Characterizing and dealing with anxiety in the foreign language classroom

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Abstract

Foreign Language Anxiety has been defined as the feeling of nervousness that may appear in the process of acquiring a new language. Although it may have beneficial effects on students' performance, the presence of anxious students in language classes is a major concern for teachers and for the students themselves, which is why researchers on the topic have mainly explored its negative effects and its correlation with Foreign Language Acquisition (FLA). The present paper aims at understanding and analysing the role of this affective variable with a view to providing certain tips and strategies for teachers to take to the classroom, and to improve students' self-esteem. In order to achieve this goal, I will deal with both theoretical and practical issues. Thus, the paper summarises several research studies that help us characterize foreign language anxiety. These studies are fundamental for the understanding of Foreign Language Anxiety as situation specific type (Gardener & MacIntyte, 1989, cited in MacIntyre, 2017). In addition, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz *et al*., 1986) will be described in detail. This scale is considered a pivotal tool to measure anxiety levels and it has been highly useful for subsequent research. This paper also focuses on the effects of apprehension on each of the language competences, paying special heed to oral production since this is considered the most anxiety-evoking skill. From a more practical perspective, in this paper I intend to assist the learners in their process of overcoming foreign language anxiety. In order to do so, the ways in which instructors can identify apprehensive students by paying attention to the symptoms and attitudes adopted by those learners that require assistance are discussed. Then, some suggestions to create an anxiety-free classroom are provided. Thus, it is argued that it is very important that teachers accommodate their attitude or their classroom methodology to the needs of apprehensive students. In addition some activities that can boost learners' confidence and help them to have a more realistic approach to their anxiety are proposed The main conclusion of the paper is that a favourable learning process needs to devote adequate consideration to anxiety since this is a frequent feeling that appears in many students and its effects may prevent the learners from having a comfortable experience of learning a new language.

Keywords: foreign language anxiety, foreign language student, communicative apprehension, strategies

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1.   Introduction

"The affective side of the learner is probably one of the very biggest influences on language learning success or failure" (Oxford, 1990, p.140). Controlling our own feelings may be determinant for a prosperous language learning process. Yet, acquiring this ability is a demanding task. Among the different affective variables that may determine students' psychological well-being, anxiety is one that can have a great impact on Foreign Language Acquisition (FLA). According to the description provided by MacIntyre and Gardener (1991a, p. 86), "[a]nxiety poses several potential problems for students of foreign language because it can interfere with the acquisition, retention, and production of the new language." Thus, while being slightly anxious can help students in their performance, it is widely held that acute rates of anxiety can hinder foreign language learning (Oxford, 1990).

Given the effects of anxiety on students of second languages, the concern about this affective variable has been present in the ample research of FLA during the last decades. Anxiety has been shown to occur in multiple situations of foreign language lessons, for instance when speaking in front of the class, when listening to podcasts and not being able to follow what the record is saying or when reading a text in a foreign language. Students are apprehensive due to the "negative expectations and cognitive concern about, the situation at hand, and possible consequences" (Morris, Davis & Hutching, 1981, cited in Stephenson, 2006, p.41).

Yet, determining the extent to which anxiety has negative (or positive) effects on foreign language learning has been an arduous task due to the fact that there was not a uniform scale to measure it. Furthermore, labelling Foreign Language Anxiety a determinant characteristic of FLA has also been difficult because of the different characterisations of the feeling of anxiety that have been proposed by many theories (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a).

Against this backdrop, the present paper will aim at giving an insight into Foreign Language Anxiety, providing special attention to foreign language speaking anxiety. Moreover, certain strategies to cope with anxiety and in particular communicative apprehension will also be suggested in the last part of the paper. In order to fulfil these goals, firstly, I will discuss some of the substantial contributions to the field of the affective variable under study, along with a pioneering scale that has been proposed to

measure it so as to provide a definition of anxiety. I will then consider the negative effects of apprehension in the acquisition of the different language competences, devoting special heed to the speaking production ability. After this, I will contemplate the role of the variables of age and academic achievement to identify anxious students along with the symptoms and reactions of the affected learners. Finally, I will offer a number of strategies and tips that may potentially enhance students' self-confidence in language lessons and help them overcome Foreign Language Anxiety in general, and anxiety in speaking production in particular.

2.   Anxiety in foreign language learning

Since anxiety started to be a concern in the field of FLA, the focus of the research has been on its negative effects on language learning. The reason for this may be the frequent appearance of anxiety during language lessons and how this results debilitating on students' performance. Indeed, this latter issue will be addressed further on. Yet, before focusing on the negative correlation between anxiety and FLA, some words to the distinction of the potential effects that anxiety may have on students should be devoted.

Alpert and Harber (1960) identified two types of anxiety based on the debilitating or facilitating effects that certain academic tasks had on students. Following this idea, Eysenck (1976) stated that whether anxiety "facilitates or impairs performance is determined by which high-anxiety subjects compensate for reduced processing effectiveness by enhanced effort" (cited in MacIntyre, 1995, p.92). Thus, when the task is relatively simple, the intrusion of anxiety may be positive due to the fact that "individuals who feel anxious try to make up for the raised cognitive demand by more effort" (Rafieyan, 2016, p.114). Stated differently, when students regard that they can cope with the given activities, the anxiety that may arise can motivate them to raise their effort and consequently, their performance is likely to ameliorate. Nonetheless, when the difficulty of the task goes beyond the ability of the learner, the effects of anxiety could inhibit their performance as portrayed in the following curvilinear figure (from MacIntyre, 1995):
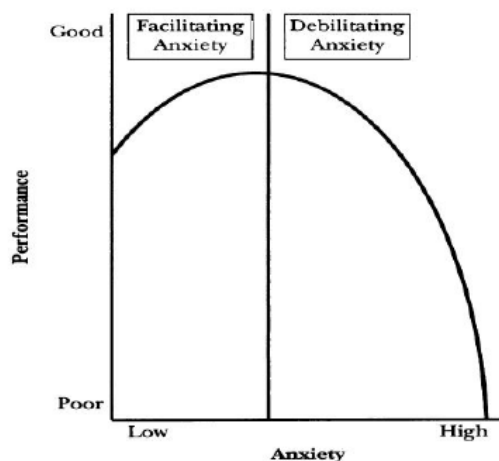
Figure 1: Inverted "U" Relation between anxiety and performance

Alpert and Harber (1960) proposed a scale to see whether anxiety was present or absent in learners' performance: Alpert Haber Achievement Anxiety Test (AAT) (see Appendix A). This questionnaire consists of 19 items aiming at measuring the degree of facilitating and debilitating anxiety in a test-taking context. This was one of the first scales proposed to identify anxiety in the classroom and to see whether it had positive or negative effects on learners (Stephenson, 2006). Nonetheless, since most of the subsequent research has been devoted to the adverse effects of apprehension in students' language learning, what follows focuses on the debilitating aspect of this affective variable.

2.1.   From anxiety to Foreign Language Anxiety

"Anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (Spielberger, 1983, p.1). This feeling of apprehension prevents the anxious person from achieving their goal, that is to say, from performing correctly and efficiently in any field of knowledge. Therefore, there is no doubt that anxiety intrudes the learning process. In an attempt to analyse the different types of situations that may be affected by this, Spielberger (1983) drew a line between *trait* and *state anxiety*. The former refers to a characteristic of an individual's personality, while the latter is used to label the feeling of apprehension that appears when confronting particular situations.

Later to this distinction, Gardner and MacIntyre (1989, cited in MacIntyre, 2017) added another type of apprehension, the so-called *situation-specific*. Sometimes

considered an alternative to state anxiety, this last-mentioned type focuses on the situations that give rise to nervousness where the source of it is delimited. The researchers argued that the situation-specific anxiety could be distinguished from state and trait type in the case of foreign language learning, since in this context anxiety has been proved to emerge on repeated occasions in well-defined circumstances, such as in language lessons. Thus, because of the appearance of it in certain consecutive situations, "at some point learners come to associate the language class with anxiety" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, cited in MacIntyre, 2017, p. 15). As a result, research started to categorise the anxiety that arose while learning a second language as a situation-specific type and many researchers began to shed light on this affective variable because it seemed to be one of the most intense and frequent feelings that emerges during the language lessons (MacIntyre, 2017).

2.2.   *Measuring Foreign Language Class Anxiety through scales*

Traditionally, research related anxiety "to clinical, social and general academic context" (Rubio-Alcalá, 2017, p.199). One of the first referential approaches to the field of Foreign Language Anxiety was published by Scovel (1978) who gathered all the studies that had addressed the presence of this affective variable in FLA available until the time. In his paper, the researcher concluded that the contributions made to the field so far were "mixed and confusing results, immediately suggesting that anxiety itself [was] neither a simple nor well understood physiological construct" (p.132). Scovel (1978) himself suggested that a unified scale to obtain consolidated results was needed and that the questionnaire required to complete this scale had to be specifically focused on language learning.

Indeed, some years later, this gap was addressed by E.K. Horwitz, M.B. Horwitz and Cope (1986). Horwitz *et al*. (1986) aimed to fill the gap in the field of anxiety aiming specifically at language learning. They argued that the investigations held in this field had not adequately addressed the issue of anxiety. The group of researchers claimed that the measures applied until then had not been specific to FLA and that there were no studies which had paid attention to the subtle effects of anxiety in this context.

Once that they had acknowledged anxiety as a major burden that hampered students' language acquisition, Horwitz *et al.* (1986) provided a detailed characterisation

of Foreign Language Anxiety by explaining the feeling of apprehension that students may undergo in detail. They argued that anxiety may emerge mainly because there is a clear contrast between performing in a mother tongue and performing in a second language. They provided the following explanation:

> Because individual communication attempts will be evaluated according to uncertain or even unknown linguistic and socio-cultural standards, second language communication entails risk taking and is necessarily problematic. Because complex mental operations are required in order to communicate at all, any performance in the L2 is likely to challenge an individual's self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic (p.128).

In order to identify the students who usually go through the feeling of apprehension during classes and determine their level of anxiety, the group of researchers proposed a scale of measurement called Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS).

The scale proposed by Horwitz *et al*. consisted of a set of questions (see Appendix B) which concerned three components that are responsible for anxiety in the classroom: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. The fear of communicating with others in the target language may probably make people that are normally talkative in classes to be unable to express themselves in the foreign language. The second component, test anxiety, is relevant since tests are the most widely used method for the evaluation of the language proficiency level in classes nowadays. The pressure that this sort of assessment involves increases the probability for the feeling of apprehension to appear since students may feel that unless their performance is perfect they will not succeed in passing the test. Likewise, the researchers claim that the fear of being negatively evaluated contributes to the occurrence of anxiety. This latter component encompasses not only the evaluation in the academic context but also in social contexts (Horwitz *et al*., 1986).

The students who were tested with the scale were provided with 33 assertions and they agreed or disagreed with each of them in a scale from 1 to 5 (1, I strongly agree; 5, I strongly disagree). The results of their study were based on clinical experience along

with students' personal self-reports. 78 students out of 225 of a Spanish language class at University of Texas (Austin) took part in the research. The authors confirmed that these students were concerned about their foreign language class and therefore they were able to take part in their study. Once that they had obtained the results, the researchers concluded that the feeling of anxiety was fairly common in the majority of the students who had been tested. They likewise contemplated that anxiety was a much more complex construct involving self-perception beliefs, feelings and other behavioural characteristics of foreign language classes amongst other factors, in addition to the three components that were considered in their scale.

In the last decades of the 20th century, several studies have used different methods to measure Foreign Language Anxiety, such as *The French Class Anxiety Scale* (Gardner & Smythe, 1975, cited in Horwitz, 2001) or *The Scale of Language Class Discomfort* (Ely, 1986 cited in Stephenson, 2006). Yet, Horwitz *et al.'s* (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) is the one that has offered the most consistent results, which is the reason why this scale has been employed in subsequent studies most frequently and it has been mostly reconsidered or questioned. In fact, it is noteworthy that many of the studies that have applied FLCAS to measure anxiety in students of different contexts (Aida, 1994; see also Perez Paredes & Martínez Sanchez, 2002, Tóth, 2008, all cited in MacIntyre, 2017) have shown rather uniform results: they all prove that anxiety correlates negatively with FLA. The consistent results have given plausibility to the distinction of Foreign Language Anxiety from anxiety in general and account for its negative effects as being different from the ones associated with other related anxieties (Horwitz, 2001; see also MacIntyre, 2017)

Once Foreign Language Anxiety was established as situation-specific, and the issue of the existence of an effective tool to measure it was resolved, the scope of the research on anxiety in the second language commenced to broaden (Horwitz, 2001). Numerous papers can be found focused on examining anxiety in relation to language skills, personal characteristics, contexts or in terms of its relationship with other affective variables. Furthermore, many studies have shed light on the effects of this affective variable and how this affects the cognitive process of language learning. Given the ample research that this field offers, in the following section I will focus on the relationship between Foreign Language Anxiety and the different language skills to offer a more detailed perspective of how hinders language acquisition.

3.   Foreign Language Anxiety and language skills

Since anxiety commenced to gain prominence in the field of FLA, out of the four skills, reading, writing, listening and speaking, the vast majority of the studies have mainly examined its effects on oral production. In the last years of the 20th century, many researchers started to claim that the factors that triggered anxiety in the case of speaking and listening were different from the ones in reading and writing. They stated that speaking (along with listening) was directly related to interpersonal communication (Saito, Garza, & E.K. Horwitz, 1999), while reading and writing are related to language skills and not to instant communication. Given the difference in the nature of the anxiety, some authors claimed that the tools proposed until then, such as FLCAS, were mainly practical to identify anxiety in oral production rather than in the other three competences (Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999). However, there are some studies dealing with the relationship of anxiety with reading, writing and listening specifically. I will discuss each of the skills and anxiety hereafter.

In general, Foreign Language Reading Anxiety has been found to be negatively correlated with FLA. Saito *et al*. (1999) speculated about two potential reasons that could generate anxiety while reading in an L2 language. Firstly, anxiety may arise when a student has to read an unfamiliar text or writing system that hinders students' processing of what they are reading. This occurs because learners have to make an association of the letter-sound relationship while simultaneously processing the meaning. When the student's competence in the foreign language is not good enough, the process of making sense of a text may be hampered at some stage by the appearance of anxiety. Secondly, when students encounter cultural material they are unfamiliar with, they may not be able to process the message and this might also result in apprehension.

"Writing is an emotional as well as a cognitive activity, that is, we think and feel while we are writing" (Cheng, 2002, p. 647). On the bases of this statement and as Kim (2006) pointed, the anxiety that may arise when writing can be a result of the students' own "negative self-perception about [their] writing ability" (p.147). Rankin-Brown (2006) also claimed that writing apprehension consisted of the "negative, anxious feelings (about oneself as a writer, one's writing situation, or one's writing task) that disrupt[ed] some part of the writing process" (cited in Badrasawi, Zubairi & Idrus,

2016, p. 134). Furthermore, Lee (2005) claimed that Foreign Language Writing Anxiety can appear as a result of the combination of cognitive aspects, such as not being comfortable with one's writings, which may result in what is known as Writer's Block, and affective factors, as is the case of writing apprehension. Hence, the (in)capability of writing in a foreign language apart from being determined by the mastering of the language conventions, it is also influenced by affective factors.

Anxiety may also arise when the learner cannot process the input data, such as the information that he or she hears in a podcast or during talk exchanges. This is Foreign Language Listening Anxiety and it is defined as the state of feeling fearful and nervous due to listeners' presumption that they have to understand all the information they are hearing in the target language (Elkhafaifi, 2005, cited in Borekci & Yavuz, 2017). Consequently, students feel left behind and unable to follow the class (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b). In order to provide an effectual scale to measure FL listening anxiety Kim (2000, cited in Stephenson, 2006) proposed the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS). The researcher explained that although the scale proposed by Horwitz *et al.* (1986) considered listening comprehension into account, it did not analyse it specifically, and thus, she offered a more complete scale.

The literature on Foreign Language Anxiety suggests that speaking is the most anxiety-provoking skill of the four language competences and thus, most studies focus on the relationship of this language skill and anxiety. The reactions that arise when learners have to express themselves in the target language, (e.g. when asked to speak up in class) may vary from stuttering or not being able to follow the rhythm and the intonation, to forgetting the words (Young, 1991). Anxiety is likely to appear in talk exchanges in which learners feel that they cannot control the situation (McCrosky & Richmond, 1990). Mejias *et.al* (1991) pointed out that in such circumstances, students tend to avoid speaking and opt for silence.

Horwitz *et al.*'s (1986) FLCAS focuses its main attention on communication apprehension as one of the three factors that contributes to the arousal of anxiety. The FLCAS offers a set of miscellaneous questions that revolve around the anxiety that may appear while facing a communicative situation in the L2. The first item of the questionnaire, for example, concerns the self-security that students feel when they are speaking in the foreign language class. Not surprisingly, over half of the interviewed students (51%) reported that they usually do not feel sure of themselves in such

situations. Furthermore, item number 9 in the scale asks students how they feel when they have to speak in class without previous preparation. In this case, 49% of the students agreed that they usually start to panic as opposed to 32% of the students who claimed that they could deal with the situation. In addition, 52% of the interviewees disagreed or strongly disagreed with item 32 which states that they feel more comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language. This last result could be directly related to the fear of being negatively evaluated by the native speakers. Instead of being a kind of support to ameliorate their performance in the target language, native speakers' superiority can be regarded as a threat to the learners, as a result of which, they may feel inhibited in front of the "expert" speakers.

Likewise, oral tests may create anxiety in the case of susceptible students as oral evaluations encompass all three anxiety-provoking constituents (Stephenson, 2006), that is to say, anxiety arises when the student has to express himself/herself in a foreign language and faces an evaluation of his or her performance. This assertion was also considered by MacIntyre and Gardener (1991a) who pointed out that "foreign language test, given orally, likely evoke test anxiety as well as communication apprehension" (p.105). To this, the fear that might result from being negatively evaluated has to be added (Stephenson, 2006). Consequently, even when students may have prepared their speech beforehand, they may forget words or what they have learned during an oral test (Stephenson, 2006) and they may become speechless during their evaluation as a result of the appearance of anxiety.

Since Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety is a major issue that anxious students who aim at mastering the target language need to overcome, in section 5 I will provide several tips and strategies to offer support for the students that suffer from communicative apprehension.

4.   The anxious student: characteristics, symptoms and reactions

It has been repeatedly asserted throughout this paper that anxiety and second language learning correlate negatively and consequently, the process of acquiring the language may be hindered. Since this is a prevailing situation in language classes, teachers' support is essential for those students who are going through that feeling of apprehension. Yet, in order to assist them, it is required that instructors identify the signs of anxiety that may appear in learners first. To this end, I am going to focus on the

anxious learners' characteristics, symptoms and attitudes. First, I will try to see if it is possible to draw a generalised profile based on age and academic achievement of the anxious student that are two variables that may lead to generalisations as it will be explained hereafter. Then, I will focus on the symptoms those learners may present, and after that, I will have a look at the attitudes or behaviours that students suffering from apprehension may adopt.

4.1. *Age and academic achievement and anxiety*

Onwuegbuzie, Bailey and Daley (1999, cited in Rubio-Alcalá, 2017) enumerated seven predictors that may have an influence on the appearance of anxiety in students of foreign languages: age, academic achievement, travel history to foreign countries, language learning prior experiences, mark or grade expectations, perceived academic competence and perceived self-worth. In order to see whether it is possible to take into account such predictors so as to draw a generalised profile of the anxious students, I am going to consider the first two that have been mentioned (age and academic achievement) and to analyse if the studies on these characteristics have shown consistent results.

It could be hypothesised that anxiety decreases as we gain confidence with age. Therefore, it would make sense to conclude that, in general, older students are less anxious in language classes. This is an empirical issue that needs further study since the results of the investigations are contradictory. On the one hand, some research has demonstrated that younger students are more anxious than their older classmates are. Arnaiz and Guillén (2012) and also Dewaele *et al.* (2008, cited in Arnaiz & Guillén, 2012) analysed anxiety in foreign language classrooms and both studies revealed that the younger the novice was, the more anxious he/she was in front of a situation that needed to be confronted in the target language. On the other hand, Bailey's (2000, cited in Arnaiz & Guillén, 2012) and Onwuegbuzie *et al.*'s (2000) study acknowledged that the oldest students were more anxious than the younger ones in foreign language lessons.

As regards academic achievement, it seems intuitive to conclude that the more advanced your level is, the more efficient you will be performing in the target language and consequently, the rate of anxiety will be lower. In fact, many studies have proved that the students that are more proficient in the foreign language feel more secure and

therefore, less anxious when confronting a situation in the L2 (e.g. Gardner *et al.*, 1977, 1979, cited in Tóth, 2017). On account of this, it is logical to point out that "as experience and proficiency increase, anxiety declines in a fairly consistent manner" (Gardener & MacIntyre, 1991a, p.111). However, other studies support the idea that the language proficiency is not a critical factor for the disappearance of anxiety in the foreign language (Saito & Samimy, 1996, cited in Stephenson 2006). One of those studies was conducted by Tóth (2017), whose findings showed that advanced language students also suffer from high rates of anxiety. The most interesting contribution of this study is the fact that she proposed several possible reasons why being proficient in the foreign language will not be determinant in overcoming anxiety. She argued that the self-pressure of advanced learners is not positive for them. Many students believe that their language performance has to be linguistically perfect once they have mastered most of the language conventions. Besides, they feel that mistakes must be avoided and are taken as a personal failure. This self-pressure contributes to the arousal of the feeling of inferiority because these students cannot be themselves in the target language. The author stated that "high anxious participants' internal experiences [...] provide a clear evidence that long years of commitment to learning an FL and a relatively high level of proficiency do not necessarily confer a sense of confidence in using the TL on every learner" (p.170). In the following section, I will discuss how instructors could deal with perfectionism in anxious students while expressing themselves in the target language.

Thus, the contradictory results regarding the role that age or language proficiency play in the identification of the profile of a student that is more likely to suffer from anxiety, suggest that instructors should not fall into generalisations. Teachers should not take for granted students' confidence solely because they seem to be mature for their age or because they have acquired a considerable amount of the language conventions. It is essential to take into consideration that, apart from general variables such as age or language proficiency, each individual's personality factors are key to the understanding of the students' reactions and their state of anxiety (Şimşek & Dörnyei, 2017). For example, Dewaele (2013) asserted that certain personality traits that are very common in learners might serve as predictors to identify the anxious students. The researcher found a significant link between neuroticism and anxiety: the students that are naturally more worried will become even more anxious in front of a communicative

situation in an L2 and, accordingly, the rates of anxiety will be higher. In addition, Ortega (2007, cited in Rubio-Alcalá, 2017) pointed out that L2 learners' self-esteem and anxiety are closely related. Besides, Young (1991) expressed that students' with low self-esteem or/and a tendency to be competitive can also increase the probability of the appearance of anxiety. What Young (1991) stated was that students tend to compare themselves with others or even with an "idealized self-image" (p.427) which may make them feel inferior. Therefore, based on the previous ideas, teachers should increase their effort to get to know their students, and watch signs in their behaviour or the traits in their personality that may trigger anxiety and therefore identify them and offer the support they need.

4.2. *Symptoms and attitudes of anxious students*

Since it is very difficult to draw a general profile of the anxious student based on general characteristics or predictors, I will now focus on the students' symptoms and attitudes as a way to identify the learners that are going through the feeling of apprehension.

The most common symptoms that are associated with the anxious student are the ones that normally appear when we are nervous, such as the ones described in the following anxious students' quotes (all the examples are from Şimşek & Dörnyei, 2017):

> I feel my heartbeats (p.57).

> I suddenly feel hot and my hands start shaking. I don't know if my face really turns red but certainly I feel that (p.57).

> My legs shake. Sometimes it is so extreme that I barely stand (p.57).

As we can see in the last example, the situation goes beyond the feeling of nervousness. Indeed, some students' reactions even make them lose their concentration:

> It feels like I am paralyzed […] Last year, even though I was well-prepared for a topic, I could not even talk about it (p.57).

And in some cases, anxiety may also result in some extreme symptoms, such as the one reported by this student:

> It was during an exam period. I woke up early in the morning. All I thought about was the exam that day. I felt dizzy and headed to the bathroom. Then, I fainted on the way there (p.58).

Rojas (1989, cited in Rubio-Alcalá, 2017) named five different groups of symptoms that are associated with foreign language anxiety: *physical symptoms*, such as, palpitations, sweating or stomach ache; *cognitive symptoms* that are related to distorted thoughts, as when the student misinterprets the teacher's feedback and becomes oversensitive rather than taking it as a constructive advice. *Psychological symptoms,* for example, may lead to the breakdown of the ego when students think they are incapable of pronouncing correctly in the target language and feel embarrassed by their pronunciation. In this case, students usually feel incompetent and uncomfortable in the language classes. *Communicative symptoms* are disclosed when the student feels inhibited to convey the message. And lastly, *behavioural symptoms* may be the most visible ones because they are noticeable at a glance, such as caressing the hair, uncontrolled movements, facial gesture or avoiding the teacher's look.

When these symptoms occur, anxious students may adopt three different attitudes: the fighter, the quitter and the safe player (Şimşek & Dörnyei*,* 2017). The fighter is a student who actively adopts an active attitude to overcome anxiety in the situation that hampers his/her language acquisition process, as it is the case of this next student (Şimşek & Dörnyei*,* 2017, p.61):

> Actually, I often criticise the anxious me and find it unnecessary to be anxious. The positive side is that I have become a person who does detailed research to be well prepared before attending to a lecture, going somewhere or doing something. I have also started reading about anxiety. What I am saying is I do not give up. I am trying to improve myself. Is getting better and I feel happier.

What stands out in reports such as this one is the fact that this student has actively confronted the situation and overcome anxiety. However, some other students see their anxiety as unresolvable, like in the case of the student who said: "I do not think I can

change. It is typical me. I have always been anxious and I will always be, I know" (Şimşek & Dörnyei, 2017, p.62). This kind of attitude comes from the frustration of the impossibility of overcoming anxiety. As time goes by and they still feel apprehensive in the language classes, and some learners decide to give up. Finally, Şimşek & Dörnyei (2017) noticed that some students stay on the safe side (i.e. the safe players) and avoid confronting situations. Thus, these students tend to avoid being asked to perform in the target language. "[S]uch behaviours can turn into a cohesive avoidance type that would also affect other aspects of the individual's everyday life" (p. 62).

Having seen these different reactions to anxiety, we can state that the student's self-predisposition is important in the process of overcoming foreign language anxiety. Yet, as it will be considered in the following section, teachers may help their students to have a positive attitude and confront their apprehension. I suggest that instructors should mainly be supportive of those students that take a passive attitude or give up in the process of overcoming their anxiety.

5.   Strategies and tips to overcome second language anxiety

Anxious students may affect the atmosphere of the foreign language classroom. Nevertheless, the current educational system does not take their difficulties into account because it is based on tight deadlines, the syllabi cover as much material as possible, and the students' competence level of the language is based on written examinations. As a matter of fact, it seems that the methodology that prevails in foreign language classroom does not address the issues or situations that may hamper learners' language acquisition, as it is the case of foreign language anxiety (Rubio-Alcalá, 2017). Creating an anxiety-free classroom environment is a crucial step in order for students to overcome apprehension. So, hereafter I will suggest certain strategies or tips for instructors, their teaching methodology and some activities directed to students that aim at decreasing students' foreign language anxiety that have been discussed in the literature.

5.1.   Tips for instructors

It is important that teachers engage in the process of overcoming student anxiety. In order to achieve this end, it is essential the instructors' active cooperation in the

implementation of a new class environment that is partly centred on students and their anxiety. For this purpose, I suggest that there has to be a shift in the instructor's behaviour and in their teaching style, which needs to depart from the more traditional styles. To this effect, teachers should be kind, patient and should have the ability to empathise with all the students, and mainly with those that are going through an apprehensive situation in class. This attitude may be achieved using students' first names, for instance. Besides, nonverbal communication is also essential, including eye contact, positive expressions and understandable attitude towards any sign of anxiety (Christophel, 1990). These small gestures show that instructors are interested in getting to know the student and are approachable. In addition, instead of adopting the role of the authority in the class who is always right and is the only source of knowledge, teachers should become facilitators. That is to say, someone that will provide learners with tools that will make their performance in the target language more effective:

> [C]hoosing the role of the facilitator can be beneficial. This role requires being aware of different classroom situations- specifically, how student feel- and acting accordingly. Thus, when students see that the teacher cares about them, their emotional security is enhanced (Rubio-Alcalá, 2017, p. 209).

Following this line of action, Price (1991) conducted a study in which he interviewed highly anxious students, and the vast majority of them agreed that they felt more relaxed in class when the teachers adopted the role of facilitators, since these are not only concerned with covering the course programme but also focus their attention on students' psychological well-being.

Another concern that I would like to focus on is how teachers deal with errors. It is widely held that learners should be corrected so as not to make the same errors again. However, there is a growing trend to shift instructors' attitude and not to draw so much attention to them. This approach may also be helpful as far as anxious students are concerned. Indeed, many apprehensive learners have agreed that they would feel much more comfortable if their instructor had a more positive and supportive attitude when they are not correct (Price, 1991). This does not mean that they have to turn a blind eye to all the errors. Instead, it could be positive to make students "realise that [errors] are not taboo- and that they can contribute to learning" (Crookall and Oxford, 1991, cited in

Young, 1991 p.432). Besides, it has to be taken into consideration that native speakers are not perfect in their everyday communication either, and thus, perfection is not part of everyday speech. A possible strategy is for teachers to avoid correcting every single mistake explicitly. Young (1991) exemplifies the supportive attitude towards errors that teachers should consider adopting:

> For example, if a student's response to a question *"¿Que quiere hacer el presidente Bush?"* was *"Quieres subir los presupuestos"* the instructor would respond *"Si, quiere subir los presupuestos."* The instructor's *Si* acknowledges that the student conveyed a meaningful message, and by repeating the correct form (…) the instructor provides the appropriate feedback for the class (p.432).

In such manner, teachers transmit the sense that being understood, rather than saying something perfectly, is essential for effective communication. In fact, anxious learners in the interviews conducted by Price (1991) suggested that instructors in class should accept that as learners, they cannot always be perfect. Hence, this attitude could contribute to a more relaxed environment in the classroom, which is always beneficial for the students that are apprehensive. In addition, "[t]he teacher should help learners to build 'realistic expectations' about correctness when speaking about the time it takes to learn a language, and about how normal it is to make mistakes" (Phillips, 1992, cited in Stephenson, 2006, p. 163). This is an important idea to transmit since as it has been mentioned in section 4, students' assumption about being perfect is a considerable source of anxiety, mainly in advanced learners.

The tips that have been considered so far are aimed at helping learners to create a more relaxed atmosphere in the classroom and to offer students the support they need in their process of overcoming anxiety. Thus, teachers have a great role in the creation of an anxiety-free classroom environment, and apart from strengthening this atmosphere, they can also contribute to boosting the students' active attitude to deal with their apprehension.

5.2.   *Some comments on methodology*

Anxious students do not normally do well in the traditional classroom methodology which is based on the teacher's explanation of the grammatical rules and

vocabulary and the subsequent practice through individual exercises (Öztürk & Akkaş, 2013). Besides, when the opportunity to speak in class arises, anxious students do not take part because they may not feel secure enough to express themselves. This fear is even more prevalent when students are tested orally (Horwitz *et al.,* 1986).

Teacher-centred lessons, one of the most recurrent ways of teaching in foreign language classrooms, do not help reduce anxiety (Littlewood, 1991 cited in Rubio-Alcalá, 2017). A glimpse to foreign language classes discloses that, although the methodology is mixed to some extent, traditional teacher-centred lessons still prevail over learner-centred teaching. Thus, the most applied methodology is that in which most of the language class is devoted to the teachers' explanation, while learners listen. Yet, this kind of teaching does not necessarily support the needs of the students. Learner-centred education, however, encourages constructive learning based on the students' active role in their own learning, in which the instructor is someone to lean on and take advice from (Zohrabi, Torabi & Baybourdiani, 2012). This clearly encourages learners to do self-reflection and have a more effective outcome in their language acquisition process (Worth, 2009, cited in Zohrabi *et al*., 2012).

The shift from teacher-centred to student-centred classroom methodology can be beneficial to reinforce students' autonomy (Jones, 2007), and this is important for Foreign Language Anxiety. A teacher-centred methodology has been proved to be more anxiety-provoking since students feel that they are constantly tested. Besides, immersed in this type of methodology, students have few opportunities to make use of their language skills in a natural manner. However, when students are encouraged to think for themselves and are not strictly ruled by teacher's instructions, they might not feel so much pressure and, as a result, anxiety can be reduced (Rubio-Alcalá, 2017).

"Cooperative work can also be used to foster a greater sense of belonging and to create a less competitive classroom climate" (Rubio-Alcalá, 2017, p. 210). Casal (2007, cited in Rubio-Alcalá, 2017) stated that when students belong to a group, their social identity is reinforced, which is claimed to be determinant to feel more relaxed in language classes. Hence, cooperative activities could be held in groups that gather students with complementary abilities in which each member is in charge of some part of the activity (Casal, 2007, cited in Rubio-Alcalá, 2017) as well as having the duty of the learning process of their group-members (Öztürk & Akkaş, 2013). Working in groups can also serve as a support that aids students in other aspects. Many learners feel

inhibited to speak up in classes because of the fear of being laughed at (Mejias *et al*., 1991). Thus, they avoid making any kind of statement because of the fear of being judged, becoming anxious and being unable to express themselves. Nevertheless, by implementing cooperative activities all the members of the group will be in charge of the progress of the whole group (Rubio-Alcalá, 2017). This will enhance supportive attitudes among students and consequently, it can be beneficial for those who feel anxiety due to the fear of being negatively evaluated, as well as fostering oral practice among the novices.

As stated in section 3, oral practice and oral exams have been identified as the most anxiety-provoking tasks. Oral exams may be an alternative to the current method of evaluation in foreign language teaching which is mainly based on written examinations (Rubio & Tamayo-Rodriguez, 2012, cited in Rubio-Alcalá, 2017), but in order not to create anxiety, more time should be provided to the oral performances in class. Accordingly, teachers should spend some time preparing students, giving them advice and tools if they are going to be orally tested. Tutorials, rehearsals or giving detailed information about the evaluation system could be helpful to give them confidence. The procedure of the examination is essential as well, and being kind or doing interactive activities before starting the test may also be enormously helpful for students to feel more relaxed (Rubio-Alcalá, 2017).

All things considered, the tips I have discussed in this section can be beneficial not only for students with affective problems but also for the atmosphere of the whole classroom. Finally, in addition to the proposed changes in the methodology of the classroom, specific activities could also be implemented during the academic course so as to make all students gain self-confidence when facing different situations in the target language. These activities can also serve as a special aid for those students whose performance is heavily affected by anxiety. In the following section, therefore, several tasks will be suggested that could be put into practice the during class hours.

5.3.   *Tips for types of activities aimed at reducing students' anxiety*

"[E]xperience of learning a language should not be confined to the development of communicative competence but also to personal development" (De Andrés & Arnold, 2009, cited in Rubio-Alcalá, 2017, p.211). In the case of students with anxiety

in the language class, learning a foreign language can be taken to be a personal challenge that enriches their personality. The following activities will help to reduce students' anxiety as well as to boost students' self-esteem.

Some of the in-class activities that aim at reducing anxiety among students may come from self-reflection, deliberation about their apprehension and by sharing and comparing students' fears and worries in class with all the classmates. Foss and Reitzel (1988) stated that "if students can recognise their irrational beliefs or fears, they will be able to interpret anxiety-provoking situations in a more realistic way and eventually, opt to approach rather than avoid anxiety-evoking situations" (cited in Young, 1991, p.430). Small gestures, such as taking a couple of minutes to consider and process the situations that provoke anxiety may be very useful. In order to achieve this goal, the researchers proposed an in-class activity in which the practice starts by writing students' experiences in anxiety-provoking situations on the board. When the students see that their classmates also deal with similar fears, they may appreciate that anxiety is a much more prevalent feeling than they expected. An additional exercise is to identify the highest level of anxiety so as to see that not every communicative situation in the target language produces equal rates of apprehension. Potentially, this would provide students with a more realistic approach to the situations in which anxiety is present. Finally, they also suggest the idea of keeping a journal. The authors stated that journaling can be beneficial because it is positive for students to have an introspective perspective of their anxiety (Foss & Reitzel, 1988 cited in Young, 1991). Positive self–talking can also be an effective manner of self-encouragement that helps to gain self-esteem and accordingly, to lower the possibility of suffering from acute anxiety. As Oxford (1990) stated, "the most potent encouragement (…) may come from inside the learner" (p.143). Thus, she recommended that teachers should urge their students to repeat the following kind of statements: "I understand a lot more of what is said to me now," "I enjoy writing in the new language," "everybody makes mistakes; I can learn from mine!" or "I'm confident and secure about my progress" (p.165). Oxford (1990) also adds that before facing an arduous task, these statements can serve as self-encouragement, and after doing such activities, positive self-talking can be beneficial as self-reward that may result in an increase of self-confidence.

The tips that have been introduced in this section should serve as tools to increase a relaxed environment in classrooms which should help students overcome anxiety or at

least reduce their rates of nervousness. As mentioned above, apprehension during language lessons is not positive for the learning and it may also affect the whole classroom environment. Thus, an effective teaching approach which includes the instructors´ encouraging attitude, the class methodology and activities should partly be addressed to deal with such constraints. Apart from helping learners to reduce the rates of anxiety, these tips or strategies are also handy for students to take a proactive attitude to overcome their fears. However, each and every lesson should not be devoted to the overcoming of anxiety. These suggestions are only presented as small gestures that could be included in different situations to make the learning-activity more suitable and pleasant for anxious students.

6.   Conclusion

This paper has described the issue of anxiety in the FLA by discussing the main ideas on the topic found in the literature. Although anxiety may benefit the performance of certain students, I have principally focused on its negative effects in the process of learning a second language. This study has pay special heed to the contribution by Horwitz *et al*. (1986), namely FLCAS, which has been fundamental for the subsequent research in this field. After their proposal, the scope of the research on anxiety started to point in different directions that were aimed at identifying anxious students and how their language process was hindered due to the feeling of apprehension. This paper has not encompassed all the aspects that have been considered to have a negative correlation between anxiety and FLA, yet the effects of language learning anxiety on the language skills have been explained. I have devoted special attention to communication apprehension since this is the most determinant and studied skill as far as foreign language anxiety is concerned.

Because "[l]anguage anxiety is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon" (Young, 1991, p.434), it may result difficult to identify and asses those students that are going through the feeling of apprehension. The literature concerning general predictors, such as age and language proficiency does not disclose any conclusive results. This being so, I have directed special attention to those symptoms and attitudes that anxious learners may present, so that instructors may be able to identify them and offer the support they need. In addition, I have provided certain strategies and tips for teachers to create an "anxiety free classroom" and help those apprehensive students to be more

relaxed, more secure and have a more comfortable language learning experience.

In this paper, I have tried to emphasize the idea that addressing anxiety is essential for learners of foreign languages. In this line, Horwitz (2001) claims that "language anxiety is fundamental to our understanding of how learners approach language learning, their expectations for success or failure, and ultimately why they continue or discontinue study" (p.122). Apprehension will only be overcome if supportive teaching is implemented.

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Appendix A - Alpert Haber Achievement Anxiety Test (AAT) (1960)

1. Nervousness while taking an exam or test hinders me from doing well.
    A. Always
    B. Often
    C. Sometimes
    D. Rarely
    E. Never

2. I work most effectively under pressure, as when the task is very important.
    A. Always
    B. Usually
    C. Sometimes
    D. Hardly ever
    E. Never

3. In a course where I have been doing poorly, my fear of a bad grade cuts down my efficiency.
    A. Never
    B. Hardly ever
    C. Sometimes
    D. Usually
    E. Always

4. When I am poorly prepared for an exam or test, I get upset, and do less well than even my restricted knowledge should allow.
    A. This never happens to me
    B. This hardly ever happens to me
    C. This sometimes happens to me
    D. This often happens to me
    E. This practically always happens to me

5. The more important the examination, the less well I seem to do.
    A. Always
    B. Usually
    C. Sometimes
    D. Hardly ever
    E. Never

6. While I may (or may not) be nervous before taking an exam, once I start, I seem to forget to be nervous.
    A. I always forget
    B. Usually
    C. Sometimes
    D. I often feel some nervousness
    E. I am always nervous during an exam

7. During exams or tests, I block on questions to which I know the answers, even though I might remember them as soon as the exam is over.
    A. This always happens to me

B. This often happens to me
C. This sometimes happens to me
D. This hardly ever happens to me
E. I never block on questions to which I know the answers

8. Nervousness while taking a test helps me do better.
    A. It never helps
    B. It usually doesn't help
    C. Now and then it helps
    D. It generally helps me a little
    E. It often helps

9. When I start a test, nothing is able to distract me.
    A. This is always true of me
    B. This is often true of me
    C. This is sometimes true of me
    D. This is hardly ever true of me
    E. This is never true of me

10. In courses in which the total grade is based on mainly "one" exam, I seem to do better than other people.
    A. Never
    B. Hardly ever
    C. Sometimes
    D. Quite often
    E. Almost always

11. I find that my mind goes blank at the beginning of an exam, and it takes me a few minutes before I can function.
    A. I almost always blank out first
    B. I usually blank out first
    C. I sometimes blank out first
    D. I hardly ever blank out first
    E. I never blank out first

12. I look forward to exams
    A. Never
    B. Hardly ever
    C. Sometimes
    D. Usually
    E. Always

13. I am so tired from worrying about an exam, that I find I almost don't care how well I do by the time I start the test.
    A. I never feel this way
    B. I hardly ever feel this way
    C. I sometimes feel this way
    D. I almost always feel this way

14. Time pressure on an exam causes me to do worse than the rest of the group under similar conditions

    A. Time pressure always seems to make me do worse on an exam than others
    B. Time pressure often seems to make me do worse on an exam than others
    C. Time pressure sometimes seems to make me do worse on an exam than others
    D. Time pressure hardly ever seems to make me to worse on an exam than others
    E. Time pressure never seems to make me do worse on an exam than others

15. Although "cramming" under pre examination pressure is not effective for most people, I find that if the need arises, I can learn material immediately before an exam, even under considerable pressure, and successfully retain it to use on the exam.
    A. I am always able to use the "crammed" material successfully
    B. I am usually able to use the "crammed" material successfully
    C. I sometimes can use the "crammed" material successfully
    D. I hardly ever use the "crammed" material successfully
    E. I am never able to use the "crammed" material successful

16. I enjoy taking a difficult exam more than an easy one.
    A. Always
    B. Often
    C. Sometimes
    D. Rarely
    E. Never

17. I find myself reading exam questions without understanding them, and I must go back over them so that they will make sense.
    A. Never
    B. Rarely
    C. Sometimes
    D. Often
    E. Almost Always

18. The more important the exam or test, the better I seem to do.
    A. This is true of me
    B. This is true of me much of the time
    C. This is sometimes true of me
    D. This is rarely true of me
    E. This is not true of me

19. When I don't do well on difficult items at the beginning of an exam, it tends to upset me so that I block on even easy questions later on.
    A. This never happens to me
    B. This very rarely happens to me
    C. This sometimes happens to me
    D. This frequently happens to me
    E. This almost always happens to me

Appendix B- Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)
Horwitz, E.K., Horwitz, M.B., Cope, J.A., (1986)

Please answer the following questions by providing the number correspondent to the option that best describe your opinion.

1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neither Agree nor Disagree 4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class
2. I don't worry about making mistakes in language class
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes
6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class
11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes
12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class
14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it
17. I often feel like not going to my language class
18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class
21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get
22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class
23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students
25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class
28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language
31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance