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**CLASSROOM**

**ENVIRONMENT INFLUENCES IN SPEAKING ANXIETY LEVELS**

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## ENVIRONMENT INFLUENCES IN SPEAKING ANXIETY LEVELS

### INFLUENCIA DEL ENTORNO DE AULA EN LOS NIVELES DE ANSIEDAD AL HABLAR INGLES

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#### ABSTRACT

Speaking anxiety is present and persists innumerable in schools, high schools, or even universities, no matter whether public or private they are. Speaking anxiety may stem from different sources and affect each individual student differently. The research for this study was done through the use of a quantitative students' questionnaire based on the Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) administered to 23 students (14 male and 9 female) from the tenth grade of Basica Superior of Colegio de Bachillerato Asaad Bucaram, before and after the classroom intervention. The study started with a classroom visit to determine what kind of environment the students perform the activities. The instrument used was a classroom visit file. The findings suggest that the changes experienced by students in the classroom modified the previous results, about 4,4% of the anxiety level among students was reduced in both the Low Language Anxiety (LLA) category and High Language Anxiety (HLA) category. In genre differences before classroom intervention, girls were more anxious than boys in certain items when speaking in class. However, the results changed after the intervention. Boys showed more anxiety than girls. Further research may be needed to understand the specific factors contributing to these changes in anxiety levels and gender differences.

#### Keywords:

Foreign speaking anxiety, classroom environment, classroom intervention.

#### RESUMEN

La ansiedad por hablar está presente y persiste innumerable veces en las escuelas, institutos o incluso universidades, ya sean públicas o privadas. La ansiedad al hablar puede surgir de diferentes fuentes y afectar a cada estudiante de manera diferente. La investigación para este estudio se realizó mediante el uso de un cuestionario estudiantil cuantitativo basado en la Escala de Ansiedad del Lenguaje (FLCAS) administrado a 23 estudiantes (14 hombres y 9 mujeres) del décimo grado de Básica Superior del Colegio de Bachillerato Asaad Bucaram, antes y después de la intervención en el aula. El estudio se inició con una visita al aula para determinar en qué tipo de ambiente los estudiantes realizan las actividades, el instrumento utilizado fue una ficha de visita al aula. Los hallazgos sugieren que, los cambios experimentados por los estudiantes en el aula modificaron los resultados anteriores, aproximadamente un 4,4% el nivel de ansiedad entre los estudiantes se redujo tanto en la categoría de Ansiedad Lingüística Baja (LLA) como en la categoría de Ansiedad Lingüística Alta (HLA). En las diferencias de género antes de la intervención en el aula, las niñas estaban más ansiosas que los niños en ciertos elementos al hablar en clase; sin embargo, los resultados cambiaron después de la intervención, los niños mostraron más ansiedad que las niñas.

Es posible que se necesite más investigación para comprender los factores específicos que contribuyen a estos cambios en los niveles de ansiedad y las diferencias de género.

#### Palabras clave:

Ansiedad al hablar otro idioma, entorno del aula, intervención del aula.

## INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that the study of the effect of the classroom environment on the learning process began decades ago, Moos and Walberg in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s (Dorman, 2002), over the last few years, there has been a remarkable emphasis on its influences in foreign or second language learning.

*“Once researchers pointed at the classroom environment as one of the main barriers to beat in English learners who suffer any anxiety no matter the skill where the problem is presented, in order to enhance the academic outcomes, the strategies to overcome it were diverse.*

*They may vary from psychological methods, meditation, deep breath, mindset, passing through rules, guidelines, and contracts, finishing the organization, reorganizing their desks in a circle, or organizing them into groups. All these strategies and methods are valuable, and it depends on the type of context to be applied”.* (Hannah, 2013, p. 4)

According to Neer & Kircher (1990), speaking before half the class aroused less anxiety than speaking before the entire class. While there is research related to the topic in the world, especially in North- American, European, and Asian countries, this field has not been explored in the Iberian-America region and merits further attention.

Recent studies have shown that applying a kind of classroom intervention the language learning anxiety levels; considering the Latin-America population idiosyncrasy (Livacic, 2017) and Ecuadorian students' background, perhaps these outcomes might vary in comparison with other continents which makes such a study very interesting.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the extent of speaking anxiety levels and their relation with the classroom environment among students from the tenth grade of *Basica Superior of Colegio de Bachillerato Asaad Bucaram* in the school year 2023-2024.

The starting point was a classroom visit to determine the current climate through a checklist based on *the Ministry of Education* file extracting the “*clima para el aprendizaje*” section (appendix 1) required for the present study.

After analyzing the gathered data, whether the occasion warrants it, a Language Anxiety Scale (adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, Horwitz, 2010) was designed to assess students' language anxiety levels. The scale, with 32 items, was constructed in Spanish to facilitate students' understanding of the items in the scale. The test was administered on Google form before the classroom intervention (BCI) and after the classroom intervention (ACI). The research was focused on the following strategies: (1) Rules, guidelines, and contracts, (2) Reorganize the desks in a circle, (3) Speaking before half the class. They were chosen because these strategies might be applied in very short periods of time,

and investment would be insignificant. On the other hand, meditation, mindset, and deep breaths probably take longer training in all probability, the benefit for students who struggle with anxiety levels will be welcomed by the educative community.

In the classroom, they (students) understand their place in the world and the talents they have to offer. Students think about what they want their future to be like and learn the skills necessary to achieve that goal (Hannah, 2013). The classroom environment is what teachers focus on at the beginning of each grade. Designing effective classroom environments for learning to read and write is both an art and a science. Aligning physical space with educational objectives requires flexible use of space to meet educational needs. A well-designed classroom environment is the first step in creating a literacy environment that promotes reading and writing for learning (Roskos & Neuman, 2011).

When feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and increased blood pressure are presented, we are dealing with an emotion called anxiety (American Psychological Association, 2023) or when we are afraid of things we expect to occur in the near future. On the other hand, while performing in the second (SL) or Foreign Language (FL), a learner experiences apprehension or fear; this is known as Language Anxiety (LA) (Ling & Na, 2014).

Botes et al. (2020), explained that if, during the language learning process, students feel a single kind of anxiety, this situation is examined beside academic achievement: Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA). Palacios (1998), what causes the most anxiety among students is speaking. According to Horwitz (2010), speaking is the skill most affected by foreign language anxiety, while Aydin (2001), cited that the reasons for speaking anxiety are categorized into four groups: personal reasons, the teacher's manner in the classroom, learners' beliefs and testing and teaching procedures.

A considerable number of studies have found many factors that affect foreign language anxiety. Among those factors are a negative attitude toward learning (Krashen, 1982), students' belief about language acquisition (Horwitz, 2010), students' motivation to learn (Bandura, 1997), learning in cooperative groups (Oxford, in Duxbury & Tsai, 2010), the physical environment of the classroom (Hannah, 2013) may also contribute to the occurrence of foreign language anxiety.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study used a quantitative, experimental methodology to examine how different classroom settings affect the levels of speaking anxiety experienced by high school students. The study intends to evaluate how different classroom environments affect teenage EFL learners' levels of speaking anxiety.

Twenty-three pupils (aged 13 to 14) participated in the study at “Asaad Bucaram” High School in the tenth grade. Students of that age were picked because, given that the high school is located close to the outskirts of the town and has a small student body in contrast to other institutions, this age group is the most representative in the educational center. Students’ responses to a questionnaire were utilized to collect the quantitative data for this study, which was used to compare the speaking anxiety students reported before and after the classroom intervention. Before the speaking assignment activity, the test was given to every single student in the room.

### Substitution drill technique

Substitution drill is a fast action that builds up jargon and language structures. Students rehash a sentence, substituting a single word in the sentence for one more with a picture or composed cues ideal for A1-level learners. To measure students’ language anxiety levels, a Language Anxiety Scale was developed (modified from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, Horwitz, 2010). To make it easier for students to understand the scale’s elements, a pool of 32 initial objects was considered. However, only 16 were established as part of the scale because of their relation with the skill. On a 4-point scale (1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, and 4 = strongly disagree), students were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement (Siew & Wong, 2009).

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale is a worldwide tested instrument and preceded for its reputation does not need more presentation. However, there were modifications such as replacing the word “questions” with “affirmations” and directions for taking the test, clarifying that **participation is voluntary and that there are no wrong answers**. After colleagues’ cooperation, changes were immediately applied to complete a near-final version of the CEISAL, which was piloted with the same fellow TEFL Master program (3), who collaborated with its adaptation. By now, the instrument for this study was adjusted for three fellow TEFL Master programs. The final version of the test (16 affirmations for the study) took just under 15 minutes to be completed by participants.

Student surveys (questionnaires) were used to collect quantitative data and process the information needed for the study’s goal. After reverse scoring was completed for each scale’s elements, students’ scores were added to determine their Language Anxiety score. The study focused on three interventions: the first one: set the rule ‘Who makes fun of others while speaking does extra homework, the second one: reorganize the desk in a circle, and finally, the third one: speak before half of the class.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine how much language anxiety high school students experienced. After reverse scoring was performed on each scale’s affirmations, students’ scores on the Language Anxiety Scale were added to determine their overall language anxiety score.

### Level anxiety and genre differences

#### Before the classroom intervention

##### Level anxiety

The three levels of anxiety were used in this study to categorize the students. Low Language Anxiety (LLA) level students were those who scored more than one standard deviation below the mean (Mean = 39.04, SD = 8.26), Moderate Language Anxiety (MLA) level students scored between one standard deviation below and one standard deviation above the mean, and High Language Anxiety (HLA) level students scored between one standard deviation below and one standard deviation above the mean. According to these three ranges of scores, as indicated in Table 1 (BCI part), 21.7% of the students fell into the LLA level, 60.9% into the MLA level, and the remaining 17.4% fell into the HLA level.

##### Genre differences

Girls’ mean language anxiety scores were somewhat higher than boys’ (M = 39,00) in the study, but there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups (Table 2, section BCI). The Language Anxiety Scale’s individual item mean comparison results revealed that for five of the scale’s 16 items. In the categories 2, 3, 10, 13, and 15, girls’ results were higher than boys’. When it came to being “called on an English class,” “do not understand what the teacher says,” “getting left behind,” and “afraid of being laughed at,” girls were more nervous than boys were. For 10 of the scale’s 16 elements, girls’ mean scores were lower than boys’ on average, according to a perusal of the means for each item. (Bahrami & Yousefi, 2011; Bakhla et al., 2013). Overall, females tend to be more anxious in English classes.

#### After classroom intervention

##### Level anxiety

Low Language Anxiety (LLA) level students were those who scored more than one standard deviation below the mean (Mean = 34.87, SD = 8.92), Moderate Language Anxiety (MLA) level students scored between one standard deviation below and one standard deviation above the mean, and High Language Anxiety (HLA) level students scored between one standard deviation below and one standard deviation above the mean. According to these three ranges of scores, as indicated in Table 1 (ACI

part), 26.1% of the students fell into the LLA level, 60.9% into the MLA level, and the remaining 13.0% fell into the HLA level.

Table 1. Anxiety levels students' allocation.

Anxiety level	BCI			ACI		
	Score range	n	%	Score range	n	%
Low Language Anxiety	16 - 30	5	21,7	16 - 25	6	26,1
Medium Language Anxiety	31 - 45	14	60,9	26 - 44	14	60,9
High Language Anxiety	46 - 60	4	17,4	45 - 60	3	13,0

### Genre differences

There was no discernible difference between the mean language anxiety scores of boys and girls, with girls scoring lower on average ( $M = 33.33$  vs. boys'  $M = 35.86$ ) (Table 2, section ACI). The results of mean comparisons for each of the 16 items in the Language Anxiety Scale, however, revealed that males outperformed girls on items 1, 10, 14, and 16 for four of the scale's sixteen components. When it comes to "speaking English class," "getting left behind," "overwhelmed by the number of rules," and "nervous when the language teacher asks questions," boys expressed more significant anxiety than girls did. While this was going on, Item 9 revealed that girls were more nervous than guys when it came to being "called on an English class".

Table 2. Genre means and overall standard deviation (in parenthesis).

#	Affirmations	BCI		ACI	
		Male (14)	Female (9)	Male (14)	Female(9)
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English class.	2,71	2,78	2,21	1,67
2	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class.	2,14	2,56	2,14	1,78
3	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English.	2,07	2,78	2,00	2,11
4	I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am.	2,64	2,67	2,57	2,33
5	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.	3,21	3,00	2,14	2,11
6	In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	2,71	2,56	2,21	2,33
7	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.	2,50	2,11	2,29	2,56
8	The more I study for English language tests, the more confused I get.	1,86	1,89	2,14	2,11
9	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English class.	2,14	2,11	1,71	2,11
10	English class moves so quickly that I worry about getting left behind.	2,29	1,78	2,43	1,56
11	I feel more tense and nervous in English class than in other classes.	2,21	1,67	2,07	1,78
12	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.	2,64	2,67	2,41	2,56
13	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.	2,07	2,78	2,50	2,22
14	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak English.	2,43	2,44	2,50	2,00
15	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.	2,64	2,89	2,00	2,33
16	I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions that I still need to prepare in advance.	2,71	2,44	2,50	1,78
	Total	39,00 (5,23)	39,11 (5,07)	35,86 (3,55)	33,33 (3,40)



## CONCLUSIONS

Following the classroom intervention, the distribution of anxiety levels changed. There was a higher percentage of students in the Low Language Anxiety (LLA) category, suggesting that the intervention may have reduced anxiety for some students.

Similar to the pre-intervention findings, there was no significant difference in language anxiety between girls and boys. However, it is noteworthy that girls' mean language anxiety scores were lower than boys' scores post-intervention. This suggests that the intervention may have been more effective in reducing anxiety for girls.

When examining specific items on the Language Anxiety Scale, it was found that boys were more anxious than girls in some aspects, indicating a reversal in the gender differences. Boys seemed to be more affected by the changes introduced by the intervention, particularly in terms of speaking in English class and feeling overwhelmed by the number of rules.

In summary, the study suggests that classroom intervention had a positive impact on reducing language anxiety, particularly for girls. However, it also changed the dynamics of gender differences, with boys becoming more affected by certain aspects of language anxiety after the intervention. These findings highlight the importance of considering both gender and individual anxiety levels when implementing classroom interventions to address language anxiety. Further research may be needed to understand the specific factors contributing to these changes in anxiety levels and gender differences.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Classroom visit file.



### FICHA DE OBSERVACIÓN ÁULICA



GUÍA DE OBSERVACIÓN ÁULICA					
Curso y paralelo a evaluar:	DECIMO "A"			Código AMIEI:	07H00412
Apellidos y nombres del docente:	BRINNER DANIEL CASTRO VACA			Criterios de evaluación	
Fecha y hora:	15/08/2023	Hora de Inicio	8:40	CR	Cumple con los requerimientos
Nivel Educativo / Sección	Básica superior	Hora de Finalización:	8:45	EC	Está cerca de cumplir con los requerimientos
Tema / contenidos de la clase:	Presente progresivo			NM	Necesita mejora
Necesidades Educativas Especiales con o sin discapacidad				NO/NA	No fue observado / No aplica
CLIMA PARA EL APRENDIZAJE					
Promueve la participación de todas y todos los estudiantes y la expresión de sus opiniones e ideas.					EC
Promueve y facilita el orden y limpieza.					EC
Las reglas y rutinas son claras en la clase. <b>(Rules, guidelines and contracts)</b>					NM
Distribuye el mobiliario permitiendo espacios de circulación. <b>(Reorganize their desks in a circle or organize desks into groups)</b>					NM
La distribución de los alumnos en la sala de clases se modifica de acuerdo a la tarea a realizar. <b>(Speaking before half the class)</b>					NM
Mantiene el respeto y la disciplina del aula.					EC
El docente toma en consideración el ritmo y el tiempo de aprendizaje de cada uno de sus estudiantes.					EC

