

## Examining the Effects of Emotional Freedom Technique and Stress Monitoring on Reducing Oral Presentation Anxiety among Saudi EFL Students

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**Abstract:** This mixed-methods study investigates the potential of an integrative intervention, which combines the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) and selected elements from the Stress Monitoring of Anxiety and Affective Response in Students (SMAARS) model, to reduce anxiety among Saudi EFL undergraduate students preparing to give an oral presentation. The study's findings could have significant implications for the field of language education and psychology. A purposive sample was drawn from anxiety levels and experiences in making oral presentations among 40 Saudi undergraduate male students taking EFL courses. The participants were divided equally into control and experimental groups. The intervention included several EFT sessions that aimed to reduce anxiety related to oral presentations. SMAARS was used before and after each session to measure changes in the experiences of anxiety and its submodalities. The findings indicated a significant decrease in anxiety post-intervention, with detailed explanations in support of the qualitative analysis. The study concluded that the integrated EFT-SMAARS program held promise for improving student well-being and academic success in EFL settings.

**Keywords:** Anxiety with oral presentations, EFL anxiety, EFT, SMAARS, Higher Education, Saudi Arabian students

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دراسة عوامل الخطر لتعرض الضحايا للاحتيال عبر الإنترنت: دراسة حالة نظم المعلومات الإدارية

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**مستخلص البحث:** تبحث دراسة الأساليب المختلطة في فعالية الإطار المقترح، وهو تدخل تكاملي يجمع بين تقنية الحرية العاطفية (EFT) وعناصر مختارة من نموذج مراقبة الإجهاد للقلق والاستجابة العاطفية لدى الطلاب (SMAARS) لتقليل القلق بين الطلاب. طلاب المرحلة الجامعية السعودية في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يستعدون لتقديم عرض تقديمي شفهي. تم استخلاص عينة قصدية من مستويات القلق والخبرات في تقديم العروض الشفهية بين الطلاب الجامعيين السعوديين الذين يتلقون دورات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. شمل التدخل العديد من جلسات التحويل الإلكتروني التي تهدف إلى تقليل القلق المرتبط بالعروض التقديمية الشفهية. تم استخدام SMAARS قبل وبعد كل جلسة لقياس التغيرات في تجارب القلق وطرائقه الفرعية. تم الحصول على نتائج من SMAARS بيانات كمية، وتم الحصول على بيانات نوعية من ردود الفعل والأفكار من المشاركين. أشارت النتائج إلى وجود انخفاض كبير في القلق بعد التدخل، مع تفسيرات مفصلة لدعم التحليل النوعي. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن برنامج EFT-SMAARS المتكامل يبشر بتحسين رفاهية الطلاب والنجاح الأكاديمي في إعدادات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.



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## 1. Introduction

Anxiety, according to Felman (2024), is a disorder that is related to mental health. It includes uncontrolled stress, agitation, uneasiness, and disconcertment. Anxiety is a feeling that triggers a reaction to a threat and triggers charges of stress hormones. As a result, these hormones develop specific cognitive, physical, and behavioral changes, such as increased heart rate and breathing problems. These signs can negatively affect any individual's quality of daily life; however, they are soluble to an extent.

Chand and Marwaha (2023), while discussing anxiety, stated that everyday anxiety is triggered by feelings of fear that develop forthcoming mood states involving complex cognitive, psychological, and behavioral-related reaction systems. This reaction system prepares for upcoming occasions or situations assumed as a sign of threat.

According to Collier (2024), everyone gets worried, and one cannot escape being terrified, which is considered normal. While discussing symptoms of normal levels of anxiety, Marques (2020) asserted that it is associated with fear, muscle stiffness, sweating, and being doubtful about personal strengths. She added that a normal level of anxiety is not insufficient as it may motivate a person to work harder and more intelligently to achieve the target, improve critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and forewarn about any possible threat. People, on different occasions, experience anxiety, and the apparent effect of anxiety can be seen through oral communication.

One form of oral communication is oral or verbal presentation, through which speakers deliver information to an audience (Nundy et al., 2021). Oral presentations can be didactic or dialectic. According to Grieve et al. (2021), public speaking or oral presentations are significant in higher education, where students must verbally address a specific topic. Many students experience assessment fear, which, in turn, negatively affects their learning and overall motivation.

Since stress and anxiety-related problems can be addressed, the world's leading professional EFT organization introduced the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), also known as 'Tapping,' in 1999 and has continuously developed it (EFT International, 2024). EFT is a self-reliant method

to tap with fingertips on acupuncture points on the hands, face, and body while focusing on uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. The tapping strategy illuminates negative emotions, relieves stress, and transforms anxiety. The EFT tapping technique also identifies limited thinking and related behavior, identifies the causes of our problems, such as trauma, and provides viable solutions. The EFT method is effective if the extent of the stress and anxiety in an individual is identified. EFT works on the theory that negative emotions or stress are caused by blockages or interferences in the human body's energy flow. According to Anthony (2023), an ancient Chinese philosophy claims that disruptions in the body's energy flow cause diseases and illnesses. Blacher (2023) further stated that an ancient Chinese philosophy involves acupressure to attempt to correct these imbalances in the body. Therefore, the general concept of this framework suggests that not dealing with emotions results in disorderliness or blockage of the free energy circulation within the body and, therefore, remains responsible for psychological distress (Anthony, 2023; Blacher, 2023).

According to Kennedy Baxter (2018), during an individual's experience that brings out negative emotions, EFT re-establishes the free flow of energy within the body by tapping the various points along the meridians. In return, emotional distress is minimized in experiences where one speaks about their thoughts and emotions that might be depressing. EFT also includes cognitive restructuring techniques to assist the individual in re-framing negative thoughts and beliefs held about their anxiety. By combining acupoint stimulation with cognitive strategies, EFT treats both the physiological and psychological aspects of anxiety.

Powell and Enright (1990) and Stress Management are part of the human condition as recorded in literature throughout history and are expressed through language using multiple phrases. Anxiety and stress are referred to as a diverse category of problems that are different from other issues as stress and anxiety deal with any demands which in return tax our physiological, social, and psychological systems and the reaction of these systems. People's reactions depend on how they interpret or appraise, consciously or unconsciously,

the importance of a dangerous and terrifying situation. Powell and Enright developed a job stress questionnaire to examine job-related stress, a Type-A behavior questionnaire to analyze attitudes and traits of an individual during anxiety, etc. The study stated that some people who can control situations and influence events are stress-resistant. According to the survey, people accepted the situations and fate and had an internal locus of control that did not push them to seek explanations for others' actions. These people remained committed to specific work-related or family-oriented tasks, activities related to hobbies, and tasks involving social events. They were committed to themselves, had a direction and purpose, and favored their purposeful life. Such people had a sense of challenge. People who did not have attributes such as control, commitment, and accepting challenges were found to be stressed and suffer from anxiety. For such people, specific questionnaires proved helpful and could be self-reliant or filled in with the help of a field-related expert. These questionnaires were helpful as they allowed me to track and manage my stress-related attitude and behavior.

Following this, the Australian Psychological Society (APS) developed the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-42 Items (DASS-42), which includes three self-reliance scales to identify, understand, and evaluate the emotional state during stress. The Australian Psychological Society (APS) also emphasized the clinical importance of depression, anxiety, and stress. DASS-42 is adapted through a Self-Analysis Questionnaire (SAQ). DASS-42 has further been reduced based on the same three categories, and the shorter version of the test is known as DASS-21 (Physiopedia, 2024). DASS-42 consists of 14 items in each domain whereas the DASS-21 includes seven. Each domain examines the negative emotional indicators on a four-point Likert scale. The greater the score, the higher the seriousness of these negative emotional indicators. DASS-42 differentiates the state of depression, anxiety, and stress as experienced by everyday people and a clinically disturbed individual. The components of the depression scale examine dysphoria, hopelessness, devaluation of life, self-depression, and lack of interest. The anxiety scale is based on identifying autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effects, situational anxiety, and subjective experience of anxious affect. The contents of the stress scale identify difficulty in relaxing,

nervousness, and being easily upset and impatient. The psychometric properties of the DASS-42 questionnaire also included reliability, validity, and excellent internal consistency. Based on its efficacy, Physiopedia (2024) developed a variety of questionnaires to assess depression and anxiety among patients suffering from different health-related problems, such as the cardiac Depression Scale to assess depression among cardiac patients, Catherine Bergego Scale to manage unilateral neglect, the Falls Efficacy Scale - International (FES-I) to measure the fear of falling, Psychological Basis of Pain to assess the multidimensional components of pain, and Neurobehavioral Functioning Inventory Depression Scale to examine post-injury behavior among patients.

Anxiety in oral presentation is a formidable blockage in the path of EFL learners' academic achievements, psychological well-being, and, eventually, language acquisition as a whole. For students from Saudi Arabia, such problems are magnified due to various reasons that encompass not only linguistic and cultural differences but also social and academic expectations of both learners and teachers, among others (Alharbi, 2021; AbuSahyon et al., 2023; Anthony, 2023). For decades, oral presentation anxiety has been recognized as a significant issue; however, being multi-faceted, most of the traditional interventions cover only some aspects of this problem, which is why both learners and instructors keep struggling with it.

The importance of dealing with oral presentation anxiety among Saudi EFL students goes beyond academic issues and is linked with personal, professional, and social implications. Oral presentations are not an assessment but a channel for students to voice their opinions and enter meaningful discourse with classmates and teachers on various topics of interest (Jahromi, 2020). However, this anxiety in presentations can be a substantial barrier that students face, which also may hinder the academic progress of students who cannot express their ideas effectively (Grieve et al., 2021).

Conversely, the high incidence of oral presentation anxiety in Saudi EFL students warrants an equally high need for appropriate interventions that can meet the challenges confronted by students such as this one (Alharbi, 2021). However, several

interventions have been suggested to reduce anxiety during oral presentations, like relaxation techniques, cognitive-behavior therapy, and exposure therapy. Some are effective but not in EFL contexts (Bodie, 2010). They do not give much consideration to individualized experiences of anxiety and the wide range of contributory factors that culminate in anxiety among Saudi EFL students.

Conversely, the cultural and linguistic sensitivities embedded within Saudi Arabian society warrant treatments of interventions for anxiety that are very sensitive to context and relevant to the culture of the people involved (Al-Noor et al., 2018).

Despite extensive research on oral presentation anxiety and its interventions, significant gaps persist in regard to EFT, particularly in the Saudi EFL students' context (Faqihi, 2023; Kho & Ting, 2023; Alshammari & Abdelrahim, 2023). However, based on the studies mentioned above, the researcher believes that existing strategies are mostly culture-free and non-specific in terms of language in their efforts and do not tackle the distinctive challenges for this group of learners. Though cognitive-behavioral therapy techniques have been tried with relaxation methods, holistic approaches—the ones that combine physiological with psychological components—have been minimally explicitly researched about integrating the Emotional Freedom Technique, which can be combined with the SMAARS Scale. Personalized ways of handling anxiety have been highly demanded, among other traditional interventions that do not necessarily consider the idiosyncratic experiences of learners, emphasizing the importance of customized strategies targeting specific triggers and manifestations in Saudi EFL learners. Equally important but, unfortunately, less explored is the development of culturally sensitive interventions in line with Saudi society's social norms and values. In this regard, there is a lack of empirical support that emphasizes the combined effectiveness of EFT and SMAARS and its mechanism in reducing anxiety. Filling these research gaps is essential for contributing to our knowledge of oral presentation anxiety and providing practically relevant, contextually appropriate interventions to enhance Saudi EFL students' learning experiences and academic achievements in language learning.

Following the above discussion, the researcher integrated EFT-SMAARS to present a holistic approach to mitigating oral presentation anxiety among Saudi EFL learners. These students often face language barriers, self-confidence, and performance-related anxiety. The present study used SMAARS and EFT as a structured framework to foster oral communication skills and self-confidence to handle psychological, physiological, and cultural barriers. EFT reduces nervousness, self-doubt, and psychological pressure, while SMAARS regulates emotions. Both the EFT and SMAARS worked as a dual support system to enhance speaking skills and reduce anxiety. This integrated framework developed a positive, interactive, and holistic learning experience.

The study examined the effectiveness of the integrated EFT-SMAARS in ameliorating oral presentation anxiety among Saudi EFL students. It also intended to see how the combined approach could help deal with both the physiological and psychological components of anxiety in a focused and individualized manner. The research added knowledge towards the development of contextually apt, culturally sensitive strategies for managing anxiety in EFL contexts and enhancing the experience of Saudi students in general while learning a foreign language.

## 2. Literature review

Oral presentation anxiety is a common problem for an EFL learner—almost in every non-native context, as per Kho and Ting (2023). The pressure of performing well in an oral presentation might be high in Saudi Arabia, where academic and professional excellence is a must (Faqihi, 2023; Alharbi, 2021; AbuSahyon et al., 2023). The anxiety in Saudi EFL classrooms stems from students, EFL teachers, teaching and learning pedagogy, and the environment (Fakieh, 2025).

Yazdani et al. (2010) Stated that stress affects students' learning abilities, decision-making, problem-solving, and concentration abilities, which ultimately affects learners' presentation skills. They experimented with the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-42 Items (DASS-42) while examining the effectiveness of stress

management training programs on depression, anxiety, and stress of nursing students. Through a quasi-experimental trial, the DASS-42 questionnaire was used as an instrument to focus on individual traits, depression, and anxiety among selected participants. The study concluded that the stress management and training program can uplift the mental well-being of the learners.

According to Boath et al. (2012), presentations carry the most common types of anxiety among people. EFT, in this regard, proved to be a valuable therapy to treat multiple phobias. Participants in this study went through assessed presentations and then received a lecture on EFT. They were assessed through the Subjective Unit of Distress (SUDs) and the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADs) before and after EFT. Afterward, they participated in face-to-face interview sessions regarding their views about EFT. The findings observed a significant decrease in SUDs and HADs. The qualitative data were examined using the framework technique, which unveiled three themes: nervousness, novelty, and practical implementation of EFT. The results further suggested exploring EFT in the educational context involving oral presentations.

The effectiveness of emotional freedom techniques (EFT) on public speaking anxiety was examined by Wati et al. (2022). They stated that public speaking anxiety is one of the most threatening academic problems among university students. EFT, on the other hand, gained significant popularity in decreasing emotional anxiety in multiple contexts and among a variety of people. The study included review articles on Indonesian students who were to present in English. The study concluded that EFT proved to be a successful technique and that EFT programs should be included in the early years of the curriculum, such as in the first year of university.

Alshammari and Abdelrahim (2023) examined the oral presentations, as assessment criteria, for EFL university-level learners from Saudi instructors' perspectives. The researchers believed that oral presentations were frequently used as an assessment tool to gauge students' attitudes. A random sampling technique included a total of 122 EFL Saudi instructors from 20 different universities, and the data was gathered through a questionnaire and a focus group interaction. The mixed-methods study found that oral presentations proved to be a helpful assessment tool as they uplift language skills to a significant level. The findings provided insight into Saudi Arabian EFL instructors and their practices in EFL classes to improve language skills, primarily oral communication, in the Saudi Arabian context.

Rayani et al. (2023) conducted a cross-sectional examination of glossophobia or public speaking anxiety among Saudi Arabian nursing students. According to them, glossophobia has commonly been observed among Saudi students at the college level, and this situation gets worse with those learning in non-primary language. Productive oral communication is essential for nursing students to enter the job market effectively. The study found that Arab students studying nursing in English as a second language are unaware of glossophobia. Therefore, the area needs further exploration. For this correlation comparative study, a convenient sampling technique was employed for a cross-sectional approach. Data was collected from participants through an online self-reported questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three categories: a socio-demographic questionnaire, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), and the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA). The findings concluded that students had moderate levels of anxiety on the FLCAS and PRPSA scales. The two scales also had a positive relationship. The study highlighted a gap regarding training programs to provide a sufficient amount of support to manage anxiety

among Saudi nursing students. The research suggested investigating culturally customized techniques to reduce nursing students' stress and anxiety while uplifting their self-esteem, confidence, and motivation.

The present study builds on past research on anxiety related to oral presentations and anxiety-related intervention strategies in EFL contexts by exploring the effectiveness of the integrated EFT-SMAARS approach among Saudi EFL students (Alharbi, 2021; Blacher, 2023; AbuSahyon et al., 2023). Through collaboration with experts in language education, psychology, and cross-cultural communication, this study seeks to advance our understanding of oral presentation anxiety and contribute to enhancing language learning experiences for Saudi EFL students.

Despite considerable research on oral presentation anxiety in EFL contexts, existing research strategies are often based on generic or Western-centric techniques that may not wholly highlight the specific linguistic, educational, and socio-cultural issues Saudi EFL students face. While numerous studies have examined anxiety-reduction strategies, there remains a need for culturally and contextually relevant interventions customized to the unique experiences of Saudi EFL students. Furthermore, limited studies have explored the integration of the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) and structured anxiety-management frameworks like SMAAR in the Saudi Arabian EFL context.

The present study addresses this gap and proposes a unique, integrative EFT-SMAARS approach originated specially for Saudi EFL students. Unlike previous interventions, this model incorporates evidence-based psychological techniques with culturally sensitive strategies to offer a more holistic and personalized solution to oral presentation anxiety. By bridging the gap between language education, psychology, and cross-cultural communication, this study presents significant insights into anxiety reduction, ultimately enhancing language learning outcomes and educational experiences for Saudi EFL learners.

### 3. Research problem

There is a widespread issue of oral presentation anxiety among Saudi EFL students, which profoundly impacts their academic performance, psychological well-being, and overall language acquisition (Alharbi, 2021; Faqihi, 2023; AbuSahyon et al., 2023). The study proposes a culturally and contextually relevant intervention by integrating the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) to provide personalized strategies for effectively reducing anxiety. Unlike generic interventions, this approach contributes to EFT techniques to enhance Saudi EFL learners' linguistic, educational, and socio-cultural experiences, ensuring greater effectiveness. By addressing the abovementioned factors, the EFT technique provides evidence-based practices that can improve Saudi EFL students' academic and cultural experiences. This would ultimately benefit educators, practitioners, and policymakers in language education.

### 4. Research objectives

- To explore the key factors that contribute to oral presentation anxiety among Saudi EFL students and assess its prevalence within the group.
- To implement and assess the efficacy of an integrated Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) and SMAARS Scale intervention in reducing oral presentation anxiety among Saudi EFL students.
- To analyze the physiological and psychological effects of the EFT-SMAARS intervention and utilize these findings to develop culturally and contextually relevant anxiety management strategies in EFL education.

### 5. Research questions

- What are the leading causes of oral presentation anxiety among Saudi EFL students; and how prevalent is this issue within this group?
- How effective is the integrated Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) and SMAARS Scale intervention in reducing oral presentation anxiety among Saudi EFL students?

- What are the physiological and psychological impacts of the EFT-SMAARS intervention on Saudi EFL students, and how do these insights inform the development of culturally and contextually relevant anxiety management strategies in EFL education?

## 6. Theoretical framework

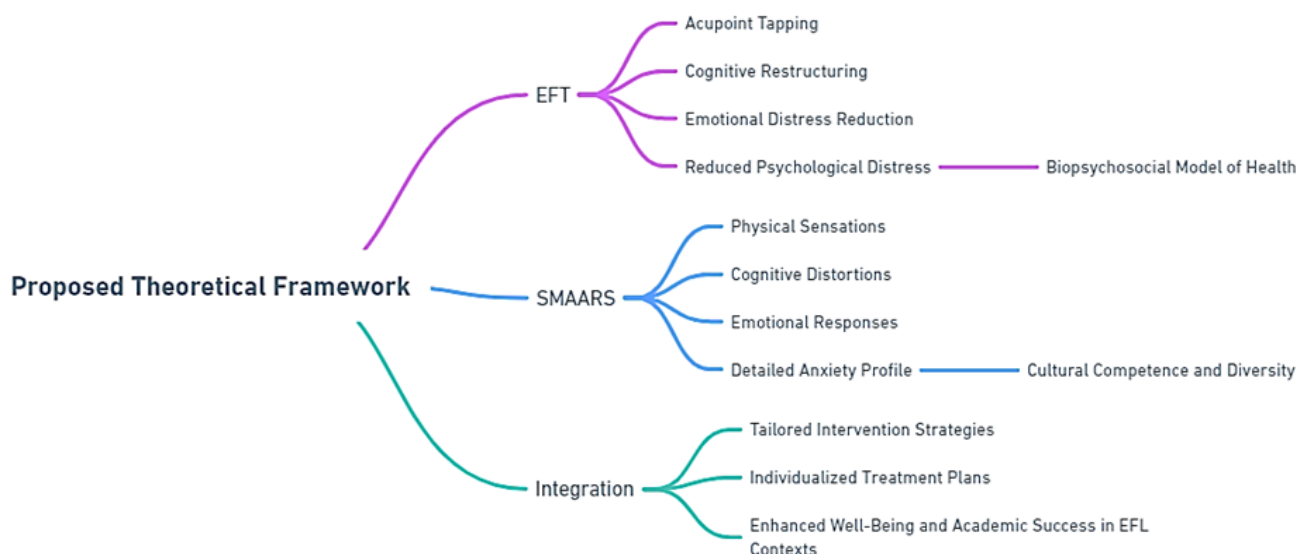
The theoretical framework of the present study included EFT. To examine the efficacy of EFT in dropping anxiety during oral presentations among Saudi students, the researcher adapted previously validated Likert scales such as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA), Subjective Unit of Distress (SUDs), Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-42), and Self-Analysis Questionnaire (SAQ). Based on these, an adapted scale, 'The Stress Monitoring and Anxiety Assessment and Reduction System (MAARS)', was developed and integrated with EFT. The framework showed how EFT and SMAARS could work to reduce anxiety among Saudi EFL students. These intervention strategies and general broad-based assessment would equip practitioners with the ability to deliver person-centered, culturally relevant interventions that take into account the multidimensionality of anxiety in the target population.

The current study forwards an innovative intervention approach of integrating the Emotional

Freedom Technique with the SMAARS Scale to assuage oral presentation anxiety among Saudi EFL students. Grounded in the principles of acupuncture and cognitive-behavioral therapy, EFT separately and distinctly combines two approaches to anxiety relief by directly addressing both physiological and psychological components of anxiety.

When using EFT, a process of tapping specific areas of the body while addressing disturbing thoughts and feelings, balance to the body's energy is restored, and emotional upset is said to be relieved. Overall, the technique has shown potential in various clinical settings and holds promise as an effective intervention tool for managing anxiety (Anthony, 2023). SMAARS is a legitimate measure in the evaluation of anxiety submodalities, that is, physical sensation, cognitive distortion, and emotional response. It helped to identify actual triggers and forms of anxiety manifesting that enabled intervention strategies to be directed to the exact experiences of anxiety. EFT integrated with SMAARS could be an effective intervention for the nuanced aspects of oral presentation anxiety among Saudi EFL students, offering a personalized and direct mode of support for the varied needs of these students. An example would be the unique case of EFL students from Saudi Arabia. Based on the usefulness of EFT and SMAARS, the study integrated the two, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1 Visual Description of EFT, SMAARS, and their Integration**



In Figure 1, the sub-modalities of EFT included acupoint tapping, cognitive restructuring, emotional distress reduction, and reduced psychological distress. The components such as Physical sensations, cognitive distortions, emotional responses, and detailed anxiety profiles were included in the SMAARS. SMAARS, by contrast with the intervention technique, focused on EFT. SMAARS offered a comprehensive anxiety assessment by capturing the widest number of sub-modalities, including physical sensations, cognitive distortions, and emotional responses. SMAARS would provide an organized outline to evaluate and comprehend an individual's anxiety experience. Using SMAARS, the identification of the actual triggering events, plus the associated cognitive distortions that set in motion anxiety for clinical populations, would be possible. This combined approach of SMAARS and EFT and their integration showed a view of the anxiety experiences of Saudi EFL students. In considering the underlying causes and maintaining factors of anxiety, SMAARS helped in drawing up individualized treatment plans that would account for the unique vulnerabilities and strengths of an individual. This human-centered approach concurred with the principles of cultural competence and diversity within psychological practice, dictating that considerations must be made for the cultural backgrounds and contextual factors for any given case of assessment and intervention of individuals.

The energy-based techniques of EFT can be integrated into the broad assessment that SMAARS provides, which, in turn, would support the practitioner in performing an anxiety treatment that is much more individualistic and effective for Saudi EFL students. For example, applying EFT interventions with the SMAARS assessment would enable the individual to identify where they have an energy imbalance and cognitive distortions, which can be targeted for intervention. Finally, combining these approaches, under the mantle of evidence-based practice, holds scientific research evidence, clinical expertise, and client preference as parts of planning.

## 7. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, to evaluate the effectiveness of the integrated Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) and SMAARS Scale in reducing oral presentation anxiety among Saudi EFL students. The SMAARS Scale is a Self-Perceived Communication Competence and Public Speaking Anxiety Scale. This scale measures stages of oral presentation anxiety and self-perceived communication competence among individuals, specifically in public speaking settings. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the intervention's impact, as it allows for a more nuanced exploration of the participant's experiences and the effectiveness of the intervention.

The SMAARS Scale, like EFT, identifies and monitors anxiety before and after the intervention for the experimental group. Using EFT and the SMAARS Scale can help examine their effectiveness in minimizing oral presentation anxiety. The research participants included 40 Saudi Arabian undergraduate male students studying English as a Foreign Language in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Department of Foreign Languages, University of Albaha, Saudi Arabia. The average age of these participants was around 18 to 22 years.

Following Creswell's (2008; 2009) guidelines for the purposive sampling technique, participants were selected to ensure a diverse and representative sample. This approach allowed the inclusion of participants with a broad range of anxiety levels, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the study's findings. The selection of the participants was based on the diversity in anxiety levels and their varied experiences in oral presentations. Participants were selected based on a pre-screening measure using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986) and a self-reported oral presentation anxiety questionnaire to ensure diversity in



anxiety levels. The combination of these two categorized the participants into low, moderate, and high anxiety groups before the intervention. Participants who scored within a predetermined level on the FLCAS and reported significant anxiety during oral presentations were selected for the experiment. This specific framework confirmed that the study included diverse yet relevant participants to assess the EFT-SMAARS intervention accurately.

A group of 20 individuals in the intervention group attended a program for six weeks (Appendix A). The participants were selected through a random sampling technique to control biases and improve generalizability. The said program was conducted for one hour each time. The program was personalized, and during the sessions, the participants practiced EFT techniques that included acupressure tapping on some specific points on the body when feeling anxious due to an oral presentation. The sessions started by addressing general anxiety and gradually worked up to the specific anxiety triggers related

to oral presentations. Participants completed the SMAARS before and after each session to provide data on their anxiety that a personalized intervention would target.

Participants in the control group also completed six weeks of sessions, each lasting an hour. These sessions (Appendix B) focused on traditional methods for treating anxiety, specifically adapted techniques from cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) (Crown, 2022). This structured CBT framework ensured that participants systematically developed cognitive and behavioral strategies to manage oral presentation anxiety effectively. The CBT techniques included identifying and testing negative thought patterns, devising coping strategies, and implementing exposure tasks to situations that produce anxiety. Additionally, participants were trained in relaxation exercises, including deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and guided imagery, to help manage anxiety symptoms. Table 1 shows the information related to participants' assignments.

**Table 1: Participants' Group Distribution and Characteristics**

Group	No of Participants	Description
Integrated EFT-SMAARS Intervention	20	Given integrated EFT-SMAARS intervention to handle the physiological and psychological components that accompany anxiety
Control Group	20	Given the best traditional techniques for managing anxiety
Total	40	Saudi Undergraduate students majoring in EFL were taken to ensure there was a mismatch between anxiety levels and familiarity with the oral presentation experience.

The participants are described in Table 1 above. These participants were  $n = 20$  each, with 20 for the interventions and 20 for the controlled groups, respectively. The integrated EFT-SMAARS group was given EFT-SMAARS intervention to handle anxiety-related emotions. The control group was given the best traditional techniques to handle their anxiety. This essence was to make the comparison study effective enough to glean precise information about a possible integrated EFT-SMAARS intervention, which proved effective against traditional techniques in reducing Saudi EFL undergraduates' anxiety toward oral presentations.

For quantitative data collection, anxiety levels were assessed using the SMAARS and FLCAS both before the first session and after the last session in each group. Additionally, weekly assessments were conducted at the start and end of each session to track changes in anxiety levels throughout the program. This broad approach facilitated scrutiny of the development and effectiveness of the interventions, which was how changes in anxiety over the short and long term occurred in participants.

For qualitative data collection, participants, after each session, detailed their experiences of

changes in their level of anxiety and the thoughts and feelings that they had about the techniques implemented. Participants also maintained a reflection journal over the 6 weeks to note down any change in their anxiety, experiences with oral presentations, or their general well-being. Participants received structured reflection prompts for journals (Appendix C). Finally, at the end of the intervention period, members from both groups were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews to explore the experience in more detail and to evaluate the interventions' effectiveness. The researcher conducted the interviews (Appendix D). During the interview, the participants were asked to communicate in English to examine their stress levels. This extensive feedback mechanism provided a means to evaluate the participants' progress and give an overview of the strategies' effectiveness in reducing anxiety.

The quantitative data, gathered through pre- and post-intervention stages, were analyzed using mean scores. The difference between the two groups' pre-intervention scores was measured using an independent t-test. In comparison, the difference

between the two groups' post-intervention scores were analyzed using ANOVA.

## 8. Data analysis

### 8.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

The data gathered through the SMAARS Scale were quantitative and, therefore, analyzed to determine whether the integrated EFT-SMAARS intervention effectively reduced oral presentation anxiety. For this, the efficacy of SMAARS was compared with traditional anxiety scales such as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). A total of 40 participants were randomly assigned, half to the intervention group, EFT-SMAARS ( $n = 20$ ), and the other half to the control group. In the pre-intervention analysis, the mean anxiety score for the intervention group was 85 ( $SD = 8.2$ ); whereas, for the control group, it was 84 ( $SD = 7.9$ ). An independent samples t-test confirmed no significant difference between the two groups at baseline ( $t(38) = 0.45$ ,  $p = 0.65$ ). The pre-intervention means SMAARS score for the intervention group was 55 ( $SD = 6.5$ ), compared to 56 ( $SD = 6.7$ ) for the control group, with no significant difference noted ( $t(38) = 0.55$ ,  $p = 0.58$ ).

**Table 2: Description of Pre-Intervention Analysis**

Measure	Group	Pre- Intervention Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	p-value
Mean Anxiety Level through Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)					
	Intervention Group	85	8.2	0.45	0.65
	Control Group	84	7.9	0.45	0.65
Mean SMARS Score					
	Intervention Group	55	6.5	-0.55	0.58
	Control Group	56	6.7	0.55	0.58

Table 2 above shows the results of the mean score of anxiety and SMARS among the participants. No statistically significant results have been seen in the scores obtained from the intervention and control groups. In the post-intervention, the mean anxiety score for the intervention group decreased significantly to 65 ( $SD = 7.3$ ), while the control group showed a minor decrease to 81 ( $SD = 7.5$ ). A paired samples t-test revealed a significant reduction in anxiety for the intervention group ( $t(19) = 10.12$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) but not for the control group ( $t(19) = 1.82$ ,  $p = 0.08$ ). The post-intervention means SMAARS

score for the intervention group dropped to 35 ( $SD = 5.9$ ), indicating a significant improvement ( $t(19) = 12.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The control group's post-intervention mean score was 54 ( $SD = 6.2$ ), with no significant change ( $t(19) = 1.22$ ,  $p = 0.23$ ). An ANOVA test comparing the post-intervention anxiety levels between the two groups confirmed a significant difference ( $F(1,38) = 45.32$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), demonstrating the effectiveness of the EFT-SMAARS intervention over traditional methods.

## 8.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach, the qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed to identify common themes and patterns. The analysis involved systematically coding, categorizing, and identifying recurring themes (Appendix E). The analysis was conducted manually using a double-coding process. The researcher coded the data and ensured reliability to minimize bias. The following key themes were drawn from the data.

### Themes No. 1: Reduction in Physiological Symptoms of Anxiety

Various participants reportedly experienced fewer physical symptoms of anxiety, such as trembling or rapid heartbeat. One of the participants reported as:

*"Before using the EFT technique, my hands would shake whenever I presented in front of a group. However, I can breathe better and control my emotions after using the EFT technique."*

### Theme No 2: Increased Psychological Resilience and Emotional Regulation

The participants shared how their focus on emotions and cognitive reorganizing assisted them in managing fear successfully. One of the participants stated:

*"I used to humiliate myself every time I presented in front of the people, but now I have realized that mistakes are part of a learning process. I feel better as I do not panic anymore."*

### Theme No 3: Effectiveness of EFT Techniques in Immediate Anxiety Reduction

The selected participants from the intervention group combined the prompt

effect of the EFT tapping technique with well-organized strategies for better exposure. One of the participants shared:

*"Employing EFT tapping techniques right before my presentation enhanced my confidence. It immediately worked to calm down my nerves."*

### Theme No. 4: Sustainability and Real-World Application

Most of the participants confidently applied EFT techniques beyond the classroom environment. One of the participants stated:

*"I have started applying deep breathing and EFT tapping techniques right before my exams. Other than classroom presentations; it aided me in stressful situations in day-to-day life."*

Key findings included that those participants in the experimental group reported a noticeable reduction in anxiety levels, attributing this to the dual focus on physiological and psychological aspects. Common phrases included "felt more in control" and "less nervous." Many participants in the intervention group noted improvements in their presentation skills, citing increased confidence and better engagement with their audience. Quotes such as "I could express my ideas clearly" and "I was not as afraid to make mistakes" were frequent. The EFT-SMAARS approach was well-received due to its cultural sensitivity. Participants appreciated that the intervention resonated with their cultural context, making them feel more comfortable and understood. Statements like "It felt relevant to our culture" and "I could relate to the techniques" were joint. Participants in the control group expressed frustration with the traditional methods, indicating that these did not significantly alleviate their anxiety. Comments such as "still felt very anxious" and "did not see much improvement" highlighted the need for more effective strategies.

**Table 3: Mean scores of tested items of participants' pre-test and post-test**

Anxiety Type	Mean Score (Before Intervention)	Mean Score (After Intervention)
Anticipation Anxiety	8.8	-
Behavioral Signs	6.8	-
Physical Sensations	7.0	-
Performance Anxiety	7.2	-
Social Anxiety	6.5	-
Thoughts and Worries	9.0	-
Performance Assessment	-	5.5
Immediate Relief	-	3.0
Future Anxiety	-	2.0

Table 3 above showed a significant difference between the participants' scores before and after intervention across the tested anxiety items, 43 and 10, respectively. Before the EFT-SMAARS intervention, there are variations of scores across separate items: Performance Anxiety (9), Behavioural Signs (8), Physical Sensations (7), Anticipation Anxiety (7), Social Anxiety (6), and Thoughts and Worries (6). On the other hand, after

the EFT intervention, the scores on Performance Assessment remained (5), Immediate Relief (3), and Future Anxiety (2), which overall were found to be lower.

Data on the changes in SMAARS scores before and after the intervention for both groups was also visually illustrated. The intervention group experienced a more substantial decrease in anxiety levels compared to the control group.

**Table 4: Frequency distribution of scores of participants before and after intervention**

Condition	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Sample Size (N)
Before Intervention	7.17	1.169	20
After Intervention	3.33	1.528	20

Table 4 above showed that data had a negatively skewed distribution before intervention. However, after intervention, the data showed a relatively

positive and normal distribution. The p-value (.05) from the z-score table (smaller portion) was after intervention (.98500 / .01500), respectively.

**Table 5: The difference between before and after intervention**

Proximity Matrix		Difference	
		1: Before intervention	2: After intervention
1	Before intervention	.000	33.000
2	After intervention	33.000	.000

The result in Table 4 above showed that participants had higher anxiety levels before the

intervention, while anxiety levels went down after the intervention.

## 9. Coefficient Correlation

**Table 5: Mean SMAARS Scores Before and After Intervention**

Group	Pre-Intervention Mean (SD)	Post-Intervention Mean (SD)
Intervention	27.5 (3.2)	18.6 (2.5)
Control	28.0 (3.0)	26.2 (3.1)

Table 5 above showed that the integrated EFT-SMAARS intervention resulted in a significant reduction in overall anxiety levels among participants, with mean SMAARS scores decreasing from 27.5 (SD = 3.2) to 18.6 (SD = 2.5) ( $p <$

0.001). In contrast, the control group showed a less pronounced reduction in anxiety levels, with mean SMAARS scores decreasing from 28.0 (SD = 3.0) to 26.2 (SD = 3.1) ( $p = 0.04$ ).

**Table 6 Difference between before and after intervention (Dissimilarity Matrix)**

Proximity Matrix		Difference	
		1: Intervention group	2: Control group
1	Intervention group	.000	12.506
2	Control group	12.506	.000

The results in Table 6 above showed some differences between the two data before and after the intervention conducted through interviews. Interestingly, this result indicated a distant difference between the level of anxiety in both the EFT instrument and the interview questionnaire. There was a considerable distance between the anxiety level before and after interventions in both the EFT instrument and interview questionnaire treatments.

The quantitative and qualitative data analysis highlighted the effectiveness of the EFT-SMAARS intervention in minimizing oral presentation anxiety among male Saudi EFL learners. The quantitative data showed a statistically significant drop in anxiety levels in the experiment group, emphasizing the approach's effectiveness. Considering these findings, the thematic analysis showed tailored experiences of anxiety depletion. This further highlighted the dual focus on physiological and psychological strategies that helped Saudi EFL students manage their anxiety more efficiently.

## 10. Findings

The present study provides important insights into EFL pedagogy in Saudi Arabia. The findings of question no. 1 showed that the oral presentation anxiety was caused by linguistics, socio-cultural, and

psychological factors. These factors included issues related to foreign language, lack of confidence in public speaking, fear of judgment, and maintaining a personal image in society. The results concluded that all the participants faced these issues. These findings align with themes no. 1, 2, and 3. The findings of question 2 showed that integrated EFT with the SMAARS Scale effectively reduced oral presentation anxiety. This can be seen in Table 6. It also offered EFL learners an evidence-based and contemporary technique to support and improve their psychological well-being and academic performance beyond the classroom context. The findings of question 3 showed that the intervention was culturally sensitive and, therefore, streamlined with Saudi learners' social and educational context by making it relevant and effective. This supports the findings presented in Table 5. By implementing and practicing EFT-SMAARS techniques by their curriculum, teachers created a more supporting and less anxious classroom environment. Such an environment uplifted Saudi EFL students' confidence and motivated them to participate in oral activities. This further emphasized the current research as the physiological and psychological dimensions of anxiety were taken into account to understand anxious states among students.

These findings would also help develop teacher training programs so that educators can be provided with the expertise to help recognize and minimize students' anxiety. This study ultimately made a case for integrating appropriate strategies for managing anxiety in EFL education, which would be personalized and contextually sensitive, contributing to improved language acquisition by the learners and a more positive learning experience.

## 11. Discussion

Interestingly, the results of both the EFT-AMAARS instrument and the interview questionnaire converged. This indicated that participants shared symmetrical attitudes when interventions were executed. These findings aligned with previous research indicating the effectiveness of EFT in reducing anxiety (Alharbi, 2021; Blacher, 2023; AbuSahyon et al., 2023). The personalized approach of targeting specific anxiety triggers through EFT techniques, combined with systematic assessment through SMAARS, appeared to have contributed to the significant reduction in anxiety levels observed in the EFT intervention group (Alharbi, 2021; Blacher, 2023; AbuSahyon et al., 2023).

Another significance of the study could be seen through the data analysis and the findings sections that suggested that the integrated EFT-SMAARS intervention significantly reduced oral presentation anxiety among Saudi EFL students compared to traditional methods such as Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) etc (Alharbi, 2021; Blacher, 2023; AbuSahyon et al., 2023). The results showed a substantial decrease in the intervention group's general and specific anxiety measures, while qualitative feedback underscores the approach's practical benefits and cultural relevance. The researcher, therefore, acknowledges that the intervention minimized anxiety; however, the results would not be presented as a universal improvement without addressing the potential benefits of moderate stress.

These findings support developing and implementing personalized, contextually appropriate anxiety management strategies in

EFL education, especially in the Saudi Arabian EFL context. By adopting the EFT-SMAARS technique, cultural sensitivity was specially addressed in this intervention to align with the linguistic, educational, and socio-cultural context of Saudi EFL learners. The intervention combined commonly used phrases, culturally appropriate coping techniques, and respect for social values related to public speaking and self-expression. Moreover, the approach necessitates collective contributions to ensure that strategies are planned to be both individually empowering and socially and culturally acceptable within the learners' educational and cultural settings. This culturally customized strategy fostered EFL learners' interaction, acceptance, and overall usefulness of the intervention.

## 12. Conclusion

The findings gathered from the mixed-method study exclusively address the research objectives. First, the findings establish that integrated EFT-SMAARS intervention effectively reduces the anxiety of oral presentations in Saudi EFL learners. This supports key factors, including increased language proficiency, fear of judgment, personal well-being, and achieving academic success by identifying and managing individualized anxiety experiences. Second, the study shows that the EFT-SMAARS intervention is a valuable strategy for minimizing anxiety, as reflected by significant improvements in measured anxiety levels (quantitative data) and participant-shared experiences (qualitative data). Finally, by evaluating the physiological and psychological effects of the intervention, this study emphasizes the need for culturally relevant, context-sensitive strategies for managing anxiety in EFL settings in Saudi Arabia.

The present study makes a significant contribution by combining EFT with the SMAARS Scale to design a holistic and evidence-based approach customized to the cultural and linguistic needs of Saudi EFL learners. The findings yield comprehensive insights for teachers, stakeholders, and policymakers, highlighting the need for contextually grounded, anxiety-reducing techniques to foster learners' confidence and success in public speaking and oral presentation.

Implications for developing a personal approach to anxiety management in language learning will be realized if future research includes the long-term effects of integrated interventions and generalization to other cultural or school settings. Future research may consist of a large sample size, female students, or employing self-report measures to reduce anxiety. The conclusion of the interview questionnaires highlighted that guided EFT sessions successfully reduced anxiety levels for EFL undergraduates before oral presentations. The study proved to have a non-biased lecturer and instructor. Further studies may be needed to check the effectiveness and efficiency of EFT interventions in the long term and for general education.

### 13. Future directions

Future research needs to be designed so that the integration of EFT and SMAARS studies across different cultural or language situations in educational programs can also be pursued. Longitudinal research could help indicate the long-term effects of these interventions on anxiety and academic performance. Finally, research can also investigate the benefits of adding complementary therapies to EFT and SMAARS, such as mindfulness or biofeedback techniques, for improving efficacy. Also, the educators' and students' lived experiences and views in implementing EFT-SMAARS interventions would further clarify these approaches' practical challenges and opportunities. The involvement of educators in future research will go on to develop and evaluate strategies for managing anxiety that are feasible, acceptable, and effective when applied in real-life educational settings.

In other words, the integration of the Emotional Freedom Technique and the Stress and Anxiety Assessment and Reduction System makes a culturally sensitive complete approach to managing anxiety among Saudi EFL learners. Energy-based techniques from the tool EFT partnered with SMAARS's detailed assessment framework make the groundwork for individualized and effective anxiety interventions. The pedagogical implications are henceforth important, offering a dimension of tools and strategies for implementation by educators to assist the student in well-being and their academic performance. This focus on anxiety from psychological and physiological perspectives will help educators create a more supportive and inclusive

learning environment that promotes language acquisition and positive learning experiences for Saudi EFL students. There is, therefore, much mileage in future research to develop the efficacy of such integrated interventions across different educational settings, thus contributing toward developing practices for anxiety management and EFL education.

### Recommendations

Several practical recommendations emerge from the study for academicians and practitioners interested in replicating the same. Academic institutions should consider incorporating an integrated Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) and SMAARS Scale intervention in their culturally relevant EFL curriculums tailored to Saudi Arabia. This would not only address the physiological and psychological roots of oral presentation anxiety, allow students to utilize these techniques to reduce their anxiety, but also help them to employ contextually appropriate and culturally sensitive strategies to regulate emotions and enhance confidence in public speaking. The programs will teach the Saudi EFL teachers how to use EFT and the SMAARS methods while considering their culture. This way, the teachers will be equipped to manage their students' emotional and psychological challenges and, as a result, have more effective classes with increased learning gains.

The study emphasizes the development of anxiety management programs for Saudi students and teachers that are culturally and contextually appropriate for Saudis. This means the interventions will be designed according to what is effective and acceptable to the Saudi Arabian cultural values and norms of the students and teachers. For future research, it will be good to conduct longitudinal studies to find out how the integrated EFT-SMAARS intervention impacts Saudi students' oral presentation anxiety in the long term. This may help further understand the sustained impact of such intervention strategies and any long-term benefits of the Saudi Arabian education sector. Replicating the current research across Saudi EFL contexts and populations will inform the degree of generalizability. This investigation of the effectiveness of the EFT-SMAARS intervention across cultures and languages further refines an approach that can be adapted for general use.

Universities and educational institutions in Saudi Arabia should improve their support services for students who have anxiety. This can vary from counseling to anxiety management workshops to peer support groups that use the EFT-SMAARS model. Create individualized anxiety management plans for Saudi EFL learners based on their unique anxiety triggers and presentations of anxiety. By providing personalized interventions, an EFL teacher can give a much greater level of support, thus leading to better academic and personal success.

Engage all language instructors, psychologists, and cross-cultural communication experts to initiate collaborative research endeavors in developing and further refining anxiety management strategies. Such interdisciplinary approaches help improve intervention effectiveness by ensuring such strategies are well-grounded in comprehensive research findings. Consider the potential for using technology through mobile applications or online platforms to offer EFT-SMAARS interventions. This could help increase access and support students with on-demand help with their anxiety management. Awareness of prevalence and impact among educators, learners, and policymakers could enable these stakeholders to give more consideration to the development and implementation of effective strategies for anxiety management within educational environments.

By following these recommendations, educational institutions can create a more supportive and effective learning environment for Saudi EFL students, ultimately enhancing their academic performance and overall well-being. The findings of the personal approach towards the management of anxiety during language study are extensive. This concludes that the combination of both EFT and SMAARS approaches by educators will develop a comprehensive approach to aiding the multi-dimensional nature of anxiety. A much-individualized method reduces unnecessary stress and gives students the power to drive their emotional well-being. More research must be conducted to determine the effects of long-term integrative intervention and its applicability in cultures and educational systems. This shall shed more light on broader implications for the techniques used and the generalization that may be possible.

An impartial lecturer and teacher were used to administer the intervention and collect data so that a course of action could present an objective result. This will help eliminate any biases in the study and increase the credibility of the results. More studies are needed to evaluate the effectiveness and long-term efficiency of EFT interventions. Longitudinal research could shed some light on how continued use of EFT bears on levels of anxiety and academic performance through time. Moreover, it will help explore the relevance or redundancy of EFT within the general educational contexts apart from EFL and understand its broader educational advantages.

#### 14. Author's contribution

The study's author is Dr. Saeed Abdullah Alzahrani. The author confirms sole responsibility for the research concept, research design, data collection and analysis, exposition of the results, and manuscript composition.

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