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# Anxiety-provoking factors in consecutive interpreting: a qualitative study of Iranian student interpreter trainees

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## Abstract

Given the inherent association of interpreting with feelings of anxiousness, the subject of interpreting poses a formidable challenge for students in this field. A large number of prospective interpreters assert that they are unable to complete the assignment to a satisfactory level because they are unable to get past their fear. The harmful effect of anxiety on the interpreting performance of student trainees could result in failure and fully inhibit their accomplishment. Despite the growing recognition of anxiety as a significant challenge in interpreting education, there is a lack of comprehensive studies investigating the specific factors contributing to anxiety in consecutive interpreting and effective strategies for its reduction. To address this issue and in order to identify the factors contributing to trainees' anxiety and those that might help to reduce consecutive interpreting (CI) anxiety, thirty students were chosen to participate in semi-structured interviews. Different factors exerting an effect on the anxiety levels of Iranian CI pupils were identified through qualitative research. These factors were categorized into six groups, i.e., individual, input (language-related factors, speaker-related factors), note-taking (inappropriate note-taking skill, lack of creativity in taking notes), environmental (noise and distraction, peer-related factors), output (meaning transfer, delivery), and teacher-related (testing, teachers' behavior). Moreover, the study found that factors to reduce anxiety in consecutive interpreting could be classified as teacher-related and trainee-related factors each with additional sub-factors.

**Keywords:** Interpreting anxiety, Consecutive interpreting, Anxiety-provoking factors, Anxiety-reduction strategies

## Introduction

Interpreting, inherently associated with feelings of anxiousness, presents a formidable challenge for students in this field, hindering their ability to achieve satisfactory performance (Yu, 2023). Many aspiring interpreters struggle to overcome their fear, leading to an inability to complete assignments to a desired level (Ferdowsi & Razmi, 2022). The harmful impact of anxiety on the interpreting performance of student trainees can lead to failure and hinder their accomplishments. The term 'foreign language anxiety' refers to anxiety that arises when one is learning a foreign language.

Horwitz et al. (1986) defined it as “a distinct [negative] complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). According to MacIntyre (1995), anxiety negatively impacts students’ cognitive processing and behavior.

In terms of contextual factors, interpreting classes are specific language-related situations that could create anxiety for interpreter trainees (Cásedas et al., 2023; Ferdowsi & Razmi, 2022). To put it in Jimenez and Pinazo’s (2001, p. 27) words, interpreting is a “highly anxiety-provoking activity” because interpreters have to perform a sequence of intricate mental and physical actions performed in a public setting, or at the very least, in front of an audience, with the potential for the person’s understanding to be disrupted by various factors such as technical jargon and foreign accents (Munro, 2008, p. 196). This view is mirrored by Kurz (2001, p. 114) who identifies “constant information overload, the tremendous amount of concentration required, [and] fatigue” as stressors prevalent in interpreters’ working conditions. Consequently, the capacity to handle anxiety is a prerequisite for successful interpreters and a significant predictor of interpreting proficiency (Rajabi & Yousefi, 2022; Roland, 1982). In addition, according to Kurz (2003), student interpreters face even greater physiological stress in the classroom than professional interpreters do at a tough technical conference. The three components of foreign language anxiety, namely communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986), appear to be applicable to the idea of interpretation anxiety as well.

Chiang (2006), in a comparative study of foreign language and interpreting anxiety, found that interpreter trainees’ anxiety levels were “both significantly more severe and significantly more prevalent than their levels of foreign language anxiety” (p. 156). According to Kao and Craigie (2013, p. 1036), “in the process of interpreting, foreign language anxiety can be transformed into or manifested as interpreters’ stress.” Therefore, interpreting anxiety should be distinguished from foreign language anxiety. To put it in other words, anxiety related to interpreting classes could be the combination of foreign language anxiety, such as listening & speaking anxiety, and interpreting-anxiety trigger factors such as meaning transfer anxiety. Additionally, interpreting related sources of anxiety could vary depending on the mode of interpreting. Since each mode necessitates specific skills, it seems reasonable to assume that the types of anxiety-provoking factors in each mode would vary. For example, one of the skills, which distinguishes consecutive interpreting (CI) from the other two modes, is note-taking skill. As a result, it seems logical to consider note-taking as a possible type of anxiety-inducing factor specific to CI. Interestingly, a comparison of translation and interpreting students in terms of their linguistic self-confidence, motivation, and language anxiety revealed that the language anxiety profiles of translation and interpreting students differ (Rosiers et al., 2011).

Despite the fact that anxiety impacts interpreting learning, little empirical study has been carried out on the sources of stress in the pedagogical environment of interpreter training in Iran. To fill this gap, the present study tried to identify the source of anxiety in CI classroom and come up with possible solutions to help students feel less anxious during consecutive interpreting.

## Literature review

Interpreting research and education is affected by humanistic views in general education. Kiraly (2000) introduced the idea of a humanistic approach to interpreting studies. The humanistic perspective does not view translation students as passive knowledge recipients but as active contributors to knowledge construction. Davies (2004), Moser-Mercer (2008), and Tan (2008) share this viewpoint about the role of students in translation and interpreting classes. The value of learners and the learning process has increased in interpreting research. The primary premise of such studies is that individual differences affect the interaction between an event and a person. For example, the investigation of personality characteristics (e.g., Schweda Nicholson, 2005; Shaw & Hughes, 2006) and anxiety/stress in particular (e.g., Chiang, 2009, 2010; Jiménez Ivars & Pinazo Calatayud, 2001) has garnered increasing interest.

A review of the literature on anxiety in CI would suggest that researchers focused on different kinds of stressors in consecutive interpreting (Yu, 2023). Orlando (2010, p. 74) mentioned that “the content accuracy, the quality of the expression, and the presentation” determine good interpreting performance. As a result, the public speaking ability is a prerequisite for interpreting the lack of which would lead to stress and anxiety. Orlando (2010) believes that interpreting students can improve their public speaking ability by participating in “role plays, mock business meetings, mock trials or conferences.” By the same token, Cho and Roger (2010) applied theatrical techniques to train interpreters to help them overcome performance anxiety and improve their extemporaneous performance skills. The use of theatre techniques in interpreting is justified by the similarities between the two, as interpreting is a ‘performance art’ (Weller, 2006). These common features include the aim for communication, audience consideration, and problem-solving techniques. Participants of the study were divided into experimental and control groups. The first group received a seven-week theatrical training program ranging from relaxation, memory, anticipation, logic, bodily communication to impromptu techniques and problem-solving ability. The survey findings revealed that most participants concurred that they learnt valuable lessons applicable to their studies from these theatrical exercises. While the raters’ judgments indicated that the most notable ‘externally observable’ advantages came early in the program, the participants’ reflections revealed that ‘internal’ benefits continued to accrue as the training progressed. Notably, this positive response was accompanied by strong academic performance on the final exam administered shortly after the project’s conclusion.

Chang (2016) conducted a study to design a measure to detect anxiety-triggering factors for sight translation (ST) of Chinese interpreter trainees. A modified version of Lu and Liao’s (2012) 34-item questionnaire was used to gather the data. Chang’s (2016) refined 21-item questionnaire covers five subscales, including “learners’ worries about evaluation, their cognitive challenges in performing ST, their concerns about English competence, their anxiety in performing ST, and their attitudes in learning ST” (p. 88). In another study, Kao and Craigie (2013) assessed the stress level experienced by Taiwanese student interpreters and the coping strategies they employed to deal with it. The Coping Strategy Indicator (Amirkhan, 1990) was used to measure the coping strategies adopted by the participants. The scale consists of three subscales: problem-solving, seeking social support, and avoidance. The findings revealed that most of the participants (85%) reported high stress levels.

The survey also revealed that problem-solving was the most frequently employed coping strategy compared to the other two. This finding implies that “the participants perceived the stressful encounters in the interpreting class to be controlled and changeable” (Kao & Craigie, 2013, p. 1040).

Yan et al. (2018b), as part of their investigation, tried to estimate the interplay between foreign language anxiety in interpreting classrooms (FLAICS) and willingness to communicate (WTC) in a tertiary interpreter training programme in Hong Kong. Concerning the relation between FLAICS and WTC, the study found a mild but significant negative correlation. The findings imply that students’ willingness to communicate in translating classrooms is proportional to their fear of the foreign language. Students’ FLAICS scores were strongly negatively correlated with both their final interpreting exam and general course exam scores. The results also indicate that students’ WTC was favorably associated with their interpretation general and final test score, however, the correlations were not statistically significant. In addition, the association between WTC and final exam score was stronger than the relationship between WTC and general course score.

The present study diverges from the previous ones in various aspects. First, concerns regarding language proficiency, public speaking ability, cognitive challenges, and evaluation anxiety are among the stressors highlighted in the reviewed studies pertaining to CI. By identifying the specific triggers of anxiety in CI classrooms as perceived by interpreter trainees, this study contributes to our comprehension of the origins of stress. Second, Cho and Roger (2010) investigated the effectiveness of theatrical techniques in overcoming anxiety and improving the performance abilities of interpreters. In addition to recognizing interpreting as a performance art, this methodology places an emphasis on audience engagement, effective communication, and problem-solving strategies. In contrast, the current investigation seeks to provide further understanding regarding potential remedies for alleviating interpreting anxiety in CI classrooms. Third, questionnaires were utilized by Chang (2016) and Kao and Craigie (2013) to assess coping mechanisms and anxiety-inducing factors among interpreter trainees. The objective of this study is to collect qualitative data via semi-structured interviews regarding the determinants of anxiety in CI classrooms and possible solutions.

Building on the previous research, the current study attempts to investigate student interpreters’ sources of stress in CI lessons and identify potential remedies from the trainees’ point of view. It is hoped that through the integration of learners’ personal experiences and perspectives, a comprehensive understanding of their perceptions and the contextual intricacies of anxiety can be acquired. Therefore, the following questions were posed:

1. What are the different factors that trigger anxiety in CI classrooms as perceived by interpreter trainees?
2. What are the possible solutions to reduce interpreting anxiety in CI classrooms?

### **Context and study setting**

This study was conducted in Iran, where interpreter training programs play a crucial role in preparing students for the demanding field of interpreting. Iran has a diverse linguistic landscape, with multiple languages spoken and a growing need for professional

interpreters to facilitate effective communication in various settings such as conferences, business meetings, and diplomatic negotiations.

The interpretation training programs in Iran typically emphasize the development of language skills, interpreting techniques, and theoretical knowledge. However, limited attention has been given to addressing the psychological aspects of interpreter training, such as the anxiety and stress experienced by interpreter trainees during their coursework. Given the importance of interpreter training and the potential impact of anxiety on students' performance and well-being, it becomes essential to explore the factors that trigger anxiety in the Iranian context and identify potential solutions to alleviate interpreting anxiety in the classrooms.

By focusing on the specific Iranian context, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature by shedding light on the unique challenges faced by interpreter trainees in Iran and providing insights into effective strategies to mitigate interpreting anxiety. Understanding the contextual factors and addressing the specific needs of interpreter trainees in Iran can enhance the overall quality of interpreter training programs and improve the professional development of future interpreters in the country.

## Method

The present study adopted a qualitative interpretative approach to answer the research questions of the study by following a 'participant-oriented research method' (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014). This approach considers participants in two different but complementary ways. Initially, they can be employed to investigate the individuals engaged in the translation process, including translators, trainers, students, commissioners, and others. Furthermore, human involvement is an essential component of the research process.

## Research design

The present study employed a qualitative research design to gain in-depth insights into the anxiety-provoking factors in consecutive interpreting (CI) classrooms and explore potential solutions. Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring complex phenomena and understanding individuals' experiences, perceptions, and social interactions in depth and contextually. By adopting a qualitative approach, the study aimed to capture the nuanced and subjective aspects of interpreting anxiety. The study followed a participant-oriented research method, as proposed by Saldanha and O'Brien (2014), which considers participants in two different but complementary ways. Firstly, participants were investigated as individuals engaged in the translation process, including translators, trainers, students, and commissioners. This approach recognizes the importance of understanding the experiences and perspectives of these key stakeholders in interpreting anxiety. Secondly, human involvement was regarded as an essential component of the research process. This means that the study acknowledged the active role of participants in shaping the research outcomes. By involving participants in the research process, such as through focus group discussions, the researchers aimed to gather direct insights from those who had firsthand experience with interpreting anxiety. This approach recognizes the expertise and knowledge that participants bring to the research and emphasizes the importance of collaboration and dialogue between researchers and participants.

### Participants

The present study centered on consecutive interpreting trainees in an academic environment in Iran. Due to the absence of a specialized CI training program in Iran, the population of interest for the researchers consisted of B.A. English translation students who were enrolled in three two-credit courses on interpreting at Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman, Iran.

A total of thirty undergraduate students of English Translation (16 females and 14 males) participated in the study. The participants were selected using a non-probability sampling approach, specifically convenience sampling. Convenience sampling was chosen due to the accessibility and availability of the participants within the university setting. The participants had an average age of 21.7 years ( $SD = 0.78$ ), ranging from 20 to 23 years. They had completed the sixth semester of their B.A. program and had successfully passed the 'Consecutive Interpreting' course. None of the participants had prior experience in interpreting before taking the course. It is important to note that the participants in this study were novices in the field of interpreting.

All participants spoke Persian as their first language and had acquired English as their second language. They had received 16 weeks of systematic interpreting instruction based on Setton and Dawrant's (2016) curriculum. The curriculum included theoretical knowledge, practical exercises, and feedback sessions to enhance their interpreting skills.

It is worth mentioning that this study is part of a larger mixed-methods investigation, which encompassed both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. However, due to space limitations, only the qualitative phase of the investigation is presented in the current study. The qualitative phase aimed to provide a deep understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives regarding interpreting anxiety in CI classrooms.

Prior to and during the completion of the study, the researchers took several measures to ensure the ethical requirements were met. The study followed ethical guidelines and principles outlined by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman and the ethical standards set forth by the American Psychological Association (APA). Ethical requirements were met in the study by obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, emphasizing voluntary participation and withdrawal, and maintaining ethical considerations throughout data collection and analysis. The researchers provided detailed information about the study, assured participants of confidentiality, and obtained written consent. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Data were treated with strict confidentiality, and participant identities were anonymized. The researchers were mindful of potential biases, engaged in reflexivity, and maintained a supportive and respectful environment during interactions with participants.

### Data collection procedures

To gather the required data, a qualitative study in Persian was conducted using focus groups to explore anxiety-provoking factors in CI classrooms and potential solutions. The focus group interviews were conducted at [insert location], and they were facilitated



by a team of experienced researchers who specialize in interpreting studies. The participants were assigned to five focus groups, each consisting of six students, using a sampling method based on available participants. The participants were categorized into groups based on their performance in the CI class during the term. This grouping strategy aimed to create an environment that fostered open expression of ideas and where participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences. It also ensured that they were surrounded by peers who had comparable levels of expertise and experience in consecutive interpreting.

Prior to participating in the focus group sessions, the participants were provided with detailed information about the study and its objectives. They were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any penalties. Additionally, the participants were assured that their privacy and confidentiality would be strictly maintained throughout the study.

Each focus group session lasted an average of 40 to 45 min. The sessions began with the facilitators using baseline questions as prompts to initiate the discussions. As the discussions progressed, further questions were asked to elicit deeper insights and to clarify participants' perspectives on anxiety factors in CI classrooms and potential anxiety-reduction techniques. The facilitators ensured that all participants had the opportunity to contribute and that the discussions were conducted in a supportive and respectful manner. By following these data collection procedures, the study aimed to capture a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and insights related to anxiety in CI classrooms. The use of focus groups facilitated interactive discussions and allowed for the exploration of diverse perspectives among interpreter trainees.

#### **Data analysis procedures**

In order to analyze the data, the guidelines provided by McCrudden and Barnes (2015) were carefully administered. First, the gathered data were transcribed and organized into a written format. Second, once the data were transcribed, the two researchers (re) read the gathered information to become familiar with the data. The researchers read through the data multiple times to become familiar with the nuances and themes present in the data. Third, the researchers assigned codes to the data based on the emerging themes and patterns. Fourth, after coding the data, the researchers synthesized the data by sorting them into categories and identifying patterns and connections between those categories. This helped the researchers understand the relationships between different categories and themes. The disagreements between the researchers were settled in this step through the following procedures:

- Discussion and clarification: the researchers actively participated in comprehensive dialogues and sought clarifications pertaining to the data. The primary objectives of these dialogues were to clear up any uncertainties, establish consensus, and guarantee a collective comprehension of the information.
- Revisiting the data: the researchers endeavored to discern significant statements, recurring patterns, or noteworthy patterns that might have been overlooked during

the initial classification phase. This procedure facilitates a more profound investigation and comprehension of the data.

- Seeking consensus: it entails researchers engaging in collaborative efforts to arrive at a mutual comprehension and agreement regarding the coding framework. The researchers compared their personal coding choices, reconciled any inconsistencies or variations in coding, and tried to establish a coding system that is dependable and consistent.
- Iterative process: Once a consensus has been achieved regarding the initial coding framework, the researchers proceeded to implement the codes that have been agreed upon for the remaining data. Nevertheless, with the continuous analysis of data, additional insights may surface, necessitating modifications, additions, or enhancements to the coding scheme. The researchers consistently revisited and enhanced the labeling in order to acquire a more profound comprehension of the data.

The final step in analyzing the qualitative data was interpretation. The researchers used the patterns and connections identified during synthesis to develop a narrative that explained the data. The narrative was supported by evidence from the data, and the researchers drew conclusions and made recommendations based on their interpretation of the data.

To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, the researchers employed multiple strategies, including the involvement of multiple researchers in the analysis process, ongoing discussions to ensure consensus, and a systematic and iterative approach to data analysis. These measures aimed to mitigate bias and increase the credibility of the study's findings. By adhering to these rigorous data analysis procedures, the study aimed to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, providing a robust basis for drawing conclusions and making recommendations related to anxiety factors and anxiety-reduction techniques in CI classrooms.

## Results and discussion

The first research question examined interpreter trainees' perceptions of anxiety in CI courses. To this aim, interviews were analyzed following a rigorous process in accordance with established guidelines and steps proposed by McCrudden and Barnes (2015). Initially, the interviews were transcribed and then reviewed multiple times. To provide greater reliability, two distinct coders performed the data coding process.

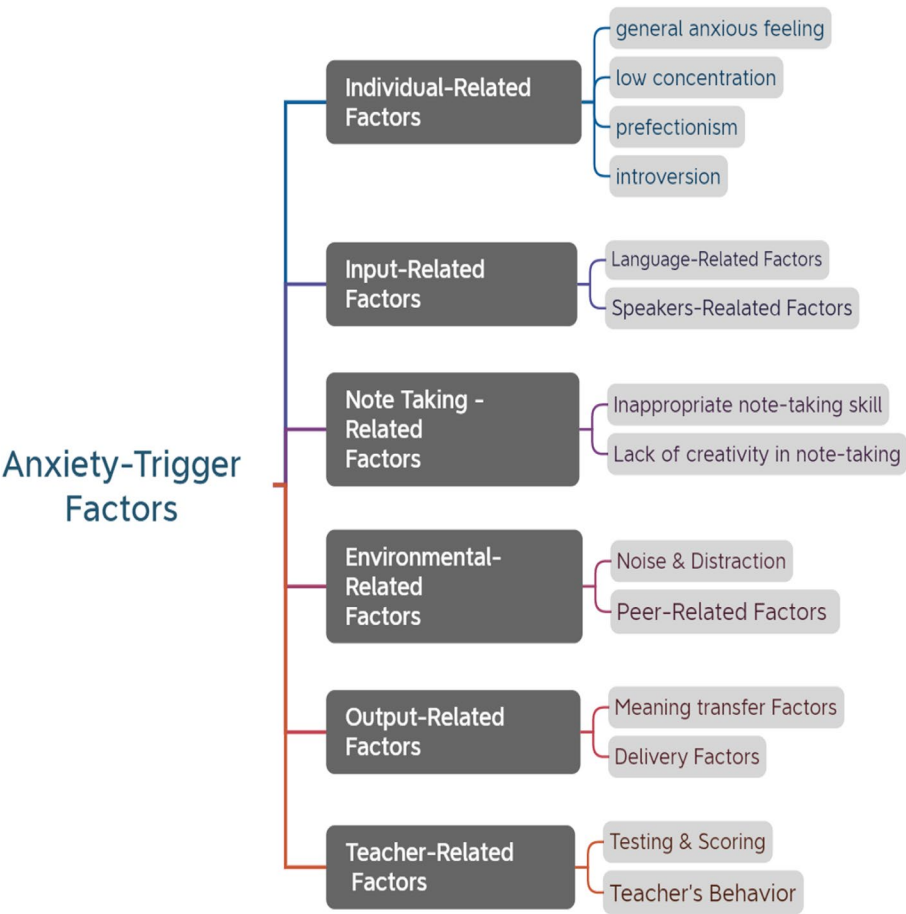
During open coding, the data were divided into units of analysis to establish "categories of theoretical significance," after which "the content is continuously compared within and between categories" (Gall et al., 1996, p. 566). The second stage, axial coding, consists of "connecting and grouping these first-order concepts into more encompassing concepts that subsume several subcategories" (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014, p. 191). This led to the creation of selective coding categories.

A thorough examination of the data revealed six stressors which were labeled as: (1) individual-related factors, (2) input-related factors, (3) note-taking-related factors, (4) environmental-related factors, (5) out-put related factors, and (6) teacher-related factors. The order of significance was computed based on the number of occurrences of each factor and sub-factors (see Table 1 and Fig. 1).



**Table 1** Frequency of anxiety-inducing factors in CI classrooms

| Factor                        | Frequency |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Individual-related factors    | 36        |
| Input-related factors         | 30        |
| Note-taking-related factors   | 24        |
| Environmental-related factors | 15        |
| Output-related factors        | 18        |
| Teacher-related factors       | 12        |



**Fig. 1** Anxiety-provoking factors in the Iranian CI classes

As indicated in In Table 1, the frequency of anxiety factors in CI classrooms is presented, ordered from highest to lowest. The most frequently mentioned factor was individual-related factors, with a frequency of 36. This indicates that individual-related factors were discussed extensively by the participants and are considered significant contributors to anxiety in CI classrooms. Following individual-related factors, input-related factors had a frequency of 30, making them the second highest. Input-related factors refer to aspects related to the information or input received by students, such as the difficulty or volume of the material. Note-taking-related factors came next with a frequency

of 24. These factors pertain to difficulties or challenges associated with taking notes during class. Environmental-related factors had a frequency of 15, positioning them as the fourth highest. These factors include elements related to the classroom environment, such as noise, temperature, or physical layout. Next, we had output-related factors with a frequency of 18. Output-related factors encompass aspects related to producing or demonstrating knowledge, such as exams, presentations, or group work. Lastly, teacher-related factors had the lowest frequency of 12. These factors include characteristics or behaviors exhibited by teachers that may contribute to student anxiety, such as teaching style or expectations.

As it is evident, individual-related issues were the most significant drivers of anxiety in CI courses for Iranian interpreter trainees. According to the participants, general anxious feelings (as opposed to situation-specific anxiety), low concentration, perfectionism, and being introverted, were among the influential personality-related factors that trigger anxiety during consecutive interpreting.

Concerning general anxiety, CI trainees claimed, “they become anxious in CI lessons, even before the class begins because they are anxious individuals and believe they have a tendency to become anxious in every setting.” The notion is backed by theories that view anxiety as a general construction (Young, 1992; MacIntyre, 1999). This perspective on anxiety implies that language-related anxiety is merely the transfer of other types of anxiety into language learning environments. One of the participants asserted that “I am an over-anxious person. When I experience anxiety in CI classes, I lose my listening comprehension skills. It doesn’t matter whether the item is listening-demand or not. All I can hear is the beat of my heart.” This is confirmed in the literature by research that suggests stress could decrease listening comprehension (Lund, 1991). Additionally, another student mentioned her inability to concentrate due to her general feeling of anxiety. She explained, “when I am anxious, I simply lose my concentration. I cannot focus on the input content. Therefore, I cannot interpret.” However, interpreters require a great deal of attention and concentration to perform successfully (Kao & Craigie, 2013). Another issue strongly related to the concept of ‘anxiety transfer’ is the capacity for multitasking. One of the students stated, “You may find it humorous, but when I’m anxious, I cannot perform multiple tasks concurrently. I cannot devote enough energy to listening, note-taking, analysis, and interpreting at the same time.” This assertion is backed by the notion of attentional control (Eysenck & Calvo, 1992). According to this theory, the cognitive capacities of an anxious individual that are necessary for completing a goal are impaired. Shifting is one of the cognitive functions necessary for successful multitasking. It facilitates the balanced allocation of cognitive resources across multiple subtasks.

Perfectionism is another personality trait cited as a source of anxiety in interpreting classes. Several students indicated that they typically held themselves to ideal personal standards and were excessively worried about making mistakes. They opt not to participate in CI classrooms when they feel they may not meet the standards required for consecutive interpreting (Razmi et al., 2020). This finding is supported in the literature. For example, Liu and Jackson (2008) reported that maladaptive perfectionism would cause fluency problems, which in turn, move participants toward passiveness.

Students allude to their introversion as their anxiety-provoking individual characteristics. One of the participants claimed, “I am the source of the problem. Unfortunately,

I am an introvert who struggles with public speaking. Due to my reserved nature, I am typically unwilling to volunteer at CI classes. For me, the greatest issue with CI classes is that my performance is visible to everyone. But in translation classes, for example, since your performance is written, it is solely the teacher who may read and evaluate your performance.” As mentioned in Yan et al., (2018a, p. 147) “successful interpreters are often projected as eloquent speakers and good communicators, and therefore they are expected to be extrovert and eager to communicate.”

As to the input-related issues, two sub-factors were identified. The first one was labeled as language-related factors. The interpreter trainees argued that sometimes the material they have to interpret consecutively is a real challenge regarding topic, vocabulary, or sentence structure. As to terminology, for instance, Lee (1996) reported that the most common obstacle for interpreting learners was a shortage of vocabulary items. Language-related factors may contribute to a sense of inadequate language proficiency. According to Yan et al. (2018b, p. 160), “students who are anxious about their foreign language ability tend to be also unwilling to be called to interpret in class.” Similarly, it was discovered that repeated failure owing to insufficient language skills led to dissatisfaction and reluctance to interpret (Pan & Yan, 2012; Yan et al., 2018a). The second sub-factor refers to speaker-related factors including non-native accent. Participants declared that listening to a non-native speaker creates a great deal of stress and make them feel distressed in interpreting. The same idea is reported in the literature indicating the detrimental effect of non-native accent on interpreting quality (Lin et al., 2013; Cheung, 2013). For example, Kurz (2008) found a substantially higher loss of information when interpreting non-native speakers. Interestingly, the majority of the participants favored American accent to British accent. They stated that listening to a content with a British accent was really stressful. Multiple studies have demonstrated that Iranian EFL students prefer the American accent (Rajablou & Shirvan, 2017; Monfared & Khatib, 2018). In the same vein, Weisi et al. (2019, p. 20) reported the same result. Furthermore, they identified “American English exposure, lack of guidance from the teachers, and lack of reinforcement toward British English accent” as the primary variables influencing the learners’ attitudes toward either of the accents.

The third source of anxiety in CI classes was related to note-taking skills. The students admitted that inappropriate note-taking skills can hinder interpreting. Several participants asserted that it is not sufficient to grasp all the principles of note-taking; you must also be creative, especially when it comes to symbols. However, if you restrict yourself to merely following the rules, you are stuck in the rules and you lose the idea. In other words, note-taking loses its facilitating function if not observed creatively. It is worth mentioning that participants received 10 h of note-taking training based on Gillies (2017).

The environmental concerns were referred to as other determining considerations, which are divided into two subsections. The first one refers to the disturbance and noise. This assertion can be explained based on Chiang (2010) which demonstrates which reveals that some conditions, such as noise, may hinder interpreters’ concentration, hence causing stress and failure. The second cause of stress in the environment was the mere presence of the classmates. It was found that gestures as produced feedback by classmates may indicate peers’ negative assessment. The result would be

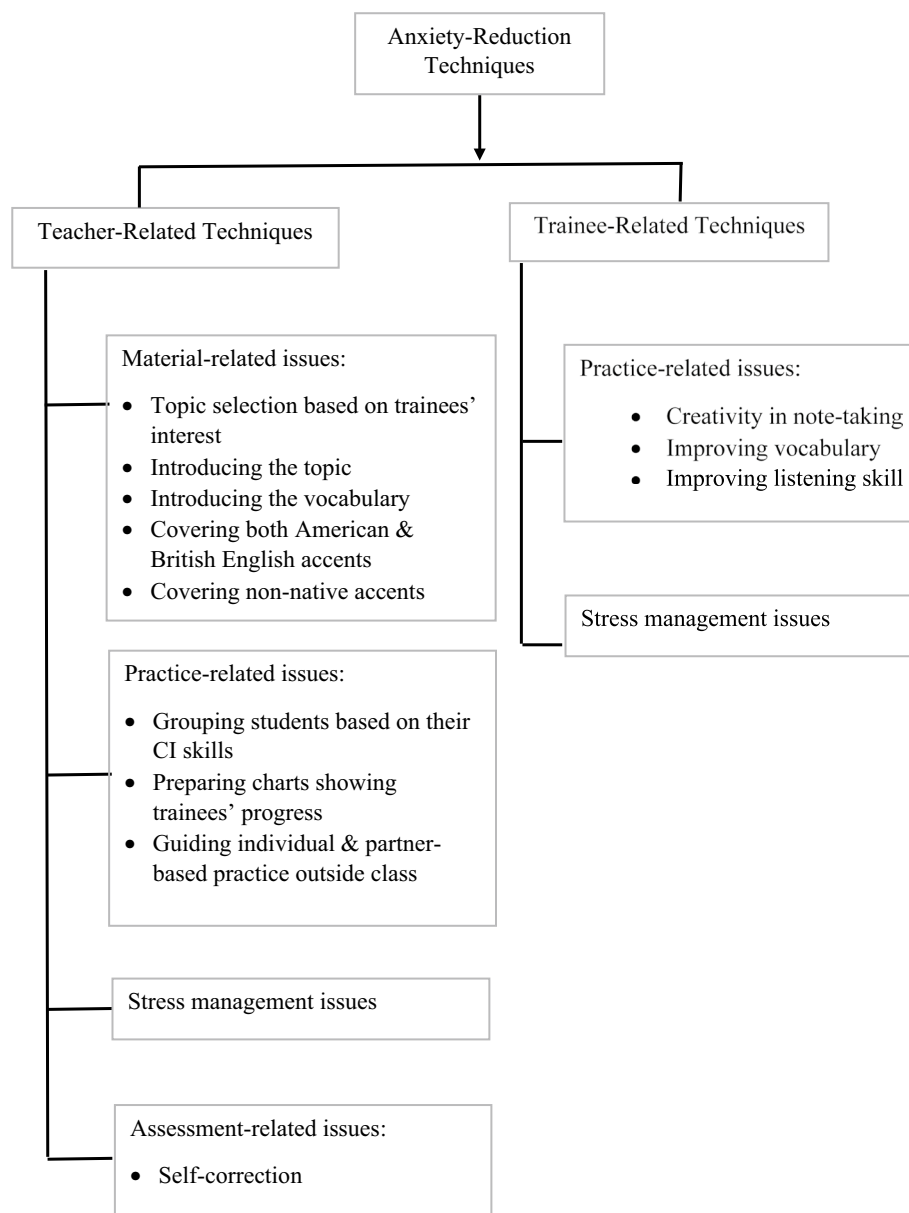
fears of making a fool of oneself and being laughed at. Some of the participants indicated that they have an unhealthy preoccupation with the possibility of failing and receiving unfavorable feedback from their fellow students. The anxiety caused by the worry that one may be embarrassed owing to poor interpretation skills is very high. This is significant in light of the anxiety-provoking components presented in Horwitz et al.'s (1986). They claim that fear of negative evaluation is one of the three factors of anxiety in foreign language classrooms.

Output-related factors include (a) interpreting anxiety and (b) delivery anxiety. The former can be the result of any problem in language-related issues (mentioned above). In contrast, the latter is characterized by shaking voices, trembling hands, erroneous beginnings, or stuttering/hesitation while interpreting, resulting in speech disfluencies in the output (Zhao et al., 2023). According to Zhao (2022), anxiety level affected the incidence of disfluencies in general. Specifically, stressed interpreters tended to use more fillers, such as *er* and *um*, and more word and sentence repetitions. In a similar vein, Cho and Roger (2010) emphasized that student interpreters may suffer significant levels of anxiety when delivering the target language, resulting in speech disfluencies. Recognizing the importance of speech fluency in CI, Setton and Dawant (2016, p. 115) highlight the significance of voice training to ensure “vocal quality and resonance; improve projection, diction and breathing (also for stress control); and eliminate verbal tics.”

Finally, teacher-related issues were among the least influential anxiety causes in CI classes. It includes two sub-factors, namely, (a) testing and scoring and (b) teacher's behavior.

The second research question addressed the possible solutions to reduce anxiety in CI classes. Careful examination of the data resulted in the identification of teacher-related and trainee-related anxiety-reduction strategies. Each category includes different sub-classes (see Fig. 2).

Interpreter trainees believe that a teacher can guide and monitor students' CI performance both inside and outside the class. The first subcategory of teacher-related concerns is material selection (Ferdowsi et al., 2023). The job of the teacher in alleviating stress in CI classes begins with the consideration of students' interest in topic selection. The participants asserted “interpreting is an arduous endeavor in nature. However, CI issues multiply when our professor asks us to interpret a topic we are not interested in. This issue can be readily resolved by determining students' interests prior to topic selection.” Moreover, nearly all of the students focused on the necessity of introducing context and terminology before the act of interpreting. They claimed that when the subject matter is familiar, their output is of higher quality and greater fluency. This notion is confirmed by Sweller (1994, p. 298) who stated that due to familiarity with the topic “the need to devote attention to the required process is reduced. Gradually, they become more automated, freeing cognitive resources for other activities. ... Without automation, performance is slow, clumsy and prone to error.” Additionally, trainees believed that during the course both American and British accent materials should be practiced. Furthermore, non-native accented material should also be included in CI training content. Setton and Dawrant (2016, p. 72) address the same issue and focus on the necessity of “exposure to differently accented varieties of the languages.”



**Fig. 2** Anxiety-reduction techniques in the Iranian CI classroom

The second subcategory of teacher-related concerns was practice-related issues, which comprises three subcategories. First, trainees proposed grouping students based on their CI skills, since they believed that working in homogenous groups would minimize their stress levels. The participants also believed that developing charts illustrating trainees' progress throughout the semester would be beneficial for both trainers and trainees. Finally, students emphasized the necessity to regularly practice CI skills in groups outside class under the supervision and direction of teachers. Setton and Dawrant (2016, p. 66) consider the ability to "to devote long hours outside class to group and individual practice as well as to language and knowledge enhancement" as a characteristic of ideal interpreting students. They continue stating that "working together in pairs or groups

outside class is vital to getting enough practice—but to make this work, some fairly precise guidelines are necessary to ensure that each session is useful and stimulating instead of frustrating or demoralising.” (Setton & Dawrant, 2016, p. 176).

The last kind of teacher-related factors concerns assessment issues. The participants focused on the effectiveness of self-correction. They claimed “the immediate feedback we receive from the teacher is somewhat disappointing. Self-evaluation, on the other hand, allows us to assess our performance in order to identify delivery or meaning transfer problems. To achieve this aim, our performance can be tape-recorded. After the end of each CI activity, we can look back to the recording and our notes. The instructor can then provide additional explanation for the errors.” Setton and Dawrant (2016) emphasize the need of self-correction, which can be facilitated by the instructor’s probing questions. In other words, the process of evaluation starts with the trainee itself “the instructor asks leading questions, in the usual way, to help the student self-correct any major problems” (p.149). Finally, the instructors can offer “more detailed feedback—possibly inviting other students to flag errors, contradictions, etc.—and hint at problems to elicit self-correction by the interpreter.” (p. 181).

Developing stress-management skills was the last type of teacher-related approaches to minimize stress. Participants suggested that stress management instruction should be integrated into CI courses. They sensed an urgent need for learning on what stress is, how to avoid it, and what to do if it occurs while consecutive interpreting. Literature review demonstrates that the capacity to deal with anxiety is a crucial talent for the selection of future interpreters (see Brisau et al., 1994; Gómez et al., 2007; Moser-Mercer, 2008; Riccardi et al., 1998). For example, Longley (1989, p. 106), regards the ability to operate under stress for an extended period as “one of the basic prerequisites of the profession” (Seleskovitch, 1978, p. 45). One participant noted, “I initially experienced a great deal of anxiety while doing CI, but as time passed, I learned how to control it. I could even transform it into a form of joyful stress. Then, interpreting resembled riding a roller coaster. I was nevertheless terrified. However, the horror was pleasurable.” According to Detz (2014, p. 99) “nervousness is simply energy. If you channel that energy, you can turn it into a positive force. You can make it work for you. You can use the extra energy to your advantage.” Similarly, Brisau et al., (1994, p. 91) commented on the role of positive stress in interpreting:

*To the interpreter the distinction between debilitating and facilitating anxiety will be of the utmost importance, as he will have to deal with the butterflies that will undoubtedly hover inside him at any moment. Awareness of such feelings and of the important potential of the “positive frustration” they may give rise to will be an element of training.*

Considering the trainee-related solutions to reduce anxiety, the participants stated that the best way to reduce stress was self- and group-practicing to enhance note-taking skill, vocabulary knowledge and listening proficiency. They believed that the amount of time dedicated to consecutive interpreting at universities in Iran was insufficient to develop various skills required in CI. It needs to be mentioned that the undergraduate translation programs last 8 semesters over a four-year period. Consecutive Interpreting is offered as a two-credit course which is hold 2 h a week for 16 weeks. Therefore, self- and



group-practice outside class is essential for establishing the skills taught in class. In addition, trainee interpreters emphasized the significance of stress management ability.

## Conclusion

This study was an attempt to identify anxiety-inducing factors that interpreter trainees encounter during consecutive interpreting. The study also steps beyond to remedy the anxiety problems, as well as the solutions that the study has revealed that Iranian interpreter trainees perceive anxiety as a significant challenge that hinders their performance in CI courses. The study has identified six primary sources of anxiety in CI courses, including individual-related factors, input-related factors, note-taking-related factors, environmental-related factors, output-related factors, and teacher-related factors. Among these factors, individual-related issues were found to be the most significant drivers of anxiety for Iranian interpreter trainees. Moreover, the study has identified several teacher-related and trainee-related strategies that can help reduce anxiety in CI courses effectively. These strategies include material selection, developing charts to illustrate students' progress, regular practice in groups outside the class, self-correction, and stress management instruction. In conclusion, this study highlights the need for teachers to pay attention to the personal characteristics of interpreter trainees and provide specific strategies to help them manage and reduce anxiety. Additionally, offering trainee-centered activities such as self- and group-practice outside the class and integrating stress-management training into the curriculum can be effective in addressing the issue of anxiety in CI courses. Overall, the findings of this study could provide valuable insights for improving the quality of CI training programs in Iran and other similar contexts.

There are some major implications of the study. First, the study's findings could help curriculum designers develop more effective CI training programs by incorporating stress management, note-taking training, and exposure to non-native accents guidance into the curriculum. Moreover, the study's findings could help teachers and trainers recognize the sources of students' anxiety and stress and adjust their instructional practice to minimize anxiety in CI classes. Additionally, using progress charts to monitor students' progress, offering self-correction sessions, and facilitating group practice outside class could be an effective way of reducing anxiety in CI classes. The implications of this study extend beyond the immediate context of CI classrooms and can be valuable for various stakeholders involved in language education. In addition to curriculum designers, the findings of this study have implications for teacher trainers, students, and policy makers.

Certainly! Here's the expanded implications section in one unified paragraph:

The implications of this study extend beyond the immediate context of CI classrooms and can be valuable for various stakeholders involved in language education. In addition to curriculum designers, the findings of this study have implications for teacher trainers, students, and policy makers. Teacher trainers can be informed about the sources and impact of anxiety in CI classrooms, allowing them to incorporate stress management techniques, note-taking training, and guidance on exposure to non-native accents into teacher training programs. This equips future teachers with strategies to effectively manage and address student anxiety. Students, upon

understanding the factors contributing to their anxiety, can work towards developing coping mechanisms and utilizing available resources to manage anxiety levels. Strategies such as progress charts for monitoring language learning progress, self-correction sessions, and opportunities for group practice outside of class can enhance students' confidence, reduce anxiety, and promote a positive learning experience. Policy makers, recognizing the significance of anxiety in CI classrooms, can incorporate the study's findings into language education policies and standards. This could involve advocating for the integration of stress management programs, note-taking training, and resources for exposure to non-native accents within curriculum guidelines. Policy makers can also encourage the implementation of effective assessment practices that focus on progress monitoring and promote a low-stakes learning environment. By involving teacher trainers, students, and policy makers, a comprehensive approach towards addressing anxiety in CI classrooms can be achieved, resulting in more supportive, effective, and inclusive language learning environments.

This finding of the study should be interpreted in the light of the limitations of the study. First, the study used a relatively small sample size of interpreter trainees, so the generalizability of the findings to a larger population of Iranian CI trainees may be limited. Second, since the participants were volunteers, they may have had a pre-existing interest in the topic of anxiety in CI courses, which could have influenced the study's results. Fourth, the study used only one method of data collection, namely interviews. This may have limited the depth and breadth of the study's findings. Fifth, the study used a cross-sectional design, which doesn't account for the changes that might occur over time. A longitudinal study would be more appropriate in identifying changes in anxiety among CI students. Sixth, the findings of this study were limited to a specific cultural context, and generalization of those findings to other cultures or countries should be made with caution. Finally, due to the limited geographic coverage and focus on Iran, the generalizability of the study's findings to other contexts or countries may be limited. Future research should address these limitations and explore potential areas for further investigation. Prospective studies may examine trainees' anxiety during CI training, taking into account the aforementioned limitations. Some suggestions for further research include conducting investigations with larger sample sizes of interpreter trainees or including other countries to enhance the generalizability of the findings; employing random participant selection methods to mitigate potential bias; utilizing multiple data collection methods such as surveys or observation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue; implementing longitudinal designs to examine changes in anxiety among CI students over time; conducting comparative studies to investigate cross-cultural differences in anxiety among interpreter trainees; and replicating similar studies in other regions or countries to compare the results with the findings from the Iranian study. By addressing these limitations and exploring these avenues, future research can contribute to a more robust understanding of anxiety in CI classrooms and its implications for interpreter training.

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#### **Author contributions**

Both authors contributed to the design of the study, data collection, analysis and interpretation of the results, and drafting of the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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### Availability of data and materials

The datasets analyzed during the current study are available. Additional data and materials are available upon request from the first author.

### Declarations

#### Ethics approval and consent to participate

This research study was conducted in accordance with the APA ethical guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all human participants included in the study. A pre-requisite formal permission was sought from the participants.

#### Consent for publication

Appropriate consent for publication was sought.

#### Competing interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest. All co-authors have seen and agree with the contents of the manuscript and there is no financial interest to report.

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