive skills anxiety, speaking and writing, EFL classrooms, Libya

## **Introduction**

### **Background**

Learning a foreign language is generally a challenging experience. For instance, when learners perform a speaking or writing tasks in the target language, they are required to produce the language in either a spoken or written form to achieve effective interactions. This often causes students to feel anxious about making mistakes. This type of anxiety, known as Productive Skills Anxiety (PSA), might become a major obstacle to active class engagement, effective language learning, and good academic performance (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

In the traditional methods of teaching, when a classroom is being teacher centered as is the case in most of the EFL classes in Libya, students' participation along with communicative skills are in its poorest level. Consequently, their ability to practice the language confidently inside classroom is not guaranteed. Because of some factors such as: individual competitions, and listening to the teacher speaking for hours with very limited performance from the students, the apprehension experienced by the learners may be increased (Swain, 2000).

Alternatively, cooperative learning (CL) suggests a more supportive learning approach which can help decrease anxiety level. In CL, students work together with their colleagues in small groups to achieve a common objective. Working together creates a more communicating and collaborative classroom environment where the requirements of performance is shared among the group members (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). By working in a team, learners have a tendency to feel more

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supported and less anxious of committing mistakes, as they know their peers are likely to offer assistance.

### **Research Questions**

This study examined the impact of cooperative learning on productive skills anxiety among Libyan EFL students at Misurata University. Specifically, it addressed the following research questions:

1. How does cooperative learning (CL) impact EFL students' anxiety levels in comparison with to traditional learning (TL) environments, particularly in relation to productive language skills?
2. What specific factors in cooperative learning settings contribute to reducing students' anxiety?
3. What are the potential effects of cooperative learning on students' social skills, confidence, and motivation in language learning?

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following definitions are structured exchange of information between learners. The success of the whole group depends on the performance of each member in the group (Bousalem, et al., 2023).

**Foreign language Classroom Anxiety.** It is defined as the feelings of tension, stress and apprehension related to classroom learning arising from the Uneasiness of language learning process (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986)

**Social Skills.** Are skills acquired through exposure and communication with other people describing the capacity of interaction, delivering and receiving verbal and non-verbal means (Stanne, 2000)

**Traditional Learning.** It is one of the widely used teaching approaches in which teachers play the most active role delivering knowledge through typical face-to-face interaction (Bousalem, et al., 2023).

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provided to improve better understanding of the study concepts.

**Cooperative Learning (CL).** It is an approach by which students of various levels can work together. In cooperation learning models, a group learning activity depends on

### **Related Studies**

There have been several studies investigated foreign language anxiety (FLA) in the field of second/foreign language learning and acquisition. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), FLA is a particular type of apprehension which foreign language learners might encounter in language learning contexts. It is directly related to the class language tasks and its level might increase during speaking and writing activities. Three recognized components are identified: fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety. EFL learners often be concerned about negative judgment by instructors or peers while they are performing in speaking and writing tasks, while they might experience a feeling of anxiety when they are interacting in the target language. The effect of test anxiety, which is usually associated with written exams, extends to speaking tasks because learners often fear inadequate performance (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope 1986. Regarding the influence of FLA on EFL learners, research confirmed that FLA is a main factor of avoidance behavior on the part of learners. Students who were identified with the feeling of apprehension tended not to participate in the speaking and discussion tasks and show a desire to answer instructor's questions (Young, 1991). According to several studies, FLA was related to poor language performance because EFL learners do not have the ability to practice the target language in an effective way due to anxiety. This negative feeling created a sort of reluctance to participate in language tasks (Young, 1991).

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Effective communicative language competence is recognized by the ability of speaking and writing efficiently. These productive skills often cause high anxiety levels among EFL learners. When learners are required to communicate with their teacher or peers in real life situations, they do not have enough time to rehashing or correcting their errors. Ur (1996) emphasized that speaking in front audience is a stressful task because EFL learners might make mistakes or be evaluated by others. Such situations can result in several anxious signs such as hesitancy, stammering, or complete silence. Similarly, writing anxiety might reduce the learners' language production. According to Cheng (2002), learners who were identified by high levels of writing anxiety tended to produce poor quality of written work because they were likely afraid of being criticized by teacher or peer feedback. Therefore, they might focus more on grammar and lexical accuracy rather than expressing ideas in a fluent and creative method.

Teacher-centered pedagogies are one of the most recognized characteristics of traditional EFL classrooms. According to this method, teacher's role is often dominant in the setting, while students tend to play a rather passive role. Language instructions often mainly contain performing drills, delivering lectures, and practicing recitation. EFL learners are required to answer several questions in turns or individually perform some language tasks in front of the class (Cheng, 2002), This approach might lead to increase anxiety level for those who struggle with speaking and writing skills because the absence of peer support can cause more stress, apprehension and confusion; therefore, less adequate performance in the target language. Moreover, teacher-centered classrooms are recognized by competitive atmosphere among students. They might concern of being evaluated in comparison to their peers. This can create a sort of fear of failure. Moreover, public performance of tasks, like oral presentations, might further increase the feeling of fear. Therefore, students tend to adopt long-term avoidance behaviors by

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becoming increasingly unwilling to participate in classroom activities which involve productive skills (Ismail et al., 2018).

On the other hand, (CL) transfer the focus from teacher and solely individual performance to group collaboration among students as the center of the learning process. As Johnson and Johnson (1994) clarifies that CL is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning, the main objective of CL is creating effective student interaction, constructive peer support, and shared responsibility for learning outcomes. In CL settings, EFL learners work in groups to perform a task. The approach assesses to decrease stress and anxiety levels by distributing the responsibility for achieving the productive skill task successfully rather than focusing on individual learner's performance.

Several researchers have investigated the effectiveness of CL on decreasing FLA and PSA among EFL learners. For instance, three studies were undertaken by Crandall (1999), and Dörnyei (2001), respectively, emphasized the advantages of cooperative learning (CL) in reducing anxiety and apprehension levels among EFL learners and helping in enhancement of language production in EFL classrooms. According to Crandall (1999), CL adopted encouraging and low-stress atmosphere where EFL learners could work with each other, feel less isolated and more confident in achieving the task. Committing mistakes in such environment, was seen as learning opportunities rather than failures. Therefore, learners have more chance to be risk takers without being afraid of being judged by their individual performance as the focus on success achieved by the group. Likewise, Johnson, Johnson, and Stanne (2000) emphasized on the influence of CL in improving social skills as EFL learners are required to effectively communicate and collaborate within the group. Since CL approach could decrease anxiety by offering interactive relationships and creating a sense of community, learners felt less stressed and demonstrated

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a desire to participate in language tasks. In the same light, Dörnyei (2001) argued that the sense of common purpose and responsibility in the same group increased learners' engagement, recognizing that their individual contributions are significant to the group's achievement. Overall, these perspectives have emphasized that CL could help in reducing FLA and PSA among EFL learners, promoting active participation and sustain language enhancement.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

This study used a mixed research approach to investigate the potential influence of cooperative learning on decreasing productive skills anxiety among EFL learners in the classroom. Both quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures were employed to gain a comprehensive understanding of how CL could affect EFL learners' speaking and writing performances.

### **Participants and Setting**

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Arts, Misurata University, Libya. The participants were both students and teachers. 105 Libyan EFL students from the Department of English were selected randomly to complete a questionnaire. Their ages ranged between 18 and 24, and they had different levels of English proficiency, but they were enrolled in different courses which involved performance productive skills activities, speaking and writing classes. Moreover, 16 Libyan EFL instructors from three faculties at Misurata University: Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Education, and Faculty of Languages, were asked to participate in filling in a questionnaire. A purposive sampling technique was used based on their previous teaching experience in using cooperative learning approach in their classrooms; therefore, all of the teachers had at least three years of

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teaching experience and had used both traditional and CL methods with their students. Furthermore, 9 Libyan EFL students who had also participated in group learning were interviewed to collect qualitative data for deeper insights into the question under investigation.

### **Instruments**

The study used three data collection instruments: questionnaires for students and teachers and semi-structured interviews with students. The student questionnaire was taken from two well-known questionnaires. The first questionnaire was designed by Daly and Miller (1975): Writing Apprehension Test (WAT), while the second one was prepared by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986): Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The current study researchers have added some modifications to the final draft of the questionnaire to meet the objectives of the study. Students were required to rate their anxiety levels on a Likert scale, ranging from "1 = never anxious" to "5 = always anxious.". 25 items were included in the questionnaire, divided into two sections, to identify the students' anxiety levels in both traditional and cooperative learning settings. The first section was designed for speaking tasks and the second one for writing tasks in EFL classrooms.

A teacher questionnaire was used to examine the teachers' perceptions of EFL students' anxiety levels and their experiences with cooperative learning approach. They were requested to respond to 20 items on the frequency of students' anxiety-related behaviors they observed during both traditional and CL activities. There are also open-ended questions in the questionnaire; therefore, teachers can add more detailed insights about the challenges and benefits they might experience when using the cooperative learning approach in the classroom.

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In order to ask the students' opinions about speaking and writing tasks, how they felt about peer feedback, and to what extent they were anxious in a cooperative learning setting compared to a traditional classroom, a semi-structured interview was run and nine students were asked open-ended questions. The questions were asked in English and the time allocated for each interview was 30 minutes.

## **Procedure**

A pilot study was conducted to test the questionnaire and interview questions to ensure clarity, effectiveness, and reliability. Feedback from a small group of students and teachers helped refine the question wording and flow. The full data collection took place over one academic semester (fall 2023-2024) and involved two stages. First, questionnaires were given to students and teachers to identify their perceptions on both traditional and cooperative learning approaches. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students to gather deeper insights into their experiences with CL. Ethical approval was obtained from the participants who were fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study.

## **Data Analysis**

The data analysis used both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of how CL influences students' productive skills anxiety in EFL classrooms. The quantitative data collected from the student questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize the responses regarding speaking and writing anxiety in traditional versus CL settings. Percentages were calculated to illustrate the differences in anxiety levels across the two teaching methods. The data collected from teacher questionnaires were also analyzed quantitatively to support the findings from the students. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize teachers' observations of student anxiety levels during CL

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tasks. Additionally, qualitative feedback from teachers was thematically analyzed to understand their perspectives on the benefits and challenges of implementing CL in EFL classroom.

Additionally, the qualitative data were analyzed thematically. This involved identifying key themes in students' experiences with CL and its effects on their anxiety. The responses were coded to capture recurring sentiments, such as feelings of comfort and support when working in groups, as well as challenges related to group dynamics. Quotes from students were used to illustrate these themes and provide deeper insights into their perceptions of CL. This qualitative analysis enriched the quantitative findings by adding personal narratives and context, highlighting how peer support and group interaction played a crucial role in reducing anxiety.

### **Findings**

The results of the study provide a detailed understanding of how CL influences students' productive skills anxiety in EFL classrooms. Both the quantitative data from the questionnaires and the qualitative data from the interviews offer insights into the ways in which CL reduces anxiety and promotes more active participation in language production tasks.

### **Students' Questionnaire Findings**

The questionnaire aimed to evaluate students' anxiety levels in traditional classrooms compared to those in cooperative learning settings. It consisted of two sections: one focusing on experiences in TL and the other on cooperative learning experiences. Most questions were designed to be parallel across both sections, with slight modifications to account for the differences in teaching methods. The questionnaire integrated

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established measures adopted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) and the Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) by Miller & Daly (1975), accompanied by some additional researcher-developed items. A total of 105 students participated, providing a dataset for analysis. The findings of student questionnaire were systematically organized into several key categories. Each category highlighted critical aspects of how CL impacts anxiety related to productive skills in language learning.

The data regarding speaking anxiety reveal a significant difference between traditional and CL environments. In TL settings, 16.2% of students reported being always anxious, 72.4% indicated they were sometimes anxious, and 11.4% claimed they never felt anxious. On the contrary, in cooperative learning settings, only 12.4% of students reported being always anxious, while 58.1% indicated occasional anxiety, and 29.5% stated that they never feel anxious. These findings highlight that cooperative learning effectively reduces anxiety related to speaking, creating a more supportive and engaging atmosphere for students to express themselves.

### Table 1

#### *Levels of Speaking Anxiety in Traditional and Cooperative Learning Classrooms*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Traditional Learning</b>	<b>Cooperative Learning</b>
<b>Always anxious</b>	16.2% (17 students)	12.4% (13 students)
<b>Sometimes anxious</b>	72.4% (76 students)	58.1% (61 students)

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<b>Never anxious</b>	11.4% (12 students)	29.5% (31 students)
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Regarding anxiety feeling while making mistakes in TL environments, 40% of students expressed they were always worried about making mistakes during productive skills activities, with 49.5% reporting occasional worries. In cooperative learning contexts, only 21% reported always worrying about mistakes, while a significant 65.7% expressed occasional concerns. This suggests that CL not only decreases anxiety about making mistakes but also fosters a more positive attitude towards language production, encouraging students to take risks in their learning.

**Table 2**

*Anxiety About Making Mistakes in Productive Skills (Speaking & Writing)*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Traditional Learning</b>	<b>Cooperative Learning</b>
<b>Always worried</b>	40% (42 students)	21% (22 students)
<b>Sometimes worried</b>	49.5% (52 students)	65.7% (69 students)
<b>Never worried</b>	10.5% (11 students)	13% (14 students)

The findings also address how comprehension difficulties affect anxiety levels. In traditional classrooms, 21.9% of students reported always feeling anxious about not understanding their teacher, while 54.3% indicated occasional anxiety. In contrast, 16.3% of students in CL environments expressed always feeling anxious, with 51% reporting

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occasional anxiety. These findings suggest that CL alleviates anxiety associated with understanding instructional content, likely due to enhanced peer interaction and collaborative problem-solving

**Table 3**

*Difficulty in Understanding Teacher's Speech as an Anxiety Trigger*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Traditional Learning</b>	<b>Cooperative Learning</b>
<b>Always anxious</b>	21.9% (23 students)	16.3% (17 students)
<b>Sometimes anxious</b>	54.3% (57 students)	51% (53 students)
<b>Never anxious</b>	23.8% (25 students)	32.7% (34 students)

A critical aspect of classroom dynamics involves the balance between teacher and student talk time. Notably, 66% of students agreed that excessive teacher talk time contributes to their anxiety about speaking. This indicates a strong preference for learning environments where students have more opportunities to engage verbally, suggesting that a shift towards more student-centered pedagogies could significantly reduce anxiety and boost confidence in language use.

**Table 4**

*Excessive Teacher Talking Time (TTT) vs. Limited Student Talking Time (STT) as an Anxiety Factor*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	69	66%
<b>No</b>	35	34%
<b>Total</b>	104	100%

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77.5% of the students reported that they were more productive in cooperative learning settings, particularly in terms of speaking and writing class activities. This underscores the effectiveness of cooperative learning in reducing anxiety enhancing overall language proficiency and engagement.

**Table 5**

*Students' Productivity in CL Classes*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	79	77.5%
<b>No</b>	23	22.5%
<b>Total</b>	102	100%

According to table 5, 77.5% of respondents acknowledged that cooperative learning strategies significantly contribute to the improvement of several social skills. This finding is particularly essential as it emphasizes that cooperative learning extends beyond academic improvement to foster interpersonal skills that are vital for effective communication.

**Table 6**

*CL as a Tool to Enhance Social Skills*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	100	95.2%
<b>No</b>	5	4.8%
<b>Total</b>	105	100%

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Regarding brainstorming preferences, a notable 95.2% of students indicated they favored group brainstorming over individual tasks. This preference highlights the reduced stress levels associated with collaborative idea generation, which can enhance creativity and participation among students.

**Table 7**

*Participant Preferences for Individual and Group Brainstorming in Writing Tasks*

<b>Brainstorming Preference</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Individual Brainstorming</b>	Yes	47	44.8%
	No	58	55.2%
<b>Group Brainstorming</b>	Yes	90	85.7%
	No	15	14.3%
<b>Total Participants</b>	-	105	100%

The findings also indicate that there are sources related to productive skills anxiety during both traditional and cooperative learning classes. In TL, lack of information about the subject is the most recognizable anxiety source, as it is chosen by 52.4% of the participants. Half of the students (50.5%) reported that having little time to think is a reason for classroom anxiety. Teachers' correction style is indicted by 32.4% of the respondents. 30.5% of the students distinguish social skills deficit as a source of anxiety. Moreover, not having a supportive environment is chosen by 26.7 of the participants. 24.8% of the students suffer from anxiety because they overthink about the evaluation of the teacher. Nevertheless, 3.8% of the students do not have the before mentioned anxiety sources.

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In CL classes, 39% of the students reported that not having a clear idea about the topic contributed to their apprehension. Compared to (TL) classes, this represents a 13.9% decrease. Additionally, 37.1% attributed their classroom nervousness to limited thinking time. Three factors, lacking social skills, striving to surpass peers' achievements, and the teacher's correction style, were each cited by 28.6% as sources of anxiety related to productive skills, with no significant differences compared to TL classes. Moreover, 21.9% of the students indicated that teacher evaluation contributed to their discomfort. Notably, the percentage of students who reported having no sources of anxiety increased to 14.3%

**Figure 8**

### *Anxiety Sources Inside the ESL Classroom*

<b>Anxiety Source</b>	<b>Traditional Learning</b>	<b>Cooperative Learning</b>
<b>Lack of information about the subject</b>	52.4%	39%
<b>Limited time for thinking</b>	50.5%	37.1%
<b>Teacher's manner of correction</b>	32.4%	28.6%
<b>Lack of social skills</b>	30.5%	28.6%
<b>Teacher's evaluation</b>	24.8%	21.9%
<b>None</b>	3.8%	14.3%

Regarding anxiety-related symptoms experienced by the students in both traditional and cooperative learning classrooms, the study findings indicated that in TL classes, the most frequently reported symptom of anxiety among students was forgetting thoughts with a percentage of

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71.0%. Increased heartbeat was chosen by 41%, followed by tongue-tied responses at 30.5%, and feeling distracted at 29.5%. Moreover, 23.8% reported that thinking about unrelated topics is one of the symptoms they might feel, while 20% experienced trembling hands. Sweating due to anxiety was reported by 14.3%, and 5.7% acknowledged skipping classes. A small percent of students, 8.6%, reported that they experience no anxiety symptoms.

**Table 9**

*Anxiety-Related Symptoms in Traditional Learning (TL) Classrooms*

<b>Anxiety-Related Symptom</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>
<b>Forgetting thoughts</b>	71.0%	75
<b>Increased heartbeat</b>	41.0%	43
<b>Tongue-tied</b>	30.5%	32
<b>Feeling distracted</b>	29.5%	31
<b>Thinking about unrelated topics</b>	23.8%	25
<b>Trembling hands</b>	20.0%	21
<b>Sweating</b>	14.3%	15
<b>Skipping classes</b>	5.7%	6
<b>None of the above</b>	8.6%	9

In CL classes, similar symptoms were identified, but with reduced percentages. Forgetting thoughts remained the most common symptom at 49.5%. Increased heartbeat was experienced by 30.5%, while 27.9% reported feeling distracted. Thinking about unrelated topics was chosen by 22.9%, of the participants, and 18.1% reported getting tongue-tied while speaking. Hand trembling was reported by 14.3%, and sweating by 7.6%. However, the rate of students skipping classes rose to 6.7% in CL settings.

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Notably, 20% reported no symptoms of anxiety in cooperative settings, indicating a marked reduction compared to TL settings.

**Table 10**

### *Anxiety-Related Symptoms in Cooperative Learning (CL) Classrooms*

<b>Anxiety-Related Symptom</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>
<b>Forgetting thoughts</b>	49.5%	52
<b>Increased heartbeat</b>	30.5%	32
<b>Feeling distracted</b>	27.9%	29
<b>Thinking about unrelated topics</b>	22.9%	24
<b>Tongue-tied</b>	18.1%	19
<b>Trembling hands</b>	14.3%	15
<b>Sweating</b>	7.6%	8
<b>Skipping classes</b>	6.7%	7
<b>None of the above</b>	20.0%	21

### **Teacher Questionnaire Findings**

According to teachers' observation of students' productive skills anxiety, 37.5% of teachers think that students get anxious from time to time, while 31.3% believe that their students are often nervous. Similarly, 31.3% other teachers agree that anxiety has always existed among students. The choice (never) has not been selected by any teachers.

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**Table 11***Frequency of Students' Productive Skills Anxiety*

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of Teachers</b>
<b>Always</b>	31.3%	5
<b>Sometimes</b>	37.5%	6
<b>Often</b>	31.3%	5
<b>Never</b>	0%	0

The given table below represents teachers' opinions about the negative effect of anxiety on students' academic performance. This idea is adopted by the vast majority of teachers who form 75% of the respondents. In contrast, only 25% of them are not quite sure of the impact. Furthermore, none of them disagree.

**Table 12***Anxiety as a Prevention of High Academic Achievement*

<b>Opinion</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of Teachers</b>
<b>Agree</b>	75%	12
<b>Neutral</b>	25%	4
<b>Disagree</b>	0%	0

This figure indicates the symptoms that appear to the teachers when students speak or write. A significant majority 75% of teachers consider hesitation as the most prominent feature of anxiety. Following it, speaking with low voice and failing to memorize things score 62.5%. Instructors who notice that some students do not act in response are 43.8%. Sweating has been selected by 25% as an indication of productive skills anxiety. However, only 18.8% (3) recognize trembling.

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**Table 13**

*Noticeable Signs of Students Anxiety*

Symptom	Percentage	Number of Teachers
Trembling	18.8%	3
Sweating	25%	4
Low voice tone	62.5%	10
Not responding	43.8%	7
Hesitation	75%	12
Forgetting things	62.5%	10

### Student Interview Findings

To gather qualitative data, interviews were conducted with nine students who experienced CL in productive skills classes. The interview included seven questions, covering general topics on anxiety and CL, and exploring differences between traditional and cooperative learning environments in reducing productive skills anxiety.

#### 1. The Negative Effect of Anxiety

Students were first asked about anxiety's negative impact on learning English as foreign language. All nine confirmed its adverse effects. For example, student A described anxiety as a response to stress that disrupts learning, making students fearful and nervous. Students B, C, and D added that anxiety limits productive skills, as students worry about pronunciation, spelling, and word choice.

#### 2. Frequency of Productive Skills Anxiety

When asked how often they feel stress in speaking or writing classes, most students reported regular anxiety. Student C noted her fear of making

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grammar mistakes, while student E felt judged by others who might notice her errors in grammar or pronunciation.

### **3. Difference of Anxiety Levels**

All students agreed that speaking triggers the highest anxiety due to concerns like stuttering and pronunciation, although writing also causes apprehension. Student B said, "I stutter in speaking and worry about grammar and spelling in writing." Student F mentioned ongoing anxiety with more challenging writing tasks.

### **4. Experience of Cooperative Learning (CL)**

All students confirmed they had attended CL-based classes, such as Short Story, Translation II, Research Methodology, and several writing courses. Some also experienced CL in elementary school or private language and training center courses.

### **5. Reducing Anxiety through CL**

Students consistently agreed that CL helps reduce anxiety. Student A reported that CL creates a calmer environment with less stress, while other participants highlighted benefits like idea-sharing and receiving corrective feedback. For example, student D found herself more active in group settings, and student G felt more comfortable working with his friends. However, F reported that some students might feel anxious if certain group members dominate discussions.

### **6. Classroom Anxiety Sources**

All participants agreed that CL fosters a more supportive environment than traditional learning (TL); for instance, Student F felt that TL places sole responsibility on students, increasing anxiety, whereas CL provides peer support. Student B noted that support is particularly high in CL when working with close friends. Fear of negative evaluation was identified by most students as a major anxiety factor, especially in TL, where individual

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focus heightens pressure, whereas CL's group-based evaluation eases this tension; however, Student C believed that anxiety often originates from other students rather than teachers. Opinions on social skill development varied; some students felt that TL limits social interaction without causing discomfort, while others argued that CL actively breaks down social barriers. Student B observed that CL promotes essential skills like listening, sharing, and trust. Most students also mentioned that limited speaking opportunities in TL increase anxiety, while CL's frequent speaking practice gradually reduces nervousness; for instance, Student D reported that regular group discussions in CL make addressing the whole class less intimidating. Conversely, Student C stated that teacher talk time in TL does not directly impact her anxiety, as self-confidence plays a more crucial role.

### **7. Classroom Anxiety Symptoms**

Four students indicated that TL classes increased absenteeism, while CL encouraged attendance; for example, Student A often skipped TL classes due to boredom but eagerly attended CL sessions. However, some participants felt that absenteeism was influenced more by individual attitudes than by teaching methods. Many students reported that TL classes led to forgetfulness, whereas CL facilitated recall; Student D mentioned that forgetting words in TL was embarrassing, while in CL, peers helped with reminders, and Student H added that group work in CL provided reassurance when they forgot ideas. Anxiety symptoms, such as sweating, were also mentioned, with some students experiencing different signs like blushing; Student A noted sweating in both TL and CL, though Student D felt it intensified in TL's more stressful environment. Additionally, all students agreed that heartbeats were faster in TL settings, especially during presentations, whereas CL reduced this reaction. Student D, for instance, noted heart-pounding was typical in TL but rare in CL. Tongue-tied responses due to anxiety were also less common in CL; Student E found that group work eased her pronunciation difficulties. Distraction was

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another source of anxiety, particularly in TL, whereas students B and H felt losing focus drew unwanted attention and increased stress. In CL, they appreciated group support to maintain focus, though Student E noted that distraction could happen in both settings, with CL offering more help from peers.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study emphasize the positive influence of CL on reducing productive skills anxiety in Libyan EFL classrooms, aligning with other several research on the effectiveness of CL in language learning contexts. Research by Song (2017), Han (2015), Slavin (2014, 1996), and Johnson & Johnson (2009) revealed consistent results which highlighted the positive impact of cooperative learning on students' speaking skills and fostered effective performance in a stress-free and anxiety-free setting. Students in this study reported remarkably reduced anxiety levels in CL settings compared to traditional classrooms. As a result, CL suggests a more encouraging, low-stress setting to practice language productive skills. In a similar insight other research findings by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) and Young (1991) demonstrate how anxiety can hinder language acquisition, particularly in speaking and writing tasks. By promoting peer support, CL performs to alleviate some of the anxiety causes existing in teacher-centered settings, such as excessive teacher talking time and fear of making mistakes.

One of the most important findings of the current study is the reduced speaking anxiety level in CL settings. While 16.2% of students revealed always feeling anxious about speaking in traditional settings, this number decreased to 12.4% in CL environments. This reduction is likely due to the collaborative, low-pressure atmosphere CL creates, encouraging students to share speaking roles. This result is similar to previous research findings by MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), who found that peer collaboration helps

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reduce language anxiety by moving the focus away from individual performance. Moreover, group brainstorming activities were chosen by 85.7% of participants; supporting the idea that collaborative settings can reduce the fear of potential negative evaluation from the teacher, which is a key anxiety cause recognized by students in this study (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2004). Previous research reported that providing more opportunities for meaningful peer interactions allows students to use the target language in less judgmental conditions, encouraging a sense of linguistic confidence and reducing productive skill apprehension (Dörnyei, 1997).

The study also revealed that anxiety related to committing mistakes was considerably lower in CL classrooms, with only 21% of students reporting constant worry about making mistakes in CL settings, compared to 40% in traditional classrooms. This finding agrees with recent research highlighting the role of collaborative learning in supporting positive attitudes toward language production and use, where peer feedback is often perceived as less intimidating than teacher correction (Tolentino & Aggabao, 2020 and Dobao & Blum, 2013). The structured support from classmates provides encouragement and lessens the stress level students may feel to be perfect in front of their teacher, promoting a more risk-tolerant learning environment which stimulates experimentation on the part of students. This brings into line with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, proposing that reduced anxiety can lower the affective filter, thus promoting more effective language learning.

According to the findings of this study, 66% of students reported that excessive teacher talking time (TTT) contributes to their anxiety. In a similar insight, findings from (Goldman 2017; Lumpkin, Achen & Dodd, 2015; and Kember, 2009) indicate that student-centered approaches, such as CL, provide more opportunities for active engagement and reduce performance stress accompanying to teacher-center approaches. The social

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interaction among students in CL encourages students to focus less on answering to teacher questions and engage more in peer-led discussions, which can promote self-confidence and reduce anxiety about public speaking (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000). Furthermore, CL supports autonomy learning self-regulation and confidence, which are essential for language learners to overwhelmed anxiety and build their linguistic competence (Little, 1991).

Furthermore, the study indicated that 95.2% of participants reported that CL enhances essential social skills. This finding highlights the benefits highlighted in CL research for building teamwork and communication competencies (Gillies, 2016 and Slavin, 2014). It is emphasized that social skills are particularly significant in language learning as they equip students with the interpersonal tools to negotiate meaning, exchange ideas, and manage potential language failures effectively (Vygotsky, 1978). It is emphasized that interpersonal skills play an important role in decreasing language anxiety, as students can better cope with the challenges of real-time language use in communicative tasks (Swain, 2000).

In CL settings compared to traditional classrooms, the study further observed a noticeable decrease in physical anxiety symptoms, such as sweating, trembling, and tongue-tied responses. This observation is similar to findings by Oxford and Ehrman (1993), who suggest that interactive and supportive environments, like CL setting, are linked to lower physiological anxiety signs, creating a more relaxed atmosphere for language learners. This reduction in symptoms demonstrates that CL environments can meet the essential social support needs which are critical for decreasing anxiety level in language learners. This decrease in symptoms emphasizes how CL settings can achieve the social support critical needs to lowering anxiety in language learners (Young, 1991).

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### **Conclusion**

This study explores how cooperative learning helps decrease anxiety in Libyan EFL students at Misurata University, particularly in speaking and writing. Since these skills often cause stress in traditional, teacher-centered classrooms, the research examines whether a more collaborative approach can ease students' fears and improve their performance. Using a mixed-method approach, data was gathered from 105 students and 16 teachers through questionnaires, along with interviews with 9 students. The findings highlight that cooperative learning significantly lowers anxiety levels, making students more comfortable with speaking and writing tasks.

The study concludes that cooperative learning is an effective pedagogical strategy for reducing productive skills anxiety in EFL classrooms. The findings indicate that students experience less anxiety about speaking and writing when they can collaborate with their peers in a supportive group environment. Cooperative learning not only reduces anxiety but also enhances social skills, increases classroom participation, and improves overall language production.

This study highlights the significant role of cooperative learning (CL) in reducing productive skills anxiety among EFL students, and enhancing their social and linguistic abilities and fostering a more inclusive classroom environment. The findings suggest that incorporating CL strategies into language teaching can create supportive, engaging spaces that lower anxiety and encourage active participation. For EFL teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers, this means prioritizing the integration of cooperative learning activities in language courses. Teachers should receive professional development focused on implementing CL effectively, with specific guidance on managing group dynamics and ensuring equal participation. Additionally, curriculum designers might

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consider embedding cooperative tasks, especially in courses centered on speaking and writing, to promote collaborative skill-building.

Although the study found several encouraging results, its limited sample size and specific context may restrict the generalizability of the results. Future research could expand on these insights by examining the effects of cooperative learning across various age groups and proficiency levels to gain deeper insights of its broader applications. Furthermore, longitudinal and experimental studies exploring the long-term impact of CL on language anxiety would provide valuable data on the sustainability of its benefits over short and long terms.

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