

## **Anxiety and Oral Assessment**

### ABSTRACT

Although language anxiety has been widely recognized as a factor influencing language learning long time ago, only with the development of humanistic approaches in language teaching, this issue has become an interesting topic for language researchers.

this descriptive- contrastive study is intended to measure to which extent this affective aspect influences oral assessment of the students of the language program at the university of nariño regarding six variables: communication apprehension, general feeling of anxiety, fear to negative evaluation, symptoms associated with anxiety, anxiety-reducing strategies and anxiety-provoking experiences, furthermore, to contrast the occurrence of this variables in each semester in order to determine if anxiety increases or decreases as students advance in the career. therefore, this work entails a detailed description of the problem, all the theoretical background related to the issue, the methodology of the study, the analysis of the results and the conclusions and recommendations for pedagogical practice. it is hoped that this research become a first and valuable step in future studies related to this issue at a local context.

## **Anxiety and Oral Assessment**

### RESUMEN

Aunque la ansiedad asociada al aprendizaje de un lenguaje ha sido ampliamente reconocida hace muchos años, solo con el desarrollo de las teorías humanísticas, su estudio ha cobrado un verdadero interés para los investigadores del lenguaje.

este estudio descriptivo contrastivo se propone como objetivo medir este estado afectivo teniendo como referencia seis variables: communication apprehension, general feeling of anxiety, fear to negative evaluation, síntomas asociados con la ansiedad, situaciones que provocan ansiedad en los estudiantes y estrategias que ellos podrían utilizar para reducir esta emoción y después contrastar la ocurrencia de estas variables en cada semestre con el propósito de determinar si la ansiedad disminuye o aumenta a través de la carrera. siendo así, el estudio incluye una detallada revisión del problema, todo el marco teórico en el cual se conceptualiza la investigación, la metodología empleada, el análisis de los resultados y las conclusiones y sugerencias para la práctica pedagógica.

se espera que esta investigación sea un valioso paso inicial para futuros estudios a nivel local.

ANXIETY AND ORAL ASSESMENT ON EFL COURSES AT THE UNIVERSITY  
OF NARIÑO

Anxiety and Oral Assesment on EFL courses at the University  
of Nariño

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Submitted to the Faculty of Human Sciences  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of B.A. in the Department  
of Linguistics and Languages

2007

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

*Introduction to the problem*

EFL assessment is a complex process which has been examined for several years by an important number of researchers in order to improve the way in which it occurs, and this improvement has not been finished yet. Continually, the concept needs to be redefined to the beating of language teaching dynamics, and adapted to specific learning environments. A similar process has occurred with all related issues surrounding EFL assessment, such as the affective implications that it carries out. The aim of this paper is to work with one of them, which is anxiety related to oral assessment.

For many students, both ESL and EFL learners, it is very difficult to avoid the sensation they feel before an examination especially if it is an oral one, that state defined from an educational psychological perspective (Hansen quoted in Woolfolk, 1998, p.396) as a "general uneasiness, a sense of foreboding, a feeling of tension" is anxiety. This has been studied and measured by important researchers (Gardner, 1993; MacIntyre, 1993; Horwitz, 1986; Oxford, 1999; Krashen, 1983; Young, 1991) and significant results have been found indicating that anxiety could be a

relevant factor influencing SLA, and thus ESL assessment. However, at the local level, there has been a general trend to overlook this important factor when students are orally assessed. It could be ideal to have a more detailed and contextualized knowledge about the effects of anxiety on oral assessment.

Essentially the aim of this paper is to describe the relationship between this affective state and EFL oral assessment at a local environment. Being this a wide field, it is hoped that it be an initial step for further research around this issue.

#### *Problem statement*

The relationship between cognition and affect had been widely recognized long time ago. In fact, in the fifth century B.C, Plato stated that "reason must reign in passion" which otherwise "distorts rational thinking" (Westen, 1999, p.499). Surprisingly, intents for doing an integrative educational approach of these two concepts are relatively new. Only in the 70s and 80s, foreign and second language researchers stressed the need to do an integrative approach of the cognitive and affective domains. Indeed, most of the major attainments in language teaching during the past 35 years are, in some way, intents to harmonize affect with language learning: Suggestopedia, Silent Way,



Community Language Learning consider the relationship between affective states and language learning as an essential element of all their theories (Curran, 1976; Gattegno, 1972; Lozanov, 1979) (Arnold, 1999, p.6). In the same way, the Natural Approach by Krashen & Terrell (1973) considered the emotional states of the learner as a vital factor influencing language learning. Indeed, one of the five hypotheses of this method is the *Affective Filter* that stated that affective dimension is a barrier that learners put up if his/her anxiety level is high, the lower the anxiety the lower the filter. Furthermore, Krashen & Terrell identified three affective variables: "motivation, self-confidence and anxiety". (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p.133)

The history of Communicative Language Learning (CLT) is similar. In fact, since the early beginning, this method took into account some humanistic concepts as Richards & Rodgers (1986) asserted: "Communicative Language Teaching appealed to those who sought a more humanistic approach to teach in which the interactive process of communication received priority" (p.83).

This general trend to consider the importance of the affective side is present too in the design of modern curricula; Nunan (1988); and Tudor (1997) designed some models that incorporate the personal experience of learners

rather than the "non-learner related linguistic corpora".  
(Arnold, 1999, p.6)

Nevertheless, the importance of all affective theories in SLA, some aspects related to affective states are not well-known and in some cases ignored by the people involved in language learning. Concretely, this paper will deal with some important generalities regarding one of these issues: anxiety.

Anxiety is an aspect to be considered as a potential cause of interference of language learning. According to Oxford (1999) language anxiety "ranks high among factors influencing language learning regardless of whether the setting is informal or formal" (Quoted in Arnold, 1999, p.59). Particularly, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1997) have found that anxiety typically "centers" its influence on listening and speaking, in their research, they found that speaking in class was the most frequent difficulty for anxious students, even if they are good at this kind of activity. (Quoted in Ellis, 1995, p.480) Horwitz et al. (1997) also stated that anxious students have problems in discriminating sounds and structures, or in catching their meaning.

Young (1991) noted that incomprehensible listening is a common generator of anxiety. Another relevant fact to be

considered are the methods and classroom activities. He also noted that some sources of anxiety are related to methodological and instructional practice (Worde, 2003, Discussion section, para.3).

Price (1991) bound up error-correction and anxiety-provoking experiences specially if this procedure is carried out in front of class (Quoted by Oxford in Arnold, 1999, p.65)

Several methods have been created to measure the level of anxiety and its possible relationship with language learning: by behavioral tests, where the action of a subject is observed, by the subject's self-report of internal emotions, or by physiological tests intended to measure some variations of vital signs. The most common of these tests is one of the second type called Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), which is intended to measure three related anxieties: general feeling of anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of cognitive evaluation. (Quoted by Ellis, 1995, p.481)

Nonetheless the importance and accuracy of FLCAS, its results are in some way abstract. FLCAS was only designed to ask if students are anxious or not, but concrete information is not considered, that is the reason, it is necessary to

complete this test with an instrument capable of determining *tangible information* about the types of anxiety-provoking experiences, the signs of this feeling in classroom and the strategies that students usually adopt to avoid it, and the relationship with oral assessment. A research that provides data about these topics will be doubtless a useful tool to create more effective language learning practices and environment in the EFL classroom.

*Research Question*

How are anxiety and oral formal assessment related when it comes to EFL courses at the University of Nariño?

*Justification*

Since the beginning of educational psychology about 90 years ago, the effect of learners' affective states has been largely recognized as potential factors of distortion of cognitive processes (Woolfolk, 1998, p.396). In fact, after some decades, the implications of all those theories in TESOL have been considerable and they have been the subject of a lot of research (Krashen, 1983; Lozanov, 1979; Gardner, 1993; McIntyre, 1993; Young, 1991; Horwitz, 1991) with important conclusions regarding the role of affective states in the complex process of learning a second language; some of those studies have focused on one particular issue: anxiety.

In contrast, in most EFL teaching local environments, the importance of all this theoretical and practical background has not been profusely researched. This might be because some teachers believe that anxiety is a personal trait of learners, an individualistic and non manageable feature not related to learning process, and thus to assesment, which is an integral part of the former. Then, it would be important to describe the possible relationship between assessment and anxiety in an EFL setting concretely regarding oral assesment which may be a core-anxiety inducing area for EFL students.

A research on anxiety and assesment might provide teachers with some insights that can constitute the first step to understand how it differs at a local context from what is found in foreign books. This research may also serve to design a contextualized and effective instrument intended to reveal important data regarding the learners' opinions about the most anxiety-provoking experiences, the signs that identify language anxiety and the strategies adopted by them to alleviate this feeling. An instrument that provides accurate information about these aspects is certain to be considered valuable by those involved in TESOL.

On the other hand, and out of statistical descriptions, the importance of this research could be a reference for

teachers, students and for further research about this issue at a local level.

*Objectives*

*General objective*

To describe and explore the relationship between anxiety and oral assessment in EFL courses and learners' perceptions about this issue.

*Specific objectives*

To apply the standardized test (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale)

To design and apply an instrument to determine some possible relations and manifestations of anxiety during oral assessment, and some strategies that students could use to deal with this feeling.

To analyze systematically collected data from surveys.

To do a contrastive analysis in order to establish if anxiety increases or decreases through the career.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

*Anxiety, an affective state, a feeling, or an emotion?*

Oatley & Jenkins (1996) two well-known psychologists stated the following opinion which is a useful hint in order to answer this question:

The term "feeling" is a synonym for emotion, although with a broader range. In the older psychological literature the term "affect" was used. It is still used to imply an even wider range of phenomena that have anything to do with emotions, moods dispositions, and preferences (Quoted in Arnold, 1999, p.12).

Thus, in the following paper anxiety is considered as a feeling, an emotion, an affective state, or an affective factor. Sarason (1988) defined anxiety as "a basic human emotion consisted of fear and uncertainty" (Quoted in Worde, 2003, Introduction section, para.1).

Anxiety has been widely recognized as an individual learner difference. Skehan (1989) included anxiety as a part of the affective dimension (Quoted by Ohata, 2003, Introduction section, para.1). Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) considered that this affective state is a "part of personality" (Quoted by Ohata, 2003, Introduction section,

para.2). The results of the following researches (Aida, 1994; Bailey, 1983; Crookal & Oxford, 1991; Ely, 1986; Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986; Horwitz & Young, 1991; Krashen, 1985b; MacIntyre, 1995; MacIntyre & Garner, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1994; Young, 1990, 1991, 1992) have shown anxiety as a negative factor impeding second language acquisition.

#### *Language Anxiety*

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) stated "language anxiety" as an inseparable "*psychological construct*" attached to language "learning". They defined anxiety "as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors ... arising from the uniqueness of language learning process" (Quoted by Hauck & Hurd, 2002, introduction section, para.1).

According to Gardner & MacIntyre (1993) language anxiety is related to "all those negative feelings of fear and apprehension to performance in a second language. This form of anxiety is not directly linked with any other form of anxiety". (Quoted by Oxford in Arnold, 1999, p.59)

Language anxiety, a part of the affective dimension, influences cognitive processing in a subtle and pervasive way (Arnold, 1999, p.8). According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) the impact of language anxiety on second language



learning has been widely recognized and associated with several problems in SLA, for instance, impaired vocabulary learning, reduced word production, low score on standardized tests, low performance in language courses, or a combination of these factors (Quoted in Hauck & Hurd, 2002, Introduction section, para.10). MacIntyre & Gardner (1993) claimed that anxiety can be both: "cause and consequence of poor language learning" they asserted that language anxiety is "experienced by learners of both foreign and second language, and possesses potential problems because it can interfere with the acquisition, retention, and production of the new language" (Quoted by Hauck & Hurd, 2002, Introduction section, para.10).

Previous anxiety research (Spielberger, 1983; Levitt, 1980; Scovel, 1978) suggested that there are at least two types of anxiety: *trait anxiety and state anxiety*. (Ellis, 1995, p.480)

#### *State Anxiety*

According to Spielberger (1983), *state anxiety* can be defined as "apprehension that is experienced at a particular moment in time to response to a definite situation, for example having to speak in a foreign language in front of classmates" (Quoted in Ellis, 1995, p.480).

In that sense Desrochers and Gardner (1981) asserted that "language anxiety can start as transitory episodes of fear in a situation in which the student has to perform in the language, at this time anxiety is simply a passing state". (Quoted by Oxford in Arnold, 1999, p.60)

Eventually, state anxiety can become *trait anxiety*; Gardner & MacIntyre (1993) claimed "if repeated occurrences cause students to associate anxiety with language performance, anxiety becomes a trait rather than a state". (Quoted by Oxford in Arnold, 1999, p.60)

#### *Trait Anxiety*

According to Scovel (1978) this sort of anxiety is "a more permanent predisposition to be anxious". This anxiety is a typical feature of some personalities (Quoted in Ellis, 1995, p.479). On another hand, trait anxiety can also be, an advanced stage of state anxiety (Quoted by Oxford in Arnold, 1999, p.60).

#### *Debilitating Anxiety versus Facilitating Anxiety*

There has been a wide discussion about possible positive effects of language anxiety. Alpert and Haber's (1960) made the distinction between *facilitating* or *helpful* anxiety and *debilitating* or *harmful* anxiety. Williams (1991) suggested that this dichotomy is directly related with the intensity of this affective state, thus "low levels on

anxiety have a facilitating function and high levels of anxiety a debilitating effect" (Quoted in Ellis, 1995, p.482).

#### *Debilitating Anxiety*

This kind of anxiety is associated with negative effects in language learning. Oxford (1991) stated that harmful anxiety can affect learner's performance in several ways "Indirectly through worry and self-doubt and directly by reducing participation and creating over avoidance of language" (Quoted in Arnold, 1999, p.60).

A great amount of researches have shown a negative correlation of anxiety with a wide set of language issues: *proficiency test performance* Ganschow et al (1994); Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft, and Evers (1987); performance in speaking and writing tasks Trylong (1998); Young (1986); *grades in language courses* Horwitz (1986); Trylong (1987); *self-esteem* Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986).

Doing a detailed and comprehensive review of the former studies MacIntyre & Gardner (1991) stated:

Covering several measures of proficiency in several different samples, and even in somewhat different conception frameworks, it has been shown that anxiety negatively affects performance in the second language. In some cases, anxiety provides some of the highest

simple correlation of attitudes with achievement

(Worde, 2003, Introduction section, para.1).

Nevertheless those findings, there is not a final conclusion about these issues, in fact Young (1986) found significant correlation among anxiety and other proficiency tests in a group of language teachers, but no relation among anxiety and guided composition. Gardner, Moorcroft and MacIntyre (1987) did not find a direct relationship between anxiety and free speech quality. Ely (1986) failed to find a relationship between anxiety and participation in class in a group of university learners. (Quoted in Ellis, 1995, p.482)

#### *Facilitating Anxiety*

Another group of researchers, notably a minority, Scovel (1978); Chastain (1975); Ehrmand & Oxford (1995) had a very singular point of view about language anxiety, in fact, they supported this emotion as 'helpful or facilitating'. Scovel (1978) argued that students 'stay alert because of anxiety' (Quoted in Arnold, 1999, p.61).

The following studies support the existence of a positive anxiety: oral production of difficult English structures among native Arabic-speakers and Spanish-speakers Kleinmann (1997); good grades in language classes for students in regular French, German, and Spanish classes Chastain (1975); high language proficiency and self-

confidence among a group of excellent language learners  
Ehrman and Oxford (1995). (Oxford in Arnold 1999 p.60)

But all those research have been criticized constantly,  
Krashen (1981) stated that anxiety and language acquisition  
are not compatible, "the student who feels at easy in the  
classroom and likes the teacher may seek out more intake by  
volunteering ... and may be more accepting of the teacher as  
a source of input". (Quoted in Ellis, 1995, p.482)

Horwitz (1986) was skeptic about the utility of language  
anxiety in language learning and reserved it only for  
'fairly simple tasks' (Quoted in Ellis, 1995, p.482).

Taking into account these opposite opinions, it is  
clear that there are a lot of unexplored field opened to  
further research.

#### *Test Anxiety*

The concept of Brown (2004) is illustrative of the  
relationship between testing and anxiety:

If you hear the word *test* in any classroom setting your  
thoughts are not likely to be positive, pleasant or  
affirming. The anticipation of a test is almost always  
accompanied by feelings of anxiety and self-doubt along  
with a fervent hope that you will come out of it alive.  
(p.1).

And the opinion of Brown is not alone, in fact, it is well-known the complex relation among anxiety-provoking experiences and problems with the input, processing, and output level of language.

According to Krashen (1985):

Anxiety inhibits the learner's ability to process incoming language and short-circuits the process of acquisition. An interaction is often found among anxiety, task difficulty, and ability, which interferes at the input, processing, and at the output level. If anxiety impairs cognitive function, students who are anxious may learn less and also may not be able to demonstrate what they have learned". (Quoted in Worde, 2003, introduction section, para. 2)

Sarason (1984) gave a simple and clear concept about test anxiety, "...the tendency to become alarmed about the consequence of inadequate performance on a test or other evaluation". He suggested that the student who experiences this kind of anxiety is exposed to "*cognitive interference*" (Quoted by Oxford in Arnold, 1999, p.64).

Oxford (1992) considered test anxiety as a part of social anxiety specifically related to communicative performance in L2.

*Ways to Measure Anxiety*

Traditionally, the methods to determine the levels of anxiety and some aspects related to this issue in EFL environments had been derived from experimental psychology, however, all this *psychometric* approaches were never an adequate tool since their original purpose was not focused on ESL research.

Fortunately, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) developed an instrument known as Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) which is the best-known instrument in EFL researching. FLCAS is a 33-items, self-report measure, scored on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. It was originally developed to capture the specific essence of foreign language anxiety in a classroom setting and to provide investigators with a standard measure. The FLCAS is based on an analysis of potential sources of anxiety in a language classroom setting integrating three related anxieties: test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and communication apprehension (Ellis, 1995, p.480).

This scale has been applied in many studies regarding the issue and found to be a highly reliable instrument

(Aida, 1994; Ganshow & Sparks, 1996; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Price, 1988).

However the accuracy of FLCAS in measuring some anxiety-relating variables has been criticized because it overlooks some important behaviors surrounding language learning (Arnold, 1999, p.66). For that reason, several researchers have applied additional instruments in order to determine some more *concrete* aspects of anxiety and its influence on EFL Hurd & Hauck (2002); Worde (2003); Oxford (1988). For instance, Hurd & Hauck (2002) proposed a model to rank some well-known stressful language classroom situations and their related issues. Worde (2003) used an instrument designed to elicit the beliefs and experiences surrounding anxiety. Price (1991) examined teacher-generated anxiety. Young (1990) reported a positive correlation between instructor-learner interaction and anxious states. (Quoted in Hauck & Hurd, 2002, Introduction section, para. 2)

#### *Potential Sources of Language Anxiety*

Young (1991) offered the following list of potential sources of language anxiety, some of them associated with the learner, some with the teacher, and others with classroom activities and methods.



*Self-esteem*

Oxford (1999) defined self-esteem as "a self-judgment of worth or value, based on feelings of efficacy, a sense of interacting with one's own environment". It indicates the extent to which a subject believes in himself "to be capable, significant, and worthy" (Quoted in Arnold, 1999, p.62). Krashen (1981) stated a reciprocal relationship between anxiety and self-esteem, he suggested that people with low self-esteem may "worry what their peers or friends think" in fear of their negative opinions resulting they become anxious (Quoted in Andres, 2002, Discussion section, para.6). Oxford (1999) suggested that self-esteem is an aspect of personality and like anxiety can be both: a *trait* (permanent predisposition), or a *state* (related with some specific situations)" (Quoted in Arnold, 1999, p.62).

*Competitiveness*

Bailey (1983) examined the relationship between learner's competitiveness and language anxiety, claiming that "the competitive nature of L2 learning can lead to anxiety when learners compare themselves to others" (Quoted in Ellis, 1995, p.480).

*Group Identity*

Krashen & Terrell (1981) suggested that "children acquire their first language in order to identify and be a

member of the group that speaks that language" (Group Membership Theory). A similar process occurs in SLA, in fact, Krashen & Terrell asserted that language anxiety is closely related to the student's experiences of "target language group identification" (Quoted in Ohata, 2002, Purposes section, para.8).

#### *Learner and instructor's Beliefs*

According to Young (1991) learner's beliefs about language learning could potentially lead to anxiety. Horwitz (1988) found that misconceptions and unrealistic goals of learners about language learning are connected to anxiety. The following is a list of common, but sometimes erroneous conceptions that she found: learners who were concerned about the correctness of their speech in comparison to native-like accent or pronunciation, others believed that two years of language learning are enough to achieve a native-like fluency, learners who were sure that language learning means how to translate, and finally a group that believed that a successful learning of L2 is only possible for gifted individuals. Taking into account these learners' expectative is conceivable that these unrealistic beliefs can lead to anxiety. (Quoted by Oxford in Arnold, 1999, p.65).

On the other hand, teacher's beliefs are also connected with learner's anxiety, in fact, some behaviors and idiosyncrasies of instructors were studied by Young (1991), for instance she found that teachers who believed that their principal function in class is constantly to provide error correction can generate anxious environments for students (Quoted in Ohata, 2002, Purposes section, para.12).

#### *Classroom Procedures*

Some pieces of research have suggested that students bound up some instructional and methodological practices with language anxiety. Young (1991) noticed a high relationship between some types of activities such oral skits in front of the class and language anxiety. Similar results were found by Koch & Terrell (1991) (Quoted by Ohata, 2002, Purpose section, para.12). Another anxiety-provoking procedure is error correction; Horwitz (1988) suggested that students are more concerned about how, when, how often their mistakes are corrected rather than in the error correction itself (Quoted in Ohata, 2002, Purpose section, para.13).

#### *Risk-taking, Tolerance to Ambiguity, and Inhibition*

Brown (1994) noted that language learning "implies a great deal of self-exposure to mistake". Risk-taking refers to the acceptance of errors as a normal situation in language learning, risk-taking and tolerance to ambiguity

are similar (Quoted in Andres, 2002, discussion section, para.4). According to Oxford (1999) "tolerance of ambiguity is the acceptance of confusing situations" (Quoted in Arnold, 1999, p.62). Ehrman (1993) suggested that students with a great deal of ambiguity tolerance are better learners than students who do not accept confusing experiences, he stated that the lower the tolerance of ambiguity; the stronger the inhibition to protect the ego.(Quoted in Andres, 2002, Discussion section, para.11),

Both risk-taking and tolerance to ambiguity can be affected by some uncomfortable experiences in the language classroom (Arnold, 1999, p. 62).

Arnold defined inhibition as "the loss of the capacity to take risks and to tolerate ambiguous experiences"(p.10) It can be said that when children learn their first language make, maybe, millions of mistakes, however children are not "ashamed by these permanent errors, against that, they are constantly taking risks or tolerating ambiguity, in others words, they are never inhibited". Inhibition is interrelated to negative prophecies: "I can't do it, I'm not good at it" and by the way connected to anxious states (Ehrman quoted by Andres, 2003, discussion section, para.13)

*Manifestations of Anxiety*

Oxford (1999) provided a quite complete inventory of the typical signs of anxiety:

Physical actions: squirming, fidgeting, playing with hair or clothing, nervously touching objects, stuttering or stammering, displaying jittery behavior, being unable to reproduce the sounds or intonation of the target language even after repeated practice.

Physical symptoms: complaining about a headache, experiencing tight muscles, feeling unexplained pain or tension in any part of the body.

General avoidance: forgetting the answer, showing carelessness, cutting class, coming late, arriving unprepared, low levels of verbal production, lack of volunteering in class, seeming inability to answer even the simplest questions.

Other signs which might reflect language anxiety, depending on the culture: overstudying, perfectionism, social avoidance, conversational withdrawal, lack of eye contact, hostility, monosyllabic or noncommittal responses, image protection or masking behaviors (exaggerated smiling, laughing, nodding, joking), failing to interrupt when it would be natural to do so, excessive competitiveness, excessive self-effacement

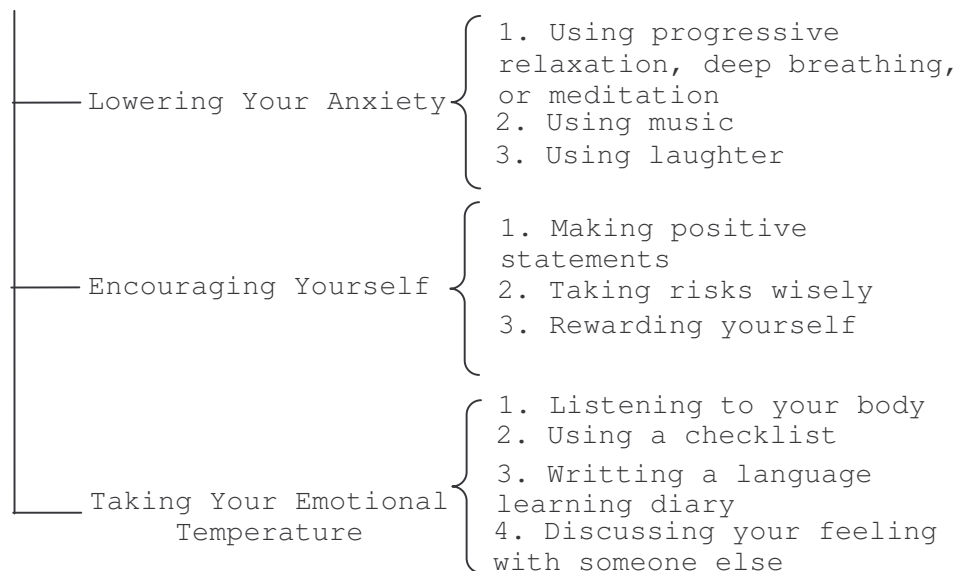
and self-criticism (I'm so stupid). (Quoted in Arnold, 1999, p.66)

### *Affective Strategies*

Affective strategies can be defined as a set of mechanisms that learners use for regulating emotions, motivations, and attitudes to enhance their own learning (Oxford, 1990, p. 135).

Oxford (1990) distinguished three groups of affective strategies: Lowering Your Anxiety, Encouraging Yourself, and Taking Your Emotional Temperature (p. 140). The following is a diagram that shows the Oxford's model.

#### **AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES**



Oxford (1990) stated that these strategies are not a replacement for psychotherapy, and thus they are not recommended for solving deep psychological problems as trait anxiety or trait self-esteem.

The use of affective strategies has been studied from different corners. Rubin & Thompson (1994) looked at ways in which the use of this kind of strategies influence language learning, in their research they noted the interdependence between a low *affective filter* and thus low anxiety levels, and self-esteem, self-efficacy and motivation resulting in improved performance (Quoted in Arnold, 1999, p.64). Hauck & Hurd (2002) asked students in order to rank a proposed group of affective strategies to deal with anxiety; they found that the most used was self-encouragement. Chamot et al. (1987) conducted a study to determine the frequency of use of the affective strategies, surprisingly, they found that only 1 in every 20 language learners used this kind of strategies to reduce anxiety. (Quoted in Oxford, 1990, p.143)

#### *Evaluation, Assessment, and Testing*

It is a very common error in the educational settings to misunderstand these three concepts, considering them as synonymous. In order to avoid this confusion, it would be useful to have a clear definition of each one of them.

### *Evaluation*

According to Brown (1989) evaluation can be defined as: "the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote improvement of the curriculum, and assess its effectiveness and efficiency as well as the participants' attitudes within the context of particular institutions involved" (p.223).

In that sense, evaluation has a clear and wide purpose: to gather information systematically about the effectiveness of a program since a specific or general perspective in order to improve it.

### *Assessment*

According to Brown (2004) assessment is: "an ongoing process that encompasses a much wider domain. Whenever a student responds to a question, offers a comment, or tries out a new word or structure, the teacher subconsciously makes an assessment of the student's performance" (p.4). This concept gives a clear idea about the real scope of assessment which is really extensive since it is interrelated with every situation in EFL classroom.

Traditionally, assessment has been separated in two major trends: formal and informal assessment. Brown (2004) defined formal assessment as a set of "systematic planned sampling techniques constructed to give teacher and student



an appraisal of student achievement" (p.6). Doing this explanation, it can be inferred that formal assessment is all that informal assessment is not. In fact, it is neither a systematic procedure nor planned, moreover, it is not designed to record results or judgments about the students' behaviors.

### *Testing*

According to Brown (2004) "Tests are prepared administrative procedures that occur at identifiable times in a curriculum when learners muster all their faculties to offer peak performances, knowing that their responses are being measured and evaluated" (p.4).

Although the former definition seems quite simple, the correct design of a test implies some grade of difficulty. . Brown stated some essentials requisites for a good test, the first one is a method, referred to "a set of techniques, procedures, or items", the second one is a system of measuring, and reporting the results of the test, the third one is a clear knowledge about the intentions of the test, that is the criteria to be measured and the previous background of this criteria that the person to be tested has. Moreover those characteristics, tests are typically time-constraint practices (Brown, 2004, p.3).

Then, it is clear that tests are not the only way to assess students and thus, it can be inferred that every test is a form of assessing students and that assessment is a broader concept than test is.

#### *Characteristics of a Reliable Test*

Brown (2004) stated the existence of five "cardinal criteria" for judging the accuracy of a test, these are: "practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback" (p.19).

##### *Practicality*

This term refers to "the degree to which it is cost effective and easy to administer". The number of testees, the time constraints for testing and marking, and the available human and physical resources, all need to be considered carefully before an assessment scheme is chosen. This is not only an issue of money, but also of the perceptions of those who will be taken and using the test. Also, if a test can be "administered efficiently by assessors and markers, this increases the validity and reliability of the results" as a whole. (Brown, 2004, p.19).

##### *Reliability*

According to Bachman (1990) "reliability ... has to do with consistency of measures across different times, tests

forms, raters, and other characteristics of the measurement concept" (p.24).

Reliability is a quality of *test scores*, and a perfect reliable score, or measure, would be one which is free from errors of measurement. American Psychological Association APA (1985). Mousavi (2002) stated the following factors affecting testing reliability:

*Students-related Reliability*

This kind of reliability takes into account: "the psychological and physical conditions of the subject while he/she is being tested, and states those as possible factors interfering the achievement of *true scores*" (Mousavi, quoted in Brown, 2004, p.21)

*Rater Reliability*

According to Brown (2004) this term refers to the deviation that "human error, subjectivity, and bias may enter into the scoring process" (p.21) at least in two ways: inter-rater reliability and intra-rater reliability.

The first one "occurs when two or more scores yield inconsistent scores of the same test, possibly for lack of attention to scoring criteria, inexperience, inattention, or even preconceived biases".

And the second one occurs when a teacher scores a great number of tests, and as consequence of "unclear scoring

criteria, fatigue, or bias", the standard varies, and the first tests are scored in a different way from the last ones (Brown, 2004, p.41).

#### *Test Administration Reliability*

For Brown (2004) this term corresponds to some conditions that can affect, in some way the necessary comfort for a testing session, such as the adequacy of testing environment, and material.

#### *Test Reliability*

It refers to a proper design of a test, taking into account several variables such as the length of a test, the time limit, the correctness of the test; avoiding ambiguity, among others (Brown, 2004, p.22).

#### *Validity*

Validity has been described as the "the single most critical element in constructing foreign languages test". A valid test has a recognizable logic to it that makes the test a meaningful tool to assessment (Gronlund, quoted in Brown, 2004, p.22). The most fundamental kind of validity relates to the underlined theory of language on which the test is constructed (construct validity). This influences the sampling of language materials and tasks (content validity), which in turn has an effect on the appearance to the test to the teachers and learners who use it.

*Authenticity*

McNamara (2000) defined authenticity as "the degree to which test materials, and test conditions succeed in replicating those in the target use situation" (p.131).

Brown (2004) gave a list of some standards that the test must approximate to be considered as authentic:

The language in tests is as natural as possible.

Items are contextualized rather than isolated.

Topics are meaningful (relevant, interesting) for the learner.

Some thematic organization to items is provided, such as through a story line or episode.

Tasks represent or closely approximate real-world tasks (p.28).

*Washback*

According to Brown (2004) *washback* constitutes a part of consequential validity relative to the effect of a test on instruction (p.29).

For McNamara (2000), "ethical language testing practice should work to ensure positive washback from tests" (p.7).

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

*Design of the study*

The present research and the design of all the instruments to be applied are based on previous works done by some well-known researchers around the world (Horwitz, 1986; Macintyre, 1991; Hurd, 2003) designed to examine the relationship between anxiety and second language acquisition from different perspectives and with diverse purposes. This is a descriptive study and it does not involve neither the statement of an hypothesis, nor the manipulation of variables, nor the application of a treatment.

*Procedure*

The present research will be carried out with students from the English and French program of the University of Nariño.

The students are going to be asked to answer two questionnaires, the first one is the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz (1986) and the other one is a questionnaire designed to gather data about some specific issues related to anxiety such as symptoms, anxiety-provoking experiences, and anxiety-reducing strategies. Both questionnaires are intended to collect *introspective data*, that is, "information which is acquired from a student

account of his/her own feelings, thoughts, ideas, etc."." (Wallace, 2000, p.39)

#### *Subjects*

The subjects who were going to be part of this research were 68 students of third (29), seventh (21), and ninth (18) semester from the English and French program of the University of Nariño during the second period of 2006. Gender, age, and socioeconomical status were indifferent for the research purposes of this study.

#### *Materials*

The materials that are going to be used in this research are essentially the formats of the questionnaires plus some bibliographic material that will serve as the basis for the analysis of the data.

#### *Instruments*

The instruments are two self-report questionnaires designed to be asked in a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, the first of them is *The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)* developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) which is a 33-item, self-report measured, developed to capture the specific essence of foreign language anxiety in a languages classroom integrating three related anxieties: *communication apprehension, general feeling of anxiety, and fear to*

*negative evaluation.* The second questionnaire is a 30-item questionnaire taken from a research of Hauck & Hurd (2002) about the issue; intended to measure the opinions of the students about the symptoms that they experience when they are being orally assessed, the techniques or strategies that they use to deal with this feeling and the situations that they consider as anxiety-inducing.



## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The following part of this paper reports and analyses the results which were obtained by applying the questionnaires described earlier in the procedure (Chapter 3).

In this descriptive study about anxiety and its influence on oral assessment in foreign languages students, the analysis was focused on finding out some generalities about this feeling in a group of 59 students of three different semesters. The first part of the study does not involve contrastive purposes, scores from the groups were not considered individually, all of them were mixed and added in order to obtain a total score which was the base for the first part of this chapter. The second part of the study is attempted to determine if anxiety levels towards oral assessment decrease as students are exposed to language learning, for doing that, scores from each semester were discriminated and compared as it is explained later.

## METHOD

The starting point of this research was the FLCAS, The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), which is a structured

questionnaire designed to determine potential levels of anxiety on foreign and second language students.

Furthermore, three additional questionnaires were applied to obtain related data concerning this research. The design of them was based on FLCAS; in fact the system used to answer and to analyze collected data from them was the same.

The structure of the survey was the following: first of all, an initial question intended to ask about the willingness of the students to answer the questionnaire, in this case three options of response were possible: good, regular, or bad. Then, the FLCAS which was designed to measure three variables: *Communication Apprehension*, *Fear to Negative Evaluation*, and *General Feeling of Anxiety*, students could choose one of five options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. After that, a second questionnaire presented a group symptoms that students feel before or during oral assessment. The third questionnaire enquired students about if they considered as anxiety-provoking some common situations during oral assessment. Finally, the fourth questionnaire proposed a set of strategies that students could use to deal with anxiety.

The system used to ask all the questionnaires was the same, but the second, the third, and the fourth questionnaires had additionally an open-ended question to let the students suggest new responses not provided.

The sample entailed in this study was a heterogeneous group of 68 students enrolled in third, seventh, and ninth semester on the English-French program at the University of Nariño, however the initial size of the sample was reduced as it is explained ahead. The English proficiency of the group oscillated between intermediate and advanced level. Once the questionnaires were applied, they were checked and classified as useful or non-useful data. The last category was discarded; criteria to do that were essentially three: The questionnaires marked *bad* in the first question related to willingness of the student, the questionnaires marked partially, that is, less than 90% of the items, and finally the questionnaires with the same answer for all the statements proposed. After this process, the initial number of 68 participants was reduced to 59.

After that, data obtained from the questionnaires was processed following the method applied by Horwitz et al. in their studies, that is, using a system of percentages for

each category. The results appeared on frequency tables, likewise percentages based on overall averages are supported by barcharts for a better understanding of the research findings. Following the process, a second deeper analysis was made in order to rank the results of each set of questions.

## RESULTS

### *Communication Apprehension*

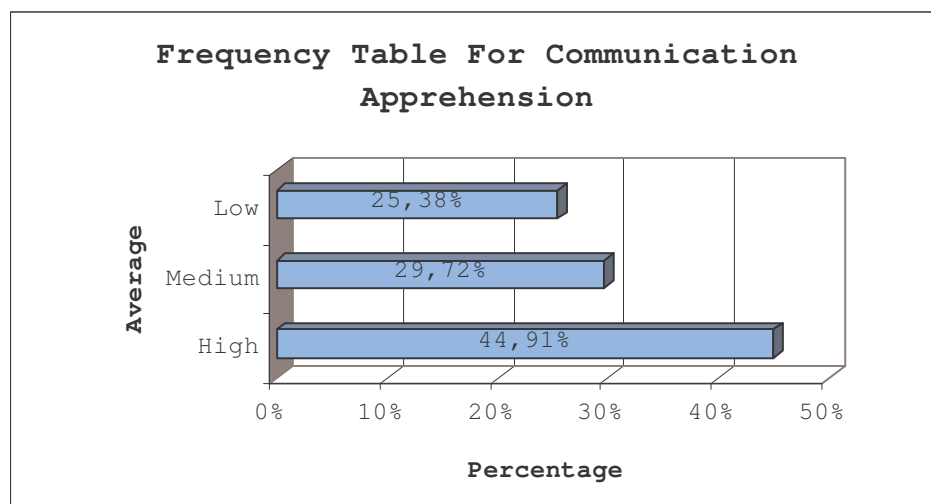
*Communication Apprehension* has to do with some specific kind of anxiety called *state anxiety*, which is apprehension, experienced at a particular moment in time to response to a definite situation (Spielberger, quoted in Ellis, 1995, p. 480).

To determine the levels of this feeling, FLCAS was used according to the model proposed by the authors of this instrument, that is, questions No.1, 3, 4, 9, 13, 14, 18, 24, 27, 29, 33; were added and the results were divided to obtain an average expressed in percentages, after that only three categories of classification were possible *High*, *Medium*, and *Low*, all the questionnaires of this research followed the same procedure.

Table 4.1 displays the occurrence of the situations described on the questionnaire. A great number of the surveyed sample exhibited a high agreement with the statements 44.91 %, while a 29.72 % of the students manifested indifference or indecision towards the items; finally an important amount of the participants, near a third of the sample refused to accept the assertions.

4.1. Frequency Table for Communication Apprehension

| AVERAGE | CATEGORY                      | FREQUENCY | RELATIVE FREQUENCY | CUMULATIVE FREQUENCY | CUM. REL. FREQUENCY |
|---------|-------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| HIGH    | Strongly Agree<br>Agree       | 27        | 27                 | 44.91%               | 44.91%              |
| MEDIUM  | Neutral                       | 17        | 44                 | 29.72%               | 74.63%              |
| LOW     | Disagree<br>Strongly Disagree | 15        | 59                 | 25.38%               | 100%                |



To give a more detailed description about the responses, table 4.2 displays a ranking-list of these according to the frequency value in which they occurred. At the top of this list, students reported to feel nervousness while they were speaking English in front of others 57.63%. The second score seem to be supportive of this assertion, 55.93% of the students manifested to feel their heart pounding before or during oral assessing, this symptom has been typically associated to state anxiety. In the same way, some participants felt panic when they were asked to speak English spontaneously 55.93%; it was also frequent that students experienced insecurity about their capacity to speak English, a 52.54% of the sample did not feel confident while they did it. In the following statements of the rank, participants displayed a general feeling of apprehension, they feared that something bad were going to happen while oral assessment, this fact could be the reason why volunteering in English class was considered as an embarrassing situation for a 38.98% of the surveyed. At the end of the table, there are some statements that reflected confidence of the students while they were speaking English: "I feel confident when I speak in English

class" 35.59%, and "I'm not nervous when speaking with English speakers" 32.20%.

Table 4.2. Rank of responses for Communication Apprehension

|   |        |    |
|---|--------|----|
| I feel shy when speaking English in front of other students.                        | 57.63% | 1  |
| I feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be asked to speak in English class.      | 55.93% | 2  |
| I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.         | 55.93% | 3  |
| I never feel quite sure of myself when I'm speaking in my English class.            | 52.54% | 4  |
| I'm afraid when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the English class. | 47.46% | 5  |
| I get nervous when the teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.  | 45.76% | 6  |
| I tremble when I know that I'm going to be asked to speak in English class.         | 40.68% | 7  |
| I get nervous when I speak in my English class.                                     | 40.68% | 8  |
| It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.                         | 38.98% | 9  |
| I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.          | 38.98% | 10 |
| I feel confident when I speak in English class.                                     | 35.59% | 11 |
| I'm not nervous when speaking with English speakers.                                | 32.20% | 12 |

The findings of this part of this research appear to corroborate other studies mentioned in chapter 2 suggesting that communication apprehension as a factor of interference when students are orally assessed, specially in the language classroom setting where learners have little control of their communicative situation and their performance is constantly monitored by both teachers and peers. Results indicate that it would be an error to ignore the relevance of this emotional side of oral assessment and its influence in learning process.

*General Feeling of Anxiety*

This part of the FLCAS was designed to measure specifically the *trait anxiety*, for that reason 13 questions elicited to which extent students experienced this feeling during oral assessment, in that sense an important number of them reported acceptance of the items proposed in the questionnaire 43.16 %. On another hand, 29.86% of the surveyed did not agree with the assertions, a similar amount 26.86% were indifferent or neutral, this statistic would be explained by the fact that *trait anxiety* as its name suggest is a characteristic of each personality and some people normally do not feel this emotion during oral assessment.

## 4.3. Frequency Table for General Feeling of Anxiety

| AVERAGE | CATEGORY                      | FREQUENCY | RELATIVE<br>FREQUENCY | CUMULATIVE<br>FREQUENCY | CUM. REL.<br>FREQUENCY |
|---------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| HIGH    | Strongly Agree<br>Agree       | 25        | 25                    | 43.16%                  | 43.16%                 |
| MEDIUM  | Neutral                       | 16        | 41                    | 26.86%                  | 70.02%                 |
| LOW     | Disagree<br>Strongly Disagree | 18        | 59                    | 29.86%                  | 100%                   |



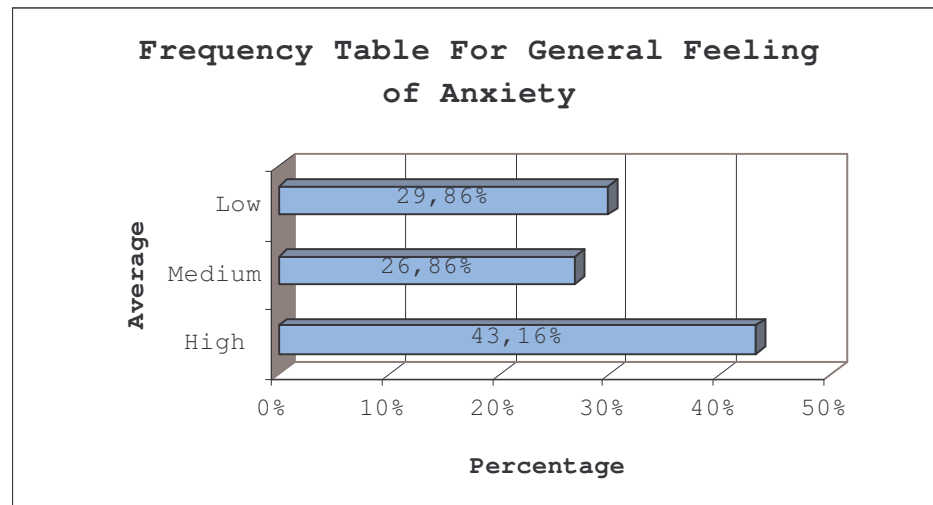


Table 4.4 shows the correspondent rank of the most common responses of the students respect to this issue. At the top of the list, students declared that in English class they simply froze up due to nervousness, even if they knew the correct answer 61.02%. It was also important, the number of surveyed who reported worry for the consequences of failing their English class, for 59.32% of the sample, the implications on grades and "prestige" deserved a special interest and when these were in risk, this situation normally lead to anxiety. Going after, a 55.93% of the students got anxious in English class it did not matter if they were prepared for it. The following percentages show in some way the compromise of students to do better: "It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English classes"

49.15%, or "English class move so quickly that I worry about getting left behind" 42.37%, but curiously between these sentences was:

"In English class, I think of things that are unrelated to the lesson" 47.46%, this particular finding maybe would be explained considering some attitudinal aspects, in fact, some students try to cope with anxiety avoiding reality, that is, the study of English, supporting this opinion was also: "I often like not going to English classes" 42.37%. In contrast, other students considered that to improve their knowledge could constitute some sort of strategy to avoid anxiety. At the end of the rank, results revealed the opinion of people who take things easy: "Before English class I feel confident and relaxed" 37.9%, "I don't understand why some people get so upset over English class" 33.90%, "I feel easy when English speakers are with me" 30.51%, "I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for English class" 23.73%.

Table 4.4. Rank of responses for General Feeling of Anxiety

|   |        |   |
|---|--------|---|
| In English class, I'm so nervous that I forget what I know.                 | 61.02% | 1 |
| I worry about the consequences of failing my English class.                 | 59.32% | 2 |
| Even if I'm well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it.       | 55.93% | 3 |
| I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English. | 54.20% | 4 |
| It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English classes.                  | 48.15% | 5 |

|  |        |    |
|--|--------|----|
| In English classes, I think of things that are unrelated to the lesson.      | 47.46% | 6  |
| English class moves so quickly that I worry about getting left behind.       | 42.37% | 7  |
| I often feel like not going to my English class.                             | 42.37% | 8  |
| Before English class, I feel confident and relaxed.                          | 37.29% | 9  |
| I don't understand why some people get so upset over English class.          | 33.90% | 10 |
| I feel easy when native English speakers are with me.                        | 30.51% | 11 |
| I feel tenser and have more pressure in English class than in other classes. | 23.73% | 12 |
| I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for English class.                | 23.73% | 13 |

In general terms, the results of this part of the FLCAS lead to the conclusion that an important number of the students were afraid constantly of situations involving oral performance.

#### *Fear to Negative Evaluation*

This part of FLCAS refers concretely to the apprehension that students feel towards a negative evaluation from others, for doing that, 8 statements were proposed; results revealed a high tendency to agree with the occurrence of the situations described in the statements 42.58%. Fear, confusion, and even depression were reported by students who feared a negative evaluation from others. On the other hand, another group of students declared to be neutral respect to the items 23.94 and finally a 33.47% of the sample did not agree in any way.

4.5. Frequency Table for Fear to Negative Evaluation

| AVERAGE | CATEGORY                      | FREQUENCY | RELATIVE FREQUENCY | CUMULATIVE FREQUENCY | CUM. REL. FREQUENCY |
|---------|-------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| HIGH    | Strongly Agree<br>Agree       | 24        | 24                 | 42.58%               | 42.58%              |
| MEDIUM  | Neutral                       | 14        | 38                 | 23.94%               | 66.52%              |
| LOW     | Disagree<br>Strongly Disagree | 21        | 59                 | 33.47%               | 100%                |

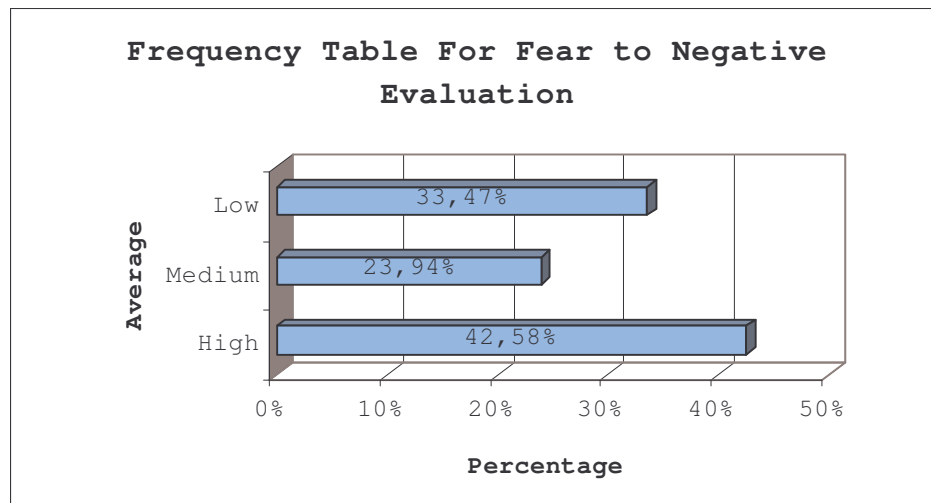


Table 4.6 arranges the responses of students in order of preference. At the beginning, with a 55.93% of occurrence, students stated to be afraid that their classmates would laugh at them when they spoke English; in the second position 54.24% students picked up: "The more I prepared for an English test, the more confused I get", the acceptance of this item deserves a special attention, because some people involved in languages teaching believe that lack of preparation is the real and unique cause of

anxiety, this finding contradicts in some way this belief. Error correction was another disturbing aspect of oral assessment, this pedagogical practice is cited by a 52.54% of the students.

The following assertions of the rank supported the lack of self-confidence of students in their English proficiency: "I think that my classmates' English is better than mine" 40.68%, or "I always feel that my classmates speak better English than I" 40.68%. Only at the end of the rank, some statements appeared suggesting calm such as: "I'm usually at ease during tests in my class" 35.59%, or "I don't worry about making mistakes" 30.51%.

Table 4.6. Rank of responses for Fear to Negative Evaluation

|   |        |   |
|---|--------|---|
| I'm afraid that my classmates will laugh at me when I speak English.    | 55.90% | 1 |
| The more I prepare for an English test, the more confused I get.        | 54.24% | 2 |
| I'm afraid that my English teacher will correct every mistake I make.   | 52.54% | 3 |
| I think that my classmates' English is better than mine.                | 45.76% | 4 |
| I always feel that my classmates speak better English than I.           | 40.68% | 5 |
| I'm usually at ease during tests in my class.                           | 35.59% | 6 |
| I don't worry about making mistakes in English class.                   | 30.51% | 7 |
| I get depressed when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting. | 25.42  | 8 |

In conclusion, an important number of the participants expressed serious concerns about various kinds of evaluative situations in which their knowledge and oral performance of

English were to be monitored. Apprehension about other's evaluation, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate their performance negatively were felt by near a half of the sample, leading to the conclusion that fear to negative evaluation interferes with learning process.

The following part of the results reports and explains some findings obtained from three additional questionnaires which were designed based on studies from Hauck & Hurd (2000) as it was explained formerly. The system to analyze data was identical to that carried out firstly.

#### *Symptoms of Anxiety*

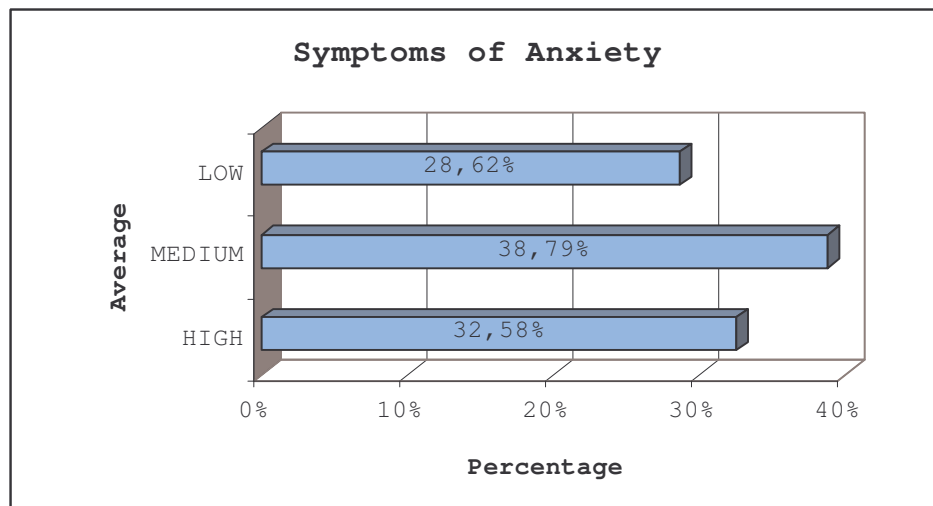
Regarding the symptoms of anxiety, the questionnaire proposed a set of some physical and emotional signals of stress which some students could experience before or during oral assessment.

As it is shown in table 4.7, a third part of the surveyed students accepted to manifest some of the symptoms of anxiety suggested in the questionnaire, while another part of the sample was not decided for the proposals of the list

38.79%, and finally a 28.62% of the surveyed did not agree with feeling these symptoms.

4.7. Frequency Table for Symptoms of Anxiety

| AVERAGE | CATEGORY                      | FREQUENCY | RELATIVE FREQUENCY | CUMULATIVE FREQUENCY | CUM. REL. FREQUENCY |
|---------|-------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| HIGH    | Strongly Agree<br>Agree       | 19        | 19                 | 32.58%               | 32.58%              |
| MEDIUM  | Neutral                       | 23        | 42                 | 38.79%               | 71.37%              |
| LOW     | Disagree<br>Strongly Disagree | 17        | 59                 | 28.62%               | 100%                |



With a view to give a more detailed description about the opinion of the students table 4.8, displays a ranking-list of the symptoms of anxiety according to the frequency value in which they occurred among the participants.

“To forget unwillingly the answer” is at the top of the list, most of the students who manifested some symptoms of

anxiety because of oral assessment agreed with this item, and put it with a 57.63%, as the most common one.

This was followed by a well-known physical signal which is to play with hair, fingers, pencils, or clothing, a 45.76% of the respondents agreed with this assertion. Consequently with the first score, the third one: "I'm unable to answer even the simplest questions" had a preference of 37.29%.

After that, some physical symptoms such as pain or muscle tension were experienced by the surveyed 37.29%. With a similar importance in the scale, it was the lack of volunteering in class. Finally, at the end of the scale are rated some symptoms referring inadequacy to produce correct or complete answers 27.12%, or to produce sounds or appropriate intonation while oral assessing 23.73%.

Furthermore, in the open-ended question there were multiple suggestions, first of all 4 participants responded that they blushed during assessment; sweating was named by 3 students as a typical symptom associated to oral assessment, while five of them manifested a chilling sensation when they were confronted orally.



Table 4.8. Rank of responses for Symptoms of Anxiety

|   |        |   |
|---|--------|---|
| I forget unwillingly the answer.  | 57.63% | 1 |
| I play with my hair, fingers, pencils, or clothing.   | 45.76% | 2 |
| I'm unable to answer even the simplest questions.   | 37.29% | 3 |
| I feel unexplained pain or tension in any part of the body.                                       | 37.29% | 4 |
| I lack of volunteering in class.  | 33.90% | 5 |
| I give monosyllabic or not adequate responses.  | 27.12% | 6 |
| I feel to have a low level of verbal production.  | 23.73% | 7 |
| I'm unable to reproduce sounds or intonation of the target language even after repeated practice. | 16.95% | 8 |
| I stutter or stammer.   | 13.56% | 9 |

The reported findings lead to the conclusion that a larger number of students manifested in some degree one or more symptoms while they were facing oral assessment. It would be a great attainment if teachers and students learn to identify these symptoms, that step could become the first one to avoid the interference that anxiety causes on oral assessment.

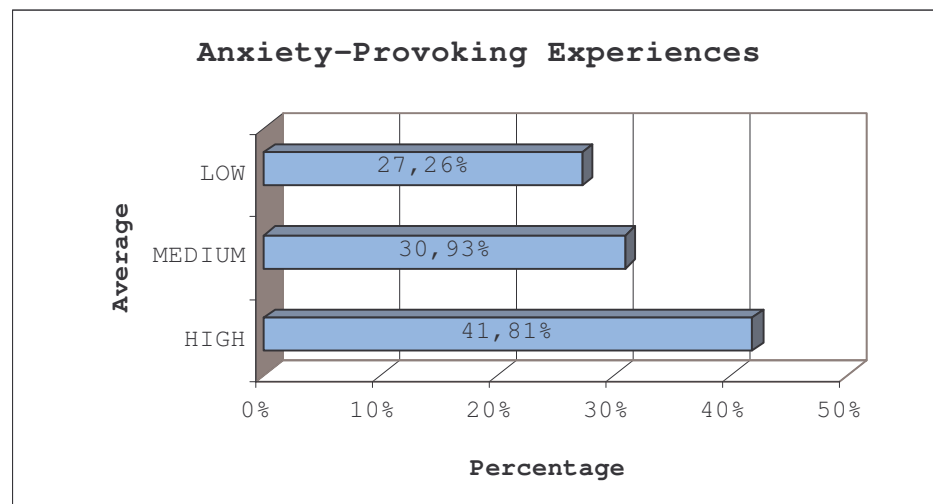
#### *Anxiety-Provoking Experiences*

4.9. Frequency Table for Anxiety-Provoking Experiences

| AVERAGE | CATEGORY                      | FREQUENCY | RELATIVE FREQUENCY | CUMULATIVE FREQUENCY | CUM. REL. FREQUENCY |
|---------|-------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| HIGH    | Strongly Agree<br>Agree       | 25        | 25                 | 41.81%               | 41.81%              |
| MEDIUM  | Neutral                       | 18        | 43                 | 30.93%               | 72.74%              |
| LOW     | Disagree<br>Strongly Disagree | 16        | 59                 | 27.26%               | 100%                |

In this questionnaire students were asked if they considered as anxiety-provoking a list of situations in which they must perform orally in a second language. The

following bar chart provides a graphical description about the preferences of the surveyed respect to what they considered as anxiety-provoking. As it can be seen, is considerable the number of students that agreed with the situations proposed as possible sources of anxiety 41.81%. In contrast only a 27.26% of the participants do not consider these experiences as anxiety-provoking, while a 30.93% of the respondents were neutral or undecided.



In order to highlight the frequency of occurrence of responses, they were ranked downwards.

According to the results shown in table 4.10, it can be assumed that when it comes to anxiety-provoking experiences, students considered fear of critical reaction of their

teachers or classmates as the most stressful situation 62.71%, by the way associated events to the first one as fear of making mistakes 49.15%, not remembering vocabulary 45.76%, or worrying about accent 44.07%, had proved to produce nervousness and discomfort among the students. It is remarkable that an important number of students became anxious when they thought about not matching up the expectations of classmates and teachers 44.07%, some of them get stressed when they felt too much was expected of them 40.08%. At the end of this rank, there are some items related to the worry that students experienced when they realized about the effort and time necessary to learn the language and the inadequacy of the structures of their own language respect to the L2 30.51%.

In the open-ended question, 5 students stated to become anxious when teacher corrected them in front of their classmates.

Table 4.10. Rank of responses for Anxiety-Provoking

#### Experiences

|  |        |   |
|--|--------|---|
| Fear of critical reaction of my teacher or my classmates.                          | 62.71% | 1 |
| Fear of making mistakes.   | 49.15% | 2 |
| Not remembering vocabulary.  | 45.76% | 3 |
| Worrying about my accent.  | 44.07% | 4 |
| Worrying because not matching up the expectations of my classmates and my teacher. | 44.07% | 5 |
| Feeling too much is expected of me.  | 40.08% | 6 |

|  |        |    |
|--|--------|----|
| Fear of not being understood.  | 40.08% | 7  |
| Realizing no making progress quickly enough.   | 40.68% | 8  |
| Realizing how much work it takes to learn a language.                                  | 38.98% | 9  |
| Remembering negative experiences of past oral assessment sessions.                     | 38.98% | 10 |
| Discovering that another language does not follow the same patterns as my own language | 30.51% | 11 |
| Wanting to translate every word, but finding it does not help.                         | 25.42% | 12 |

As it is apparent from these results, it is conceivable to conclude that some learning experiences related to oral assessment become sources of anxiety for an important number of students, for that reason teachers must be aware of the importance of avoiding threatening classroom environments that can affect the performance of learners specially when they are orally assessed. Moreover, the implementation of some techniques to minimize anxiety might be considered in order to get a more adequate learning environment.

#### *Anxiety-Reducing Strategies*

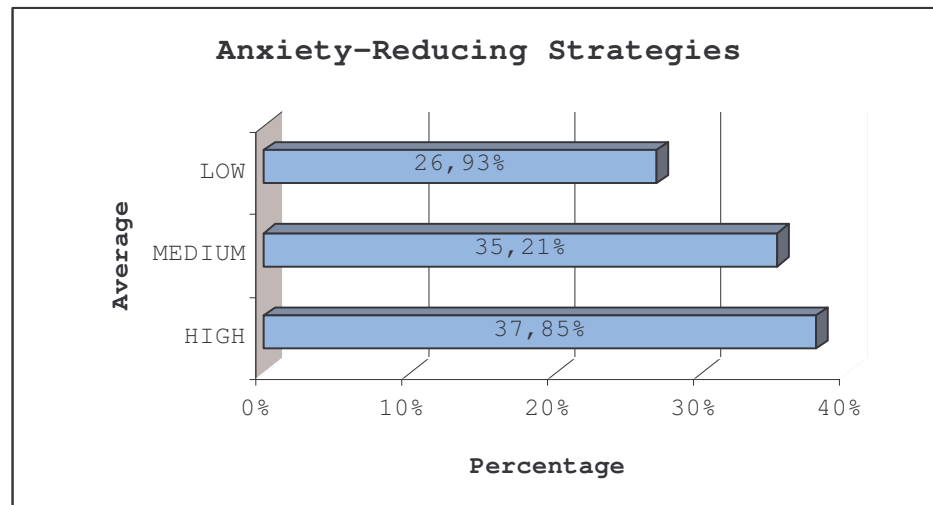
Table 4.11 provides a detailed description of findings specifically about some strategies that students used to diminish anxiety.

## 4.11. Frequency Table for Anxiety-Reducing Strategies

| AVERAGE | CATEGORY                      | FREQUENCY | RELATIVE<br>FREQUENCY | CUMULATIVE<br>FREQUENCY | CUM. REL.<br>FREQUENCY |
|---------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| HIGH    | Strongly Agree<br>Agree       | 23        | 23                    | 37.85%                  | 37.85%                 |
| MEDIUM  | Neutral                       | 21        | 44                    | 35.21%                  | 73.06%                 |
| LOW     | Disagree<br>Strongly Disagree | 15        | 59                    | 26.93%                  | 100%                   |

The following barchart presents the cumulative frequencies for the use of anxiety-reducing strategies, as it can be observed, a considerable percentage of the sample 37.85% agreed respect to use some kind of technique to diminish anxiety before or during assessment. It is worthy to note that the set proposed in the questionnaire exclusively included affective strategies. On another hand, a 35.21% of the sample did not use this sort of techniques for managing anxiety, while an important number 26.93% disagreed with the use of them.

Results revealed that a significant number of the surveyed do not make use of affective strategies, a possible explanation for these findings would be some personal traits of the participants, maybe these students do not think about the usefulness of the techniques to cope with anxiety or simply they do not feel this emotion.



Following this analysis, the strategies which help learners to overcome anxiety were listed downwards according to the preference of students.

As it can be observed in table 4.8, the most popular strategy selected by 64.41% of the students who responded was: "I use positive self-talk before or during oral assessment".

"I actively encourage myself to take risks", a well-known affective strategy was the second, 64.41% of the sample ticked it. With regard to getting support from others, there was an interesting contrast, while a 52.54% of the students shared worries with others students, only a 27.12% let their teacher know they were anxious. 35.59% of the participants were aware of the signals of stress that could affect their

oral performance. Curiously, some techniques for dealing with anxiety are not commonly used by most of students, only 18.64% manifested they used relaxation techniques such as deep-breathing or speaking more slowly and at the end of the list were ranked some distraction techniques such as: "I tell myself when I'm being assessed, that it will not take long" 22.03%, and "I imagine that when I'm being assessed that it is just a friendly informal chat" 16.95% used by a reduced number of the participants. As it was explained earlier, this questionnaire included an open-ended question for suggestions of students, in this case, 2 participants manifested to deal with anxiety speaking English alone if possible in front a mirror.

Table 4.12. Rank of responses for Anxiety-Reducing Strategies

|  |        |   |
|--|--------|---|
| I use positive self-talk before or during oral assessment (e.g. I can do it, it doesn't matter if I make mistakes, others make mistakes) | 64.41% | 1 |
| I actively encourage myself to take risks such as trying to speak, even though I make mistakes.  | 61.02% | 2 |
| I share my worries about assessment with other students.   | 52.54% | 3 |
| I'm aware of the physical signs of stress that might affect my oral performance. (e.g. tight muscles, headache)                          | 35.59% | 4 |
| I give myself a reward after assessment when I do well.  | 33.90% | 5 |
| I let my teacher know that I'm anxious.  | 27.12% | 6 |
| I tell myself when I'm being assessed that it will not take long.  | 22.03% | 7 |
| I use relaxation techniques (e.g. deep breathing consciously speaking more slowly.)  | 18.64% | 8 |
| I imagine that when I'm being assessed that it is just a friendly informal chat.   | 16.95% | 9 |

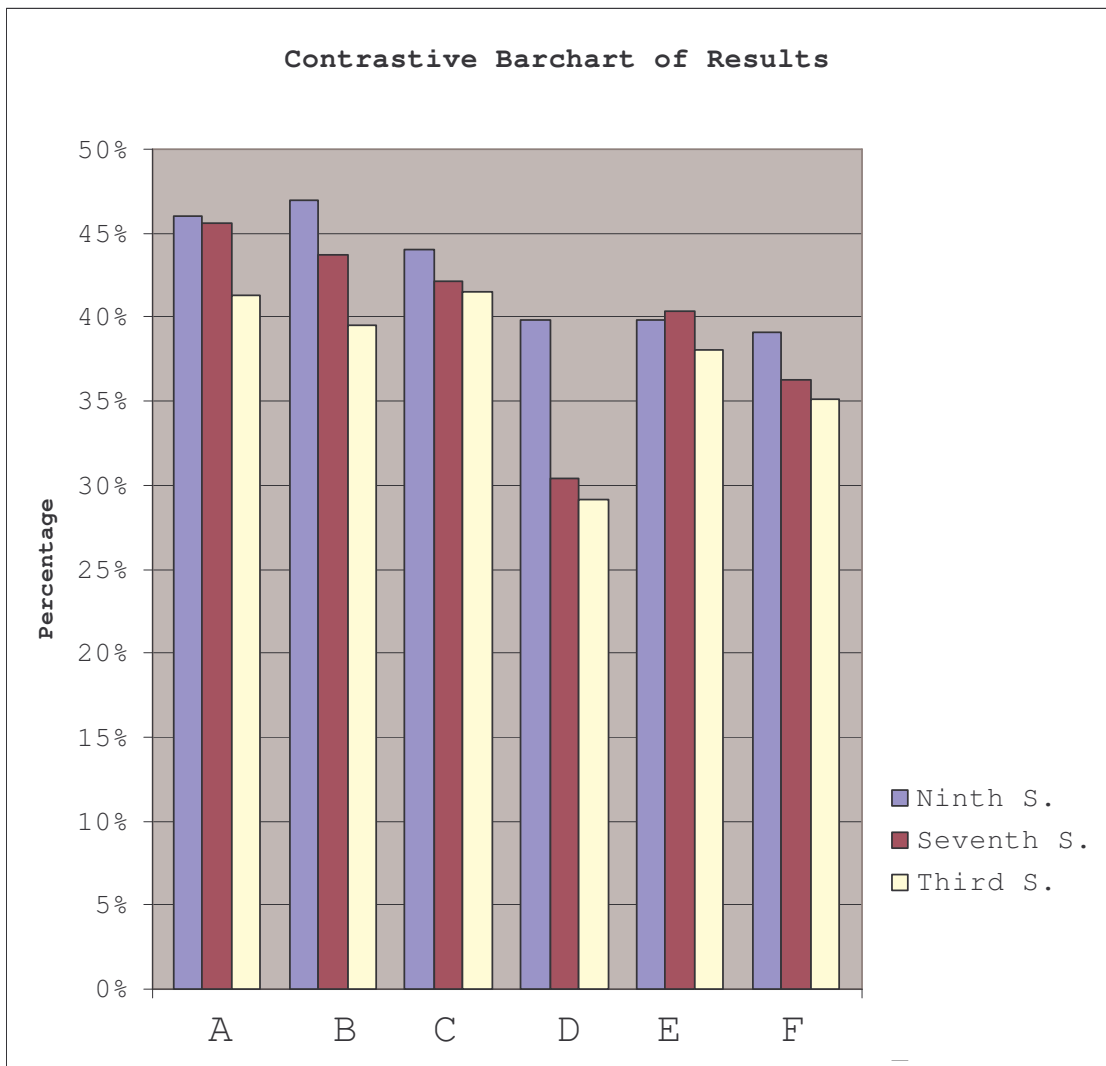
In conclusion, findings revealed that although a considerable number of students involved in this research used affective strategies to reduce anxiety while they were being assessed, a disquieting amount of participants was indifferent or apathetic towards these techniques, in some way; they did not consider the emotional side of assessment which was evident in the results from the questionnaires analyzed earlier.

*Anxiety and Oral Assessment Regarding Exposure to English  
Language Learning*

The second part of this study is aimed towards doing a contrastive analysis about the relationship between oral assessment and anxiety regarding the experience of foreign language students involved in this research, for doing that, results of the questionnaires were discriminated according to the semester and then high categories of each group were added and the results divided to obtain percentages which were presented graphically in table 4.13.



Table 4.13 Contrastive Barchart of Results



- A: Communication Apprehension
- B: General Feeling of Anxiety
- C: Fear to Negative Evaluation
- D: Symptoms of Anxiety
- E: Anxiety-Reducing Strategies
- F: Anxiety-Provoking Experiences

Regarding *communication apprehension*, barchart A displays the overall percentages of the semesters, as it can be observed the variance of this feeling between the ninth and seventh semester was very slight, only 0.42% separated the opinion of the participants about this issue. Third semester showed a lower level, 41.28% of the participants agree with feeling communication anxiety and although the difference respect to the others semesters is not meaningful, it makes evident an increasing tendency of this emotion through the career. The occurrence of this phenomenon can be explained by the fact that advanced students are more aware of criticism of their teachers and peers, in their level they are not disposed to accept error as a normal situation in language learning, after all, it is supposed that they overcame this stage.

Concerning *general feeling of anxiety*, the results found maintains the former tendency (barchart B), that is, the percentages increased according to the level of students, in that sense almost 47% of the sample from ninth semester agreed with the situation described in FLCAS for this purpose, following the rank seventh semester had a

43.73% and third semester a 34.57%. It is worthy to remember that this part of FLCAS is attempted to determine the levels of *trait anxiety* which is as the name suggests a permanent predisposition of some personalities to feel anxiety whenever they assessed. Researchers as Scovel (1978) predicted that this kind of anxiety does not have an important variance, against that it stays more or less constant through the time.

Bar chart C shows the percentages of students who feared a *negative evaluation* from others, as results indicate the tendency was maintained, although the difference among the groups is quite slight. This statistic data might be explained by the fact that social anxiety is directly related with *general feeling of apprehension* in which the students displayed similar behaviors confronting oral assessment.

Regarding *Symptoms of Anxiety*, results drawn out of the questionnaire were different in some way to the former ones, although the general trend stayed, the difference of rank is larger, specially from ninth semester, 38.78% of them accepted to experience some of these symptoms, while only a 30.22% of seventh and a near 29.09% of third semester

manifested these signals. On another hand, results revealed a low general tendency of students to exhibit some sort of symptoms when they were oral assessed. These findings might be explained by the fact that some common signals were not included in the questionnaire, in that sense, students made a considerable number of suggestions described earlier, which were not included in this barchart.

In the following part of the study, results evidenced that less than 40% of students use some kind of strategy to reduce anxiety (barchart E). The differences among the groups were very slight, but now, the trend changed and students from ninth semester reported a lower percentage than seventh respect to use these techniques to avoid this feeling. Third semester had the lowest level of use of such strategies.

Consequently with data obtained from FLCAS, the percentage of *anxiety-provoking experiences* questionnaire represented in barchart F was the highest for ninth semester, a 39.14% of participants considered to get anxious when they faced the situations proposed, moreover in the open-ended questions, some of them stated that error correction in front of their classmates was a stressful

experience. Seventh and third semester had a similar percentage 36.26% and 35.10% respectively.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter contains the conclusions of the study and the correspondent recommendations for both pedagogical purposes and further research about the issue. Although some preliminary overviews were provided at the end of each point of analysis in the previous chapter, the intention of this part of the study is to give a general conclusion of the study and the findings obtained.

Since the beginning and before commenting the conclusion, it would be adequate to highlight some important aspects founded throughout the research which might have altered or limited in some way the results of the study. The first of them refers to a lack of volunteering of some students to ask the questionnaire, in fact, as it was commented in chapter 3, the initial size of this study was 68 students, but for several reasons only 59 of them were taken into account in this survey. This reduction of the sample reinforced the second limitation for this study which was the size of the sample, although 59 questionnaires are enough to do a descriptive study, it would be ideal to work with a wider number of participants. On the other hand, and although it is understandable that descriptive studies must

be as spontaneous as possible in order to obtain natural and sincere answers, it would be advisable to do a previous induction before applying the surveys, in this way results would be more fitted to reality, but this is only an hypothesis.

Despite this limitation, the study proved to be dependable, and most of students were interested in collaborating with the research.

#### *Conclusions*

It can be deduced from this study that some levels of foreign language anxiety are experienced by university students in response to oral assessment. The study further suggests that anxiety can affect negatively oral performance of students in numerous ways and that reducing anxiety seems to increase the ability of learners to demonstrate what they have learned, therefore, it is suggested that awareness of foreign language anxiety be heightened and taken seriously by teachers and students alike. Of course, the proclaimed goal of eliminating negative emotional elements from language learning is virtually impossible to achieve, however it is undoubtedly true that a supportive attitude of the teacher towards students anxiety, along with continuous

efforts to understand the nature of this affective state can make a significant contribution to reduce this feeling. Moreover, because anxiety seems to be inherent to learning process of the foreign language university students, reducing this emotion should be an intrinsic part of any program for languages teaching. Concerning the second part of the results, that is, the contrastive study it can be concluded that anxiety experienced while oral assessing does not necessarily declined or diminished as students progress in their career, rather, the oral apprehension levels increased slightly during the seventh semester of the career, and even more during ninth semester, when all variables concerning oral anxiety reached their highest point. This might be explained by the fact that advanced students prefer not to take risks, they fear a loss of prestige if their teachers and peers perceive errors of oral production in their speech. Paradoxically, this belief leads students to an introspective behavior which is not convenient to language learning

#### *Suggestions for Pedagogical Purposes*

Although the main purpose of this research was only focused on providing a descriptive analysis of the issue of



anxiety and its influence on oral assessment and not in finding out solutions to the problem, some important recommendations were drawn out for pedagogical practice, obviously, all of them are supported for previous related studies made by well-known authors:

Make students aware that being fluent and getting a good accent in the target language take in most of cases several years of study and practice.

Speak slower specially when key points and instructions are given.

Provide students with positive reinforcement and create a relaxed classroom environment specially when they are being orally assessed.

Be sensitive to students' fear and insecurities and help them to confront those fears.

Use gentle or non-threatening methods of error correction and offer words of encouragement.

Attend to learning styles or the individual learning differences and hear and appreciate the voices of students for valuable insights, ideas and suggestions.

Use relevant and interesting topics for oral assessment purposes.

Moreover, it would be recommendable to do workshops or presentations explaining foreign language anxiety and to explore the positive motivational aspects of anxiety reduction. It may be also helpful for teachers to become familiar with the FLCAS instrument (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986) to understand better the ways in which students experience anxiety. At a local context, it is clear that time constraints makes difficult to put into practice this kind of suggestions, however, if teachers and students are sensitized to the problem a lot of time could be saved and foreign language learning could be easier.

#### *Further Research*

Although the phenomenon of anxiety has been investigated as it correlates to many instructional variables among them oral assessment, there are a lot of empty spaces not explored yet, especially, when local context is concerned. Researches of various models are possible, for instance, an experimental study attempting to determine if anxiety levels decrease when reducing-anxiety strategies are put in practice or a case study about the relation among oral assessment and culture influence or individual differences. Possibilities of doing research about this topic are endless.

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# APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE OF THE SURVEY

A. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

What is your willingness to answer the following questionnaire?

Good ( )                      Regular ( )                      Bad ( )

CONVENTIONS

- SA: Strongly Agree
- A: Agree
- N: Neutral
- D: Disagree
- SD: Strongly Disagree

|  | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I'm speaking in my English class.            | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 2. I don't worry about making mistakes in English class.                               | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be asked to speak in English class.         | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 4. I'm afraid when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the English class. | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English classes.                          | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 6. In English classes, I think of things that are unrelated to the lesson.             | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 7. I think that my classmates' English is better than mine.                            | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 8. I'm usually at ease during tests in my class.                                       | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 9. I start to panic when I have to speak without Preparation in English class.         | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 10. I worry about the consequences of failing my English class.                        | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over English class.                | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 12. In English class, I'm so nervous that I forget what I know.                                | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.                                | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 14. I will not be nervous when speaking with native English speakers.                          | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 15. I get depressed when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.                    | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 16. Even if I'm well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it.                      | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 17. I often feel like not going to my English class.   | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 18. I feel confident when I speak in English class.  | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 19. I'm afraid that my English teacher will correct every mistake I make.                      | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 20. I feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be asked to speak in English class.             | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 21. The more I prepare for an English test, the more confused I get.                           | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for English class.                              | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 23. I always feel that my classmates speak better English than I.                              | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 24. I feel shy when speaking English in front of other students.                               | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 25. English class moves so quickly that I worry about getting left behind.                     | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 26. I feel tenser and have more pressure in English class than in other classes.               | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 27. I get nervous when I speak in my English class.  | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 28. Before English class, I feel confident and relaxed.  | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.                 | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English.                | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 31. I'm afraid that my classmates will laugh at me when I speak English.                       | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 32. I feel easy when native English speakers are with me.                                      | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| 33. I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance. | 0 0 0 0 0 |

*Questionnaire developed by Horwitz, Horwitz et al (1986).*

B. Symptoms of Anxiety Questionnaire

When you are assessed, to which extent do you agree with the following statements?

|   | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1 I forget unwillingly the answer.  | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 2 I feel to have a low level of verbal production.  | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 3 I play with my hair, fingers, pencils, or clothing.   | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 4 I stutter or stammer.   | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 5 I'm unable to reproduce sounds or intonation of the target language even after repeated practice. | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 6 I feel unexplained pain or tension in any part of the body.                                       | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 7 I give monosyllabic or not adequate responses.  | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 8 I lack of volunteering in class.  | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 9 I'm unable to answer even the simplest questions.   | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |

Do you suggest any other? What?\_\_\_\_\_

*Questions taken from Hauck & Hurde (2002).*



C. Anxiety-Reducing Strategies Questionnaire

When you are assessed, to which extent do you agree with the following statements?

|  | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1 I use positive self-talk before or during oral assessment (e.g. I can do it, it doesn't matter if I make mistakes, others make mistakes) | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 2 I actively encourage myself to take risks such as trying to speak, even though I make mistakes.  | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 3 I imagine that when I'm being assessed that it is just a friendly informal chat.   | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 4 I tell myself when I'm being assessed that it will not take long.  | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 5 I give myself a reward after assessment when I do well.  | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 6 I'm aware of the physical signs of stress that might affect my oral performance(e.g. tight muscles, headache)                            | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 7 I share my worries about assessment with other students.   | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 8 I let my teacher know that I'm anxious.  | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 9 I use relaxation techniques (e.g. deep breathing consciously speaking more slowly).  | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |

Do you suggest any other? What?\_\_\_\_\_

*Questions taken from Hauck & Hurde (2002).*

D. Anxiety-Provoking Experiences Questionnaire

When you are assessed, do you consider the following items as anxiety provoking experiences?

|  | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1 Remembering negative experiences of past oral assessment sessions.                     | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 2 Fear of making mistakes.   | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 3 Fear of not being understood.  | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 4 Fear of critical reaction of my teacher or my classmates.                              | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 5 Worrying about my accent.  | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 6 Not remembering vocabulary.  | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 7 Wanting to translate every word, but finding it does not help.                         | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 8 Discovering that another language does not follow the same patterns as my own language | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 9 Realizing how much work it takes to learn a language.                                  | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 10 Realizing no making progress quickly enough.  | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 11 Worrying because no matching up the expectations of my classmates and my teacher.     | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
| 12 Feeling too much is expected of me.   | 0  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |

Do you suggest any other? What? \_\_\_\_\_

*Questions taken from Hauck & Hurde (2002).*