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English Speaking Anxiety Among Upper-Level Learners: A Mixed-Methods Study

Ansiedad al hablar inglés entre los estudiantes de nivel superior: Un estudio de métodos mixtos

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Abstract — This mixed-methods study explores language anxiety among advanced English-language learners (B2–C2 levels according to the CEFR) who study English at university. The aim was to determine whether anxiety persists at higher proficiency levels and how strongly it affects high-proficiency students. Data were gathered through an online questionnaire and followed up with interviews, thereby combining quantitative and qualitative approaches and providing a more comprehensive understanding of this issue. The results reveal that even advanced learners experience situational anxiety and that linguistic competence does not completely exclude anxiety, although it does reduce its intensity. Anxiety often occurs due to fear of negative evaluation, perfectionism, and comparison with peers rather than because of linguistic incompetence. Qualitative findings show that students believe they could reduce anxiety through consistent practice, authentic communication, and positive reinforcement, whereas self-doubt and avoidance maintain it. Numerous studies have examined the anxiety levels of foreign language learners in general, but relatively few have focused on students at such an advanced level. The most important pedagogical implications of this study include recognizing the need to foster a supportive classroom environment and focusing on affective strategies that can help students build their confidence and self-efficacy.

Keywords — foreign language anxiety, speaking skills, advanced learners, coping mechanisms, EFL

Resumen — Este estudio de métodos mixtos explora la ansiedad lingüística entre estudiantes avanzados de inglés (niveles B2–C2 según el MCER) que cursan estudios universitarios en esta lengua. El objetivo fue determinar si la ansiedad persiste en niveles altos de competencia y en qué medida afecta a los estudiantes con mayor dominio. Los datos se recopilaron mediante un cuestionario en línea y se complementaron con entrevistas, combinando así enfoques cuantitativos y cualitativos para ofrecer una comprensión más completa del fenómeno. Los resultados revelan que incluso los aprendientes avanzados experimentan ansiedad situacional y que la competencia lingüística no elimina por completo la ansiedad, aunque sí reduce su intensidad. La ansiedad suele aparecer debido al miedo a la evaluación negativa, al perfeccionismo y a la comparación con los compañeros, más que por una incompetencia lingüística. Los hallazgos cualitativos muestran que los estudiantes creen que podrían reducir la ansiedad mediante una práctica constante, comunicación auténtica y refuerzo positivo, mientras que la inseguridad y la evitación contribuyen a mantenerla. Numerosos estudios han examinado los niveles de ansiedad en aprendientes de lenguas extranjeras en general, pero relativamente pocos se han centrado en estudiantes de un nivel tan avanzado. Las implicaciones pedagógicas más importantes de este estudio incluyen reconocer la necesidad de fomentar un entorno de aula de apoyo y centrarse en estrategias afectivas que ayuden a los estudiantes a fortalecer su confianza y autoeficacia.

Palabras clave — ansiedad en lenguas extranjeras, destrezas orales, estudiantes avanzados, mecanismos de afrontamiento, EFL

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INTRODUCTION

During the 19th and 20th centuries, language teaching changed and developed rapidly, placing focus on different skills. Speaking as a skill had been largely neglected for a considerable period of time. However, the end of the 20th century made communication and the communicative language approach prominent, allowing speaking skills to thrive, and the emphasis shifted to meaningful communication (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001), which further continued during the 21st century.

As Harmer (2001) states, speaking and writing are productive skills that provide evidence of how well learning is progressing. In the context of English language education, speaking is often regarded as the most immediate and visible demonstration of communicative competence, and in real life, proficiency in speaking is paramount for academic and professional success, social integration, and building relationships. It is also a skill exposed to real-time pressure and judgement, particularly in classrooms.

The anxiety that students feel while speaking is considered one of the strongest detrimental factors in learning a new language and, as such, has been the topic of a plethora of research (Dörnyei, 2005; Horwitz, 1986; Woodrow, 2006). Unexpected persistence of speaking anxiety is found even among high-proficiency learners. This paradox challenges the assumption that linguistic competence naturally eliminates emotional barriers. Prior studies (Horwitz, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989) have shown that anxiety can persist or even intensify with increased expectations and self-awareness.

Research in the field of language learning has generally explored anxiety in lower-proficiency learners, and there is a lack of research on advanced-level learners. This paper aims to examine anxiety among university-level students studying English whose proficiency ranges from B2 to C2 according to the CEFR.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foundations and Classification of Foreign Language Anxiety

Horwitz et al. (1986) were among the first researchers dealing with foreign language anxiety (FLA), or second-language anxiety, as a special type of situation-specific anxiety. Scovel (1991) defined anxiety from the perspective of psychologists, focusing on the feeling of apprehension and an unknown fear not connected to a specific object. Psychologists focused more on general anxiety, whereas the focus of foreign language anxiety is on a specific situation. Students often become anxious as they try to avoid making mistakes when performing in a foreign language. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) used the analysis of anxiety scales to conclude that foreign language anxiety is separable from general anxiety, yet also part of more general communicative anxiety.

There are three performance anxieties related to FLA: (1) communication apprehension, (2) test anxiety, and (3) fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986). Communication

apprehension occurs in individuals who experience stage fright and are not comfortable speaking in public. It is particularly pronounced in language-learning environments because limitations posed by insufficient linguistic knowledge can make speakers feel self-conscious and reluctant to speak at all. Test anxiety is connected with students who have unrealistic expectations of themselves and who strive for perfection; therefore, nothing less than perfect is satisfactory for them. Fear of negative evaluation is similar to test anxiety and is not necessarily connected to tests but rather to the negative evaluation that may arise from social situations where others may evaluate speakers of a foreign language. It affects people's self-esteem.

Another classification, which focuses on the impact of anxiety on performance, distinguishes between two types of anxiety: debilitating (harmful) and facilitating (helpful) (Alpert & Haber, 1960). Studies in FLA primarily focus on the debilitating type (Brown, 2007; Horwitz et al., 1986; Oxford, 1999), the one that causes negative effects. These effects may be direct or indirect: reducing class participation as a direct and observable effect, and fear, frustration, and worry as indirect effects (Oxford, 1999).

Causes and Factors of Foreign Language Anxiety

Oteir and Al-Otaibi (2019) provided an overview of various causes of foreign language anxiety. They listed several factors that can contribute to FLA, such as foreign language aptitude and language skills, teachers' beliefs and students' perceptions of foreign language proficiency, low self-esteem, fear of speaking a foreign language, fear of making mistakes, the teacher's role, and the learning atmosphere.

The factors that may cause foreign language anxiety can be related to the language system (lingual factors) or to the language-learning process (extra-lingual factors) (Králová, 2016). Lingual factors can be divided into two groups: interlingual and intralingual. The former refers to factors that appear due to contact between different languages, whereas intralingual factors stem from the language itself. Since FLA is considered more psychological than linguistic in nature, extra-lingual factors are generally more influential. Králová (2016) further states that extra-lingual factors can be personal or impersonal. Attitudes and beliefs are considered intrapersonal factors, whereas relationships between learners or between learners and teachers (learner–learner or learner–teacher) are considered interpersonal.

Woodrow (2006) emphasizes the distinction between in-class and out-of-class anxiety, noting that interaction between teachers and students in various activities can be a major cause of anxiety, particularly regarding speaking. Students tend to compare themselves with others, have high expectations, and show competitive traits in classroom contexts. Quite often they avoid participation and procrastinate performing tasks, which just accumulates the levels of anxiety they can feel.

With the advancement of technology, the internet, and global connectivity, students are increasingly exposed to native speakers and may compare themselves to them. Such comparison

can lead to anxiety, even though they are only foreign language learners (Akbar, Sofyan, & Damayanti, 2018).

Foreign Language Anxiety Assessment

Assessing such a vague concept can be rather challenging. However, its importance is indisputable, as it can help reveal emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions that students show during speaking activities. The most famous assessment tool was created for the study by Horwitz and her colleagues (Horwitz et al., 1986), in which they developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). This self-report instrument aimed to measure the level of anxiety among students, mostly in classroom settings, and it inspired numerous other studies (Sparks & Ganschow, 2007; Lee & Ye, 2023; Aida, 1994; Phillips, 1992). The scale consists of 33 Likert-type statements administered to college students attending "support groups," and the results showed that students who reported high anxiety also reported being afraid of speaking in a foreign language. Typically, anxiety is measured using Likert-scale responses to evaluate sources of stress.

Qualitative research has also been conducted through self-report questionnaires that are more skill-specific, focusing on different language modalities such as writing (Cheng, 2002), listening (Zhang, 2013), and reading (Saito, Garza, & Horwitz, 1999).

Even though quantitative instruments are more commonly used for FLA assessment, qualitative methods provide deeper insight into the issues involved (von Wörde, 2003). Qualitative research can be carried out through interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journals. It can be useful for revealing peer dynamics, language levels, and the behaviors of teachers and students.

Effects of Speaking Anxiety on Learners

Emotionality or worry are two reactions that reflect anxiety (Liebert & Morris, 1967). While emotionality is a physiological and behavioral reaction (blushing, heart racing, stammering, fidgeting), worry brings about cognitive reactions, such as self-deprecation or thoughts not relevant to the task (Woodrow, 2006). Obviously, worry is the one that can undermine communication in a foreign language. Woodrow (2006) also states that even though the items used to measure language anxiety do focus on anxiety reactions, they have not been exploited enough.

Anxiety is usually negatively related to performance in the foreign language (Woodrow, 2006). Students often describe it as "mental blocks," which prevent them from speaking fluently and retrieving vocabulary efficiently. As Woodrow states, anxiety reduces self-confidence and self-efficacy.

Teachers do not always manage to identify anxious students and very often consider the lack of participation to be equal to the lack of motivation (Gregersen, 2003). Behavioral effects include avoiding participation and not volunteering during classes. Despite the extensive number

of studies regarding speaking anxiety, there are not enough that focus on the sources of anxiety and recommendations for overcoming it (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted among students from all four years of the BA English Language program at Singidunum University in Belgrade. According to the university curriculum, their proficiency levels ranged from B2 to C2 on the CEFR scale. The study comprised two components: an anonymous online survey completed by 78 students and follow-up interviews with 20 participants. Accordingly, the research employed a mixed-methods design, combining questionnaires and interviews and providing a more holistic approach. The data from different sources were triangulated to obtain better results and enhance the reliability and validity of the findings.

The survey consists of 17 questions, including 8 multiple-choice items, 6 Likert-scale items, and 3 open-ended questions. Although it is not a version of the FLCAS, some aspects are similar. This questionnaire was specifically adapted for university-level students and is meant to be culturally and linguistically relevant for students in Serbia.

Quantitative data from the closed-ended questions were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software (version 26) to produce descriptive statistics. The qualitative dimension includes an analysis of responses to the open-ended survey questions, complemented by thematic descriptions derived from the interview data.

In total, 20 students participated in the interviews, which consisted of 11 questions and focused on the aspects of language that are the most challenging and the situations that cause anxiety levels to rise. The aim of the final part of the interview was to obtain ideas and suggestions for overcoming anxiety, or at least alleviating its effects.

RESULTS

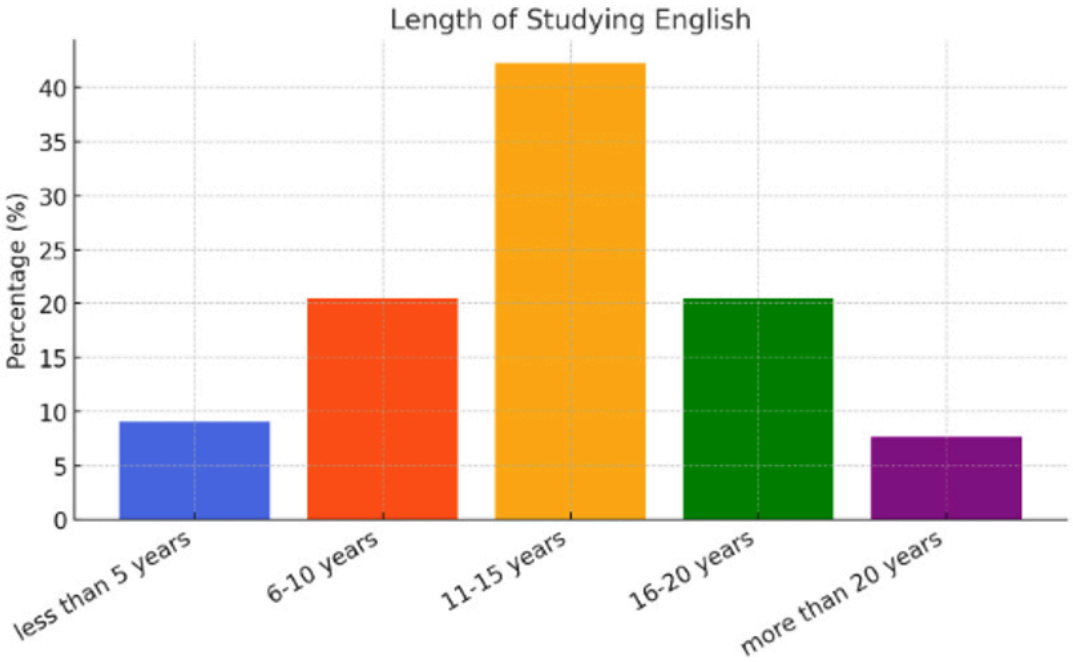
Quantitative Results

Participants' Profile

Based on the responses in the survey form, it can be concluded that the vast majority of students are female (79.5%), with only 16.7% male students and 3.8% of students who did not want to state their gender. Most participants are in the 18–25 age range (83.3%), representing typical undergraduate students. The exposure to English for most students is quite high, which is not surprising, since they had studied English at school in the educational system of Serbia for 12 years prior to entering university.

Figure 1.

Answers to the question about the number of years studying English



However, only 7.7% of students had immersion experience living in an English-speaking country. Most students state that they use English on a daily basis through classes, media, and communication with friends, and some students need it at work, but 18 students claim that they rarely or sometimes use English when they are traveling.

The responses about the number of languages students have been studying reveal that this is a highly multilingual group, where most respondents have studied two or more additional languages, often for extended periods of time (4 to 10 years), indicating exposure to language education from various aspects. Due to this rich linguistic background, as well as interaction with multiple foreign languages and cross-linguistic awareness, it can be supposed that participants have metalinguistic competence and confidence in language learning.

Perceptions of Speaking, Mistakes, and Peer Interaction

Overall, respondents rate their English levels as very good, with a mean score of 3.96, a median of 4.00, a standard deviation of 0.78, and a mode of 4, which can be observed in Table 1. It also shows that students feel confident when speaking English, with a mean of 4.08, but the mode is 5.00, indicating that most of them reported feeling extremely confident speaking English. Only a small number of students claim to still experience uncertainty.

Nevertheless, a mean value of 2.56 for the question about panic—where students were asked if they panic when they have to speak without preparation—shows a moderate level of panic, even though the majority of students feel confident. Even though this panic exists, it is manageable among the given sample.

Table 1.

Descriptive statistics regarding self-rated proficiency and speaking without preparation

Statistics				
		How do you rate your proficiency in English?	I feel really confident when speaking English	I start to panic if I have to speak without preparation
N	**Valid**	78	78	78
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		3.96	4.08	2.56
Median		4.00	4.00	2.50
Mode		4	5	1
Std. Deviation		.780	1.016	1.383
Sum		309	318	200

Note. Higher scores indicate higher proficiency, confidence, or panic, depending on the variable.

The correlation for the above parameters was checked through a Pearson correlation analysis, where statistical significance was found. Namely, there is a statistically significant relationship among all three variables. Students who consider their English proficiency high also tend to feel confident speaking (Pearson correlation, r = 0.708), while those with lower proficiency are more likely to experience panic when unprepared (moderate negative correlation, r= -0.413). Confidence acts inversely to anxiety – higher confidence corresponds to reduced panic. All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level, suggesting that these associations are highly reliable (Table 2).

Table 2.

Pearson correlation analysis for three variables

		How do you rate your proficiency in English	I feel really confident when speaking English	I start to panic if I have to speak without preparation
How do you rate your proficiency in English	**Pearson Correlation**	1	.708**	-.413**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	78	78	78
I feel really confident when speaking English	**Pearson Correlation**	.708**	1	-.503**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	78	78	78
I start to panic if I have to speak without preparation	**Pearson Correlation**	-.413**	-.503**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	78	78	78

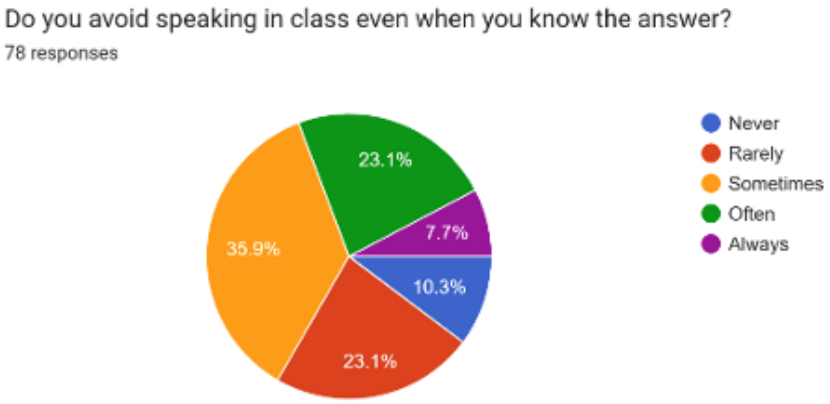
Note. N = 78. All correlations are significant at the p < .01 level (2-tailed). ** p < .01.

A considerable number of students (30.8%) do not feel apprehension when speaking in front of their peers in a classroom. With 26.9% neutral students and 15.4% of those who experience extreme discomfort in such situations, it can be concluded that communication apprehension defined by Horwitz et al. (1986) is present in the case of one in four students.

When asked if they avoided speaking in class even if they knew the answer to a question (Figure 2), 7.7% say they always avoid speaking, 23.1% claim this happens often, and 35.9% admit they sometimes avoid it. This indicates that avoidance behavior is fairly common. This avoidance may reflect communication apprehension or fear of negative evaluation, both common components of foreign language anxiety.

Figure 2.

Responses to the Question "Do You Avoid Speaking in Class Even When You Know the Answer?"



When asked whether they worry about making mistakes in class, responses were relatively balanced across the scale. Roughly 32% (ratings 1–2) showed little concern, while another 32% (ratings 4–5) admitted frequent worry. The remaining 24.4% were neutral. This balance shows a diverse emotional response, where some students approach speaking in classrooms with confidence, while others experience moderate to high anxiety.

The results also highlight that most students are comfortable communicating with non-native speakers and, in general, show little cross-linguistic anxiety.

A significant number of respondents, 61.5%, admitted to code-switching – mixing English and their mother tongue – while 38.5% denied doing so. This suggests that code-switching is a common communicative strategy, which could be used to manage lexical gaps. It reflects more bilingual flexibility and not lack of competence, and could be considered another coping mechanism.

Students were asked to identify their biggest language-related difficulty. Most often, they recognized grammar as the part of language that poses the greatest difficulties (26.9%), whereas speaking was recognized as a problem by 16.9% of students. Since it was not perceived as the main problem, fear of speaking may originate more from situational stress or psychological barriers than from actual linguistic limitations.

Finally, the independent samples t-test compared the mean anxiety scores of students who had lived in an English-speaking country for more than one year (n = 5) with those who had not (n = 67). Results indicated a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(70) = -2.14$, $p = .037$, with the immersion group reporting markedly lower levels of speaking anxiety ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 0.70$) than their peers without such experience ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.82$). Thus, it can be

concluded that being exposed to authentic communication for a longer period of time reduces anxiety when speaking. Nevertheless, the number of students is not large, and this could be further researched with a bigger sample.

Qualitative Results from Surveys

The students were asked about suggestions on how to overcome speaking anxiety, and the predominant answer, repeated across more than half of the responses, was the importance of practice (e.g., "Practice makes perfect." "Just start speaking."). In general, they believe that active use of language is crucial, some of them indicating gradual exposure ("little by little") and consistency ("every day," "as much as possible"). They see authentic interaction with foreigners or spending time in an English-speaking country as an option, which is actually statistically supported in the results above. The most important conclusion is that a person cannot eliminate anxiety through avoidance but, quite the opposite, through engagement.

Indirect practice through media is also considered a good mechanism for building confidence. The proposed ways of overcoming anxiety include watching TV shows and movies and reading books and articles, which should help enhance linguistic familiarity. A few of them even describe their personal journeys, where through books and movies they managed to develop themselves, and intrinsic motivation replaced their fear.

Some responses highlight a positive mindset and self-acceptance, with examples such as: "Everyone makes mistakes – it's how you learn"; "Even native speakers make mistakes"; "It's not the end of the world if you don't know some of the words"; "Nobody will judge you." These are rational coping strategies, lowering perfectionism and normalizing imperfection, and they support Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, which claims that anxiety decreases when learners feel safe to err (Dulay et al., 1982). Logical self-talk, mentioned by some students, could be included in this positive mindset, where students remind themselves that nobody is perfect and pretend they are alone and no one else matters.

Certain suggestions were given on how to overcome the issues of anxiety, and they mostly include psychological techniques, claiming people should focus on mindfulness, breathing, relaxing, and taking their time, thus regulating their emotions.

However, there are a number of responses that indicate a lack of strategies and resignation. Some of them acknowledge their struggles, saying they would love to discover some strategies for overcoming anxiety themselves. Students admitted they simply avoid speaking, so they are aware of the anxiety but not of the coping mechanisms. This avoidance keeps them in a vicious circle, and they do not manage to make improvements.

Overall, the group believes in growth and advancement. They do not think anxiety is a fixed trait, but something that could be managed. This suggests a positive learner mindset.

ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS

The interviews revealed that no students feel the highest level of anxiety. On a scale from one to ten, where one represents no anxiety whatsoever and ten represents strong anxiety, the highest mark given by one student is 7. Among the rest of the students, seven of them indicated that they feel anxiety at a medium level, from 5 to 6, and six students claimed they feel almost no anxiety, at the level of 0–1. This could be connected to the fact that 11 out of 20 interviewed students claim that speaking is one of their favorite skills in English.

Key Triggers of Anxiety

Even though students overall do not feel strong anxiety while speaking, there are several recurring triggers mentioned by them during the interviews. First of all, the performance context is important, since most of them start feeling anxious when asked to present in front of others, combining this with the fear of public speaking. Another issue arises in cases of formal assessment, and several students mentioned increased anxiety during midterm tests or exams.

The aspects of language that students identified as the most anxiety-provoking are linguistic inadequacies connected to grammar accuracy (tenses and articles in particular), pronunciation, and lack of appropriate vocabulary. Moreover, six students claimed that pronunciation makes their insecurities surface, one of them specifically stating that she knows a lot of words from being an avid reader but is not always certain how to pronounce them.

While some students were unaffected by audience presence, many reported increased anxiety when speaking before peers, professors, or native speakers. Familiarity with the audience is also considered relevant, since the more familiar the students feel, the lower the level of anxiety reported.

A significant number of students claim that familiarity with the topic they are involved with is not essential in relation to anxiety levels. It is definitely easier to foster discussion with a popular subject, but in cases of uninteresting or unfamiliar topics, there will be hesitation and minimal participation.

Coping Strategies

The most common strategy for dealing with anxiety that was mentioned is avoidance. A large proportion of students tend to completely avoid speaking when they feel nervous. On the other hand, some students keep their answers short or speak more quietly.

There were some compensatory techniques mentioned as well, such as speeding up their speech, using non-verbal gestures, or paraphrasing (examples of answers: “I avoid speaking and speak really quietly.” “I shorten my sentences.” “If I can’t remember, I use gestures and say ‘How

can I say…' to help me continue."). One student said she would start stuttering when feeling anxious about her mistakes in speaking.

A minority of students claim that they deliberately push themselves or even speak more when anxious, treating the whole experience as practice.

Comparison with Peers and Impact on Language Processing

Even though a large proportion of students believe that they do not tend to compare themselves to their peers (8 of them), the majority do make comparisons, as they say "for comfort, or for motivation." In situations in which students felt below average, they reported reduced willingness to speak.

Several participants described moments when anxiety caused mental blocks, making it harder to recall vocabulary or apply grammar rules. In these cases, they would leave the sentence incomplete, mix the languages they speak, or start using gestures. On the other hand, some students claim this anxiety motivates them even more and makes it easier to paraphrase and find a way to describe what they want to say, confirming the existence of facilitative anxiety.

Perceived Support

One really important part of the interview was discussing the options for overcoming the aforementioned anxiety. The most important aspects mentioned in this context are improving discipline, receiving encouragement from professors and peers, as well as proper feedback and positive reinforcement. Reassurance and kindness are exceptionally important aspects of feedback.

DISCUSSION

This study highlights the complex and multidimensional nature of speaking anxiety for advanced students. It emphasizes that even though the level of linguistic competence is noteworthy, they still experience certain emotional barriers that can prevent them from speaking or reduce their general willingness to participate in speaking activities. This aligns with the research done by Horwitz (2010), MacIntyre and Gardner (1989), and Woodrow (2006), who claim that proficiency does not mean confidence. Hence, speaking performance is mainly determined by affective factors such as fear of negative evaluation, comparison with peers, and high self-expectations.

The results overall show a strong, confident, but cautious group. A significant minority experiences situational anxiety, particularly in contexts focused on performance. The data reveal that fear of mistakes and peer judgement brings occasional speaking avoidance and that students are more confident outside the classroom compared to the formal classroom setting. It is concluded that one of the mechanisms for naturally reducing anxiety is code-switching, and most

students worry about grammar and accuracy. All of this aligns with the theoretical framework of foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986) and the three main components listed: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Namely, avoiding speaking in front of peers, sometimes even in situations when they know the answer, is a clear example of communication apprehension. Fear of negative evaluation is presented through their reluctance to speak in front of their peers. However, the anxiety is context-dependent since this anxiety is more pronounced in the classroom with peers than with native speakers.

Another aspect the students mention is the focus on grammatical accuracy, which makes a link between perfectionism and performance anxiety (Dörnyei, 2005; Woodrow, 2006). At the same time, respondents also emphasize practice, self-acceptance, and authentic communication as ways of constantly developing and growing. This highlights the effect of facilitative anxiety, which can be a motivator when appropriately managed (Alpert & Haber, 1960).

A noteworthy insight is that learners who experienced immersion in English-speaking environments reported lower levels of anxiety. Kao and Craigie (2010) claimed in their paper that exposure to authentic contexts enhances self-efficacy and comfort in communication. Additionally, the learners' emphasis on supportive feedback and emotional reassurance confirms Krashen's (Dulay et al., 1982) affective filter hypothesis, illustrating that anxiety diminishes in environments where mistakes are normalized and participation is encouraged.

From a pedagogical perspective, the study highlights for all educators the fact that they need to recognize that anxiety can coexist with proficiency. When students are silent or reluctant to speak, it does not necessarily mean a lack of interest, and it is the task of teachers to try to organize less anxiety-provoking activities, collaboration with peers without public speaking in front of the whole class to reduce stage fright, provide reflective practice, and allow students to deal with their speaking anxiety in this process.

CONCLUSION

The research indicates that speaking anxiety can be found even among advanced-level learners and can be an obstacle to meaningful conversation. Even though the students consider themselves proficient speakers who feel they have enough confidence, situational factors – such as speaking unprepared, or talking in front of the peers and teachers – can still provoke anxiety.

It was discovered that fear of negative evaluation, perfectionism, and comparison with others are emotional variables that affect learners' performance even when they reach higher levels. At the same time, some of the factors that could reduce anxiety are a supportive learning environment, consistent practice, authentic communication, and improving self-belief. One of the main solutions to overcoming this is being exposed to a lot of everyday communication in English.

The implications for pedagogy are clear. Teachers need to address the affective dimension of teaching and try to create a supportive classroom climate where mistakes are accepted and

feedback is provided so that students do not feel reluctant to express themselves. Activities during speaking lessons should combine peer communication, reflection, and peer support.

Further studies could be conducted with a larger and more diverse sample of learners from different educational contexts. Also, it could be explored how specific pedagogical interventions impact the level of anxiety in students or focus on the distinction between online and in-person environments.

All in all, reducing anxiety is an affective factor teachers should strive to address in order to help students use the language confidently.

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