

Factores que provocan la ansiedad al hablar en inglés en los alumnos Factors that trigger foreign language speaking anxiety in ELT students

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Abstract:

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) harms foreign language learners. This article explores the factors that trigger FLSA in English Language Teaching (ELT) learners. This study draws on Horwitz et al. (1986) Foreign Language Anxiety theory since it focuses on anxiety in the English Language classroom. This is a qualitative study conducted via semi-structured interviews with four female ELT students from Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo (UAEH) who all reported experiencing FLSA. The research utilized thematic analysis and adopted an inductive approach to analyze the data. The results uncovered that the factors that trigger FLSA are poor vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, teachers' attitudes, fear of speaking in public, and fear of negative evaluation. However, all these factors seem to be a result of little speaking practice in the classroom. This study serves as a contribution to language anxiety research by providing some suggestions on how to address speaking in the classroom to lower anxiety.

Keywords:

English language speaking, speaking anxiety, factors

Resumen:

La ansiedad del habla de lenguas extranjeras afecta negativamente a los estudiantes de lenguas extranjeras. Este artículo explora los factores de la ansiedad del habla de lenguas extranjeras en estudiantes de la Licenciatura en Enseñanza de Lengua Inglesa (LELI). Este estudio se basa en la teoría de ansiedad de Horowitz et al., (1986) porque el enfoque es en la ansiedad en el salón de clases. Esta es una investigación cualitativa mediante entrevistas semi-estructuradas con cuatro estudiantes de ELT de la Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo (UAEH) quienes han reportado sufrir de ansiedad al hablar en inglés en el aula. La investigación empleó un análisis temático y adoptó un enfoque inductivo para el análisis de los datos. Los resultados revelaron que los factores más importantes que contribuye a la ansiedad del habla de lenguas extranjeras es el pobre vocabulario, el temor de cometer errores, la actitud de los docentes, temor de hablar en público y temor de una evaluación negativa. Sin embargo, estos factores parecen ser el resultado de la poca práctica de la habilidad oral en el aula. Este estudio contribuye a la investigación sobre la ansiedad lingüística ya que se discuten algunas implicaciones pedagógicas para promover la habilidad oral y disminuir la ansiedad.

Palabras Clave:

habilidad oral en inglés, ansiedad, factores

Introduction

For English Language Teaching (ELT) students, being able to communicate in English is crucial; however, many struggles with Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA)

for various reasons. Previous studies have identified different factors that trigger students' anxiety and can be classified as internal and external (Annur & Nasrullah, 2023). In this study, we focus on linguistic and affective, classroom dynamics, as well as on social factors.

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Factors that trigger FLSA in university students is an important phenomenon to be addressed because it can significantly impact language learning and communication (Faqihi, 2024). Since FLSA concerns students as much as teachers, it is essential to identify the factors that trigger students' anxiety when speaking a foreign language in the classroom, so teachers are better equipped to address them and lower anxiety.

While there are a number of studies (i.e. Young, 1991; Liu, 2006) focused on English Foreign Language students (EFL) or on English as a Second language students (ESL), there is limited research that explores FLSA with ELT students in Mexico, where this study took place. This study draws on Horwitz et al. (1986) Foreign Language Anxiety since anxiety is conceived as situation-specific, that may occur only on certain occasions when speaking is involved in an English language classroom.

Comprehending the factors that trigger FLSA provides practical implications for language instruction. By identifying the specific factors that foster anxiety in ELT students, teachers can develop more empathetic strategies and interventions to alleviate this feeling. This is particularly relevant in the context of English Language Teaching, in which assertive communication skills are essential for future teachers. In addition, insights gained from this research can inform teaching programs, allowing future teachers to adopt a more empathetic approach toward their students' anxiety. Lastly, addressing FLSA can contribute to creating a more supportive and effective learning environment, enhancing both student confidence and language proficiency.

This study intends to analyze the factors that trigger Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety in English Language Teaching students. As a result, the following research question is set: What factors trigger ELT students' foreign language speaking anxiety?

Literature review

Studying a foreign language in school is important for developing cultural understanding, mental development, and communication abilities (Zhou et al., 2025). This learning process may be exhausting as students have to interact with others using a language, they are not fully proficient in. As a result, they may face some obstacles, and FLSA is one of them which is the focus of this study. In the context of teacher education, research such as Hismanoglu's (2013) demonstrated that in English language teacher candidates in Turkey prospective teachers may experience FLSA, with levels varying according to demographic variables such as gender and age. Previous research highlights the importance of examining anxiety not only among learners but also among those preparing to teach a foreign language. We

first define what we mean by anxiety in a foreign language context.

Anxiety

According to Lader (1975) anxiety is typically accompanied by unpleasant emotions. Macintyre and Gardner (1994, as cited in Bozavli & Gulmez, 2012) state that, "foreign language anxiety can be defined as the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, such as speaking, listening, and learning" (Bozavli & Gulmez, 2012: 284). Annur and Nasrullah (2023) claim that, "foreign language anxiety can have a negative role where it interferes with the child's language performance" (p.40). They also add that, "language anxiety usually emerges when learners have doubts about their capacity to acquire a second language or when they have difficulty understanding the learning process" (Annur & Nasrullah (2023: 41).

According to Moafa (2024), FLSA may be considered as situational anxiety given the particularity of the context. Various researchers have extensively examined anxiety in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, and they claim that students' anxiety can be caused by various factors, such as lack of practice, limited vocabulary, low proficiency, personality traits, input that is difficult to understand, and fear of making errors, among other reasons (Liu, 2006). Some other factors such as the fear of making mistakes, the fear of criticism from others, and the fear of not being able to express oneself as desired can also contribute to foreign language anxiety (Arifin et al., 2025)

Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that, "the anxiety pertaining to the speaking of English as SL/FL consists of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p.128).

Factors that trigger foreign language anxiety

As stated in the introduction, several authors have identified different factors that trigger students' anxiety. For example, Young (1991) identified six types of sources of anxiety in foreign language classrooms: "(1) personal and interpersonal anxiety, (2) learner beliefs about language learning, (3) instructor beliefs about language teaching, (4) instructor-learner interactions, (5) classroom procedures, and (6) language evaluation" (p. 427). Meanwhile, Aydın (2001) categorized the reasons for speaking anxiety into four groups: personal factors, teachers' actions in class, learners' beliefs, and testing and instructional approaches. More recently, Annur and Nasrullah (2023) conducted a systematic literature review and classified anxiety factors as internal and external. The former refers to "any kind of

foreign language anxiety that comes from what the learners have in themselves... [the latter] “come from things outside the learners' control, such as the environment they live in, things they are doing, or people around them” (Annur and Nasrullah, 2023: 45). These authors identified seven types of internal factors:

...students make mistakes and teachers are aware of it; students fear a negative response due to a language error; students tend to be slow to understand and adapt to the learning; lack of self-confidence and preparation; their perceptions of teachers' classroom habits; students' shyness; and high expectations in mastering the target language. On the other hand, eight types of external factors of FLA have been identified: teachers who are too serious and strict; teachers' age, teaching style, and clothing style; teachers' high demands of the students; situations in the learning environment; classroom atmosphere and preparedness; the absence of classroom activities; students being randomly selected to answer questions in class; and the presence of a native speaker. (Annur and Nasrullah, 2023: 46)

In this study, we focus on both internal and external factors that have been identified as linguistic and personal factors, pedagogical and classroom dynamics, and social factors because these are the ones that seem to have an impact in this particular context where the study took place, and they are discussed below.

Linguistic and personal factors

Linguistic and personal factors are related to internal aspects of students, which can be linked to students' low level of English or lack of vocabulary, and personal factors may be linked to personal traits and low confidence or self-esteem. For example, Young (1991) stated that speaking incorrectly, given to a bad pronunciation or lack of vocabulary, making mistakes in front of peers, looking or sounding “dumb” give rise to fear among learners. As a result, students may avoid participating in speaking activities to protect themselves from embarrassment. This fear of making mistakes can limit practice opportunities, which is essential for developing oral proficiency.

Additionally, Ahmed (2016) conducted a research on Kurdish university students learning English and found that learners are mostly worried about not being successful in English, being laughed at by classmates, facing unfamiliar grammar and using appropriate English vocabulary during class talks. These concerns often lead to hesitation, silence, or complete avoidance of speaking tasks, which further hinders language development.

Moreover, Arifin et al. (2025) found that EFL learners often experience anxiety related to fear of mistakes, low confidence, mispronunciation, and limited vocabulary—all of which stem from internal linguistic and personal factors that can significantly hinder classroom participation and

language development. Furthermore, Gynan (1989, as cited in Young 1991) outlines various practices that learners believe are essential for successful language learning. For his pupils, pronunciation is a paramount practice in language learning. Learners who perceive their pronunciation as weak may feel insecure and reluctant to speak, reinforcing feelings of anxiety and low self-esteem. In a nutshell, linguistic limitations combined with personal factors such as fear and low confidence can significantly affect students' willingness to communicate in English.

Pedagogical and Classroom Dynamics

Another reason for experiencing foreign language anxiety may be related to the role of teachers in the language classroom, which can contribute to affective stress just as much as linguistic challenges. Previous research suggests that teachers who do not tolerate silence; place excessive pressure on students to perform in language classes. Tsui (1995, as cited in Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022) identified teachers' intolerance of silence as a factor in anxiety. In her action research project, many teachers reported that they feared silence and felt very anxious or impatient when they did not get answers from their students, which can create a tense classroom atmosphere that discourages participation. Furthermore, there are also other teachers who believe it is their responsibility to correct students constantly and seem reluctant to encourage student collaboration for fear of losing control of the talking time in the classroom and the teaching process. Such practices can result in harsh classroom interactions and create an intimidating learning environment. Consequently, students' language anxiety may stem from overly strict teaching approaches. A similar conclusion was reached by Horwitz et al. (1986), who explained details of anxiety concerning the relationship between instructors and learners. Anxiety can also be caused by the habit of cruelly correcting students when they make mistakes. That is to say, correction itself does not cause anxiousness but the manner it is done actually does.

This connection between teacher behavior and learner anxiety is supported by broader research on language anxiety, which finds that internal and external factors, including classroom dynamics and teacher approaches, are interlinked. For instance, Arifin, et al. (2025) emphasize that learners concern about negative evaluation is influenced not only by linguistic challenges but also by the learning environment and interactional practices established by teachers.

Social factors

Social factors can be linked to a competitive environment, fear of negative evaluation and fear of speaking in public.

Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three primary forms of language anxiety: apprehension in communication, anxiety related to testing, and fear of receiving negative evaluations. Awan et al. (2010), studied specific causes for anxiety among EFL students, and they found that speaking in front of people prevents students from adjusting to the learning environment and achieving academic success.

A common belief is that many students are afraid to speak a foreign language out loud. There are also other teachers who believe it is their responsibility to correct students constantly and seem reluctant to encourage student collaboration for fear of losing control, and this situation may create a harsh interaction as a result of a traditional teaching approach.

These studies show that anxiety can be caused by different factors that go from linguistic and personal traits to classroom dynamics and social factors. Due to the limited research with ELT university students and FLSA, this study explored the factors that trigger FLSA in university students because it can significantly inform language learning and communication.

Therefore, the present research aims to analyze the factors that trigger FLSA in ICSHu to answer the following research question: What factors trigger ELT students' foreign language speaking anxiety? This research will not only be useful for teachers who are willing to renovate their lessons by implementing more empathic teaching methodologies to help students cope with foreign language speaking anxiety, but also for students to make them aware of this phenomenon in order to take action and make English classes more enjoyable for both parties.

Methodology

In order to answer the research question, the first author conducted a qualitative case study framed in a constructivist worldview. The study was conducted at the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities at UAEH. Four female students of English Language Teaching volunteered to participate in a semi-structured interview about their experiences with FLSA. In order to analyze the data obtained, thematic analysis was conducted, and in vivo coding was used. According to Saldana (2009), "InVivo Coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data, and studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldana, 2009: 74).

This study utilized a qualitative approach, which is understood as "as an emergent, inductive, interpretive, and naturalistic way of studying people, cases, phenomena, social situations, and processes in their natural settings" (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 312). In addition, this approach was selected given that its objective is to acquire

an understanding of the interpretations that individuals give to their experiences in the world. Hence, this research was led through a case study design. As McCombes (2023) proposed that a case study is a thorough examination of a specific subject, such as an individual, group, location, event, organization, or phenomenon. This design allows a deep analysis, improving understanding of a phenomenon, and a description of how FLSA is experienced in a real-life context.

As stated above, the study was conducted at UAEH in central Mexico, where the undergraduate program in English Language Teaching is taught. The rationale behind this choice is that, as future English language teachers, students will be expected to communicate in English effectively and confidently.

Four undergraduate female students in English Language Teaching from advanced semesters (6th to 8th semester), ages from 22 to 25, who have experienced English language speaking anxiety voluntarily agreed to participate. Their level of English language proficiency is B2+. It is important to mention that the participants signed a consent form for participation.

The instrument used was a semi-structured interview, which was selected given that the aim of this type of interview is to explore participants' thoughts, feelings and beliefs freely about foreign language anxiety. In addition, Megaldi and Berler (2020 as cited in Ruslin et al., 2022) state that semi-structured interviews allow researchers to take a more in-depth discovery approach than the subjective approaches offered before the interview. The interview guide consisted of about 21 open-ended questions which addressed topics such as experiences with the language, feelings in social and academic situations, testing, use of strategies to deal with FLSA, factors that trigger anxiety, recommendations and some advice from interviewees to foreign language speaking anxious students. The interview was recorded and it lasted around 30 minutes to 45 minutes.

Data analysis

The data analysis was done by means of thematic analysis (King, 2004, as cited in Nowell et al., 2017) and was considered an effective approach for exploring the viewpoints of various research participants, emphasizing commonalities and distinctions, and uncovering unexpected revelations. In order to analyze the data gathered from interviews, an inductive approach was used, provided that it concentrates on comprehending individuals' or groups' experiences, attitudes, and beliefs towards a topic to uncover new patterns or reasons which have not been studied. In Vivo coding was used for the purpose of focusing on participants' feelings.

Findings

Several factors that cause FLSA were found, including poor practice habits and limited vocabulary, along with mistake anxiety and criticism worries. Stressors emerge across personal and social dimensions alongside learners' attitudes, teachers' perceptions and classroom dynamics. Language learning and performance abilities become obstructed by these anxieties, which also reduce learner motivation.

Linguistic and personal factors

Lack of vocabulary

Limited vocabulary when speaking is closely related to FLSA since learners may feel nervous at the moment of speaking due to the lack of vocabulary. Participants expressed anxiety over their inability to express ideas clearly when speaking in English in their classes due to limited vocabulary. For example, Participants 1 and 2 commented that,

It [speaking] causes me anxiety that I can't express my ideas clearly, or that I don't know, or that my vocabulary is very short (Participant 1).

...There are times when I simply go blank, or there are times when I have a specific idea already very well done, but I don't know how... I can't find the words in English to make it understood... or I can't find the right words to communicate what I want (Participant 2).

As seen above, these statements reveal that students' inability to find the correct words when speaking raises their anxiety, and they can find themselves in a vulnerable situation because they even forget their ideas, and they do not know what to say. Limited vocabulary or the lack of it when speaking was also found by Liu (2006) as one of the factors that cause anxiety. She affirmed that this may provoke anxiety in students and make them reticent when communicating in English. Similar to this, another participant mentioned:

I feel much more comfortable speaking in Spanish because it's my L1 language. Okay. However, I try to do my best always. Sometimes I don't remember the words. Because I know the words, but I don't remember. Or other times I don't know how to say things. So, I feel frustrated because I have been studying for a long time. Sometimes I commit mistakes, and they are aware of my mistakes. I try to correct them, and I finally think that I'm learning, and then I forget these things. I start committing the new ones and it's like a cycle that I'm always there. And I feel really frustrated (Participant 4).

This extract reveals that some students feel frustrated for not remembering words at the moment of communicating themselves. So, frustration worsens when they have been studying the language for a long time. It leads them to use

L1 instead of using the English language to make themselves clear, making English language learning process even harder and, as a result, provoking more frustration for being stuck in this never-ending cycle. A similar conclusion was reached by Tien (2018), who carried out a mixed-method study and found that a lack of grammar and vocabulary raises foreign language speaking anxiety in students, given that they try to find a way to make themselves understood, a cognitive process that may be time-consuming and emotionally draining.

Fear of making mistakes

Fear of making mistakes is another factor that triggers Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, since it is a deep-seated fear of being viewed as incompetent or inadequate. Fear of making mistakes was closely linked to being misunderstood, which can create frustration and embarrassment when a speaker is incapable of saying what they mean, or the message leads to confusion or misinterpretation. Being misunderstood can be a strong trigger for FLSA, perpetuating the cycle of fear, self-doubt, and avoidance that can finally diminish a student's ability to enhance their proficiency in the language. For example, participant 2 stated that,

Well, it is probably that due to some carelessness in what I say, I am not able to communicate the idea that I really want to communicate, due to some small mistake, the other person could fully misunderstand what I say.... Basically it is how I am able to make my ideas understood, if I am being clear or I am not being clear, if I was wrong, and people totally misinterpret what I say. I think that's what causes me the most stress (Participant 2).

The above statement remarks the uncertainty about clarity and potential misinterpretation that students deal with when speaking English, which causes significant stress for them since they are afraid of making mistakes and being misunderstood. Similar results were reported by Awan et al. (2010), who also identified the challenge of communicating effectively as a factor that triggers Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety.

Pedagogical and classroom dynamics

Teacher behavior towards students' speaking

Another crucial factor that raises students' speaking anxiety is the behavior of the teachers' attitude towards speaking situations, such as presentations, testing, and speaking time, given that even the slightest sign of discomfort, for instance, a bad gaze, or some cold words from the teacher, could raise FLSA in the student. Teachers and their attitude are influential, so that may intensify or lessen anxiety; as Shahbaz et al. (2024) stated, teachers' behavior with the class holds significant value in

decreasing or increasing stress in students. To exemplify this, Participant 2 expressed that,

Have I Feel judged? Yes. I have received compliments that there of my family did they think that I speak well. But I know they don't speak English so it's not like worth it for me. It's like okay. So, I don't feel judged. But with my teachers I think it's like the teacher that... I'm, I'm not gonna say names of course. I have been a little bit judged.

This statement shows that some students feel judged by their teachers when using English, and they may stop using the language, or they may recall negative experiences related to the teacher's reaction. This finding is contrary to that of Osacar and Lafuente-Millán (2021), who stated that teachers were not a source of anxiety among students', given that some teachers may devote some time to pre-teach the vocabulary they are going to use when doing a speaking activity, which is done to reduce students' anxiety. Teachers can also employ a language acquisition strategy by integrating vocabulary-building activities into the curriculum.

Lack of speaking practice

In addition to the previous findings, another factor that triggers language anxiety is the lack of speaking practice in class. Lack of speaking in class also leads to a lack of confidence in one's ability in the language, further perpetuating FLSA, which adversely affects students' ability to improve in the target language in terms of communication skills. To illustrate this, Participant 1 reported that,

I feel a little dissatisfied because we don't do much speaking practice in class, so that feedback is a little dissatisfying because they don't tell me where I'm wrong or how I can improve (Participant 1).

The aforementioned extract shows that students feel disappointed given the lack of speaking practice during class time, also causing frustration about the feedback received. This insight was also reported by Faqihi (2024), who highlighted the worthiness of providing students enough opportunities to practice the language in the classroom, given that outside opportunities may be in short supply. Also, negative feedback or the lack of it could be detrimental for students, as Mouhoubi-Messadh and Khaldi (2022) stated, the choice of speaking correction procedures ought to be based on lessening negative responses in students. When the student is talking in a large group, corrections ought to be made as thoughtfully as possible. That is to say, if students do not get any opportunities to try out their speaking skills in a supportive and constructive class environment, they can become afraid to speak up at all, which seriously prevents their improvement and further restricts their ability to function in the language. In addition, it may frustrate teachers

because a lack of practice would make students feel insecure about their abilities, and they could commit several mistakes, and teachers would give negative feedback, so students would speak less because of the feedback, teachers would get frustrated by the students' response and so on, the cycle would be perpetuated.

These findings revealed that students may feel anxious because of the lack of practice in class time, so as they do not practice, they may not be able to acquire or practice enough vocabulary or improve their speaking skills.

Social factors

Fear of speaking in public

Another significant factor that triggers FLSA is fear of speaking in public, especially when presenting a topic which raises student's anxiety because of the evaluation of the use of spoken language. Participants reported nervousness and anxiety when called to speak in English. This anxiety increased when the participants had to interact with classmates with a perceived higher level of proficiency, as stated below,

Yes, in fact, since the first semester, I had that anxiety about presenting in front of the group... (Participant 2).

Participant 2 recalled anxiety stemming from the first-semester experience, a pervasive, ongoing struggle that students might relate to throughout their academic journey.

Students also reported that their anxiety is increased when presenting a topic because they are aware that teachers assess them, taking into account several aspects when presentations take place,

Yes, because in the presentations, the use of language and how you behave in front of the group are also evaluated, and I feel that it has never been my strong point (Participant 3).

These statements, as noted earlier, demonstrate that students felt uncomfortable when presenting a topic in English. This result ties well with previous studies wherein Awan et al. (2010) stated that speaking in front of other students was the main cause of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, in addition to worries about making grammatical mistakes, pronunciation and inability to express oneself were other causes of anxiety.

Fear of negative evaluation

Fear of negative evaluation when testing is involved was reported to be another cause of anxiety among participants. Participants felt anxious about speaking in situations such as oral exams, which heightened anxiety levels due to evaluation methods and the presence of peers with higher English proficiency levels. One participant explained that,

Yes, oral exams cause me a lot of anxiety because they feel more like they are very methodical exercises, rather than a speaking activity (Participant 1).

This statement, as noted earlier, demonstrate that student's anxiety about the oral exam is primarily because of the method utilized in which students are required to use certain structures or words or to discuss a topic which is unfamiliar to them, that could provoke them to memorize words or phrases just to get a good grade and if they forget it, this would raise their anxiety. A similar conclusion was reached by Horwitz et al. (1986), who described test anxiety as a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure. This means, that not only teachers may need to reflect on how their students are being evaluated, but also, they would be required to create more empathetic yet useful ways to test students.

Pedagogical implications

This study revealed that students feel anxious when speaking in the classroom due to different reasons. Based on these results, teachers can develop a series of activities to help reduce those levels of anxiety. For example, regarding lack of vocabulary, teachers can help students develop their lexicon by increasing exposure to the language or adopting techniques to manage stress such as including vocabulary journals and encouraging students to use new words in their speech, which could help them build confidence over time. In addition, the practice of using visual aids and contextual learning, as well as predicting and using background knowledge can make vocabulary acquisition less stressful and may help to reduce FLSA in students (Nation, 2022).

Regarding the fear of making mistakes, students can explore ways of dealing with their anxiety, which can be effective in minimizing misunderstandings, while at the interpersonal level, active listening could be practiced alongside the utilization of clarification techniques. Training in these strategies could potentially reduce students' levels of anxiety and improve their levels of proficiency in communication.

Teacher awareness and intervention can be a critical factor in reducing the worry about miscommunication. By establishing a supportive classroom atmosphere where making mistakes is seen as part of learning, and by creating an expectation that students take risks in speaking, teachers may be more confident in using the L2 for discussion. According to Parmar et al. (2025) peer-driven exercises and teamwork can offer students a safe environment to practice and have confidence and, therefore, fear less what others think about them.

With regard to fear of speaking in public during oral presentations, educators should promote strategies for creating a supportive classroom environment. These

strategies would include peer-support groups, and less intimidating settings for presentation practice, and increased instructor attention to skill-building confidence, which would lessen some of the public-speaking pressure.

Additionally, reducing the affective components of speaking fear with specific interventions (e.g., relaxation strategies, positive reinforcement) can help students see that it is possible to overcome speaking anxiety. Through the development of a classroom culture where mistakes are not seen as errors, but rather as opportunities of learning, students may be more motivated to become involved in their learning.

When assigning topics for oral presentations, teachers may research topics that students feel confident discussing to create a good rapport with them and create a safe environment. As Horwitz et al. (1986/1991) claim, educators should help anxious students to deal with existing anxiety-provoking situations and strive to transform the learning context into a less stressful one. Building a low-anxiety classroom environment is a crucial prerequisite to language learning success.

It is evidence that teachers need to devote more time to speaking practice in the classroom so learners gain confidence and feel more confident when speaking with other peers.

Conclusions

This research aimed to investigate the factors that trigger Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety among ELT students. The findings from this study contribute to the understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of FLSA and provide an important venue for future research in the field. The findings revealed that vocabulary insufficiency, fear of making mistakes, teacher behaviour, fear of speaking in public, and fear of negative evaluation are the factors that trigger students' speaking anxiety. However, it seems that the most salient finding is the lack of speaking practice, which increases students' anxiety. This points out that teachers should give students more opportunities to practice speaking in a supportive and constructive environment.

The results of the study provide additional evidence in support of previous studies in highlighting the urgency of dealing with these factors in order to lessen FLSA and, consequently, to foster effective language learning. Quotes from participants' comments clearly indicate that FLSA is situation specific (Horowitz et al., 1986) since they felt nervous, irritated, and negative about themselves when doing speaking activities in the classroom because of the vocabulary restrictions they felt, and misunderstanding and fear of being misunderstood.

This research underlines the necessity to reconsider the conventional techniques used to assess speaking. Fear of

being critiqued and feeling judged in speaking assessments was a common complaint and increased anxiety for most participants. It is therefore necessary that educators embrace forms of assessment that are flexible, communicative and formative and that put the use of language above correctness. Interaction and engagement focused feedback, rather than on the accuracy of the interaction, may reduce FLSA.

Even though the scope of this study is limited, due to the sample used, future research can focus on a larger sample to identify other factors that may trigger students' language anxiety while speaking in the classroom since this study has demonstrated that identifying the factors that trigger students' anxiety can help teachers inform their teaching practice as they may design strategies to lessen their anxiety. It is important to have supportive and encouraging language learning classes, increasing students' confidence and ability to communicate in English.

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