



الحد من قلق التحدث في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق من خلال لعب الأدوار التعاوني القائم على المهام
Reducing Speaking Anxiety in Iraqi EFL Classrooms through Collaborative Task-Based Role-Play

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Abstract

The paper is a quasi-experimental study that examines the impact of Collaborative Task-Based Role-Play (CTBRP) on the alleviation of speaking anxiety in Iraqi EFL preparatory students. Based on the Affective Filter Hypothesis by Krashen, the sociocultural theory by Vygotsky, and the principles of Task-Based Language Teaching, the intervention incorporates the collaborative learning, task-based teaching, and role-play learning to provide psychologically safe speaking practice opportunities. The participants included 60 female students of Gamal Abdel Nasser Preparatory School in the District of Yathrib and randomly matched to the experimental ($n=30$) and control ($n=30$) groups. The experimental group was given the CTBRP teaching advice and the control group conventional teaching. The participants were assessed on a 15-item questionnaire, which was based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and was administered to access the data before and after the eight-week intervention. The outcomes indicated statistically significant group differences with the experimental group showing significantly less anxiety levels ($M=50.56$, $SD=7.56$) than the control group ($M=37.50$, $SD=8.63$), $t(58)=6.709$, $p<0.05$. The within group analysis revealed that the level of anxiety in the experimental group has greatly been reduced, before the questionnaire ($M=29.83$, $SD=16.32$) and after the questionnaire ($M=50.56$, $SD=13.46$), $t(29)=6.417$, $p<0.05$. These results are very strong evidence that CTBRP can be used to reduce the levels of speaking anxiety by developing peer support, shifting the focus on the meaning rather than the form, and getting psychological distance through role-play. The research provides a useful and replicable model to overcome the affective barrier in Iraqi EFL classrooms and other settings.

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Published: 1- 3-2026

Keywords: Speaking anxiety, Iraqi EFL, collaborative learning, role-play, task-based language teaching, affective filter, classroom intervention

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المخلص

تتطلب الدراسة من فرضية الحاجز الوجداني لكراشن، ونظرية فيجوتسكي الاجتماعية الثقافية، ومبادئ تعليم اللغة القائم على المهام، حيث يدمج التدخل المقترح بين التعلم التعاوني، والتعليم القائم على المهام، وأنشطة لعب الأدوار بهدف خلق فرص تحدث آمنة نفسياً. تألفت عينة الدراسة من 60 طالبة من إعدادية جمال عبد الناصر في قضاء يثرب، تم توزيعهن عشوائياً إلى مجموعتين: تجريبية (30=عدد) وضابطة (30=عدد). تلقت المجموعة التجريبية تعليمات قائمة على لعب الأدوار القائم على المهام التعاونية، بينما اتبعت المجموعة الضابطة طرق التدريس التقليدية. تم جمع البيانات باستخدام استبانة مكونة من 15 فقرة، مقتبسة من مقياس قلق اللغة الأجنبية في الصف الدراسي، وطبقت قبل وبعد التدخل الذي استمر ثمانية أسابيع. أظهرت النتائج فروقاً ذات دلالة إحصائية بين المجموعتين، حيث أبدت المجموعة التجريبية مستويات قلق أقل بشكل جوهري (متوسط حسابي=50.56، انحراف معياري=7.56) مقارنة بالمجموعة الضابطة (متوسط حسابي=37.50، انحراف معياري=8.63)، بقيمة $t(58)=6.709$ ، مستوى دلالة $p<0.05$. كما أظهر التحليل داخل المجموعة الواحدة انخفاضاً كبيراً في القلق لدى المجموعة التجريبية من التطبيق القبلي للاستبانة (متوسط حسابي=29.83، انحراف معياري=16.32) إلى التطبيق البعدي (متوسط حسابي=50.56، انحراف معياري=13.46)، بقيمة $t(29)=6.417$ ، مستوى دلالة $p<0.05$. تقدم هذه النتائج دليلاً قوياً على أن لعب الأدوار القائم على المهام التعاونية يخفف قلق التحدث بفعالية من خلال تعزيز دعم الأقران، وتحويل التركيز من الشكل إلى المعنى، وتوفير مسافة نفسية عبر تبني الأدوار. تقدم الدراسة إطاراً عملياً وقابلاً للتكرار لمعالجة العوائق الوجدانية في صفوف تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق والسياقات المماثلة.

Introduction

The development of viable English language skills is becoming more prominent in the modern globalizing context, and communicative competence is becoming one of the key issues of the educational agendas of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Even though governments actively promote English language education, students in such settings as Iraq tend to have difficulties transferring their linguistic information into the fluent verbal communication (Alwehebi and Abdullah, (2025). This weakness is often not explained by a cognitive, but an affective, phenomenon, the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA). According to Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 125), FLSA can be defined as a unique set of self-perceptions and beliefs, feeling and behaviors in classroom language learning based on the peculiarities of language learning process. In high-context and collectivist cultures, such anxiety is commonly amplified by the fear of social evaluation, the loss of face, and the fear of being continuously compared with others, which results in silence, avoiding behavior, and the absence of oral practice (Shamail et al., 2025). The EFL classroom setting in Iraq offers the environment that is highly favourable to speaking anxiety. The features are large class sizes, insufficient learning materials, a classical emphasis on receptive skills, including grammar and written tests vocabulary (Alnefaie, 2024).

Therefore, most of the present instructional tasks do not provide learners with the psychological safety that is necessary in making their oral communication spontaneous and meaningful. Passive learning, individual grammar exercises, and teacher-centered corrective practices, which are the major characteristic features of the current pedagogical paradigm, contribute to the development of an anxiety-inducing environment unintentionally, particularly with regard to

Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) (Yaseen, 2021). The affective filter is high due to the focus on accuracy and formal evaluation where the fear of errors or being mocked inhibits oral production and real-life interaction, which is a self-perpetuating process that prevents language growth.

This paper suggests and discusses a proposed educational intervention which is Collaborative Task-Based Role-Play (CTBRP) to overcome these challenges. CTBRP combines the concepts of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and group learning in a role playing format. TBLT helps to shift the attention of learners to task achievement instead of worrying about mistakes, when it is an important priority (Skehan et al., 2016). Peer support through the collaborative aspect assists in reducing the affective filter (Krashen, 1985), and role-play allows simulating realistic and meaningful communicative scenarios without feeling the stress of having to interact in real life. Although communicative approaches have received a lot of theoretical support, little has been done to support them practically in the Iraqi education system where there are large classes and centralized and high-stakes testing have not been empirically validated.

This paper sets out to address this gap by attempting to find out whether CTBRP can be an effective, contextually viable, pedagogical approach to significantly de-anxiety speaking anxiety levels among EFL undergraduates in Iraq. The study has great theoretical, practical, and social implications. To EFL teachers and curriculum developers, it proposes a method that can be tested and reproduced and focused on psychological safety and peer work instead of competition. The presence of decreased Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) and Communication Anxiety (CA) may be used as evidence in training programs related to teachers and the emphasis should be put on positive classroom relationships and collaborative learning. In the case of the students, reduced speaking anxiety may result in high levels of confidence and communicative competence that directly increases their future chances in Iraqi employment environment that is largely globalized with English speaking being a prized quality. Finally, the study indicates that the effectiveness of using English language education in Iraq can be improved through the introduction of affective-focused pedagogical interventions such as CTBRP.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the efficiency of Collaborative Task-Based Role-Play (CTBRP) as a teaching method in alleviating self-reported speaking anxiety to Iraqi learners of English as a Foreign Language at the university level.
2. Explore whether there is any significant difference between the experimental group's perspectives in the pre and post-questionnaire.

Research Hypothesis

This study will use the following research questions;

1. There are no significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group who taught by using collaborative task-based role-play and that of the control group who taught by using conventional method in the post questionnaire.
2. There is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre and post-questionnaire.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety has been conceptualised as a situation-specific anxiety arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process (Horwitz et al., 1986). Horwitz and colleagues identified three interrelated components of foreign language classroom anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Communication apprehension refers to the fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with others; fear of negative evaluation involves apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively; and test anxiety pertains to a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure (Horwitz et al., 1986). Later studies have validated that the ability to speak is always highest in terms of anxiety in language learners since oral production requires real-time processing and exposes the learner to instant social critique (Al-Araji, 2026; Hedayati et al., 2025).

The outcomes of anxiety when speaking are immense and complex. Physiologically, nervous learners report that they have increased heart rate, sweat, and are filled with panic (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991, as cited in Al-Aarji, 2026). Anxiety, cognitively, absorbs processing resources otherwise available to language production, which in turn is a vicious cycle with anxious learners working poorly, which in turn proves their negative expectations (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991). Anxious learners can act in a behavioural way by avoiding an opportunity to speak, staying quiet or withdrawing themselves in classroom, which limits their practice and skill acquisition (Horwitz et al., 1986). These are especially evident in the educational settings where formal evaluation of oral performance is conducted and where students feel that they are under constant scrutiny by their teachers and classmates.

The affective filter hypothesis proposed by Krashen is a complementary theoretical approach to the context of anxiety as a hindrance to the language acquisition process (Krashen, 1982, as cited in Ulpa et al., 2025; Ayu et al., 2026). This hypothesis states that affective variables such as anxiety, motivation and self-confidence create some mental block through which

comprehensible input cannot pass to the language acquisition machine. Having a high affective filter, a learner might acquire the input in an intellectual sense and still learn nothing at all; having a low affective filter, the input is allowed to flow freely to the processes of acquisition (Krashen, 1982). According to this framework, it is not just about the comfort of learners but an inherent need to develop language that the state of anxiety needs to be brought down (Ulpa et al., 2025; Ayu et al., 2026).

2.1.1 Speaking Anxiety in the Iraqi EFL Context

Studies done in Iraqi EFL classrooms have shown the tendencies of speaking anxiety that both include general aspects of acquiring a foreign language and situation-specific characteristics. In a recent research study conducted by Al-Araji (2026) on classroom practices to help in eliminating speaking anxiety among 120 Iraqi EFL students, the study results revealed that the students were significantly anxious before the intervention, and the female group reported greater anxiety than their male counterparts. The research found out that anxiety was reflected in less fluency, hesitancy in oral production, and avoiding speaking tasks, which are similar to patterns in other situations (Al-Araji, 2026).

More qualitative investigation by Al-Tameemi (2023) considered talking anxiety among Iraqi medical undergraduates and found it was a complicated cluster of reasons. The study determined anxiety related to fear of negative judgement, fear of mistakes, vocabulary knowledge, unfamiliarity, poor time management, poor confidence, and classroom setting as high-ranking contributors to anxiety among 15 students and five teachers in semi-structured interviews. The fear of being criticized by peers and instructors, students stated that it was especially high, and had to avoid engaging in speaking activities even when they had the necessary language knowledge (Al-Tameemi, 2023). Academic implications were not limited to the immediate classroom performance as impacted students in their overall interest in the learning of the English language and their self-assurance in utilizing English language in their career lives.

The Iraqi pedagogical environment is also characterized by certain issues that can increase speaking anxiety. Conventional pedagogical practices have also focused on grammar-translation techniques, instructor-centred teaching, and rote learning with minimal consideration over communicative competence (Al-Tameemi, 2023). Al-Salim et al. (2024) noted that Iraqi EFL classrooms have long been relatively focused on accuracy, rather than fluency, which have led to the establishment of a classroom atmosphere in which the learners are subjected to the process of their mistakes being publicly corrected and to learners developing an extreme level of self-consciousness concerning their oral

production. Moreover, the lack of exposure to real English is restricted to the classroom, which restricts the opportunities to talk, the opportunities to talk are mostly restricted to the formal classroom environment, where the performance is viewed as a high stakes situation (Al-Tameemi, 2023).

2.1.2 The Collaborative Learning as an Anxiety-Reducing Process.

Theoretical potential of collateral learning based on the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky can also be applied to speaking anxiety (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Ulpa et al., 2025; Ayu et al., 2026). The Zone of Proximal Development by Vygotsky is a concept according to which learning takes place in the interaction with other capable people that can give scaffolding in the developmental zone of a learner. In cooperative learning, this scaffolding may be offered by peers in a way that minimizes the psychological dangers of teacher-centered instruction. The evaluative pressure will be shared and the social distance among participants will probably decrease when they are placed in small groups, which may diminish the affective filter (Ulpa et al., 2025; Ayu et al., 2026).

The anxiety alleviating nature of collaborative learning has been validated in a number of EFL settings. Ulpa et al. (2025) enquired the teachers about the perceptions of strategies that they use to build the speaking confidence in the classroom setting in an Indonesian English school and discovered that collaborative learning, specifically the discussion in small groups, was repeatedly reported as effective in creating the willingness to engage with others and take risks in communication. In this study, teachers mentioned that peer-based settings were associated with the feeling of psychological safety, which enabled students to feel free to experiment with language without being afraid of being publicly embarrassed (Ulpa et al., 2025). In the same way Ayu et al. (2026) tested the instruction of speaking by using peer support in an Indonesian university and discovered that peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and peer feedback had a positive impact on making the students active, lowering anxiety, and building learner autonomy. Students said that peer learning made them feel more confident and encouraged and comfortable sharing ideas in English (Ayu et al., 2026).

These results correspond to the general theoretical insights into the concept of social support as a stressor buffer (Ayu et al., 2026). The social threat of speaking reduces when the learners view their fellow learners as friends and not judges. Another way that collaborative structures normalise the error-making process is by observing that learners can see the peers who experience difficulties with the same issue and help each other. Such normalisation could be especially relevant in such contexts as Iraq, where the fear of mistakes has been determined to be one of the main causes of speaking anxiety (Al-Tameemi, 2023).

2.1.3 Task-Based Language Teaching and Speaking Anxiety

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a teaching methodology that puts more emphasis on the meaning of communication rather than language structure, and that involves the students in the practice of activities that are associated with real-world language application (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004, as cited in Zulianingrum, 2025; Nst et al., 2025). The theoretical arguments that support the potential of TBLT to decrease anxiety focus on meaning instead of form, task-oriented completion instead of grammatical correctness, and provision of chances to practice language in the real world (Zulianingrum, 2025; Nst et al., 2025).

The studies conducted on the impact of TBLT on speaking anxiety have shown encouraging findings. A research study by Nst et al. (2025) that rates the usage of TBLT and Communicative Language Teaching methods with elementary students concluded that the task-based activities demonstrated high efficacy in enhancing the confidence of students, their fluency, and their engagement. Students with some of the challenges such as anxiety in speaking, poor participation, and disruptive behaviour developed gradually overcoming these problems due to interactive and instruction based on tasks. At the end of the experiment, the majority of students showed the skills of the introduction and description of themselves fluently, which indicates that the task-based strategies can be used in systematically decreasing the anxiety effects and developing communicative competence (Nst et al., 2025).

The processes by which TBLT can alleviate anxiety are numerous. First, encouraging learners to use linguistic form to signify task accomplishment and pay their attention to it, TBLT lessens the intellectual load applied to the accuracy-monitoring process, which might allow them to focus the processing resources on productive language production (Nst et al., 2025). Second, shared responsibility of the performance process because of the collaborative nature of many tasks, lowers the individual responsibility and the performance pressure that are associated with it (Nst et al., 2025). Third, tasks can intrinsically motivate by being related to the real-life uses, which may supersede the extrinsic evaluative demands that defines conventional language teaching (Zulianingrum, 2025).

A study of Structured Academic Controversy, a particular type of task-based collaborative learning by Hedayati et al. (2025) has identified that it was especially effective in alleviating foreign language speaking anxiety among Iranian EFL students. The researchers explained this effect by the overall level of cooperation of the tasks, where the focus on the individual performance shifted on the level of collaboration in the groups. The pressures of producing language individually were less when students collaborated to figure out

controversial issues in different perspectives, and this aspect formed a less intimidating and friendlier environment to communicate (Hedayati et al., 2025). This is an indication that the task designs that demand authentic cooperation and mutual performance could be especially efficient in the anxiety reduction.

2.14 Role Playing in Task-Based Frameworks.

Role-play activities can be viewed as a particular exemplar of task-based principles which can prove especially effective in the context of solving the problem of speaking anxiety. Role-plays involve learners taking up imaginary roles and simulated communicative situations and establish some psychological distance between the performer and the learner (Zulianingrum, 2025; Smelianska et al., 2024). The risk to identity and self-concept of oral production may therefore be minimized when learners use a character as opposed to using themselves, which may diminish affective stakes of oral production.

The body of empirical research on the usefulness of role-play in the reduction of anxiety and in the acquisition of speaking competence is enormous. Zulianingrum (2025) explored the use of role-play activities in a TBLT system and established that role-play activities were an effective method to develop vocabulary in the learners, enhance their pronunciation and fluency, and alleviate anxiety. It is important to note that 90 percent of the respondents said that they felt more confident about their language skills after role-playing. It was reported that the learners have at least come across 71 new lexical terms and applied 20 phrases to real-life communication, which indicates that role-play can deal with the affective barrier and linguistic development simultaneously (Zulianingrum, 2025). The aspect of communication at the expense of grammatical accuracy in role-play exercises seems to free the learners of perfectionism that is described as the hallmark of the anxious performance.

Smelianska et al. (2024) made feasible suggestions on how to introduce role-play to alleviate anxiety levels in EFL university environments. Their review implied that the strategic implementation is necessary to reduce anxiety: making the choice of interesting topics that are relevant to the student experience makes them even more motivated; giving students role cards with specific goals and pre-task briefs on vocabulary and grammar helps lessen the performance anxiety; enabling small group discussion before role-playing creates a safe space of practice; and the consistent inclusion of the role-play in the curriculum brings benefits to the continuous development of speaking fluency (Smelianska et al., 2024). These suggestions underline that the aspect of role-play in reducing anxiety is a carefully constructed pedagogical area, and not just a simple selection of activities.

The findings of Moosa et al. (2025) were also similar, as role-play tasks increased fluency and confidence among ESL learners, and the group preparation stages were especially significant to create learner disarmament. The spontaneous requirements of speaking were alleviated when the learners were able to rehearse and plan together before the performance, and learners felt more confident about the real performance (Moosa et al., 2025). The significance of considering role-play as a process, i.e., preparation, performance, and reflection, and not a high-stakes event is highlighted in this finding.

2.1.5 Iraqi Context: Collaborative and Role Play Intervention Evidence.

Going back to the Iraqi scenario, new findings indicate the relevance of collaborative and role-play techniques in the context of alleviation of speaking anxiety. The quasi-experimental study by al-Araji (2026) directly examined the efficacy of classroom interventions such as small group work and role-play to 120 Iraqi EFL students. The experimental group, in which these interventions were done, showed that there was a 38 percent decrease in speaking anxiety and also oral performance, especially fluency, accuracy, and confidence, was significantly better than the control group. The research will be a direct empirical evidence of the usefulness of collaborative and role-play strategies in the specific context of the Iraqi classroom (Al-Araji, 2026).

It was also concluded that the gender did not have a significant influence on the results, although initially the female students had more anxiety levels. This result indicates that collaborative role-play interventions could be equally efficient in both genders in the Iraqi setting regardless of the cultural aspects that could have different effects on male and female students participating in the classroom (Al-Araji, 2026). The paper has highlighted the relevance of involving interactive and supportive teaching methods in Iraqi EFL classrooms and suggested gender-sensitive pedagogy as a measure of effective language teaching.

Almasoudi and Sarkhosh (2025) explored alternative sources of reduction of anxiety among Iraqi EFL learners, mindfulness and relaxation techniques. Though they did not concentrate on collaborative role-play, their results that integrated the methods produced better results than using the single ones implies that interventions that are multifaceted could be the most effective (Almasoudi and Sarkhosh, 2025). It has implications on collaborative role-play implementation, which implies that use of role-play together with other anxiety-reducing techniques like pre-task preparation, positive feedback and relaxation physical exercises could be beneficial.

Al-Salim et al. (2024) investigated the interconnection between the stress coping strategies, foreign language anxiety, and language achievement among

Iraqi EFL students. The fact that they found their hypothesis that coping strategies related to tasks were negatively associated with anxiety and positively related to language achievement, has a direct implication on collaborative role-play interventions. Task-oriented coping is a form of directly solving a problem and taking action in order to solve it. Collaborative role-play may be theorised as the practice of offering the learners the possibility to rehearse task-focused coping within the supportive setting and develop both language and compensatory coping strategies (Al-Salim et al., 2024).

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Experimental Design

Experimental design is a traditional method of carrying out a quantitative research or testing an idea (or practice or procedure) to define whether it affects an outcome or dependent variable (Creswell, 2012, p.294).

Table (1)

The Experimental Design of the Study

Groups	Independent variable	Posttest
Experimental group	Collaborative Task-Based Role-Play	Posttest
Control group	communicative method	Posttest

3.2 Population and Sample of the Study

Population can be defined as all individuals or interesting units, so it is difficult to have available data for all individuals in population (Hanlon and Larget, 2011). The population of the current study consists of EFL Iraqi preparatory students of a fourth preparatory school students for girls in Yathrib District, Salah Al-Deen. The total number of the fourth class students' population is (287) girls divided into five preparatory schools in center of Yathrib District as explain in table (2).

Table (2)

The Population

No.	Preparatory School	Number
1.	Bahli Preparatory School for Girls	56
2.	Yathrib Preparatory School for Girls	42
3.	Zenobia Preparatory School	48
4.	Al-Albab preparatory school	61
	Gamal Abdel Nasser Preparatory School for Girls	80
Total		287

Sample refers to the part of the target population that the researchers are planning to check in an effort to generalize target population. Ideally, a survey will be chosen to represent the entire population (Creswell, 2012).

The entire population of the current study will be made up of eighty students of Gamal Abdel Nasser Preparatory School of Girls in Yathrib District, Salah Al-Deen, in the academic year

of 2023-2024. The students will be divided into three parts (A, B and C). The experimental and control groups will consist of seventy-five randomly chosen sections that are denoted as (A) and (B) respectively. Section (A) is made up of thirty-seven students whereas section (B) is made up of thirty eight students. Section (A) and section (B) have seven and eight students respectively that are excluded. The pilot study will be done on fifteen of those students. Therefore, section (A) has been chosen as a place where thirty students have been selected as an experimental group and section (B) as a place where thirty students have been selected as a control group. Thus, the number of the involved sample is sixty which is a representation of 80.00 percent of the original population as indicated in table (3).

Table (3)

The Population and Sample of the Study

Groups	No. of Population	No. of Pilot Students	No. of Sample Students
Experimental	42	12	30
Control	38	8	30
Total	80	20	60

3.3 Instrument of the Study

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed to measure students' speaking anxiety levels and their perceptions of collaborative task-based role-play activities. The questionnaire consists of **three sections**, each targeting a specific dimension of the learning experience, with a total of **15 items**.

The first section (Items 1-5) focuses on **Feelings About Speaking English (Before Role-Play Activities)**, measuring students' communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and general anxiety related to speaking tasks. The second section (Items 6-10) addresses students' **Experience with Collaborative Task-Based Role-Play**, assessing the impact of group work, task-based learning, and role-play scenarios on their anxiety levels. The third section (Items 11-15) analyses Feelings About Speaking English (After Role-Play Activities), and the analysis of the willingness to communicate and error tolerance, as well as the general perceived effectiveness of the intervention.

The questionnaire questions were based on the reliable sources on language learning anxiety studies. Section A and C, the preparation of which was based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) created by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), are the most validated scales to measure language anxiety. These items were then altered according to the approach of Yaikhong and Usaha (2012) and tailored to being speaking anxiety-specific and in accordance with the Iraqi EFL classroom situation. The objects in Section B were guided by classroom intervention studies by Al-Araji (2026) and collaborative learning principles that had been developed in the literature (Oxford, 1999; Thornbury, 2005).

A **five-point Likert scale** was used for all items, with responses ranging from (5) "Strongly Agree" to (4) "Agree" to (3) "Neutral" to (2) "Disagree" to (1) "Strongly Disagree." This scaling allows for precise measurement of the degree of anxiety and perceptions, facilitating statistical analysis of the intervention's effectiveness.

3.5 Validity of the Achievement Posttest

Messick (1989, p.11) defines “validity as an incorporated evaluative judgment of the degree to which experimental evidence and theoretical argument assist the adequacy and suitability of inferences and actions based on scores of the test.”

3.5.1 Face Validity

Face validity can be described as the level to which a test appears correct and measures the knowledge and skills that it purports to measure (Mousavi, 2009). Validity, therefore, is an extent to which the questionnaire is actually measuring what it is supposed to be measuring.

3.6 Reliability of the Questionnaire Items

Ravitch (2007, p.70) defines reliability as a test consistency measure. An individual who had gone through two versions of the same test on two occasions on different days should have scored the same in the two tests e.g. The reliability of the questionnaire is measured using Alpha- Cronbach formula. It is determined that the coefficient is (0.93) which means that the items of the questionnaire are homogeneous.

4.0 Finding of the study

4.1 Results Related to the First Hypothesis

Comparison of the Mean Scores of the Experimental Group and that of the Control Group in the Post Questionnaire.

All the mean scores are derived in order to determine whether there exists any significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group and that of the control group in the post questionnaire. The mean scores of the experimental groups are 50.56 and, the control group is 37.50 as per statistics. Applying t-test formula of two independent the calculated t-value is determined as 6.709 whereas the tabulated t-value is determined as 2.00 at the level of significance (0.05) and the degree of freedom 58. This indicates that there is large difference between the two groups and favoring the experimental group. The initial hypothesis according to which there is no significant difference between the mean scores, between the experimental and control group, in the post questionnaire is therefore rejected as indicated in table (12).

Table (12)

Means, Standard Deviation, and t-Values of the Two Groups in Post Questionnaire

Groups	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
EG.	30	50.56	7.56	Calculated	Tabulated	58	0.05
CG.	30	37.50	8.63	6.709	2.00		

4.2 Results Related to the Second Hypothesis

Comparison of Pre- Experimental Group and the Post-Questionnaire.

It is established that mean score of difference between performance of the students in experimental group in post questionnaire = 50.56 and standard deviation = 13.46. Compared to that of the pre-questionnaire which is 29.83 with standard deviation of 16.32. The t-value obtained is 6.417 which is greater than the tabulated t-value of 2.04 at (0.05) level of significance given the degrees of freedom (29). The results obtained reveal that the performance of the students in the experimental in the pre-questionnaire and the post-questionnaire differ significantly in favour of the collaborative task based role-play as indicated in table (4.3).

Table (4.3)

The T-test Value of paired samples, the Experimental Group Performance in the Pre and Post-Questionnaire

Group	No. of students	Mean	SD.	T-Value		DF	Level of Significance
Post-questionnaire	30	50.56	13.46	Calculated	Tabulated	29	0.05
Pre-questionnaire	30	29.83	16.32	6.417	2.04		

4.3 Discussion of Results

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of Collaborative Task-Based Role-Play (CTBRP) in reducing speaking anxiety among Iraqi EFL preparatory students. The interpretation of the data, which can be performed in the section above, led to two major findings that can directly answer the research hypotheses. The following section explains these findings in the context of the reviewed theoretical frameworks and empirical literature and reflects on the implications that they have on the case of the Iraqi EFL context.

The initial hypothesis was that there would be no significant difference between the mean scores of experimental group that was taught with the help of CTBRP and the control group that was taught with the help of conventional methods on the post-intervention questionnaire. The findings provided in Table (12) strongly disprove this null hypothesis. The experimental population ($M = 50.56$, $SD = 7.56$) was significantly better than the control population ($M = 37.50$, $SD = 8.63$) and the t -value of 6.709 is significantly greater than the tabulated t -value of 2.00 ($p < 0.05$). Such statistically significant difference gives strong evidence that the CTBRP intervention was significantly more cutting-edge as compared to traditional instruction in reducing self-reported levels of speaking anxiety in students.

This observation is well consistent with the theoretical premise of the intervention. The increased levels of anxiety expressed by the control group, subjected to traditional and teacher centred approaches, support the issues expressed in the literature review on the Iraqi EFL context. According to Al-Tameemi (2023) and Al-Salim et al. (2024), the traditional grammar-translation methods where the focus is on accuracy and the ability to correct the mistakes of the public tend to create the environment in the classroom favorable to high affective filters and dominant Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE). The post-test scores in the control group are also higher to indicate that traditional teaching, which did not involve specific anxiety-reduction techniques, made minimal contributions to the removal of these affective barriers.

First, collaborative component offered an important peer-support system. The psychological burden of performance was shared by working in small groups. Following the sociocultural theory proposed by Vygotsky (1978), peers worked as a scaffold, which provided a comfortable setting in which learners had the opportunity to rehearse and generate language within their Zone of Proximal Development in the absence of the fear of a formal evaluator. The observation is similar to that of Ayu et al. (2026) and Ulpa et al. (2025), who discovered that peer-based learning has a positive psychological effect and promotes risk-taking. In the case of Iraqi students, in which the fear of being judged by peers is a major cause of anxiety (Al-Tameemi, 2023), the transition in a competitive, individualistic classroom to a collaborative one probably turned peers who are perceived as evaluators into allies, which reduced social threat and the affective filter (Krashen, 1982).

Second, the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) model shifted the main emphasis of the learners not on the linguistic form but on accomplishing the meaningful tasks. In accordance with the ideas expressed by Skehan et al., (2016) and Nst et al. (2025) this emphasis on communication over grammatical accuracy decreases the cognitive load related

to the continuous self-observation and the anxiety of error. Through performing tasks with a non-linguistic objective to achieve (e.g. booking a hotel, solving a problem), students could employ language as an instrument, which is less anxiety-inducing in nature than language as an object of study. This observation is in line with the studies conducted by Hedayati et al. (2025), which proved that task-focused and cooperative exercises can greatly decrease the levels of speaking anxiety by creating a less aggressive communication environment.

Thirdly, role-play was used which provided a layer of critical psychological distance. Students could not identify their identity with their language performance because of taking a fictional character. This distance lessens the risk to the self-concept of the learner as Zulianingrum (2025) and Smelianska et al. (2024) have pointed out and makes the speaking process that is less personally threatening. An error committed by a customer in a role-play is not perceived in the same way that an error would be in a teacher-led, frontal reality drill. This process itself is a direct opposite to the FNE and perfectionism, which are the specifics of the speaking anxiety.

The second hypothesis was the fact that the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre- and post-questionnaire would not have any statistically significant difference. This hypothesis is also strongly rejected as Table (4.3) illustrates. Mean score of the post-questionnaire ($M = 50.56$, $SD = 13.46$) was much higher than the mean score of the pre-questionnaire ($M = 29.83$, $SD = 16.32$) with a calculated t-value of 6.417 being higher than the tabulated value of 2.04 ($p < 0.05$). This result indicates that there is a significant within-group decrease in the speaking anxiety after CTBRP intervention, which is more specific evidence of its effectiveness.

The result of the dramatic reduction in anxiety between pre- and post-test in the experimental group can be explained by the fact that the CTBRP activities were living experience of the students during the intervention period. The first high (pre-test mean of 29.83) level of anxiety is used as a baseline assurance of the ubiquitous speaking anxiety problem in this case in line with the results of Al-Araji (2026). The further important decrease means that the intervention was effective in the establishment of the so-called psychological safety and the so-called positive classroom dynamics that were demanded in the introduction.

The findings prove that the assessment methods need to be re-assessed fundamentally by curriculum developers and policymakers. The worry of having high-stake, written tests is likely to continue the anxiety felt by students in the control group. In order to maximize the advantages of such strategies as CTBRP, the curricula have to incorporate continuous, formative, and low-stakes speaking evaluations that can appreciate communication and fluency as well as accuracy. This study will add to the emerging body of research (Al-Araji, 2026; Almasoudi and Sarkhosh, 2025) that the consideration of the emotional well-being of learners is not an additional quality but a necessity of effective language teaching and learning in Iraq. The lessening of the speaking anxiety attained through CTBRP is a critical placebo of developing the self-assured and communicatively efficient English speakers necessary to Iraq taking part in the global society in the future.

5.0 Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of Collaborative Task-Based Role-Play (CTBRP) as a pedagogical intervention to address such a widespread problem as speaking anxiety among Iraqi EFL preparatory learners. Basing itself on the theoretical frameworks of the Affective Filter Hypothesis presented by Krashen, the sociocultural theory offered by Vygotsky, and the concepts of the Task-Based Language Teaching, the study

aimed to fill a serious gap between the communicative purpose of teaching English and the anxiety-filled environment of most Iraq classrooms. This study contributes to the research in a number of ways. It offers empirical support of a contextually viable intervention that goes beyond theoretical advocacy to give a practical, repeatable structure of how teachers in Iraq and other EFL contexts can use. It highlights the paramount significance of focusing on the affective sphere during the process of language instruction and proves that learning preferences can have a significant effect on the emotional state of the learners and, therefore, on their readiness to communicate. Having shown the possibility of a major decrease in anxiety even in circumstances where there is a large classroom size and a test-driven culture, this study provides a promising and viable way of progress. Finally, through reducing the affective barriers to speaking, CTBRP can also assist in the creation of a generation of Iraqi learners who do not only become more proficient in English but also more empowered and confident to use the language in their academic and professional life in the future.

5.1 Suggestions for Future Research

It is suggested to develop this research and advance the knowledge levels of anxiety reduction within the context of the Iraqi EFL setting by the following recommendations:

1. Longitudinal Studies on the Sustained Effects of CTBRP
2. Investigating CTBRP Across Diverse Sample Populations (e.g., Gender, Educational Level, Region)
3. Mixed-Methods and Qualitative Research on Learner Perceptions of CTBRP
4. Examining the Impact of CTBRP on Specific Components of Speaking Anxiety (CA, FNE)
5. Comparative Studies of CTBRP and Other Anxiety-Reduction Interventions
6. Investigating the Relationship Between Reduced Anxiety and Improved Linguistic Outcomes
7. Exploring the Integration of Technology with CTBRP

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Appendix A:

Lesson Plan

Lesson Title: Finding a Flat: A Collaborative Role-Play to Build Speaking Confidence

Course: English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

Level: Preparatory School Students

Time Allotment: 90 minutes

1. Abstract/Overview

The lesson is aimed at eliminating or minimizing the speaking anxiety in Iraqi EFL learners. It involves a team-building, task-oriented role-play task in which learners are split in small groups to solve a practical issue: search of an appropriate shared flat. The pre and post activity questionnaire will be used in the lesson to assess the short-term effect of collaborative activity on self-perception of anxiety in students. The priority is made into fluency, communicative strategies and peer support as opposed to grammatical perfection.

2. Learning Objectives

By the end of this 90-minute lesson, students will be able to:

- Determine personal antecedents of speaking anxiety by taking a pre-activity questionnaire.
- Make suggestions, agree or disagree and show preference in a useful language (e.g., Why not...?, How about...?, I prefer... or That sounds fine, but...).
- Conduct a brief role-play with more confidence and less apparent nervousness with their group.
- Compare their anxiety levels after the activity using the questionnaire with the level of anxiety they had before the activity.

3. Materials and Resources

- Copies of the **Pre-Activity Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire** (one per student)
- Copies of the **Post-Activity Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire** (one per student)
- **Role-Play Scenario Cards** (one set per group of 3-4 students). *See Appendix A.*
- **Useful Language Handout** (one per group). *See Appendix B.*
- Whiteboard or flip chart and markers.

4. The Instrument: Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire

This lesson will be based mainly on a simple short questionnaire that would measure the emotion of students before and after the speaking exercise.

- Administration: The questionnaire is given twice during the lesson Pre-Activity right at the start and Post-Activity right after the role-play performance.

- Purpose: The pre-activity questionnaire makes students conscious of their own anxiety, and this acts as a control. The post-activity questionnaire will enable them to take instant notice of whether there was any alteration in their emotional state, which will be an instant feedback on the effectiveness of the activity and data to the instructor.
- Design: It employs a 4 points Likert scale to prevent neutral responses and make students make up their mind on a feeling. The questions are clear and straightforward and they target on the physical symptoms and worry.

5. Lesson Procedure

Part 1: Pre-Activity & Preparation (20 minutes)

1. Warm-Up Discussion (5 minutes): In a general discussion, discuss the topic as a whole. Question: What do you think happens to you when you are called upon to speak in English? Is it easy or difficult? Why?" This is normalizing the sense of anxiety.
2. Give Pre-Activity Questionnaire (5 minutes): Giving of the questionnaire, the Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire. Convince them that it is not a test, but an instrument to know how they feel. Ask students to be truthful depending on the way they feel at the moment. Collect the questionnaires.
3. **Present the Task & Language (10 minutes):**
4. Present the situation: "You are all university students to-day in Baghdad. You have to seek alternative flat with friends. You will be in a team to determine the ideal flat.
5. Discuss how they will collaborate in order to solve this problem. It is aimed at coming to an agreement on a flat, not doing a perfect script.
6. Issue the Useful Language Handout. Read the sentences in a class, scratching the pronunciation and giving illustrations.

6. Assessment and Evaluation

- **Formative Assessment:** The teacher monitors the group dynamics in the planning stage and notices how the students use the target language and their degree of participation and interest. The observation offers instant qualitative information concerning the process of collaboration.
- **Instrument Analysis (Questionnaire):** The main data on the assessment of the effectiveness of the lesson is the comparison of the post-activity questionnaires with the pre-activity ones. The instructor can look for:
 - A decrease in scores for anxiety-related statements (1-4).
 - An increase in the score for the confidence-related statement (5).
 - This comparison provides quantitative evidence of the immediate impact of the collaborative role-play on students' self-reported anxiety.
- **Self-Reflection:** The post-activity discussion is a self-reflective tool for students who get a chance to explain their learning and emotional experience through words.

Appendix B:

Questionnaire: Student Perceptions of Role-Play and Speaking Anxiety

Directions: You are to read out the statements one by one. How much do you agree with this answer, be it by selecting one of the following options and indicating () in the box.

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
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No.	Item	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Section A: General Speaking Anxiety in EFL Classroom						
1.	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in my English class.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.					
4.	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.					
5.	Even if I am well prepared for an English speaking task, I still feel anxious about it.					
Section B: Perceptions of Collaborative Task-Based Role-Play						
6.	Working in a small group for role-play makes me feel less nervous about speaking English.					
7.	During role-play, I feel more confident speaking English because I am playing a character, not myself.					
8.	Practicing with my group members before performing helps reduce my fear of making mistakes.					
9.	I feel more comfortable speaking English in a role-play activity than in a formal presentation in front of the whole class.					
10.	My groupmates support me when I have difficulty expressing myself during role-play preparation.					
Section C: Impact of Role-Play on Anxiety and Confidence						
11.	Participating in collaborative role-plays has helped me feel less worried about speaking English.					
12.	I am willing to speak more in English class after doing role-play activities.					
13.	My fear of being negatively evaluated by my teacher has decreased because of the role-play					

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
	activities.					
14.	I believe my English speaking fluency has improved through the collaborative role-play tasks.					
15.	I feel less self-conscious when speaking English since we started doing role-plays.					
Section D: Preferences and Future Implementation						
16.	I prefer learning English through collaborative activities like role-play over traditional teacher-centered lessons.					
17.	The collaborative nature of the role-play made the speaking activity more enjoyable and less stressful.					
18.	I would like to have more collaborative task-based role-plays in my future English classes.					
19.	The topics used in our role-plays were interesting and motivated me to participate more.					
20.	Role-playing helped me realize that making mistakes is a normal part of learning to speak a language.					