# ANXIETY AND EFL SPEAKING IN SPANISH COMPULSORY AND NON-COMPULSORY SECONDARY EDUCATION: A MIXED-METHOD STUDY

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## Abstract

This exploratory study aims to examine the relationshp between language anxiety (LA) and the speaking skill for English as a Foreign Language in both Spanish Compulsory Secondary Education (CSE) and (Upper) Non-compulsory Secondary Education (NCSE). A sequential explanatory mixed-method study was implemented with two intact classes (18 CSE and 19 NCSE students). In the quantitative phase the 37 students' LA levels were measured through the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986) to analyse their relationship with their school speaking test scores, using bivariate correlation and stepwise linear regression analyses. Quantitative results revealed an inverse relationship between the students' LA levels and the test scores; the predictive power of course level and fear of negative evaluation in the test scores and the absence of an increase of LA as a function of the students' course level. In the qualitative phase, follow-up interviews were conducted with four subjects whose quantitative results had revealed a non-isomorphic pattern in the relationship between LA and the test scores (high/low, low/high). The qualitative results corroborated the significance of fear of negative evaluation and gave prominence to other factors. Several pedagogical implications are indicated.

**Keywords:** Anxiety, FLCAS, speaking skill, Spanish Secondary Education, mixed-method design

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## Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo exploratorio consiste en examinar la relación entre la ansiedad lingüística y la destreza de expresión oral en la asignatura de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en la Educación Secundaria Obligatoria y Bachillerato españoles. A tal fin, se llevó a cabo un estudio con un diseño de métodos mixtos, de carácter explicativo y secuencial. La investigación se realizó en dos clases intactas, cuya muestra ascendió a 18 alumnos de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria y 19 de Bachillerato. En la fase cuantitativa, los niveles de ansiedad lingüística de los 37 alumnos se midieron a través de la "escala de ansiedad en el aula de lenguas extranjeras" (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986) para analizar su relación con las puntuaciones en sus exámenes orales, mediante un análisis de correlación bivariante y de regresión escalonada lineal. Los resultados cuantitativos revelaron una relación inversa entre los niveles de ansiedad lingüística de los alumnos y sus puntuaciones en el examen; el poder predictivo en el examen de las variables del curso escolar y miedo a una evaluación negativa, así como la ausencia de un aumento de la ansiedad lingüística de los alumnos en función de pertenencia a uno u otro curso escolar. En la fase cualitativa posterior, se entrevistó a cuatro alumnos cuyos resultados cuantitativos se ajustaban a un patrón no isomorfo (alto/bajo, bajo/alto) de relación entre niveles de ansiedad lingüística y sus puntuaciones del examen. Los resultados cualitativos corroboraron la importancia del miedo a una evaluación negativa e hicieron visible el peso de factores relativos a situaciones ligadas a los exámenes. Se aportan implicaciones pedagógicas que se derivan de los resultados del estudio.

**Palabras clave:** ansiedad, escala de medición de la ansiedad en el aula de lenguas extranjeras, destreza de expresión oral, educación secundaria española, diseño de métodos mixtos

## 1. Introduction

When considering affective factors, language anxiety (LA)[1] is as an essential element that affects L2[2] learning in general (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986; MacIntyre, 2017) and the speaking skill in particular (Price 1991; Aida 1994; Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert 1999; Kitano 2001; Pérez-Paredes and Martínez-Sánchez 2001; Yan and Horwitz 2008; Mak 2011). As stated by Horwitz et al. (1986: 126), "difficulty in speaking in class is probably the most frequently cited concern of the anxious foreign language students".

For both Compulsory Secondary Education (CSE) and Upper/Non-compulsory Secondary Education (NCSE), the state legislation in Spain explicitly states that

oral comprehension and expression should be prioritised in the learning of foreign languages (Royal Decree 1105/2014: 196). This accounts for the present exploratory study, along with the fact that –to the best of our knowledge– there are no previous studies explicitly focusing on an examination of the relationship between LA and the speaking skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) within the context of Spanish Compulsory Secondary and (Upper) Non-compulsory Secondary Education.

This article is organised in nine sections in all. After this introduction, the second section includes a review of the literature, section three states the rationale for this study and section four presents the corresponding research questions. The fifth section encompasses the method employed followed by the results, whilst the sixth and seventh sections respectively describe and discuss the results. The eighth section lists a series of limitations, followed by the identification of potential pedagogical implications in section nine. Finally, several conclusions are drawn from the study.

## 2. Literature review

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This section is organised into three main blocks: a description of the process which the speaking skill entails, an account of the LA construct and a review of the research into LA as related to the speaking skill.

### 2.1. The complexity of the speaking skill

The (often) on-the-spot and spontaneous nature of the speaking skill implies the execution of an extremely demanding and complex process in physical and psycholinguistic terms. A detailed account of this can be found in Levelt's (1989) four-stage model of conceptualisation, formulation, articulation and self-monitoring phases.

Thornbury (2005) refers to a number of general factors that add to the complexity of the speaking skill in terms of processing as well as its production: cognitive factors, for example, the familiarity with the topic, affective factors, such as the self-consciousness of being exposed, and performance factors, for instance, available planning time. Furthermore, he also underlines the importance of the speakers' pragmatic knowledge –which influences their ability to adapt their speech acts to different contextual elements, such as the socio-cultural context or the register. All these speaking factors can be clearly correlated in MacIntyre's (2017: 28) statement that language anxiety "[…] is influenced by internal physiological processes, cognitive and emotional states along with the demands of

the situation and the presence of other people, among other things, considered over different timescales".

Richards (1990) distinguished two main types of spoken discoursal products: interactional and transactional, both of which are encompassed within "spoken interaction" by *The Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR, 2001). Ur (1996) considers interactional communication as mainly related to the usage of short turns, whereas transactional messages can be performed both through short or long turns. A third type of discourse is added by the CEFR (2001), that of performance. This is an often monological type of transactional communication before an audience, where long turns prevail and interaction is almost non-existent or relegated to the end of the speech. Depending on the type of discourse, the complexity factors highlighted by Thornbury (2005) will make different demands on the learner.

## 2.2. The construct of Language Anxiety

In their seminal paper, which marked a milestone in this field of study, Horwitz et al. (1986: 128) defined LA as "a distinct complex of self perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning, arising from the *uniqueness of the language learning process*" (emphasis added). LA is seen as situation-specific, that is, only applicable to language learning situations rather than a necessarily static personality characteristic, that of trait anxiety.

Horwitz et al. (1986) explained that LA is related to three elements: "communication apprehension", "fear of negative evaluation" and "test anxiety". *Communication apprehension* refers to the sense of fear experienced by the person when communicating with others; those students who do not feel comfortable when speaking in front of others in general will experience a higher degree of difficulty in the FL class, where they lack full control of the communicative situation and their performance is being permanently monitored. *Fear of negative evaluation* refers to "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (Horwitz et al. 1986: 128); it may occur in any general situation which requires interacting with people, such as a job interview or a speaking activity in a FL class. *Test anxiety* underlies all the situations which require evaluation of language performance and it is most obvious in the evaluation of the speaking skill; in fact, "oral tests have the potential of provoking both test- and oral communication simultaneously in susceptible students" (Horwitz et al. 1986: 128).

To test the LA construct and make it measurable, Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). FLCAS consists of 33 items on a five-point Likert scale whose piloting demonstrated both internal

reliability (.93) and test-retest reliability –over eight weeks ($r$ = .83, p <.001). This scale became the most widely used instrument in empirical research on LA.

## 2.3. Research on LA in relation to the speaking skill

Several construct-validity studies have confirmed the link between FLCAS and speaking anxiety. For instance, Aida (1994), Pérez-Paredes and Martínez-Sánchez (2001) and Mak (2011) found that *fear of negative evaluation* is a strong component of LA, and Park (2014) discovered that *communication apprehension* was strongly associated with LA.

This leads us to question what the reasons are that make speaking the most anxiety-provoking of the four basic language skills. Speaking is an extremely demanding skill since it usually happens on the spur of the moment. Thus, it requires speed, and there is very limited or virtually no time at all to simultaneously think and use correct language spontaneously in an L2 that is generally not thoroughly mastered. This might accentuate students' fear of making mistakes and consequently of "losing face" before peers and teachers. Such pressure may affect students' self-perception negatively, especially for those who lack confidence in their language abilities. Several empirical studies have documented the existence of both sources of LA.

Within quantitative studies, Cheng et al. (1999) reported that one of the major factors in the component analysis of the FLCAS administered to 433 Taiwanese L2 English undergraduate students was their perception of their level of proficiency as low. The correlation between the learners' LA levels and their self-perception was higher than that between the students' LA levels and their actual achievement. Similarly, a significant negative correlation was found by Kitano (2001) between LA and self-perceived language ability in 211 L1 English undergraduate students of L2 Japanese in two North American universities, after completing an *ad-hoc* validated 70-item questionnaire. The results also revealed that the higher the students' anxiety, the stronger their fear of negative evaluation. Na (2007) used the Chinese version of FLCAS to study the anxiety of 115 L2 English secondary-school students in China and found that the fear of negative evaluation was the major cause of LA, and moreover high LA levels played a somewhat debilitating role in those students' learning progress. A similar pattern of results was obtained by Liu and Jackson (2008) in their study of 547 L1 Chinese first-year undergraduate learners of English.

As regards qualitative studies, Young (1990) administered an *ad-hoc* questionnaire containing close and open questions to 135 university-level L2 beginners and 109 secondary-school students in Texas. She found that speaking in front of others was a source of language anxiety shared by both groups and that students would be

willing to participate in oral classroom tasks if they were not afraid of using the language incorrectly. Price's (1991) 10 interviewed undergraduate subjects reflected this fear of negative evaluation in their answers. Ewald's (2007) qualitative study revealed that her 21 undergraduate advanced L2 Spanish students in a university from the United States suffered from LA and displayed weak self-perceptions and fear of negative evaluation, even if they did not consider their peers to be unsympathetic towards their mistakes.

Liu (2006) used a mixed-method research design to study LA in 547 Chinese undergraduate non-English majors at three different levels proficiency through an adapted FLCAS (Horwitz et al. 1986), observations and students' reflective journals and interviews. Her ANOVA results suggest that proficiency in the target language did not play a significant role in distinguishing the students by their levels of LA and that the students felt most anxious when answering questions asked by the teacher or when asked to speak English publicly in class. Gkonou (2014) developed a mixed-method study to examine the L2 English speaking anxiety of 128 adult Greek students (B1-C1 levels) attending EFL private tuition. All the students completed the FLCAS and 13 of them were interviewed. Multivariate statistics of the data from the FLCAS showed that speaking anxiety and fear of negative evaluation were high and significantly correlated with LA. The interviews confirmed the students' fear of negative evaluation, by their peers and teachers, and they also revealed that students' low self-perceptions were intrinsically related to their LA.

This review clearly demonstrates that most of the studies mentioned employed quantitative data alone. Many of them focused on undergraduate students, with the exception of Na (2007), whose subjects were secondary school students. Furthermore, LA emerges as a pervasive and debilitating phenomenon in speaking performance regardless of the L2s.

## 3. Rationale

From the previous review of the literature and, to the best of our knowledge, studies which examine LA specifically in relation to EFL speaking within Spanish CSE and NCSE are absent. The purpose of this sequential, explanatory mixed-method study is to contribute to filling this gap by exploring the relationship between LA, performance in the speaking skill and course levels[3] in Spanish EFL CSE and NCSE learners.

## 4. Research questions

The following research questions (RQs) were proposed:

— RQ1: Does LA relate to L2 English speaking performance?

— RQ2: Does LA increase as a function of course level?

— RQ3: How do Spanish EFL learners conceptualise the sources of their LA when speaking in L2 English?

## 5. Method

### 5.1. Research design

In order to answer the above-mentioned research questions, a sequential explanatory mixed-method research design (Creswell 2014) was implemented: a quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase.

In the quantitative phase of the study, all 37 students completed the FLCAS and their results were matched against their school speaking test scores. The quantitative results revealed the following patterns:

*a)* Isomorphic, that is, subjects with high levels of LA together with high speaking scores, on the one hand, and students showing low levels of LA and low speaking scores, on the other (9 subjects, accounting for 24.32% of the sample);

*b)* Non-isomorphic, that is, subjects with high levels of LA accompanied by low speaking scores, on the one hand, and students with low levels of LA and high speaking scores, on the other (28 subjects, accounting for 75.68% of the sample).

In order to investigate the sources and reasons behind LA for the students within the most abundantly clear pattern, a qualitative phase was implemented. This consisted of interviewing two students who had been randomly selected from the pool of the two sub-patterns from the non-isomorphic pattern (four students overall). In other words, the interviews facilitated the triangulation of data (method triangulation) and provided additional complementary information about the two tendencies from the largest pattern (the non-isomorphic one).

### 5.2. Research context and participants

The full sample was composed of 37 students who studied in a state-run secondary school in Murcia, the capital city of the Region of Murcia, Spain, where most of the students come from Spanish middle-class families. There were 18 subjects from the fourth and last year of Spanish CSE (access age: 15) and 19 subjects from

the year above, which is the first of two NCSE years (access age: 16). Completion of the NCSE entitles students to sit for the University entrance exam. The original intact classes to which the students belong consisted of 31 students (CSE) and 30 (BACC) students. The final and definitive sample was reduced to 37 subjects, precisely those who were present at the time of data collection.

All the subjects were Spanish native speakers. There were 12 males and 6 females in the CSE group and 7 males and 12 females in the NCSE group (19 males and 18 females overall). The students' ages ranged from 15 to 18 ($M$ = 16.27; $SD$ = 0.77). Three more variables were introduced: whether they had ever lived in an English-speaking country (1 student had) and whether they had been going to an English language school for extra lessons in the past five years (16 students had) and whether they perceived themselves as "competent" in L2 English speaking. More specifically, this question read as "do you consider yourself competent when speaking in L2 English, that is, can you understand and speak in English correctly and fluently in everyday situations?" (25 said 'yes' whereas 12 said 'no').

The NCSE group belonged to an officially designated "Bilingual Programme", which entailed eight hours' instruction in L2 English: four hours a week devoted to the "First Foreign Language" subject (EFL), one of which was taught by a British oral teaching assistant, two hours per week for Physical Education and two more for ICTs. The CSE group received four EFL hours per week. The regular teacher in charge of the "First Foreign Language" subject (EFL) was the same for both groups.

As regards the subjects' proficiency level, the CSE group used a textbook reaching the B1 level according to the *CEFR* (2001), while the NCSE group's course book covered up to the first half of the B2 level (*Advanced Real English 4* and *English File Third Edition Intermediate Plus,* respectively; see the Works Cited section). Accordingly, both textbooks stick to the language level required by the legislation of the Local Education Authority of the Region of Murcia**,** Spain (Decrees 220/2015 and 221/2015) for the First Foreign Language subject in each respective course.

Finally, as indicated in the previous section, four students were interviewed.

### 5.3. Data-collection instruments

The following data-collection instruments were used in the present study:

*a)* Background questionnaire (which was targeted at obtaining information from several demographic variables). Students were asked their age, their sex, whether they perceived themselves as competent in L2 English speaking or not, whether they had been living in an English speaking country and whether

they had been going to an English academy in the past five years. The last three variables were measured on a dichotomical scale (yes/no).

b) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). This scale was used to measure the students' LA levels. The version used was the Spanish version translated by Pérez-Paredes and Martínez-Sánchez (2001), available at file:///C:/Users/Usuario/Downloads/A_Spanish_version_of_the_foreign_language_classroo.pdf

The FLCAS consists of 33 items which are rated through a Likert scale that ranges from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) values. Assessment is carried out through simple summative scoring, but the values of the items 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31 and 33 must be inverted. The minimum score is 33 and the maximum is 165. The range of scores is distributed as follows: low LA (between 33 and 75); medium LA level (between 76 and 119) and high LA level (between 120 and 165).

c) Speaking test scores. The participants' global scores in their latest school L2 English speaking test were used as an achievement measure (maximum score: 2.5 points). The exam differed in terms of the content tested in each year group but shared the same format. The tests consisted of evaluating at the same time two students who had to interact with each other using materials such as pictures to elicit their opinions and thoughts. The scoring grid had four aspects: accuracy, fluency, pronunciation and content, each of which carried a weighting of 25% in the overall score. We were granted permission by the Head of the secondary school to access the students' overall scores.

d) Interview. We conducted a semi-structured interview in L1 Spanish with four subjects. It consisted of six open-ended questions (see the Appendix).

## 5.4. Procedure

The data-collection process took place in March 2017. The participants' parents had signed a consent form at the beginning of the academic year to allow their sons and daughters to participate in research studies and projects requiring written data.

The students were first given a brief explanation of the purpose of both the questionnaire and the FLCAS and then proceeded to complete them within one hour. They were reassured that the results would be solely used for research purposes at the University of Murcia, that they would have no impact whatsoever on their final grades and that they would remain anonymous and confidential. We also insisted on the importance of them answering each FLCAS item as sincerely as possible.

The interviews were held with the four students individually on the same day two weeks after the 37 students had completed the questionnaire and the FLCAS. On

the same day as the interviews, the purposes of the interview were explained to the four students in the presence of their teacher; they were reassured that it would not affect their grades whatsoever and that their answers would remain anonymous and confidential. The four students agreed to be interviewed. The same person conducted the interviews, each lasting around ten minutes, by reading the questions aloud to the interviewee. Since we were not allowed by the Head of the secondary school to record the interviews, in either an audio or an audiovisual format, the interviewer took notes while the students answered.

### 5.5. Data analysis

The statistical analysis of the quantitative data was carried out with the IBM SPSS Statistics version 20 software. In order to process the data from the interviews, a three-stage qualitative content analysis was utilised in line with Mayring (2014). The first stage consisted of a careful scrutiny of all the notes in order to obtain a general idea of the data. The second stage focused on identifying main and secondary topics and organising them in key words and related concepts. The third stage involved making sense of such key words and concepts by relating them to a coding scheme comprised of the FLCAS components.

## 6. Results

### 6.1. Quantitative analyses

In terms of the internal consistency and reliability of FLCAS, Cronbach's coefficient alpha for this instrument was .83. Therefore, the FLCAS as computed on the 37 subjects is satisfactorily reliable.

*RQ 1: Does LA relate to L2 English speaking performance?*

In order to answer this RQ, two types of analyses were implemented: firstly, a bivariate correlation analysis was computed so as to assess the individual relationship between all the subscales of the FLASC, overall FLCAS and the speaking test scores; secondly, stepwise linear regression analyses were undertaken to determine which demographic variables, FLA subscales and the total FLCAS best predicted school speaking test scores.

As can be seen in Table 1 (bivariate correlation analysis), the speaking test score correlated negatively with *communication apprehension*, *fear of negative evaluation* and the total of the FLCAS. Thus, from the results of both types of analyses it can be generally concluded that speaking performance is related to LA, that is, the higher the LA, the lower the school speaking test scores and viceversa.

Moreover, all the subscales of the FLCAS and the total of the FLCAS positively correlated with each other, which means that when each one of the subscales or the total of the FLCAS increases, the remaining subscales or the total of the FLCAS increase too.

| | CA | FNE | TA | FLCAST | SPKT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CA | 1 | | | | |
| FNE | .898** | 1 | | | |
| TA | .787** | .784** | 1 | | |
| FLCAST | .955** | .940** | .921** | 1 | |
| SPKT | -.432** | -.396* | n.s. | -.372* | 1 |

Table 1. Correlations between the subscales of the FLCAS, overall FLCAS and school speaking tests scores

**CA**: Communication Apprehension; **FNE**: Fear of Negative Evaluation; **TA**: Test Anxiety; **FLCAST**: Total FLCAS score; **SPKT**: school speaking test score

*.  Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). n.s. Non-significant correlation.

Regarding the stepwise linear regression analyses, the speaking test scores achieved by the students were set as the dependent variable. Sex, age, course level, attendance at an English language school, self-perception of L2 English speaking competence, overall FLCAS scores and those of its subscales were considered the independent variables.

The results in Tables 2 and 3 indicate that the first model, with the *course level* as the predictor or independent variable, explained 42.5% of the total accounted variance of the speaking test scores. The second and final model of this analysis accounted for 50.2% of the variance. The additional 7.7% is explained by *fear of negative evaluation* which, as observed in Table 1, showed a negative correlation with the speaking test scores**.** In other words, *course level* and *fear of negative evaluation* are the two variables which largely predict speaking performance.

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .664[a] | .441 | .425 | .517 |
| 2 | .728[b] | .530 | .502 | .481 |

Table 2. Model summary obtained from the stepwise linear regression analysis.

a.  Predictors: (Constant), Course Level
b.  Predictors: (Constant), Course Level, Fear of Negative Evaluation

| Model | | Unstandardised Coefficients | | Standardised Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | -.065 | .271 | | -0.242 | .810 |
| | Course Level | .893 | .170 | .664 | 5.255 | .000 |
| 2 | (Constant) | .680 | .387 | | 1.758 | .088 |
| | Course Level | .831 | .160 | .618 | 5.196 | .000 |
| | Fear of Negative Evaluation | -.031 | .012 | -.302 | -2.539 | .016 |

Table 3. Coefficients showing the direction and magnitude of the relation (course level and speaking test scores; fear of negative evaluation and speaking test scores).

a. Dependent Variable: Speaking test score.

### RQ 2: Does LA increase as a function of the course level?

This research question attempted to scrutinise whether the scores of the four FLA measures (*communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety* and overall FLCAS) differed in terms of the group that the students belonged to (CSE and NCSE).

The Shapiro-Wilk test revealed that the distribution of the data was normal for *communication apprehension* ($W = .972$, $p = .455$), and the total of FLCAS ($W = .942$, $p = .053$), but not for *fear of negative evaluation* ($W = .938$, $p = .04$) or *test anxiety* ($W = .905$, $p = .004$). An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for *communication apprehension* and overall FLCAS to check whether the effect of both variables was statistically significant between the CSE and the NCSE students; it turned out to be non-significant ($p > .05$; $M$(CSE) = 33.27, $M$(NCSE) = 28.73). A Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance was performed for *fear of negative evaluation* ($M$(CSE) = 22.22, $M$(NCSE) = 20.21) and *test anxiety* ($M$(CSE) = 43.22, $M$(NCSE) = 41.63) to verify their

effect between both groups of learners. Again, there were no statistically significant differences ($p > .05$). Therefore, LA levels do not increase as a function of the students' course level.

An additional analysis reinforces the above-mentioned finding. In order to check whether there were any statistically significant differences within groups in terms of their speaking test scores, two $t$-tests for independent samples (one for each group) were conducted. The types of scores were selected as the independent variable (divided into two halves: the highest and the lowest) and the speaking test scores were classified as the dependent variable. The $t$-tests yielded the following results:

— CSE: $t$ (16) = -5.804, $p < .000$, $d = 2.68$ (low speaking test score: $M = 0.45$, $SD = 0.18$, $n = 10$; high speaking test score: $M = 1.3$, $SD = 0.41$, $n = 8$)

— NCSE: $t$ (16) = -5.016, $p < .000$, $d = 2.33$ (low speaking test score: $M = 1.36$, $SD = 0.38$, $n = 10$; high speaking test score: $M = 2.12$, $SD = 0.26$, $n = 9$)

These results reveal not only that there are statistically significant differences in the speaking scores within each group, but also that the CSE group's mean of the highest speaking test scores is slightly lower than the NCSE group's mean of the lowest scores (1.3 versus 1.36). Accordingly, the CSE and the NCSE students constitute two different groups in terms of their speaking test scores: the NCSE subjects are academically better than the CSE group. Moreover, regardless of this result, the CSE students do not show any statistically significant differences from the NCSE group in terms of their LA levels. Thus, the results of the two $t$-tests corroborate those of the previous ANOVA and Kruskal-Wallis: students' LA levels are not affected by their course level.

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## 6.2. Qualitative results

As indicated in section 5.1, the non-isomorphic patterns from the quantitative results revealed two sub-patterns; high LA levels with low speaking scores and low LA levels with high speaking scores. Each sub-pattern included one CSE student and one NCSE student, a total of four subjects in all. Subject 1 (CSE) scored high in speaking (2 out of 2.5 points) while maintaining low mid-levels of LA (84 out of 165 points). Subject 2 (CSE) scored low in speaking (0.6 out of 2.5 points) and reflected high levels of LA (129 out of 165 points). Subject 3 (NCSE) scored high in speaking (2.5 out of 2.5 points) while maintaining low levels of LA (65 out of 165 points). Finally, subject 4 (NCSE) scored low in speaking (0.6 out of 2.5 points) and suffered from high levels of LA (129 out of 165 points). Table 4 reports the summary of their answers.

| Items 1 and 2: LA-inducing factors | |
|---|---|
| *Subjects 1, 2, 4* | *Subject 3* |
| Exposed to other people's judgements<br>Unable to express the intended message<br>Reason: lack of linguistic resources or mental blocks | Not anxious |

| Item 3: length of turn | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Subjects 1, 2* | *Subject 4* | *Subject 3* |
| Long turns<br>Reason: the longer students are exposed, the higher the chances of making language mistakes and not being able find the words to continue | Short turns<br>Reason: fewer opportunities for repairs and other adaptations | Neither long nor short |

| Item 4: types of spoken discourse |
|---|
| *All subjects* |
| Performance talks<br>Reason: lack of support during speech; students become exposed and they end up being in the spotlight |

| Item 5: accuracy vs. fluency | |
|---|---|
| *Subjects 1, 2, 3* | *Subject 4* |
| Accuracy<br>Reason: the key to avoid making mistakes | Fluency<br>Reason: it helps her "hide" her mistakes |

| Item 6: factors associated with test situations |
|---|
| *All subjects* |
| • Topic<br>  Reason: being unfamiliar with topic makes students both make more language mistakes and not know what to say or how to utter their ideas<br>• Partner<br>  Reason: a more proficient test-taker generates more anxiety (potential contrast effect) |

Table 4. Sources of LA regarding the speaking skill according to the students interviewed

## 7. Discussion

In the first RQ (Does FLA relate to L2 English speaking performance?), the results of the bivariate correlation analyses reflected an inverse relationship: students with higher LA levels scored lower on their school speaking test, which confirms the findings of other previous studies using speaking measures (MacIntyre et al. 1997; Stephenson 2006; Sparks and Ganschow 2007) and non-speaking measures (Na 2007). More specifically, *communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation* and overall FLCAS were associated with low marks in the speaking exam. In other words, those students who felt uneasy about speaking in front of their peers and their teacher (communication apprehension) and/or who feel that they could be the target of negative judgements (*fear of negative evaluation*) achieved lower scores in the speaking test.

Only the *test anxiety* subscale of the FLCAS did not correlate significantly with the speaking test scores. This recalls the non-predictive power of this subscale for LA as discovered by Aida (1994), Pérez-Paredes and Martínez-Sánchez (2001) and Mak (2011). In contrast to our results, in Na (2007) *test anxiety* was the only subscale that negatively and significantly correlated with general language achievement, which this author attributed to the frequent number of tests that Chinese secondary school students have to take. However, in our study this variable also showed a positive significant correlation with the other two subscales (*communication apprehension* and *fear of negative evaluation*). This means that the students who felt fearful about communicating with others in the L2 (*communication apprehension*) were also afraid of being negatively judged and were apprehensive of tests too (similar to Liu and Jackson 2008). A possible explanation for the absence of *test anxiety* as a predictive variable in speaking performance would be that its effect is subsumed within the other two subscales, for which further analysis is required. As can be seen below, the qualitative results from the interviews did clearly reflect the importance within the students' LA of both *test anxiety* as such and the specific format of the students' speaking tests.

The weight of *fear of negative evaluation* in the students' speaking performance is reinforced in the second predictive model of the stepwise regression analysis (Tables 2 and 3). Interestingly, the students' self-perception of their own competence at L2 English speaking was not a crucial factor in the prediction of the quality of their oral performance (as opposed to the findings of MacIntyre et al. 1997; Cheng et al. 1999; Liu and Jackson 2008). This would be an interesting avenue for further research using samples in (Spanish) Secondary and Upper Secondary Education.

Together with *fear of negative evaluation*, *course level* also appeared in both models of the regression analyses as a variable which best predicted speaking performance.

Language level and proficiency seem to be a crucial variable (Sparks and Ganschow 2007). Besides, the NCSE group was theoretically more motivated to study given its belonging to the Bilingual Programme, thanks to which these students received 8 hours of instruction weekly exposed to L2 English in contrast to the 4 EFL hours of the CSE group. Nevertheless, further related research is needed to disentangle the effect of course level in greater detail.

Questions 1 and 2 from the interviews (LA-inducing factors) provided extra corroboration for the results of RQ1. Like Gkonou (2014), the two subjects who attained low scores in their speaking test while scoring high in LA (subjects 2 and 4) spoke explicitly about their fear of being exposed and negatively evaluated by their teacher or their peers (*fear of negative evaluation*); they also mentioned their concern at not being able to express their ideas and thoughts in their L2 (*communication apprehension*) as precisely as they could in their L1. The profile of the CSE student who obtained a high score in her speaking test but a low-mid level of LA (subject 1) does not fully match that of the aforementioned subjects. Despite reaching a high speaking score, her answer is explicitly related to *fear of negative evaluation:* she claimed that she did not like feeling exposed mainly because of the risk of failing in front of her teacher. As suggested by Stephenson (2006), her low-mid levels of LA might have acted as facilitating anxiety which improved her oral performance. Likewise, she referred to *communication apprehension* as her fear of "getting blocked", also referred to by Stephenson (2006). Subject 3, who achieved high speaking test scores and low LA levels, did not make any statement that would indicate any concern related to either *fear of negative evaluation* or *communication apprehension*. She stated that she "just" did not like to be in the spotlight, which seems to point to a personality trait.

The results of RQ2 (Does LA increase as a function of course level?) signalled that students' course level did not affect their LA levels, regardless of the fact that the CSE group was academically weaker than the NCSE group in L2 English speaking performance. Such a result does not coincide with the main trends of the research on this question: on the one hand, the students with high language levels show high LA levels (Saito and Samimy 1996; Omwuegbuzie, Bailey and Daley 1999; Kitano 2001; Ewald 2007; Liu and Jackson 2008; Marcos-Llinás and Juan-Garau 2009; Gkonou 2014); on the other hand, an inverse relationship is found by which students with more advanced language levels experience lower LA levels (Stephenson 2006; Sparks and Ganschow 2007; Dewaele and Dewaele 2017). Our results do however coincide with those of Liu (2006) and with Arnáiz-Castro and Guillén-García (2013), who found no statistically significant differences between LA levels and language levels in their undergraduate students. As stated by Arnáiz-Castro and Guillén-García (2013), the disparity of all the previous trends might be due to

methodological issues when establishing the students' language level. For instance, some studies, such as Kitano (2001) and the present one relied on the student's official ascription to years of study, while the studies by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) and Dewaele and Dewaele (2017) incorporated students' rating of their own L2 competence. Besides, it seems evident that the particularities of the context of the studies, such as the socio-economic-cultural background of the students and their families, their own personalities, the nature of the schools, teachers, course materials, etc. do affect the shaping of the students' learning experiences (LA included).

RQ3 focused on how Spanish EFL learners conceptualise the sources and reasons for their LA, for which purpose the qualitative data of the interviews was used. Given that the first and the second items have already been discussed within RQ1, this part will refer to items 3 to 6 of the interviews. These items provide information about other elements of speaking performance: *length of turn, type of discourse, accuracy and fluency* and *factors associated to test situations* (see Table 4 and the Appendix).

Regarding the *length of turn*, subjects 1 and 2 (CSE) agreed on signalling longer turns as the most anxiety-provoking ones, whereas subject 3 (NCSE) did not feel anxious about either short or long turns and subject 4 (NCSE) spoke of short turns as being more stressful for her. The answers to question 4 (relating to the *type of spoken discourse*) might help shed some light on these heterogeneous results.

In item 4, an overwhelming unanimity was reached: performance talk is the most anxiety-inducing type of discourse. Ewald's (2007) and Mak's (2011) subjects also identified the lack of preparation when speaking in front of the class as an anxiety-provoking factor, which was not mentioned by our subjects. They very clearly justified their responses: in performance talks, the student speaks alone in front of the class —either in long or short turns—, is exposed and everyone focuses their attention on him or her, thus, the students' potential mistakes become much more visible for both their classmates and their teacher. Consequently, performance speech is the type of discourse most prone to make these students suffer from *fear of negative evaluation* and *communication apprehension*. Interestingly, subject 3 (a NCSE student who showed a high speaking test score and low LA levels) differed from her three classmates. She mentioned short turns as more anxiety-inducing since she argued that they afforded her far fewer opportunities for repairs and self-corrections; in other words, the self-monitoring phase (Levelt, 1989) was very important for her, which arguably points to traits of perfectionism (Price 1991).

As for *accuracy* and *fluency*, three of the subjects (subjects 1, 2 and 3) claimed that complying with accuracy puts them under more pressure, while one of them (subject 4, from *NCSE*) stated that she was more concerned about achieving fluency. *Fear of negative evaluation* once again came to light in their explanations. Those who thought of accuracy as a more anxiety-provoking factor referred to the

same idea: it is crucial to avoid making mistakes and thus, reduce the chances of being judged negatively. On the other hand, subject 4 defended the same position but from a different perspective: maintaining fluency contributes to hiding your mistakes and making them more difficult to detect.

Finally, regarding the *factors associated with test situations*, a consensus was reached again. The four students concluded that the test topic and a proficient test partner were the most important elements influencing their LA levels. Both elements coincide with two others which Thornbury (2005) indicated could facilitate or hinder students' speaking performance: familiarity with the topic (cognitive factor) and familiarity and degree of collaboration with their interlocutors (performance factors). Regarding the former, the less familiar the students are with the topic, the less control they have over the L2 communicative situation and presumably the more fearful they feel about making themselves understood (communication apprehension). In turn, as they argued, the unfamiliarity with the topic might increase the risks of making mistakes and thus heightening their fears of negative evaluation. In addition, the students believed that a more proficient partner would make their mistakes more conspicuous to the on-the-spot comparison of their respective productions, which could in all probability affect their self-confidence and self-perceptions of L2 competence.

As can be seen, all the qualitative findings highlight the importance of *fear of negative evaluation* in these students' LA (similar to those of Price 1991; Aida 1994; Kitano 2001; Pérez Paredes and Martínez-Sánchez 2001; Na 2007; Mak 2011; Gkonou 2014, etc.), which corroborates and complements the quantitative results of both the bivariate correlation analysis and the stepwise regression analyses. Also, to a lesser extent, the qualitative findings reflected students' *communication apprehension*. Furthermore, they contributed to making visible an aspect of LA that went unnoticed in the quantitative data and which is of great importance for these students: *factors associated with test situations*. Indirectly, self-perceptions and confidence were also uncovered in conjunction with such factors. Certainly, the combination of the quantitative and qualitative results highlighted the internal and social dimensions of LA (MacIntyre 2017).

## 8. Limitations

It should be acknowledged that a series of limitations have come to light in this exploratory study. Firstly, the extrapolation of the results is constrained by the small number of student participants and by the specific nature and characteristics of the sample *per se* (Compulsory and Non-compulsory Secondary Education in a

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single Spanish city). Secondly, the relationship between LA and speaking performance should be considered with a certain degree of caution: even though the scoring criteria of the speaking test had been clearly defined by the secondary school where this research took place (see section 5.2), the scores were assigned by a single person, the groups' teacher, thus inter-rater reliability was missing. Thirdly, the bivariate correlation analysis and stepwise regression analyses cannot determine whether LA is the cause of poor or good speaking performance or whether poor or good speaking performance is the cause of LA. Nevertheless we firmly believe that, despite these limitations, this exploratory study successfully achieves its aim, which was to offer some preliminary insights into the relationship between LA and speaking performance in Spanish CSE and NCSE.

## 9. Pedagogical Implications

As a result of this study a number of pedagogical implications can be identified. Firstly, fear of making mistakes was recurrent in the students' answers in the interviews. Teachers should try to encourage their students and they could also explicitly teach them about production strategies used by L1 speakers such as repetitions, pause fillers, vague language and L2 communicative strategies, for instance requesting for help, that can enable them to reduce mistakes and improve accuracy, achieve greater fluency, sound more natural and build their self-confidence.

Secondly, it should be remembered that the legislation of the Local Education Authority of the Region of Murcia, Spain, explicitly indicates the types of activities for both CSE and NCSE for teaching and evaluating students' oral performance in their L2 (Decree 220/2015, p. 31047 and Decree and 221/2015, pp. 32163-32164). The types of teaching activities consist of oral presentations of topics of interest to the students, dramatisations, simulations and real video-conference conversations; the types of evaluation activities encompass personal interviews, oral presentations of projects, conversations and debates between students. Setting such activities means that teachers must comply with the legal requirements in terms of teaching and assessment. Moreover, by providing the appropriate stimulation to create a positive emotional and cooperative environment in the classroom, teachers can also contribute to equipping the students with the necessary tools for tackling fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension, especially in performance-based activities such as oral presentations, and test anxiety. For ideas about how teachers can help their students to cope with LA as produced by oral tests, see Rubio-Alcalá (2017).

## 10. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to explore and examine the factors and sources of LA of Spanish CSE and NCSE students as related to the L2 English speaking skill. To the best of our knowledge, these two variables in this context had not been jointly researched before. For the purposes of our task, a sequential explanatory mixed-method research design was implemented.

In terms of the aim of the study, the quantitative results revealed that LA has a debilitating effect on the students' L2 speaking performance; that course level constituted a main variable which affected the students' speaking performance together with fear of negative evaluation. Likewise, the qualitative results, gathered from the interviews, displayed that fear of negative evaluation played a major role in the students' LA, followed by communication apprehension. The effect on students' LA of certain features intrinsic to the speaking skill such as length of turns, types of spoken discourse, the dimension of accuracy versus fluency and factors associated with test situations were also explored in the interviews. Further research could attempt to investigate statistically the precise role of factors associated with test situations, the importance of which was clearly demonstrated in the second phase of the study, and of students' self-perceptions, which were absent in the first phase and indirectly suggested in the second. Likewise, future studies could attempt to study which strategies are used by secondary school subjects to cope with LA regarding L2 speaking.

In terms of our research methodology, the mixed-method design proved to be more effective in achieving the aim and answering the research questions of the study than a single mono method strand. The bivariate and stepwise regression analyses offered essential objective data which helped to unveil certain general patterns. The qualitative results reinforced the quantitative ones in terms of the prominence of fear of negative evaluation. In addition, other important aspects, factors associated with test situations that had remained hidden in the initial quantitative phase, were brought to the fore.

In conclusion, it is hoped that the preliminary insights of this exploratory study have contributed to shedding light on secondary school students' LA with regard to the speaking skill and that it will encourage further related research in the Spanish context.

## Acknowledgements

collection of this study took place, and to Dr Agustín Romero (University of Murcia, Spain), for his help with the statistical analyses.

# Notes

[1] As in Horwitz (2017), the more comprehensive term of Language Anxiety (LA) instead of Foreign Language Anxiety will be used throughout this article except when referring to Horwitz et al.'s (1986) anxiety measuring scale (FLCAS).

[2] "L2" will refer indistinguishably to both a second or foreign language in this study, that is, a language other than the students' L1 or native tongue.

[3] By "course level" we refer to the two different years of study that the groups of learners belonged to (CSE and NCSE).

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# APPENDIX. Protocol interview (qualitative phase)

1. What is the most difficult or unpleasant thing that you experience when you have to talk in English? What thoughts usually come to your mind when you have to talk in English?

2. What makes you feel most anxious or nervous when you are talking in your English class? Why do you think this happens?

3. When you have to talk in English, would you say that the length of your turn affects you? If so, in what way?

4. When speaking in English, which situation generates most anxiety in you?: Interacting with a group in an informal way about one or several topics; interacting with a group on a specific topic, such as a debate; delivering an oral presentation. Why?

5. When talking in English, which of the following situations puts you under most pressure?: Speaking fluently, without many interruptions, or using accurate language even if at the cost of slowness and/or stops? Why?

6. Imagine that your teacher is going to give you an oral English exam in an hour's time. On what aspect(s) do you think that your success depends?