FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY: A COMPARISON OF HIGH SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Anxiety has been widely studied in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), as it is one of the main obstacles that students have to overcome in their language learning process. This paper presents an explanation of the term 'anxiety' and provides definitions of different types of anxiety such as debilitating, facilitating, state and trait anxiety. It also explains the term situation-specific anxiety, a type that includes the phenomenon studied in this paper: foreign language anxiety. Studies on this topic started more than 50 years ago, but it was the paper written by Horwitz et al. (1986) that marked a starting point, and research began to flourish. Apart from presenting their theoretical framework, these scholars proposed an instrument to measure FLA: the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS). FLA has been shown to negatively affect students' achievement and performance, and speaking has been found to be the most anxiety-provoking skill. The causes of language learning anxiety have not yet been determined, but the possible sources of FLA have been divided into three groups: learner characteristics, teacher characteristics and classroom characteristics. Because it is a complex issue, many variables have been analysed, but in my study, I focus on one of them: age, as the results of previous studies were contradictory. Therefore, this study aims to shed some light on the correlation between age (or education level) and FLA by making a comparison between the anxiety levels of high school and university students of the Basque Country. The participants of the study were 104 university students and 70 high school students who were studying English as a foreign language (EFL). Data was collected through a questionnaire that included a modified version of the FLCAS and two open questions, where the students had to answer which were the situations that provoked them most and least anxiety. The findings of the study showed that high school students were more prone to experience FLA, but both in the quantitative and qualitative parts of the questionnaire, students were concerned about their ability to speak in the foreign language (FL) regardless of their education level. In order to overcome this problem, teachers should create a relaxed and friendly environment in the classroom so that the learners feel more confident. In conclusion, different variables need to be taken into account to examine how anxiety affects students, since anxiety levels may vary depending on them.

Key words: foreign language anxiety, high school students, university students, age, education level

Index

List of tables and figures

1. Introduction

In the global world context, foreign languages (mostly English) are becoming essential day-to-day, not only in educational contexts but also in labour and social contexts. Therefore, the ability to speak English is becoming more and more significant every day due to globalisation and internalisation (Cenoz, 2009).

Considering the importance that FL learning has acquired during the last decades, multiple scholars have been analysing the learning process, focusing on different individual variables such as motivation, personality, attitudes or anxiety. The latter has been a widely studied emotion by SLA researchers, since it has been identified as one of the major obstacles that learners have to face while learning a FL (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

We have often heard these phrases from FL students: "I just know I have some kind of disability: I can't learn a foreign language no matter how hard I try" or "When I'm in my Spanish class I just freeze! I can't think of a thing when my teacher calls on me. My mind goes blank" (examples taken from Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986, p. 125). This emotion felt by learners has been identified by researchers, who refer to it as foreign language anxiety (FLA). This phenomenon has been described as "complex and multidimensional" (Young, 1991, p. 434), because it has been related to different individual, social, linguistic and situational factors.

As the results of the studies analysing the relationship between age and FLA tend to show inconsistent findings, the aim of this paper is to analyse the extent to which Basque high school and university students suffer from anxiety in their EFL classroom. For this purpose, I will firstly give a brief explanation of the term anxiety, and identify its distinct types. Later, I will focus on FLA, the main topic of this paper, and I will make summarize the main research findings in the field. After that, I will deal with the study, where initially I am going to analyse the results of the two groups separately, so that I can afterwards make a comparison between both. Then, I will reach some conclusions where I will compare my results with those mentioned in the literature review. Lastly, I will suggest some ideas to overcome the FLA that affects many learners.

2. General overview of the term anxiety

Before describing foreign language anxiety, it is important to have a general overview of the term anxiety, because as Dörnyei (2005) asserted "it is surprising how ambiguous the conceptualization of the concept becomes when we go beyond the surface" (p. 198). Spielberger (1983) defined anxiety as "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (p. 15). Over years psychologists have distinguished different types of anxiety, the following being the most well-known:

- Debilitating vs. facilitating anxiety: Albert and Haber (1960) were the ones who popularised this distinction (as cited in McIntyre, 2017). The former is the most usual interpretation of anxiety and it is considered to be an obstacle for the language learning process, as it impacts students' performance negatively (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Otherwise, the second one helps learners to achieve a good performance in the language (Ellis, 2008), since it could encourage students to pay more attention and motivate them to work harder (Gkonou et al. 2017).

- Trait vs. state anxiety: Trait anxiety is defined as "an individual's likelihood of becoming anxious in any situation" (Spielberger, 1983, as cited in MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p. 87). It is a general personality trait of an individual, and someone with high trait anxiety will be prone to feel anxious in different situations in their daily lives (Scovel, 1978; McIntyre, 2007). According to Spielberg (1966) state anxiety is a "transitory state or condition of the organism that varies in intensity and fluctuates over time" (as cited in Dewaele, 2018). This separation is critical in the study of anxiety because it allows the separation of individuals who are likely to be anxious in any variety of situation from those who would not normally be anxious (Pappamihiel, 2002).

In regards to second language (L2) learning process, some researchers have identified another type of anxiety, known as situation-specific anxiety, which is similar in type to other manifestations of anxiety as stage fright (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989 as cited in Kruk, 2018; Horwitz, 2010). According to Tóth (2010), this term is used to distinguish individuals who may be anxious in various situations (trait anxiety) from those

who are anxious only in specific situations (e.g. L2 classroom). In respect of this distinction MacIntyre and Gardner (1989, as cited in MacIntyre, 2017) claimed:

> A situation-specific anxiety can be differentiated meaningfully from a generally anxious personality and/or a moment-to-moment experience of feeling anxious. The differentiation between anxiety-provoking situations occurs as anxiety is repeatedly experienced in a certain type of situation such as language class; at some point learners come to associate the language class with anxiety (p. 15).

3. Foreign language anxiety (FLA)

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) coined the term FLA in order to give a name to that situation-specific anxiety frequently seen in the language learning process. Along these lines, they were first "to treat foreign language anxiety as a separate and distinct phenomenon particular to language learning" (p. 427). MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) claimed that FLA was the feeling of tension and apprehension related principally to second language[1] contexts, including speaking, listening and learning (p. 284).

In the work which is considered the pioneer in the study of FLA, Horwitz et al. (1986) presented a theory on language learning anxiety (Çağatay, 2015). Thus, they identified three related-anxieties to FLA: communication apprehension (CA), fear of negative evaluation (FNE), and test anxiety (TA).

These authors define CA as a "type of shyness characterized by fear or anxiety about communicating with people" (p. 127). Moreover, they present how this anxiety manifests itself: when someone has difficulties in speaking to peers, in groups or in public, or in listening to or understanding a spoken message. As Gkonou (2014) claimed, CA has a straight influence on an individual's willingness to communicate, since people are expected to communicate orally by using sounds and forms that they are not familiar with. Otherwise, she cited Mejias et al. (1991) who stated that "if a student is apprehensive about communicating in a particular language (…) he or she will have negative affective feelings toward oral communication and will likely avoid it". (p. 17).

Test anxiety is related to FLA because learners' performance is constantly being evaluated. It refers to a type of performance anxiety connected to fear of failure when

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[1] In this work second language and foreign language are used interchangeably

being examined. Horwitz and colleagues explained that text-anxious learners tend to put unrealistic demands on themselves and when they see that they do not perform perfectly, they consider that they have failed (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Fear of negative evaluation includes "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (Watson & Friend, 1969, as cited in Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). FL learners who are afraid of negative evaluation sit passively in the classroom or do not participate in classroom activities that could help them to practice and improve their language skills.

This construct of FLA has been misinterpreted (Aida, 1994), since it has been understood that foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) is composed of these three anxieties, but this was not Horwitz et al.'s (1986) intention. Instead, they argued that FLCA is only related to these three components:

> Specifically, we did not mean to argue that Communication Apprehension plus Test Anxiety plus Fear of Negative evaluation in various proportions formed an equation that resulted in Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. Rather we hoped that by considering these other specific anxieties, readers could better understand the anxiety construct we were proposing and why some people might experience a specific anxiety in response to language learning (Horwitz, 2017, p. 33).

Therefore, Horwitz et al. (1986) defined FLA as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p.127).

FLA can occur in a variety of situations, although it has been mainly studied in the language learning context (Dewaele et al., 2008). Anxiety is one of the most known phenomena that takes place in the foreign language classroom (Wardani, 2019), and Zheng (2008) asserted that it is a major problem in education that needs to be overcome. The classroom where the second language learning takes place is a social context that shares some features with the outside world. Ergo, it is essential to understand the role of the classroom in the development of FLA, as it is often the only circumstance in which learners have the opportunity to be in contact with a second language (Effiong, 2016). However, Dewaele (2007) argued that the consequences of FLA go beyond the classroom, and he claimed that high-anxious people who have studied a FL until

graduation probably will not speak it after leaving school. Dewaele and Thirtle (2009) considered that this fact is a shame not only for the individual, but also for the education system that has contributed money, energy and time in the teaching of a FL that probably after all will not be used in the future. Besides, these scholars claimed that the individual will also face economic consequences, because in many countries multilingualism is a prerequisite to obtain a well-paid job.

4. Research findings

Since the mid-60s scholars have stated that anxiety could suppose a hindrance in the process of acquiring a foreign language. Scovel (1978) made a literary review about language learning and anxiety in order to explain the conflicting set of findings made until that day. After all, in his research focusing on the relation between anxiety and foreign language learning he found that the results were mixed and confusing. Some of the studies available at that time showed either a negative, non-existent or positive relationship between anxiety and L2 achievement (e.g., Chastain, 1975; Kleinmann, 1977, as cited in MacIntyre, 2017). Scovel (1978) came up with a solution to solve this enigma; he argued that in the studies anxiety was measured by different parameters (e.g., test anxiety, facilitating-debilitating anxiety), thereby those puzzling findings did not come as a surprise (Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). Lastly, he concluded that for future research it was crucial for scholars to specify what type of anxiety they were going to measure before claiming that anxiety has any influence on language learning. In addition, he noted that "anxiety is not a simple, unitary construct that can be comfortably quantified into 'high' or 'low' amounts" (Scovel, 1978, p. 137).

As Horwitz (2010) stated, Scovel's work is regarded as "a turning point in the research of anxiety and language learning" (p. 157), as researchers followed his advice and started to specify what were they analysing. In this way, research into anxiety in language learning started to flourish.

Over the years researchers have concluded that FLA is one of the best predictors of foreign language achievement (e.g., Gardner, 1985; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999; Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Therefore, someone who has a high level of anxiety will obtain a lower achievement than a person with a low anxiety level (Abu-Rabia, 2004).

The need to define clearly what they were studying led Horwitz et al. (1986) to create an instrument named "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale", with the aim of measuring anxiety in the language learning context.

4.1. Foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS)

After Scovel's (1978) observations on anxiety research, different measure tools were created to deal with the problem that he brought to light. However, it was Horwitz et al. (1986) who proposed an instrument that caused research on FLA to begin to flourish, and thus became a topic of interest to applied linguistics research (Marx, 2019). Horwitz and his colleagues (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale questionnaire (FLCAS) (see Appendix A) which is used to measure the anxiety level of students in the language learning context. In words of one of the authors, E.K. Horwitz, "This self-report measure [FLCAS] assesses the degree of anxiety, as evidenced by negative performance expectancies and social comparisons, psycho-physiological symptoms, and avoidance behaviours" (Horwitz, 1986, p. 559). This self-report questionnaire consists of 33 items that are rated on a 5-point Likert scale that range from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". These 33 statements concern the three related anxieties mentioned above: CA, TA and FNE.

Horwitz (1986) stated that the items were created based on clinical experiences, previous similar instruments[2] and the experiences of some students of the University of Texas who took part in a support group. These students, who were enrolled in beginning language classes, were invited to participate in a support group called "Support Group for Foreign Language Learning", and researchers noted that 75 students out of a total of 225 were willing to volunteer, probably because they were worried enough about their foreign language class. Horwitz and her colleagues found that many of these students had similar feelings in relation to foreign language classroom context, as they talked about "freezing" in class, standing outside the door trying to summon up enough courage to enter, and going blank prior to tests" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128).

Horwitz (1986) conducted a study on the development and validation of the recently presented FLCAS, and she proved that it was a reliable scale. Thus, this study corroborated there was a specific anxiety related to language learning. Furthermore, she

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[2] e.g., Gardner's (1985) French classroom anxiety and French use anxiety scales, which were part of a larger scale focused on attitudes and motivation (the AMTB)

also demonstrated that language anxiety was independent of related anxieties, such as trait anxiety, communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz, 2016). Nowadays, due to its reliability, it is the most widely used scale for measuring foreign language anxiety (e.g., Aida, 1994; Kitano, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

It has been stated that the FLCAS focuses mainly on oral production (Aida, 1994; Arnaiz & Guillén, 2013), and as a result various scales have been developed to measure anxiety related to specific skills: Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS), developed by Saito, Garza & Horwitz (1999); Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS), developed by Kim (2000, in Capan & Karaca, 2013); Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAL), developed by Cheng (2004).

4.2. Language skills

Over the years researchers have identified four essential skills that are developed in the process of learning a foreign language: reading, writing, speaking and listening (Rodriguez-Sabiote, et al. 2017). Pae (2013) established a correlation between these four skills and anxiety, and concluded that FLA, whether generalized or more skill-specific, has prejudicial effects on the process of acquiring a second language.

However, among those different language-skills, speaking has been considered the most anxiety-provoking (Horwitz et al., 1986; Price, 1991) and therefore research has mostly focused on speaking anxiety as a main component of FLA (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). As noted earlier, communication apprehension obstructs language production, especially oral performance. Horwitz et al. (1986) noted that many students believe that they should not utter anything in the L2 until they assure that it is correct, and this was proved by Young (1990), who found that some students in the L2 class were willing to participate only if they knew that they were saying the correct thing. Moreover, other students are afraid of not pronouncing properly the words in English or not having a good accent (Price, 1991; Horwitz, 1988).

Foreign language reading is connected to the feeling of frustration and apprehension that a learner goes through when he/she does not comprehend a text in L2 (Capan & Karaca, 2013). Reading has been considered as a less anxiety-provoking activity, since solo reading does not involve any interaction with other people and the reader has the opportunity to reconsider the text (Saito et al., 1999). However, Sellers

(2000) stated that reading is a cognitive process that requires attention, perception, memory and comprehension. Two reasons that might provoke FLRA were proposed by Saito et al. (1999): unfamiliar writing scripts and unfamiliar cultural background.

Apart from speaking, listening has also been classified as the most anxiety-provoking skill (Young, 1992, as cited in Capan & Karaca, 2013). Horwitz et al. (1986) claimed that anxious students have difficulties in distinguishing and identifying sounds in listening activities, partly because of the level of vocabulary or the delivery of speed of the activity (Kim, 2000, in Capan & Karaca, 2013). Moreover, listening comprehension is also crucial when communicating, since it is not possible to maintain a conversation without understanding what the other person has said (Capan & Karaca, 2013).

Cheng (2004) defined writing as an emotional and cognitive activity, as when we are writing we do not only think, but also feel. Moreover, he defined the term writing comprehension as the dysfunctional anxiety that arouses in many students who suffer when they have to carry out a writing task.

4.3. Causes of foreign language anxiety

Through the years studies in FLA literature have discussed different components in order to identify the sources that provoke anxiety in language learners. Young (1994) categorized into three groups the sources that cause foreign language anxiety: learner characteristics, instructor characteristics and classroom characteristics.

As for learner characteristics, personal and interpersonal aspects have been the main focus of FLA causes (Young, 1991), competitiveness, self-perception, self-esteem and perfectionism playing a leading role. Bailey et al. (1983) concluded that competitiveness can result in anxiety, because language learners tend to compare themselves to others, and when they notice that they are less proficient than the other person, they might feel anxious. This is related to self-perception, since when students perceive that they are less competent than their peers, their FLA increases (Kitano, 2001). Moreover, Young (1991) and Gkonou (2014) concluded that students who have low self-esteem tend to be more anxious. Perfectionism has also been negatively correlated to FLA (Dewaele, 2017), and Young (1991) remarked that learner beliefs about language learning had great impact on language anxiety, as many of them are unrealistic (e.g., pronunciation

is the most important practice, they should be capable of speaking fluently after only two years studying the FL).

Regarding the teacher factor, harsh manner of teaching and correcting (Aida, 1994) and judgemental teaching attitude (Samimy, 1994, as cited in Tallon, 2009) are related to the fear that students feel in the classroom. Palacios (1998) identified some characteristics of the teacher that were correlated with anxiety: absence of instructional support, unsympathetic personality, lack of time for personal attention, favouritism, a sense that the class does not provide students with the tools necessary to match up with the instructors' expectations, and the sense of being judged by the instructor or wanting to impress the instructor (as cited in Tallon, 2009, p. 115). Moreover, Rubio-Alcalá (2017) claimed that teacher-centered activities (e.g., asking questions to the students one by one in front of the class) create more anxiety.

In respect of classroom, Young (1990) collected some classroom activities that students perceived as most anxiety-provoking: (1) spontaneous role-playing in front of the class, (2) speaking in public in the class, (3) oral presentations or sketches in front of the class, (4) presenting a before-prepared dialogue to the classmates, and (5) writing their work on the board (p. 547). These findings led her to conclude that what foreign language learners experience is a fear of self-exposure since "they are afraid of revealing themselves or being spotlighted in front of others" (Young, 1990, p. 546).

4.3.1. Studies dealing with education level or age

Apart from the above-mentioned causes, during decades researchers have focused on other variables to analyse FLA. Onwuegbuzie et al. (1999), for instance, identified seven variables that might correlate with FLA: age, academic achievement, prior history of visiting foreign countries, prior high school experience with foreign languages, expected overall average for current language course, perceived scholastic competence, and perceived self-worth (p. 225). Among these variables, I will focus on the first one, age, in order to carry out my study.

When analysing how age affected FLA, literature has mainly focused on university students (e.g., Bailey et al., 2000; Dewale, 2007), while few other studies have been conducted with high school students (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; MacIntyre et al., 2003). Although most of the scholars have concluded that older learners tend to experience higher anxiety levels, previous researches have showed mixed and

contradictory results. For instance, Donovan and MacIntyre (2005) found that university students tend to suffer more language anxiety compared to those who are studying in high or junior school. In the same vein, Bailey et al. (2000) argued that older students were more prone to suffer from FLA. On the other hand, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) concluded that teenagers are the students who experience anxiety most, followed by those students who are in their twenties. Similarly, Arnaiz and Guillén (2012) suggested in their study conducted with university students that younger learners have higher levels of anxiety.

Dewaele has conducted some studies in which he has analysed the relationship between multilingualism and age; in one of his studies (Dewaele, 2007) he found that younger participants tended to achieve lower FLA scores. Contrarily, in a study he and his colleagues conducted with other participants they found that it was older adults who experienced less FLA (Dewale et al., 2008). Since early studies on the relationship between FLA and education level/age provided confusing and contradictory results, I found it interesting to analyse this variable in the context of the Basque Country, in an attempt to shed some light on this controversial relationship.

5. Study

This study aims to analyse the anxiety that students from the Basque Country experience when they are learning a foreign language (in this case, English). Differences between high school and university students will be considered in order to find if age could be a possible variable that affects the process of studying English as a foreign language by focusing on FLA. It is important to clarify that I have used education level as a variable, although scholars tend to use the term age when they analyse FLA among students from different education levels. In this dissertation age and education level are used interchangeably.

5.1. Participants

The sample of this study consisted of 174 students, including 104 undergraduates and 70 high school[3] students. The university students had taken an EFL course during their degree studies, and they belonged to different degree programs: 44 Basque Studies students, 27 Translation and Interpretation students, 13 Philology students, 8 Tourism

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[3] When I refer to high school I am talking about the "Bachillerato". In Spain (Basque Country) it is a voluntary degree, which is taken after the four years of compulsory secondary education.

students, 4 Childhood Education students, 3 Primary Education students, 3 Social Work students and 2 Business Management students. Their school year also varied, as 28 of them were in the first year of their degree, 19 in the second year, 23 in the third year and 34 were in the final year of their degree. Regarding high school students, 39 were in the first year and 31 in the second year. The participants' age ranged from 16 to 25, and the average age of high school students was 16.7, being 16 years old the youngest student and 19 the oldest one. When it comes to university students, the mean age of the participants was 20.4, being 18 the age of the youngest participant and 25 the age of the oldest one. Participation was voluntary for everyone, and the answers were anonymous.

5.2. Instrument

The questionnaire was done via Google Forms, and it was divided into three parts. The first part included background information about the participants, e.g., gender, age, studies (high school or university), course level and the degree they were studying in case of being university students.

The next part was an adapted version of the FLCAS, which included 20 Likert-scale items (see Appendix B). In this study, the term 'foreign language' used in the original version was replaced by 'English language'. For instance, the original statement "I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class", became "I feel confident when I speak in the English language class". The items were written in Basque (Euskara), so that anyone could understand them without problems of comprehension. Likewise, if the survey was given in English, there was a possibility that the students would become anxious because they had difficulties in understanding the sentences. In this part of the inquiry students had to show their degree of agreement with the 20 statements by choosing one of the next options: *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *undecided*, *agree* or *strongly agree*. The items 2, 5, 12 and 19 were key-reversed[4], as their anxiety-degree score is contrary to the one of the other sentences.

As the information given in the second part of the study was quantitative, the third and last part comprised two open questions in which the students were asked to describe the situation that made them most and least anxious. In this way, the quantitative results

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[4] In the charts these statements are marked with an *, because the answers corresponding to 'strongly agree' and 'strongly disagree', and to 'agree' and 'disagree' have been reversed in order to analyse the results and calculate the average percentages.

obtained with the FLCAS were supported by the qualitative responses of the third part. When conducting the study, the answers of this section, originally written in Basque, were translated into English.

5.3. Procedure

The instrument was tested in a pilot study in which two university students who did not take part in the final study completed the questionnaire. In such manner, I was able to check if something was not understood correctly and to calculate the time it would take for the participants to answer the questionnaire.

After making the necessary changes, I spread the questionnaire through social media. In order to reach high school students, I contacted a high school teacher and explained my aim and what the questionnaire consisted of. Then, she sent the questionnaire to the stud   ents and they filled it in class.

5.4. Results

In this section, I present separately the results for high school and university students, and then proceed with a comparison between both levels of education. Table 1 and Table 2 show the percentages (%) of students who selected each option (strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree or strongly agree). In an attempt to make the graphs more reader-friendly, in Figure 1 and Figure 2 the percentages who agreed and disagreed were gathered together. Thereby, the answers were classified into three groups: those who disagreed, those who were undecided and those who agreed.

Throughout this section, some of the most remarkable items and percentages are analysed, and the results in the tables and figures are supported by students' answers received in the third section of the questionnaire.

5.4.1. High school students

Table 1: High school students' results

%	SD	D	U	A	SA
1	7.1	12.9	24.3	24.3	31.4
2*	5.7	28.6	21.4	27.1	17.1

3	34.3	11.4	15.7	17.1	21.4
4	28.6	11.4	17.1	22.9	20
5*	32.9	32.9	11.4	15.7	7.1
6	8.6	28.6	12.9	18.6	31.4
7	24.3	11.4	20	11.4	32.9
8	28.6	12.9	11.4	15.7	31.4
9	22.9	15.7	18.6	17.1	25.7
10	28.6	11.4	17.1	14.3	28.6
11	12.9	15.7	24.3	20	27.1
12*	30	25.7	20	11.4	12.9
13	17.1	20	14.3	17.1	31.4
14	12.9	12.9	22.9	20	31.4
15	21.4	24.3	21.4	12.9	20
16	22.9	25.7	20	14.3	17.1
17	15.7	12.9	21.4	28.6	21.4
18	12.9	14.3	17.1	32.9	22.9
19*	14.3	18.6	28.6	15.7	22.9
20	22.9	20	20	18.6	18.6
Mean	20.2	18.3	18.9	18.7	23.6

If we pay attention to the average of the results of the first table, we can observe that the highest percentage corresponded to the answer 'strongly agree' (23.6%), followed by 'strongly disagree' (20.2%), which indicates that there is a large number of students – one out of five– in both extremes of the continuum. Similarly, if we sum the percentages of people who agreed ('strongly agree + 'agree') we get the highest percentage (42.4%), but there was also a big percentage of students who did not feel identified with the

sentences of the FLCAS (38.5%). Therefore, among high school students four in ten students did actually undergo some degree of anxiety in the EFL classroom.

Figure 1: High school students' results
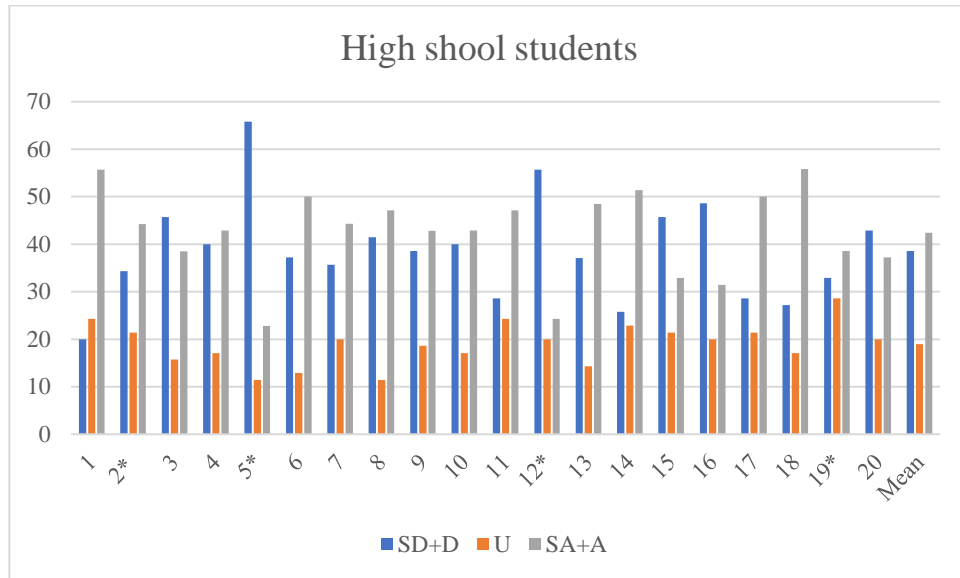
Looking at Figure 1, we can observe that in the majority of the sentences the grey column, consisting of the responses "strongly agree" and "agree", displays the highest mean. For example, we can see that 55.7% of the students agreed with the sentence "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English language class" (item 1). The lack of self-confidence and the negative self-perception they had was reflected in some of their answers in the third part of the survey, as many of them answered that they felt embarrassed and nervous when they had to speak in class. Participant 122 exclaimed that "I don't like to make presentations, especially in English. I have very little self-confidence, especially when it comes to presenting something". Besides, Participant 56 answered that "when I have a doubt, I repeat the question in my head many times, but then I don't dare to ask, because I feel that the teacher and the students will think that I am stupid".

This 1st item could be related to items 13 "I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class" and 6 "I feel very self-conscious about speaking the English language in front of other students", which were supported by a percentage of 45.5% and 50%, respectively. In relation to oral production, student 14 stated that "when I have to answer something, I am afraid that the words will not come out, that is, I will go blank and I will not know how to express what I think in English". In the last part of the survey, many of the students answered that, while speaking in class, they were concerned about

14

their pronunciation: "my pronunciation is very bad, and I often feel that people don't understand me" (Participant 162). On the other hand, 55.8 % agreed with item 18, and this reveals that students feel overwhelmed by the number of rules they had to study so that they can speak in English, and they feel anxious because "when we are on the second course of baccalaureate, they [the teachers] take for granted that you have to know English after so many years studying it, and that doesn't help very much" (Participant 102).

Competitiveness among students is one of the factors that creates the most anxiety for them, with 47.1% agreeing with item 11, compared to 28.6% who disagreed. This can be seen in the response of participant number 171 who stated that "I feel that others speak better than me, and that is why I cannot participate in the activities". Most of them (51.4%) also supported item 14, confirming that they are afraid that their classmates will start laughing at them.

In item 17 we can observe a significant difference between the percentages of the students who agreed and disagreed. In fact, many students (50%) stated that they felt overwhelmed when they did not understand what the teacher was explaining, and only 28.6% of students claimed that they were not concerned about that issue. This problem was depicted in some of the answers in the last part of the questionnaire: "when I don't understand something I feel anxious, because I get blocked, and I see that the class goes on" (Participant 148).

As regards negative evaluation, in the second item the majority of the students (44.2%) disagreed, stating that they were concerned about making mistakes in English language classes, but contradictorily, in sentence 15, 45.7% claimed that they did not worry about the possible corrections their teacher could make. This means that high school students are very divided with regards to this question. In the qualitative answers some students made the following comments, which clearly illustrate the fears almost half of the students have when it comes to correcting activities aloud: "when in class we correct the exercises I calculate which sentence I have to answer when my turn arrives, and I only focus on that, ignoring the other corrections" (Participant 158); "I feel anxious when we do the exercises out loud and when my turn comes, I don't know the answer" (Participant 132). Moreover, Student 120 stated that "when the teacher starts correcting the exercises and I am is not sure of my answer I feels anxious, and I avoid looking at her, so that she does not ask anything to me".

If we compare the percentage of the 'agree' option with the one that corresponds to 'disagree', we can observe notable differences in some of the items. For example, the majority (65.8%) agreed with item 5, arguing that they would not mind having more English language classes, while only 22.8% of the students disagreed. Although 50% of the answers agree with item 17, 48.6% claimed that they did not worry about being left behind when the class moves quickly. Once again, there is almost half of the class in each group, which means that around 50% of high school students are affected by anxiety in one way or another.

9.4.2 University students

Table 2: University students' results

%	SD	D	U	A	SA
1	4.8	30.8	20.2	24	20.2
2*	7.7	22.1	26	31.7	12.5
3	25	23.1	26.9	14.4	10.6
4	16.3	26.9	22.1	21.2	13.5
5*	32.7	26	25	2.9	13.5
6	10.6	26	17.3	26.9	19.2
7	18.3	20.2	16.3	25	20.2
8	10.6	24	18.3	24	23.1
9	27.9	21.2	22.1	17.3	11.5
10	18.3	14.4	22.1	19.2	26
11	7.7	23.1	21.2	14.4	33.7
12*	23.1	31.7	32.7	2.9	9.6
13	16.3	26.9	20.2	18.3	18.3
14	20.2	30.8	15.4	18.3	15.4

15	26	26	20.2	16.3	11.5
16	25	31.7	16.3	15.4	11.5
17	11.5	23.1	27.9	23.1	14.1
18	12.5	31.7	18.3	24	13.5
19*	13.5	28.8	27.9	13.5	16.3
20	21.2	26.9	21.2	18.3	12.5
Mean	17.4	25.7	21.8	18.5	16.3

Table 2 indicates that the highest mean score (25.7%) corresponds to the option 'disagree'. Besides, in Figure 2, where the results are put together in just three categories, we can observe that 43.2% of the university students disagree with the sentences, compared to 34.8% of them that agree.

Figure 2: University students' results
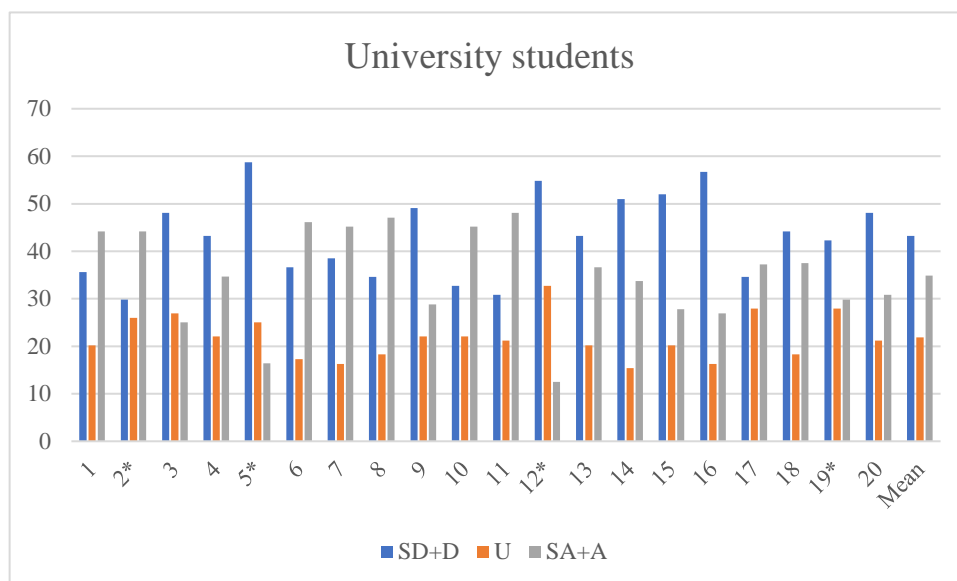
Focusing again on Table 2, in the first item, we see that 30.8% of the participants do not agree with that sentence, concluding that they feel sure of themselves when they speak in their English classes. Nevertheless, if we add the answers corresponding to 'strongly agree' and 'agree', their percentage is higher than those who do not agree and amounts to 44.2%. Taking into account items 1 (44,2%) and 6 (46,1%), the students claim that they feel anxious when speaking in English classes. In the third part of the

questionnaire several responses supported this trend, with many of the students stating that the situation that caused them most anxiety was speaking in their English language class in front of everyone. For example, Participant 18 stated that "I feel nervous when I have to speak in English or when I have to do an exercise in front of my classmates, because I feel that I do not have a good command of lexicon, grammar and pronunciation", and another participant claimed that "when I speak, I am afraid to mispronounce, and the fact of not knowing what to say makes me not only afraid, but also embarrassed" (Participant 45). Moreover, 45.7% of the students affirmed that they start to panic when they have to speak without preparation in class (item 7). This was reinforced by some of the answers in the qualitative part of the study, as some students answered that they feel anxious when they have to perform in class without prior preparation (e.g., Participants 36, 26, 47 or 52).

As for the fear of negative evaluation, many students (44.2%) disagreed with item 2, asserting that they worried about making mistakes in English class. However, 52% of the students mentioned that they were not afraid about the fact that their teacher would correct all of their mistakes. In the third part of the survey many students discussed about making mistakes in class; Student 46 commented that sometimes she was embarrassed to make mistakes in fundamental things she has learnt since she was a child, because it feels like you are "committing a crime". Student 46 affirmed that "when I am talking to the teacher and I realise that I have made a mistake, I feel anxious", while participant 57 stated that "when we are correcting grammar exercises that we have been working on since high school, I feel anxious because although we have worked on the topic in class, I believe that my answer will be wrong, and that is why I keep quiet". On the contrary, another student stated that she was not afraid of being corrected, because she learnt from her mistakes (Participant 19), but the number of comments showing this viewpoint was much lower.

We can conclude from item 11 that many of the university participants (48.1%) felt that their peers speak better than them, and this can be seen in the answer given by Student 8 who stated that "I am ashamed of speaking in class, because I am very perfectionist and I am afraid of making mistakes. Also, I compare my level of English with that of my classmates'".

In some items we can observe remarkable differences between 'agree' and 'disagree' percentages. For instance, we see a big difference in item 5, where 58.7% of the participants stated that they would not mind taking more English language classes, or in sentence 20, where 48.1% of the students refused the idea of feeling more nervous in English language classes than in any other subject. In addition, more than half of the participants (54.8%) also stated that they feel sure and relaxed on their way to English class, and that they did not worry about being left behind (56.7%). On the other hand, 48.3% of students asserted that they do not tremble when they realise that they are going to be asked.

9.4.3 A comparison between the two groups

Figure 3: Percentages depending on education level
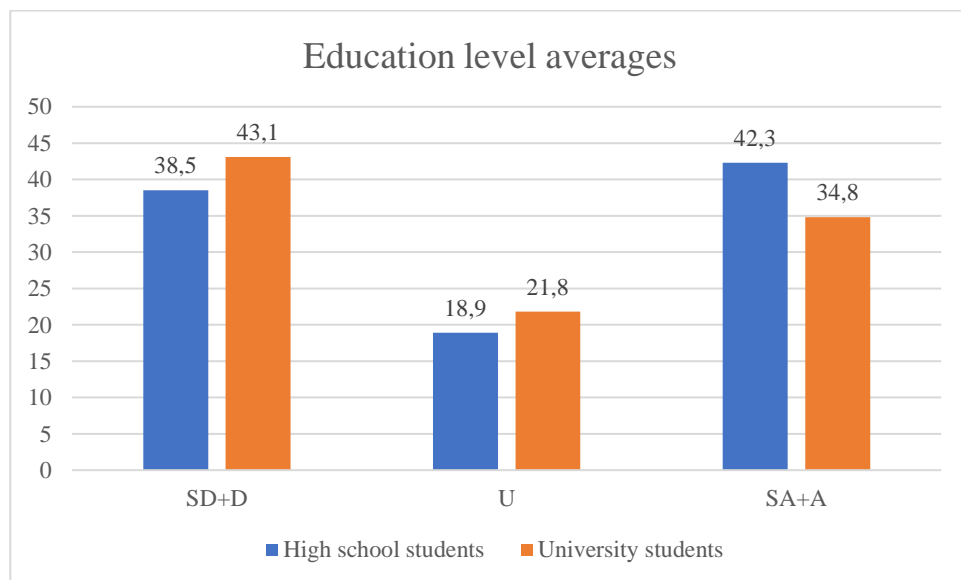
As can be observed in Figure 3, the differences among the average percentages of high school and university students seem to be significant. The largest difference can be noticed in the sum of the 'strongly agree' and 'agree' choices, with high school students supporting the FLCAS statements 7.5% more than the undergraduate students. These results reveal that high school students suffer from anxiety to a greater degree than their university counterparts. In the case of the 'undecided' option, the percentages are lower than those of the other options. However, it can be observed that there is more hesitation among university students (21.8%) than among students who are in high school (18.9%). Finally, the average percentage of the sum of the options 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' is also higher in the case of university students.

Looking at these results, it can be concluded that high school students experience more anxiety towards learning EFL than university students. The possible causes of these results and the possible courses of action will be tackled in the following sections of the study.

6. Discussion and conclusions

When the differences between these two groups were examined, it was seen that high school students experienced more FLA than university students; thus, younger students tend to have higher anxiety levels. These findings contradict the prevalent view in FLA literature that anxiety increases as learners become more advanced in their studies.

Hence, the results do not coincide with those of the study conducted by Bailey et al. (2000), where the authors argued that older students showed higher anxiety levels. The difference between these results and mine may be due to the fact that these scholars analysed a sample that consisted only of university students, without analysing the situation of those who were at a lower educational level. Similarly, my study contradicts the resolutions of the research led by Donovan and MacIntyre (2005), who found higher anxiety rates in university students (mean age=21.1) compared to high (mean age=16.2) and junior school (mean age=13) pupils.

On the other hand, the findings of my study coincide with the ones of Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), as these researchers found that younger students (teenagers) had higher levels of anxiety. However, there are some variations between my questionnaire and theirs. Firstly, their sample is much larger than mine, and secondly, they analyse different FL apart from English, such as Dutch, German, French and Spanish; and difficulty may vary depending on each language. My findings results are also consistent with the ones of Dewaele et al. (2008), who found that older multilinguals tended to experience FLA at lower levels.

My findings confirm that speaking is the most anxiety-provoking skill, as it has been frequently argued in literature (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 1994). This could be seen in the quantitative part of my questionnaire, where many participants (in the case of high school students, at least 4 out of 10) agreed with the specific items concerning speaking (items 1, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14 and 18). Speaking anxiety was also reflected in the qualitative part of the study, where many students indicated that the instant where they felt most anxious was when they had to speak in class in front of their classmates and

teachers. My study could not conclude anything about the other three skills, as the instrument used was the FLCAS, which focuses mainly on speaking (Aida, 1994; Arnaiz & Guillén, 2013). In order to be able to analyse how students feel about listening, writing or reading, it would be necessary to make a research specifically aimed at these skills by using the corresponding scales. However, in the third part of the study, none of the students mentioned these skills as being the most anxiety-provoking.

As for the three related anxieties that Horwitz et al. (1986) identified, my findings suggest that Basque high school and university students are afraid of negative evaluation and worry about communication apprehension. Regarding communication apprehension, both younger and older participants were worried about their speech (items 1, 6, 13), but university students indicated to a greater extent (37.2 %) than high school students that they felt overwhelmed when they were not able to understand what the teacher was correcting. In regard to fear of negative evaluation, both groups indicated that they were worried about making mistakes in class (item 2), but at the same time, they also answered that they were not afraid of teachers' corrections. This related-anxiety was one of the most frequently mentioned in the qualitative part of the study, where students stated that apart from being fearful, they felt embarrassed to make, above all, basic grammar mistakes, as they were afraid of what their teachers and classmates would think. Moreover, some of them stated that they often prefer to keep in silence than to give an incorrect answer, as was concluded in previous studies (Young, 1990). As for test-anxiety, I cannot comment on it, as it has not been analysed in my study.

The impact of some of the personal traits highlighted in the literature review could be observed in the findings of my study. For example, competitiveness (Bailey et al., 1983) and low self-perception (Kitano, 2001) can be recognized, as in both groups almost 50% stated that they feel that their peers speak better than them. Some learners declared that they felt worried about their poor pronunciation, and this may be because of what Horwitz et al. (1986) or Young (1991) stated, namely that learners tend to think that to be a good language learner it is crucial to speak with excellent pronunciation. On the other hand, in both the qualitative and quantitative parts, it can be observed that students do not feel self-confident when speaking in their English classroom; this may affect them when they feel the urge to ask a doubt. This fact could affirm what Young (1991) and Gkonu (2014) argued: that students who have lower self-esteem tend to have higher levels of anxiety. Although these answers from my questionnaire may suggest that some personal

traits may provoke more anxiety, a directly related study is needed to obtain more accurate answers and delve into this issue.

As for whether FLA affects performance and achievement, my study has not been able to resolve this question. For that, it would be necessary to analyse the FL classrooms to examine how students perform, to interview teachers to find out their opinion or to analyse what the grades of students experiencing FLA are.

It is important to be careful when analysing the results of this survey, as participation was voluntary, and therefore the sample is self-selected and not very large. These participants do not represent the general population of FL learners, because FL learners who hate FLs or feel rejection towards the process of learning a language were probably not willing to fill in an online form about learning an FL. Nevertheless, this sample and these results give us an idea of how high school and university students in the Basque Country deal with the FLL process. The general trend indicates that they do not feel self-confident.

In conclusion, although high school students tend to have higher levels of anxiety compared to university students, we cannot ignore the fact that university students also claimed to suffer from FLA, albeit to a lesser extent.

Furthermore, it is also a remarkable fact that most of the studies have been conducted with university students; therefore, I think that for future studies it is necessary to take into account school students. I consider that it is necessary and interesting to see how FLA affects these students, for whom EFL is compulsory.

Finally, I would like to point out that it is necessary to understand that the process of learning a new language is different for each learner. Therefore, when analysing FLA one should take into account variables linked to psychological, sociobiographical, and situational factors; e.g., personal traits, the learning context, proficiency, learner beliefs, previous language-learning experiences, personal characteristics, or the cultural context.

7. Pedagogical implications

Taking into account that anxiety can have a debilitating effect on the process of acquiring a foreign language, it is important to identify the students who have high levels of FLA (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1991). It is very important for teachers to create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere in the classroom (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1991) so

that students do not feel self-conscious about asking questions or embarrassed when they make a mistake. Teachers should not take an authoritarian role, but help learners to grow in confidence and self-esteem through empathy, encouragement and reassurance. Moreover, they should avoid the tendency to correct learners' mistakes all the time, but also make them understand that making mistakes is a necessary part of the process of learning a language (Gregersen, 2003, as cited in Arnaiz and Guillén 2012). To reduce competitiveness among learners, it is recommended that group work be reinforced, and the "surprise effect" should be eliminated, so that the learners have enough time to understand and prepare what they have to do (Ortega, 2002).

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Appendix A

Statements 1-33 refer to how you feel about foreign language learning. For each statemen indicate whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neither agree nor disagree (N), disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD).

Items of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS):

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English language class.

    SA   A   N   D   SD

2. I don't worry about making mistakes in English class.

    SA   A   N   D   SD

3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English language class.

    SA   A   N   D   SD

4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English language.

    SA   A   N   D   SD

5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English language classes.

    SA   A   N   D   SD

6. During English class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.

    SA   A   N   D   SD

7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.

    SA   A   N   D   SD

8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.

    SA   A   N   D   SD

9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.

    SA   A   N   D   SD

10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.

    SA   A   N   D   SD

11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over English language classes.

    SA   A   N   D   SD

12. In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.

    SA   A   N   D   SD

13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.

SA   A   N   D   SD

14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.

SA   A   N   D   SD

15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.

SA   A   N   D   SD

16. Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it.

SA   A   N   D   SD

17. I often feel like not going to my English class.

SA   A   N   D   SD

18. I feel confident when I speak in English language class.

SA   A   N   D   SD

19. I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.

SA   A   N   D   SD

20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English class.

SA   A   N   D   SD

21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.

SA   A   N   D   SD

22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for English class.

SA   A   N   D   SD

23. I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.

SA   A   N   D   SD

24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the English language in front of other students.

SA   A   N   D   SD

25. English class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.

SA   A   N   D   SD

26. I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes.

SA   A   N   D   SD

27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.

SA   A   N   D   SD

28. When I'm on my way to English class, I feel very sure and relaxed.

SA   A   N   D   SD

29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.

SA   A   N   D   SD

30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak in English.

SA   A   N   D   SD

31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak in English.

SA   A   N   D   SD

32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.

SA   A   N   D   SD

33. I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.

SA   A   N   D   SD

Appendix B

Age:					
Gender:					
Woman/ Man/ I do not feel identified with the binary division					
Education level:					
High school/ University					
School year:					
If you are a university student, what do you study?					

Indicate at which level you agree with the following sentences: strongly disagree (SD)/ disagree (D)/ undecided (U)/ agree (A)/ strongly agree (SA)	SD	D	U	A	SA
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English language class.					
2. I don't worry about making mistakes in English class.					
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English language class.					
4. 4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English language.					
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English language classes.					
6. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the English language in front of other students.					
7. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.					

8. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.					
9. Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it.					32
10. I often feel like not going to my English class.					
11. I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.					
12. When I'm on my way to English class, I feel very sure and relaxed.					
13. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.					
14. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak in English.					
15. I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.					
16. English class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.					
17. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.					
18. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak in English.					
19. I feel confident when I speak in English language class.					
20. I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes.					

Describe in detail a situation or event that will provoke you to be most anxious

Describe in detail a situation or event that will provoke you to be least anxious