D O I : 10.18860 /ijazarabi.V9i4.42548
I S S N (p r i n t) : 2 6 2 0 - 5 9 1 2 | I S S N (o n l i n e) : 2 6 2 0 - 5 9 4 7
e j o u r n a l . u i n - m a l a n g . a c . i d / i n d e x . p h p / i j a z a r a b i / i n d e x

When Weekly Vocabulary Assessment Becomes Effective: Repeated Low Performance, Peer Correction, and Learner Psychology Among Arab Students Reading English as a Foreign Language in Saudi Arabia

Received 2025-12-16
Accepted 2026-09-19
Published 2026-10-27

Ali S. Alghonaim
Department of English Language and Literature, College of Languages and Humanities, Qassim Univerrsity**,** Saudi Arabia
agniem@qu.edu.sa

Abstract

This study examined the psychological consequences of repeated low performance in weekly vocabulary dictation quizzes among Saudi EFL students enrolled in a university reading course at Qassim University. The study was based on the natural context of a classroom involving 52 undergraduate Saudi EFL students across a 14-week semester. Students completed 10 vocabulary dictation quizzes. Each quiz included 30-36 words from the reading passages. Students listened to the words, wrote them down, exchanged papers, started peer correction, marked the scores, and returned the papers back to their classmates. This recurring practice created a social and evaluative setting, in which lower-performing students might not only experience repeated low achievement but also directly observed the stronger performance of their peers. The study used self-efficacy theory and Control-Value Theory to investigate whether repeated low achievement reduced students' motivation, lowered self-efficacy, increased anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and embarrassment. The study also examined why some low scorers appeared discouraged whereas others remained resilient or even motivated by peer comparison. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was adopted, combining quiz-score records, a questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. The results showed that low performance was widespread, with 31 students (59%) classified as low scorers. Questionnaire findings indicated low self-efficacy (M = 2.41) and motivation (M = 2.58), alongside high anxiety (M = 3.89), fear of negative evaluation (M = 3.76), and embarrassment (M = 3.81). Negative peer-comparison perceptions also predicted lower motivation and self-efficacy, suggesting that peer correction may function not only as a cognitive tool for lexical recall but also as an affective classroom experience with differentiated consequences. The study aimed to contribute to the literature on learner psychology and peer-mediated classroom assessment in Saudi EFL higher education.

Keywords: Vocabulary Dictation; Peer Correction; Assessment; Low Achievement; Self-Efficacy; Foreign Language Anxiety; Fear Of Negative Evaluation; Saudi EFL; Reading Course

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary knowledge strongly supports reading comprehension, text processing, and academic language development. Therefore, it is a backbone component of second and foreign language learning (Nation, 2013; Qian, 2002). Pre-reading activities prepare students before they engage with the reading text in EFL classrooms. Vocabulary specifically is reinforced through different kinds of pre-reading tasks, such as short quizzes that may increase students' pedagogical accountability. However, besides assessing learning, classroom assessment can also shape how

Copyright © 2026, This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

learners feel about themselves, their abilities, and their place in relation to peers. In language education, affective variables such as anxiety and self-efficacy have repeatedly been shown to influence learner performance, persistence, and engagement (Graham, 2022; Horwitz et al., 1986; Zhou et al., 2023). The present study arose from a recurring instructional practices ESL\EFL undergraduate reading courses, where these courses apply different techniques to promote vocabulary learning. Using spelling dictation is one major activity in vocabulary classes. ESL\ EFL teachers use various ways to test students' vocabulary learning. Some teachers use tests and quizzes because they are easy to measure students' achievement, and research on test-enhanced learning suggests that repeated retrieval practice can strengthen long-term retention (Karpicke & Roediger, 2008; Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). This study examines the impact of vocabulary quizzes and peer correction on students beliefs and psychological consequences, especially important when students consistently may score low grades. Learners' confidence as well as their willingness to continue may be gradually and negatively affected by low performance. Therefore, they may experience a high level of anxiety (Woodrow, (2006). Some students may be demotivated when they correct the papers of high-scoring classmates and directly observe their performance gap. Others, on the other hand, may interpret the same experience as motivating or manageable. Graham (2022) and Pekrun (2006) suggest that continuous failure cannot be seen only as an outcome variable, which is more like perceived that way, but also should be given a psychological dimension shaped by beliefs, emotions, and classroom interactions (Maie et al., 2025).

The Saudi EFL context further strengthens the value of this study. Recent research on Saudi students' experiences with peer assessment indicates that although learners may appreciate the instructional value of peer involvement, they may also question consistency and accuracy of expert teachers' feedback, and may still prefer teacher validation (Horwitz et al., 1986; Pekrun, 2006; Zhou et al., 2023). This suggests that peer correction may have a social dimension as students' scores are visible and directly treated by classmates. Yet research appears limited on how repeated low-scoring students in Saudi EFL reading classes psychologically respond to recurrent vocabulary quizzes and public peer correction, particularly when they encounter the work of stronger students during the marking process (Al-khresheh et al., 2025).

The present study investigates the affective and motivational consequences of repeated low performance in weekly vocabulary dictation quizzes, with special attention to peer correction and peer-comparison effects. Rather than, for example, investigating if low language proficiency correlates with scoring poorly in vocabulary dictation quizzes, the study seeks to examine how low-scorer students psychologically experience themselves, especially if low scoring becomes repeated behaviour, why some learners may become discouraged while others may remain stable or motivated, and what this implies for classroom assessment in Saudi EFL higher education.

Although assessment in language classrooms serves to measure achievement, it also shapes students' learning beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes (Brown & Hudson, 1998). Peer assessment research in EFL has shown that assessment practices can influence reading motivation, vocabulary learning, and learner engagement (Schmitt, 2008), which means that classroom quizzes may have both cognitive and affective consequences. In a classroom where vocabulary dictation recurs across the semester, the assessment routine itself may become part of students' emotional experience of the course rather than a neutral tool for checking performance (Ritonga et al., 2022).

Copyright © 2026, This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

In the context of the present study, the quiz is closely tied to the reading passages because the dictated words are used directly in the passages that students are about to read. This arrangement likely raises the value of the quiz in students' minds: success matters because it is linked to the immediate course syllabus, classroom participation and course progress. At the same time, the repetitive nature of the activity means that success and failure are not isolated events. Students who repeatedly obtain low scores may gradually internalize these outcomes, which could affect later preparation, participation, and emotional engagement with the course (Pekrun, 2006).

Self-efficacy, in general, is associated with individuals' beliefs about themselves and about their ability to perform tasks successfully. Self-efficacy, on the other hand, in language learning means that learners use cognitive and metacognitive strategies, maintain persistence, and maintain higher achievement. Graham (2022) notes that learners with stronger self-efficacy tend to spend more time trying to proceed, attribute outcomes more to effort and strategy, and cope better with difficulty. Zhou et al. (2023) conducted a meta-analysis. They found a strong negative relationship between foreign language anxiety and foreign language self-efficacy, indicating that confidence and anxiety are tightly connected in language-learning settings (Bandura, 1997). These findings of previous studies are highly relevant to the focus of this study, weekly dictation quizzes. Students with repeated low performance in dictation quizzes may begin to question their ability to master vocabulary items, especially if they repeat the same routine across many weeks. As time passes and with repeated low performance, it may go beyond becoming occasional. According to Schunk and Pajares (2009), this is when it may affect not only achievement but also beliefs about future competence. That risk may increase when low-scoring students are exposed to higher-scoring peers' papers during correction, because the comparison makes the performance gap concrete and visible rather than abstract (Graham, 2022; Zhou et al., 2023).

Foreign language anxiety has long been recognized as a distinct construct in language learning (Woodrow, 2006). Horwitz et al. (1986) argued that language classrooms can produce a specific form of anxiety associated with communication demands, classroom performance, and peer evaluative pressure. In second-language learning, fear of negative evaluation is closely tied to classroom discomfort and evaluative stress (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). The concern is not emotionally simple when a student may whisper to himself: "I got a low score," but "someone else saw that I got a low score" or "I had to correct the work of someone who clearly outperformed me." Therefore, feelings of embarrassment, self-consciousness, and desire for avoidance may appear due to these psychological and social dimensions, particularly for students who repeatedly underperform in class tasks (Horwitz et al., 1986; Alhourani, 2025; Alshammari, 2025**).**

Control-Value Theory successfully accounts for why the same classroom event may affect learners differently. According to Pekrun (2006), achievement emotions are shaped by two central appraisals: perceived control and perceived value. Learners who care about success but feel that a negative outcome is inevitable are likely to experience negative emotions such as anxiety, shame, despair, or embarrassment. Here, control is perceived negatively. According to Pekrun, those students usually have limited control over their outcome. Conversely, positive emotions, such as hope will be developed if they believe improvement is possible. In this case, control is positively perceived (Artino et al., 2012).

When this theoretical ground is applied to weekly dictation quizzes, this means repeated low scorers are not necessarily demotivated. It depends on how students perceive the experience.

Copyright © 2026, This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

D O I : 10.18860 /ijazarabi.V9i4.42548
I S S N (p r i n t) : 2 6 2 0 - 5 9 1 2 | I S S N (o n l i n e) : 2 6 2 0 - 5 9 4 7
e j o u r n a l . u i n - m a l a n g . a c . i d / i n d e x . p h p / i j a z a r a b i / i n d e x

Some may view poor results as temporary and controllable through extra effort and better preparation. Others may interpret repeated low scores as evidence that improvement is unlikely. The peer-correction stage may intensify students' views because either appraisal is associated with a visible comparison from classmates. Thus, the same experience of correcting a strong classmate's paper may be motivating for one learner and discouraging for another, depending on how that learner interprets control, ability, and future possibility (Pekrun, 2006).

Peer assessment research generally shows that peer involvement can support learning, reflection, and engagement (Topping, 1998). Ritonga et al. (2022) reported that peer assessment can positively affect reading comprehension, reading motivation, and vocabulary learning among EFL learners. Similarly, recent research on peer feedback, in particular, in second-language learning highlights its potential to draw learners' attention to language form and deepen engagement with performance criteria (Sato, 2021; Nawas, 2020; Laufer, & Hulstijn, 2001). Nonetheless, peer-assessment may also create emotional consequences such as pressure and hesitation (Falchikov, 2005; Panadero, 2016). In Saudi EFL higher education, Al-khresheh et al. (2025) found that the degree of involvement and students' continued preference for traditional correction by the teacher influence students' attitudes towards peer-assessment. This suggests that peer correction may not always be experienced as comfortable or fully trusted. In a classroom setting, the peer-correction process includes a direct comparison element because a low-scoring student may physically correct the paper of a high-scoring classmate. That situation can reasonably be interpreted as a form of social comparison (Festinger, 1954). Social comparison feedback has been shown in educational research to help some learners identify gaps and improve self-efficacy while potentially pressuring others depending on how they process the comparison (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Al-khresheh et al., 2025; Lu et al., 2024).

This research is grounded on the hypothesis that not all low scorers produce similar reactions. Some feel discouraged, embarrassed, and unwilling to study vocabulary. Others may remain relatively unaffected or even become more motivated after seeing that achievement is possible. This distinction is theoretically plausible because self-efficacy and control appraisals shape how setbacks are interpreted. It is also empirically consistent with recent research showing that confidence, anxiety, and resilience-like constructs such as academic buoyancy are associated with how EFL learners respond to ordinary academic difficulties (Gao et al., 2025; Lin & Zhang, 2025).

Although the literature on second-language learning provides strong support for studying self-efficacy, anxiety, achievement emotions, and peer assessment, a clear gap remains. Existing studies have rarely focused on the psychological impact of repeated low performance in weekly vocabulary dictation quizzes within a real university undergraduate reading course. The gap is even more specific in the Saudi EFL context, where peer correction may interact with social sensitivity and teacher-centered expectations. Moreover, the distinction between low scorers themselves, who may become either demotivated, resistant, or even motivated through peer comparison appears underexplored. The present study addresses that gap by examining repeated classroom underperformance not only as an academic outcome but as a recurring affective event (Al-khresheh et al., 2025; Graham, 2022; Pekrun, 2006).

Vocabulary dictation quizzes are typical practices in second and foreign language classrooms. ESL/EFL teachers routinely use them to reinforce vocabulary learning. However, their

Copyright © 2026, This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

recurring use may cause unintended psychological effects for lower-performing students. In the present Saudi EFL undergraduate reading course, students not only completed 10 vocabulary dictation and received marks, but also participated in mutual peer correction, which means that lower-scoring learners may directly encounter the work of stronger classmates (Homayouni, 2022). This can create a classroom environment in which assessment becomes simultaneously cognitive, emotional, and social. Despite the pedagogical relevance of this routine, limited research appears to have examined how repeated low scorers psychologically experience such quizzes, how peer comparisons shape their reactions, and why some students are discouraged while others are not. (Al-khresheh et al., 2025; Horwitz et al., 1986; Pekrun, 2006).

This research answer how did repeated low performance in weekly vocabulary dictation quizzes relate to Saudi EFL students' motivation, vocabulary self-efficacy, anxiety, fear of negative assessment, and embarrassment? How did repeated low scorers interpret the experience of correcting higher-scoring classmates? Why did some repeated low scorers have different psychological responses: demotivated, unaffected, or motivated? How did peer correction function as a social-comparison experience in the weekly dictation-quiz context?

METHOD

This study used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In the first phase, quantitative data from quiz records and a questionnaire are employed to identify repeated low scorers and examine relationships between performance and psychological variables. In the second phase, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the distinct patterns of the psychological variables found in the quantitative stage. This design is appropriate because it combined measurable score-based trends with students' own interpretations of their emotional and motivational experiences, which is particularly important when studying classroom assessment as both a performance-based and affective event (Ritonga et al., 2022)

The participants were 52 Saudi undergraduate EFL students enrolled in a reading course at a Saudi university. They constituted an intact class rather than a randomly selected sample. The study was conducted over a 14-week semester, during which the students completed 10 weekly dictation quizzes based on selected major words from the reading passages of the course. The words are taken from the passages so that students study these words in context. Because the study addresses students' emotional experiences and uses classroom performance data, ethical precautions were essential here. Therefore, students were informed that their participation was voluntary, and their anonymity remained confidential. They were also explicitly informed that their participation in the research did not affect their grades.

This study will likely contribute to the ESL/EFL literature in three areas: vocabulary assessment, learner psychology, and Saudi EFL pedagogy. It attempts to investigate whether repeated dictation quizzes may affect students emotionally and motivationally and not only their learning progress. It also examines how frequent low achievement relates to self-efficacy, anxiety, and classroom pressure, while highlighting peer correction as an experience that can either discourage or motivate learners (Al-khresheh et al., 2025; Graham, 2022; Ritonga et al., 2022).

The dictated vocabulary items were drawn directly from the reading passages assigned in the course syllabus. The teacher of the course sent the words on Blackboard two or three days before each quiz. Each reading passage was preceded by the relevant dictation quiz. After

Copyright © 2026, This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

completing the quiz, students exchanged papers and started peer correction, marking papers, writing the score, and returning the papers to the corresponding students. This classroom procedure was central to the research because it created both repeated assessment and immediate peer-comparison conditions.

At the end of the semester, the researcher compiled and recorded students' scores from all 10 weekly vocabulary dictation quizzes. This ensured creating a longitudinal profile for their performance. The researcher used three groups to classify the performance of the students based on their scores. These groups include repeated low performance, mid performance, and high performance. A mean score across 10 quizzes was used to measure the performance.

A post-semester questionnaire was administered to examine students' psychological reactions to repeated vocabulary assessment. The instrument was adapted from established, validated scales in the literature to ensure both theoretical grounding and contextual relevance to the Saudi EFL students. In particular, items were drawn from self-efficacy measures developed by Albert Bandura, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) proposed by Elaine K. Horwitz et al. (1986), and achievement emotion constructs informed by Reinhard Pekrun's Control-Value Theory. With reference to the highly specific nature of the study context—weekly vocabulary dictation quizzes in an EFL reading course followed by peer correction—items were carefully adapted and reworded to reflect this classroom practice. For example, general anxiety or self-efficacy items were contextualized to refer explicitly to vocabulary quizzes, peer marking, and repeated performance outcomes. This instrumental procedure aligns with previous research in applied linguistics. Graham, (2022) and Horwitz et al., (1986) support the adaptation of validated instruments to task-specific contexts. The questionnaire was designed to measure six psychological variables relevant to the aim of the present study:

1. vocabulary self-efficacy
2. motivation related to quizzes
3. quiz-related anxiety
4. fear of negative evaluation
5. peer correction-related embarrassment
6. perceived effects of correcting high-scorers

Participants responded to each statement on a five-point scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The researcher conducted a pilot study during the first week of the semester in order to ensure clarity, contextual appropriateness, and reliability. The pilot study also functioned to ensure that the instrument had a balance between its validity (use of pre-existing instruments) and context-specific nature (modification). The researcher used Cronbach's alpha in order to examine internal consistency. Therefore and based on the pilot study, minor revisions would be made.

After quantitative analysis, the researcher selected a purposive sample of students for the interviews from repeated low-scoring learners. To investigate students' variation, interviews included four groups:

1. low scorers reporting discouragement,
2. low scorers reporting little emotional impact,
3. low scorers reporting increased motivation

The interview questions addressed five areas:

Copyright © 2026, This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

1. students' feelings before and after quizzes
2. students' feelings about high scorers' papers
3. students' responses to their low scores
4. students' reasons for resilience or discouragement
5. students' perceptions of embarrassment or motivation

This study went through three stages, which added a significant contribution to the research methodology due to its longitudinal nature. First, scores were compiled from the 10 weekly dictation quizzes. Second, the questionnaire was administered near the end of the semester and after students had completed the full assessment cycle. Third, interviews were conducted with selected students based on score patterns (repeated low scores and non-repeated low scores) and questionnaire responses. The qualitative aspect of this research provided a deeper explanation of the quantitative findings.

Quantitative analysis included descriptive statistics, reliability analysis for questionnaire scales, correlations, and one-way ANOVA for group comparisons. Repeated low scorers were compared with mid and high scorers on motivation, self-efficacy, anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and embarrassment. Regression analysis was also applied to examine whether peer-comparison perceptions predicted motivational or emotional outcomes. The interview data will be analyzed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Participants' responses will be reviewed and coded to identify recurring patterns and themes related to their experiences, motivation, challenges, and responses to vocabulary learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the 10 vocabulary dictation quizzes, the performance was variant and inconsistent among the 52 Saudi EFL students. The mean score of the 10 vocabulary dictation quizzes showed that 9 students (17%) were falling in the high scorer group, 12 students (24%) were categorized below mid scorers, and 31 students (59%) scored very low scores. This indicated that there was a larger number of students who fell into the category of low scores compared to the other two categories. However, the category of high scorers had the least number of students. The distribution of students across the three performance categories is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Overall Performance Distribution Across Ten Vocabulary Dictation Quizzes

Performance category	Number of students	Percentage
High scorers	9	17%
Mid scorers	12	24%
Low scorers	31	59%
Total	52	100%

As shown in Table 1, the low-performing students comprised the biggest group, making 31 students (59%). This group included some students gaining very low marks in a number of quizzes. These scores ranged from 0, 4, 5, and 7 out of 25 marks. Further analysis of this group showed that there was variance in their performance. Some low performance students had marks far lower than the average low scores in several quizzes.

The quiz results showed different patterns among the low performance group across the ten weekly vocabulary dictation quizzes. Based on the mean scores across the ten quizzes, 31 students among the 52 recorded low scorers. The low performance was not limited to a single quiz or a small number of students, but appeared repeatedly across the assessment cycle. In other words,

Copyright © 2026, This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

D O I : 10.18860 /ijazarabi.V9i4.42548
I S S N (p r i n t) : 2 6 2 0 - 5 9 1 2 | I S S N (o n l i n e) : 2 6 2 0 - 5 9 4 7
e j o u r n a l . u i n - m a l a n g . a c . i d / i n d e x . p h p / i j a z a r a b i / i n d e x

the same students kept obtaining very low marks in a number of quizzes. Furthermore, the scoring records indicated that some students performed poorly in more than one quiz, earning very poor grades like 0, 4, 5, and 7 out of 25. Therefore, poor academic performance was evident in several vocabulary quizzes throughout the semester. This section reports only the score-based evidence of repeated underperformance. The possible psychological effects of this pattern, such as embarrassment, anxiety, reduced confidence, or peer-comparison pressure, are addressed later in the questionnaire and interview results sections.

After each vocabulary dictation quiz, students used to exchange papers for peer correction. During this routine procedure, students corrected their classmates' spellings, marked the scores, and returned the papers to their owners. This procedure was repeated across 10 weeks. Because the correction process was conducted by classmates, students' quiz papers and scores were seen by peers during the marking stage. Therefore, the quiz results were not traditionally checked only by the teacher, but were also visible to the peers during within the peer-correction process. This classroom procedure is important to report because it formed the assessment context in which the quiz-score results were collected. The psychological responses related to peer correction and score visibility are reported later in the questionnaire and interview results sections.

Overall, the results of the ten vocabulary dictation quizzes showed uneven distribution of performance scores. 31 students (59%) were categorized as low scorers,12 students (24%) were in the mid-scoring group, and 9 students (17%) fell into the high-scoring group. Similar inconsistency was evident in the low-scoring group. Some students obtained very low marks, such as repeated zeros in some quizzes. These scenarios of variant performance were both common and severe for some students.

Table 2. The Scales Using Cronbach's Alpha in SPSS

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Vocabulary Self-Efficacy	.88
Motivation	.84
Anxiety	.90
Fear of Negative Evaluation	.87
embarrassment	.86
Peer Comparison Perception	.82

These results indicated that the instrument was reliable for measuring students' psychological responses.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics Showed A Clear Psychological Pattern Among Students

Variable	Mean	SD
Self-Efficacy	2.41	.68
Motivation	2.58	.71
Anxiety	3.89	.74
Fear of Negative Evaluation	3.76	.69
embarrassment	3.81	.72

Table 4. Group Differences by Performance (ANOVA)

Variable	Low	Mid	High
Self-Efficacy	2.12	2.68	3.41
Motivation	2.21	2.79	3.52
Anxiety	4.21	3.74	2.98
Fear Eval.	4.05	3.61	2.87
embarrassment	4.18	3.52	2.76

Copyright © 2026, This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

A one-way was used to compare psychological variables across performance groups. ANOVA results showed statistically significant differences across all variables ($p < .001$). Low scorers reported:

1. Lowest confidence with lowest motivation
2. Highest anxiety with highest embarrassment

Table 5. Correlation Analysis

Variable	Correlation with Quiz Scores
Self-Efficacy	+.62
Motivation	+.58
Anxiety	−.54
Fear of Negative Evaluation	−.49
Embarrassment	−.57

Pearson correlations showed strong relationships between quiz performance and psychological variables: ($p < .01$). This indicated that better performance was associated with more positive psychological conditions, while lower performance was associated with a higher emotional challenge.

Regression results showed that negative peer-comparison perceptions significantly predicted:

1. Lower motivation ($R^2 = .42$, $\beta = -.65$, $p < .001$)
2. Lower self-efficacy ($R^2 = .39$, $\beta = -.62$, $p < .001$)

This revealed that peer correction had a significant psychological impact on students' responses.
The overall results of the questionnaire showed that:

1. Low performance was pervasive and serious
2. Psychological responses closely related to performance patterns
3. Peer correction sharpened the experience by making performance socially visible

To explore how low scorers psychologically experienced peer correction and repeated low performance, the researcher used a purposive semi-structured interview approach. This stage took place after collecting quantitative data. The interview data were analyzed through themes that emerged from the students' responses.

Table 6. Overview of themes

Theme	Description
1. Discouragement and emotional distress	Strong negative emotional reactions to repeated low scores
2. Anxiety and anticipation of failure	Fear and stress before each quiz
3. Social comparison and embarrassment	Emotional impact of peer correction
4. Resilience and motivational response	Positive or neutral adaptation despite low scores

Discouragement and Emotional Distress

Several students whose marks in a number of quizzes were extremely low experienced discouragement and demotivation. Their responses showed reduced self-confidence and high indifference toward the weekly vocabulary spelling quizzes. The students' responses provided explicitly description about themselves regarding this concern. For example, one student said, “At the beginning, I tried to study, but after many low scores, I felt like it doesn’t matter.” Another student stated, “Every week I expect a bad result, so I stopped feeling motivated.” This theme was also consistent with the questionnaire results, where low scorers reported lower motivation and self-efficacy than mid- and high-scoring students.

Copyright © 2026, This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

Anxiety and Anticipation of Failure

Another obvious theme that emerged from the results of the interviews was the development of anxiety over time. Students viewed quizzes as moments of stress. They felt they were under pressure either during the quiz or before they took it. One student said: "Before the quiz, I was nervous because I will forget the words." Or as one said, " ... because I do not know the words." Another one stated, "When I study, I was nervous I will fail again." This frequent feeling of anxiety mirrored the findings in the quantitative data of this research, where anxiety represented one of the highest mean scores (M = 3.89). The interviews indicated likewise.

Social Comparison and Embarrassment (Peer Correction)

The interviews showed that two instances where students felt uncomfortable:

1. Having their papers corrected by other peers
2. Correcting papers of high-performing peers

To exemplify, one student stated: "When he answered my paper, I was embarrassed if I have many mistakes." Another example was "Sometimes I correct a student who gets very good marks, and I feel he is very far from me, I am not like him". These responses show that peer correction was associated with embarrassment and social comparison for some low-scoring students. This theme was consistent with the regression results, which showed that negative peer-comparison perceptions predicted lower motivation and lower self-efficacy.

Resilience and Motivational Response

Although peer comparison was negatively perceived by many low scorers in this study, not all low-scoring students reported negative reactions to peer comparisons. Some students positively described the experience of seeing high-scoring classmates as a source of motivation, hope, or as a way to learn from them. One participant said, "When I see good marks, I try to learn how they study and do like them." Another low scorer student stated, "I know I am weak, but I think I can improve if I work hard like my friends". These students conversely and positively reacted to peer comparison as:

1. Learning from the experience, not withdrawing
2. Manageable challenges, not final threats

Table 7. Distribution of Response Types

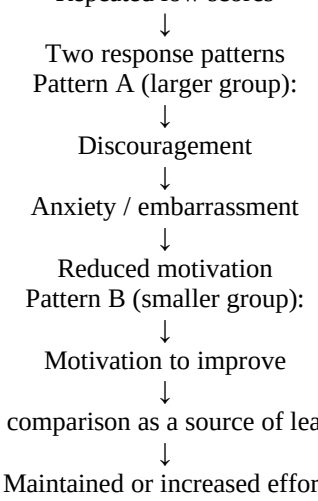
Response Type	Approx. Proportion
Discouraged / demotivated	~50%
Highly anxious	~25%
Emotionally neutral / indifferent	~10%
Motivated / resilient	~15%

Low-scoring student group represented the largest proportion of the students. These students fell in the discouraged or demotivated category. The number of students who were less anxious, less emotional, and less neutral was smaller.

To summarize the interview findings, students' responses to repeated low performance followed two general patterns. A larger group reported discouragement, anxiety, embarrassment, and reduced motivation. A smaller group reported motivation, efforts to improve, and positive attitudes towards peer comparison.

Copyright © 2026, This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

Figure 1. Summary of Student Response Patterns



This study investigated the psychological impact of repeated underperformance in weekly vocabulary dictation quizzes among Saudi EFL students. The quiz records showed that low performance was common across the class, while the questionnaire and interview findings showed that repeated low scoring was associated with lower self-efficacy, lower motivation, higher anxiety, embarrassment, and fear of negative evaluation. This suggests that repeated underperformance should not be viewed only as an academic result, but also as an experience that may gradually shape how students see their ability to improve. In this sense, repeated low scores may move students from seeing failure as a temporary outcome to seeing it as a reflection of limited ability. This interpretation is consistent with self-efficacy theory, which emphasizes the role of repeated success and failure in shaping learners' confidence and future effort (Graham, 2022; Bandura, 1997).

The severity of some low scores provided more elaboration to this interpretation. Some and the same students repeatedly obtained extremely very low marks, including zero scores in some quizzes. Although the score records alone cannot explain the exact reasons for these outcomes, such results suggest that some learners faced substantial difficulty in recalling or accurately writing the dictated vocabulary items. When this level of difficulty appeared repeatedly across the quiz cycle, it may have increased students' sense of failure and reduced their belief that improvement was possible. This helps explain why low scorers reported lower self-efficacy and motivation than mid- and high-scoring students.

The findings also reflect Control-Value Theory. According to Pekrun (2006), negative achievement emotions are more likely to appear when learners value success but perceive limited control over the outcome. In the present study, the quizzes were likely meaningful to students because they were connected to course content and repeated throughout the semester. However, students who repeatedly scored low may have felt that they had limited control over improving their performance. This combination of high task value and low perceived control may explain the higher levels of anxiety, embarrassment, and fear of negative evaluation reported by low scorers. Peer correction was another important factor in the psychological experience of the quizzes. The regression results showed that negative peer-comparison perceptions predicted lower motivation

Copyright © 2026, This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

and self-efficacy. This suggests that peer correction did not function only as a classroom marking technique. Because students exchanged papers, corrected classmates' answers, and saw scores during the marking process, the assessment became socially visible. For low-scoring students, this visibility may have intensified the emotional impact of underperformance, especially when their own weak performance was exposed to classmates or when they corrected the papers of higher-performing peers.

However, the students' responses to the interview questions showed that low scorers reported variant reactions to peer comparison. The most two obvious negative feelings that they had towards peer correction were discouraging and embarrassing. Others, on the other hand, attempted to take advantage of peer correction. They described it as a source of motivation or an opportunity benefit from this experience of learning from stronger classmates.This difference can also be explained through Control-Value Theory. Students who perceived improvement as possible seemed more likely to use peer comparison constructively, while those who perceived repeated failure as difficult to change were more likely to report discouragement or reduced motivation. Therefore, the impact of peer correction depended not only on the correction procedure itself, but also on how students interpreted their own control over future improvement.

Finally, the main and major research problem of this study: weekly vocabulary dictation quizzes may function as more than a tool for promoting vocabulary knowledge and assessing students' development. The overall findings were aligned with this assumption. When these tasks and low performance are repeated across the semester and combined with peer correction, they may become affective and social experiences that influence learners' confidence, motivation, anxiety, embarrassment, and classroom self-perception. This does not mean that vocabulary quizzes or peer correction are necessarily harmful. Rather, it suggests that their psychological effects depend on how they are implemented, how visible scores are to peers, and how much support low-performing students receive during the assessment cycle.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how repeated low performance in weekly vocabulary dictation quizzes affected Saudi EFL students psychologically, although these quizzes were intentionally and routinely assigned to promote vocabulary knowledge. Such a pedagogical activity is normal in EFL reading or vocabulary classes. Examining the psychological consequences of these quizzes on EFL students is significant to teachers. The findings of this study showed that low scores were a frequent occurrence and may have emotional consequences, especially because students' academic privacy was exposed by students comparing each other's papers through peer-correction. Therefore, weekly vocabulary quizzes should be designed carefully, as they affect not only vocabulary learning (Nation, 2013) but also students' confidence and motivation (Graham, 2022; Horwitz et al., 1986; Pekrun, 2006). The results indicated that the level of vocabulary dictation outcome determined the degree of the psychological impact on students. High-scoring students might have a positive view of such vocabulary assessment. It motivates and encourages them them to develop their vocabulary knowledge and pushes them to adhere to the course requirement and fulfill the course goals.

Several students who repeatedly scored low marks felt discouraged and demotivated. Their responses showed reduced self-confidence and high indifference toward the weekly vocabulary

Copyright © 2026, This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

spelling quizzes. The students' responses were explicitly clear about themselves regarding this concern. For example, one student said, “At the beginning, I tried to study, but after many low scores, I felt like it doesn’t matter.” Another student stated, “Every week I expect a bad result, so I stopped feeling motivated.” This theme was also consistent with the questionnaire results, where low scorers reported lower motivation and self-efficacy than mid- and high-scoring students.

ETHICAL APPROVAL/ الموافقة الأخلاقية

All participants received a comprehensive explanation regarding the research objectives and procedures, including their right to participate voluntarily. Participants were assured that participation was not mandatory and that they had the right to withdraw at any time during the study without negative consequences. To ensure the confidentiality of identities, all data obtained in this study underwent an anonymization process.

FUNDING STATEMENT/ بيان التمويل

This research received no external funding. لم يتلقَّ هذا البحث أي تمويل خارجي

CONFLICT OF INTEREST/ تضارب المصالح

The author declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

يقر المؤلف (أو المؤلفون) بعدم وجود أي تضارب في المصالح يتعلق بالبحث أو تأليف المقالة أو نشرها

REFERENCES/ المصادروالمراجع المصادروالمراجع

Al-khresheh, M. H., Ben Ali, R. A., Jillani, S. S., & Alenezi, M. F. (2025). Saudi students’ perspectives and self-efficacy in peer evaluation. Language Testing in Asia, 15, Article 353.

Alshammari, B. M. (2025). Foreign language anxiety among Saudi EFL students: A study on communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 15(9), 1527–1541.

Artino, A. R., Jr., Holmboe, E. S., & Durning, S. J. (2012). Control-value theory: Using achievement emotions to improve understanding of motivation, learning, and performance in medical education. Medical Teacher, 34(3), e148–e160..

Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. W. H. Freeman.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brown, J. D., & Hudson, T. (1998). The alternatives in language assessment. TESOL Quarterly, 32(4), 653–675. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587999

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). Designing and conducting mixed methods research (3rd ed.). SAGE.

Falchikov, N. (2005). Improving assessment through student involvement: Practical solutions for aiding learning in higher and further education. RoutledgeFalmer.

Copyright © 2026, This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. Human Relations, 7(2), 117–140. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202

Graham, S. (2022). Self-efficacy and language learning: What it is and what it isn't. Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 16(4), 354–363.

Homayouni, M. (2022). Peer assessment in group-oriented classroom contexts: on the effectiveness of peer assessment coupled with scaffolding and group work on speaking skills and vocabulary learning. Language Testing in Asia, 12(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-022-00211-3

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. The Modern Language Journal, 70(2), 125–132.

Karpicke, J. D., & Roediger, H. L., III. (2008). The critical importance of retrieval for learning. Science, 319(5865), 966–968. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1152408

Laufer, B., & Hulstijn, J. (2001). Incidental vocabulary acquisition in a second language: The construct of task-induced involvement. Applied Linguistics, 22(1), 1–26.

Lu, Y., Zhang, J., & associates. (2024). Social comparison feedback in online teacher training and its impact on learning. International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 21, Article 86.

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. Language Learning, 44(2), 283–305.

Nation, I. S. P. (2013). Learning vocabulary in another language (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Nawas, A. (2020). Grading anxiety with self and peer-assessment: A mixed-method study in an Indonesian EFL context. Issues in Educational Research, 30(1), 224–244.

Nicol, D. J., & Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006). Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice. Studies in Higher Education, 31(2), 199–218.

Panadero, E. (2016). Is it safe? Social, interpersonal, and human effects of peer assessment: A review and future directions. In G. T. L. Brown & L. R. Harris (Eds.), Handbook of social and human conditions in assessment (pp. 247–266). Routledge.

Pekrun, R. (2006). The control-value theory of achievement emotions: Assumptions, corollaries, and implications for educational research and practice. Educational Psychology Review, 18, 315–341.

Pekrun, R., Goetz, T., Titz, W., & Perry, R. P. (2002). Academic emotions in students' self-regulated learning and achievement: A program of qualitative and quantitative research. Educational Psychologist, 37(2), 91–105.

Qian, D. D. (2002). Investigating the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and academic reading performance: An assessment perspective. Language Learning, 52(3), 513–536. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9922.00193

Ritonga, M., Tazik, K., Omar, A., & Saberi Dehkordi, E. (2022). Assessment and language improvement: The effect of peer assessment on reading comprehension, reading motivation, and vocabulary learning among EFL learners. Language Testing in Asia, 12, Article 36.

Copyright © 2026, This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

Roediger, H. L., III, & Karpicke, J. D. (2006). Test-enhanced learning: Taking memory tests improves long-term retention. Psychological Science, 17(3), 249–255. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.01693.x

Sato, M. (2021). Peer feedback in second language oral interaction. In H. Nassaji & E. Kartchava (Eds.), The Cambridge handbook of corrective feedback in second language learning and teaching (pp. 275–299). Cambridge University Press.

Schmitt, N. (2008). Review article: Instructed second language vocabulary learning. Language Teaching Research, 12(3), 329–363.

Schunk, D. H., & Pajares, F. (2009). Self-efficacy theory. In K. R. Wentzel & A. Wigfield (Eds.), Handbook of motivation at school (pp. 35–53). Routledge.

Topping, K. J. (1998). Peer assessment between students in colleges and universities. Review of Educational Research, 68(3), 249–276.

Woodrow, L. (2006). Anxiety and speaking English as a second language. RELC Journal, 37(3), 308–328.

Zhou, S., Wang, C., & Sun, H. (2023). Foreign language anxiety and foreign language self-efficacy: A meta-analysis. System, 114, 103016.

Copyright © 2026, This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)