



Influence of English conversational clubs on speech anxiety

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of English conversational clubs on speech anxiety in eleventh-grade EFL students at a public school in Medellín. Using a qualitative case study approach, data was collected through conversation clubs, interviews, and focus groups with six students. The findings reveal that while speech anxiety negatively affects language acquisition, its impact can be mitigated by engaging students in topics of personal interest and implementing varied communicative activities. Students exposed to these methods demonstrated increased confidence, improved participation, and enhanced linguistic skills. The study concludes that conversational clubs serve as effective tools for reducing speech anxiety by fostering a relaxed and interactive learning environment. It recommends that EFL teachers integrate dynamic and interest-driven speaking activities to enhance student motivation and language proficiency.

Key words: Speech anxiety, foreign language anxiety, conversational clubs, EFL students, motivation, teaching strategies.

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Influencia de los clubes de conversación en inglés en la ansiedad al hablar

Resumen

Este estudio investiga el impacto de los clubes de conversación en inglés en la ansiedad del habla de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera de undécimo grado en una escuela pública de Medellín. A través de un enfoque cualitativo de estudio de caso, se recopilieron datos mediante clubes de conversación, entrevistas y grupos focales con seis estudiantes. Los hallazgos revelan que, si bien la ansiedad del habla afecta negativamente la adquisición del idioma, su impacto puede reducirse mediante la participación en temas de interés personal y la implementación de diversas actividades comunicativas. Los estudiantes expuestos a estos métodos demostraron mayor confianza, mejor participación y desarrollo de sus habilidades lingüísticas. El estudio concluye que los clubes de conversación son herramientas efectivas para disminuir la ansiedad del habla al promover un ambiente de aprendizaje relajado e interactivo. Se recomienda que los docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera integren actividades dinámicas y basadas en intereses para mejorar la motivación y la competencia lingüística de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: Ansiedad ante el habla, ansiedad ante una lengua extranjera, clubes de conversación, estudiantes de EFL, motivación, estrategias de enseñanza.

Introduction

Various challenges are faced in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in the educational field; one of these is anxiety when speaking in public. Language anxiety in second language teaching has long been known as an obstacle. In other words, it is a negative emotional state that may also negatively affect how the target language can be understood or acquired (Oad et al., 2020). Likewise, this phenomenon can significantly hinder student learning and performance.

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This study investigates how conversation clubs influence anxiety when speaking English in eleventh-grade students at a public school in Medellín. According to Horwitz (2001) Foreign language anxiety is one of the most studied topics inside the field of language learning and teaching. For a long time, this topic has caused controversy over whether anxiety can affect language learning. In response to this concern, conversation clubs have emerged as a strategy to address anxiety in students when speaking in English. These clubs offer a supportive environment where students can practice and improve their language skills in a relaxed environment. Quinde (2015) describes the conversation club as a method that helps students learn to develop linguistic skills since it works through a communicative

approach that allows them to improve these skills through interaction within the classroom.

The research was directed from an interpretive paradigm to recognize and interpret the situations or moments that cause students to generate anxiety when speaking in public. The case study research was also implemented to obtain the results and analyze how conversational clubs help students reduce their speech anxiety; we intervened with some activities and interacted with them.

The present research looked to provide valuable information for students and teachers regarding the implementation of conversation clubs within the classroom to minimize anxiety levels in learning a second language, especially for language teachers, since it provided them with a new didactic strategy for the communicative development of its students, by strengthening linguistic skills and creating learning environments free of tension and anxiety, to promote interaction dynamics between students and the teacher through conversations making appropriate use of the language.

Theoretical Framework

Speech anxiety delays second language acquisition

Teachers and students generally feel strongly that anxiety is a major obstacle to overcome in learning to speak another language fluently. This feeling causes a mental block in students, preventing them from being able to express their ideas in a second language.

Horwitz and Cope (1986) have an interesting study called foreign language classroom anxiety where they mentioned important aspects of the effects of speech anxiety on English as a foreign language (EFL) students.

They mentioned studies that examine how anxiety impacts language learning and have uncovered some interesting findings. EFL students with high anxiety levels tend to use different types of grammatical structures compared to those who are less anxious. Similarly, students in anxiety-inducing situations often convey messages that are less interpretative and more straightforward than those in relaxed states. These studies demonstrate that anxiety can influence students' communication

strategies in language classes. In other words, more anxious students tend to avoid difficult or personal expressions in the language they are learning.

Anxiety can affect the communication strategies students employ in language class because they cannot express their ideas, needs, or opinions, and they do not participate in the activities proposed by the teacher. According to Horwitz and Cope (1986), there are three concerns why students feel speech anxiety:

- 1) Communication apprehension: Communication apprehension is a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people.
- 2) Test anxiety refers to a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure.
- 3) Fear of negative evaluation: is defined as fear of how others perceive us, steering clear of situations where we might be judged, and anticipating negative judgments from others.

Building on these ideas, authors such as Hasan (2024) and Saraç and Doğan (2024) argue that speech anxiety, which affects a significant number of students, should be a key consideration in teachers' instructional planning. Educators must design activities and implement strategies that actively mitigate anxiety levels while fostering the development of discursive skills in all learners.

Teachers play a crucial role in equipping students with diverse tools to overcome obstacles in their language learning journey. Beyond simply providing resources, they should create a supportive and encouraging environment that motivates students to confront their fears and gradually build confidence in their speaking abilities. At the same time, students bear the responsibility of engaging proactively with their learning process, taking deliberate steps to address the challenges that hinder their progress. By fostering a collaborative effort between teachers and students, speech anxiety can be managed effectively, ultimately leading to improved language acquisition and communicative competence.

Motivation is a fundamental tool for second language acquisition.

One of the fundamental tools when acquiring a second language is to manage good motivation. Cerdán and García (2017) say that motivation is one of the main factors determining a student's learning. When a student is highly motivated during class, he/she is likely to learn well. This is due to the disposition and the state of

mind with which the student arrives in class; that is, when there is motivation, there is greater concentration.

Gardner, in 1985 highlighted that motivation as a central socio-educational model that allows individuals to reflect a practical and integrative social dimension with different linguistic communities when acquiring a second language. This concept is centered on the knowledge that the teacher must have to identify which students are not performing well during class, and thus develop activities according to the interests of the students in order to generate a participatory environment.

According to the above, it is important to highlight the factors that affect motivation in the classroom when acquiring a second language. One of them is insecurity to participatory discourse. Insecurity leads the student to be only an observer in the classroom; that is, it closes the possibilities of showing the skills to which they are subject. Although they may understand the language well, the lack of security causes the student to close their mind and fail to meet their goals. Sometimes, the lack of motivation in students is not due to a lack of initial interest, but rather that they need to learn because their way of thinking when facing tasks is inadequate, preventing the rewarding experience of moving forward (Tapia, 2005).

Based on this, it is necessary to design different strategies that help students to create a motivated environment that allows them to express themselves without fear of making mistakes. According to Cerdán and García (2017) New technologies allow individual or group participation of students and teachers, since teachers must choose the appropriate materials for the type of learning they want to promote, seeking to motivate all students with relevant activities. Strategies that lead individuals to participate more often in the classroom include dynamic activities such as performances, games, and debates. In this way, students feel confident when expressing their knowledge. The teaching methodology and new technologies are sufficiently rich in possibilities for the teacher to put his creativity mechanisms into operation and be able to vary the learning situations with the frequency that each student needs (Sánchez, 2003).

It is essential to highlight motivation in the classroom since it is of great importance when acquiring a second language. Motivation allows the student to focus on his or her objective more emotionally and makes him or her achieve satisfaction with the learning process.

The improvement of oral communication Skills through cooperative and interactional strategies.

Collaboration and teamwork techniques are essential in the educational field to improve classroom teaching and learning processes. For example, conversation clubs are an innovative resource that helps reduce anxiety when speaking English among students. Unlike conferences, debates or interviews, these clubs offer a space where diverse people can discuss various topics (Subina & Balbuca, 2016).

Gedikli and Başbay (2020) argue that factors that generate anxiety in students are counteracted by their positive receptivity toward collaborative activities, such as conversation clubs. These group dynamics provide them with a tension-free environment and give them the opportunity to practice more intensively within an active learning context.

It is essential to introduce innovative tactics, such as conversation clubs, in various educational institutions to foster learning environments that reduce anxiety and enhance students' English language skills. In their research, Subina and Balbuca (2016) mention that conversation clubs are created to stimulate students' interest in learning the English language and improve their speaking skills.

Conversation clubs are useful learning spaces and strategies for teachers and students. They innovate and promote English-speaking skills in students within the classroom, reducing anxiety levels and generating different spaces for language learning acquisition processes.

Methodology

Paradigm

This research was proposed from the interpretive paradigm to analyze how subjects interpret the reality they construct. Each individual's engagement in social activities or responses stems from a unique process of interpretation. Each situation is endowed with a distinct significance by individuals, shaping their subsequent actions. Hence, to comprehend their behaviors fully, it is imperative for researchers to grasp the nuances of their interpretations (Fensel, 1992).

The research focused on identifying and interpreting the specific situations or triggers that induce speech anxiety in students during public speaking engagements. Through our discussions, we aim to cultivate an environment conducive to fostering social interaction among students.

Research design

Speech anxiety is a problem that is experienced daily in classrooms in our country. Our intention with this study is to provide a solution acting directly in an educational context. For this reason, we found the case study to be ideal. In this opportunity the case study helped the researchers to understand a situation and a particular event. For instance, it contributed to understand how the English conversational clubs become a good scenario to recognize those possible events that can cause speech anxiety in the students. Here, it was evidenced Flyvbjerg's (2011) point of view, which argued that from a case study, participants can be analyzed and comprehended in a detailed way.

Context and sample

The research was carried out at a public institution, located in the Florencia neighborhood of the municipality of Medellín. It offers three modalities: elementary, high school, and technical education, with a population of around 2,500 students from the surrounding area.

The study involved eleventh-grade students between sixteen and eighteen in technical media courses. When communicating in English, these students showed varying degrees of nervousness, fear, mental blocks, or shyness. These behavioral patterns can be identified through careful observation and interaction.

During the fieldwork, six students who could handle an intermediate level of English and six who handled a low level of English were selected. This number of students was selected to analyze the speech anxiety levels in different populations in detail. The study showed a small group of students in the selected population, which allowed us to verify the speech anxiety that occurs in a classroom and analyze this problem.

Data collection

Data was collected on a class day divided into three sections, one for each instrument. The instruments were strategically designed to obtain the information necessary to analyze the research problem.

We selected an interview to ask questions that would allow us to explore the students' conceptions and assumptions concerning speech anxiety. The focal group allowed us to explore how the students felt after carrying out the conversational club that was prepared by selecting topics of interest for the students.

The interview is an instrument that allows asking open questions to know each perspective of the participants regarding the research. Some of the advantages of the interview are the degree of depth that can be reached from the analysis elements collected. In addition, the flexibility of the technique allows the recovery of the testimonies and interpretations of the interviewees, respecting their own frames of reference, their language, and their mental categories. (Bonilla & Rodríguez, 2005).

Conversational clubs are an effective strategy for enhancing students' speaking skills. This approach's primary aim is to foster authentic oral expression among participants, providing them with opportunities to practice the language in a natural setting (Girón, 1999).

A focal group is an instrument that focuses on a theme. Its in-depth dialogue allows participants to discuss their different perspectives on the social fact, in this case, speech anxiety. This instrument is a semi-structured group interview modality, where the members are encouraged to comment and develop from personal experience (Franco & Garcia, 2017).

Each instrument had previous preparation before going to the institution to apply it. The interview questions, the focus group, and the conversation club were prepared to achieve the objectives of the research.

We developed five questions for the interview that would allow us to know what the students knew about speech anxiety and their experience with this phenomenon in learning English. We planned the conversational club, taking into account topics

that could be interesting to the students and thus motivating them to participate in the activity.

Finally, we formulated four questions for the focus group. These questions gave valuable and interesting information about the positive aspects that the students showed in terms of anxiety when carrying out an activity such as the conversational club.

Rigor, Validity, and Reliability

To strengthen the validity and reliability of the instruments used in the research, it is essential to consider current practices supported by recent studies. Guillermo Cornetero and López-Regalado (2025) emphasize that the validation and reliability of research instruments in learning are fundamental to ensuring the quality and trustworthiness of the obtained results. Their systematic review highlights the importance of carefully selecting and evaluating instruments, ensuring they have sufficient reliability and validity evidence to be considered appropriate and rigorous for data analysis. This approach underscores the need to implement meticulous processes in the selection and validation of data collection tools, thereby contributing to the robustness and replicability of findings in educational research.

Data Analysis

The research proposed organizing three different instruments that respond to general and specific objectives to analyze the influence of conversation clubs on the speech anxiety of foreign language learners.

Six eleventh grade students of the institution participated in the collection of information through the application of three instruments: interview, conversation club and focus group. During the interview, a series of questions were posed to inquire about the students' experience of expressing themselves in English and about the anxiety they experience when speaking in English. Some of the questions were: How do you feel when you have to speak English to express your ideas? What do you think is the cause of this speech anxiety, according to your experience? What topics will you feel comfortable speaking in English? Does talking about topics you like help you feel better speaking English, and why? During this interview, ten testimonies, ten open codes, two axial codes, a category, and a theme that

responds to the first specific objective were obtained.

Recognize the speech anxiety manifestation in eleventh-grade high school students.

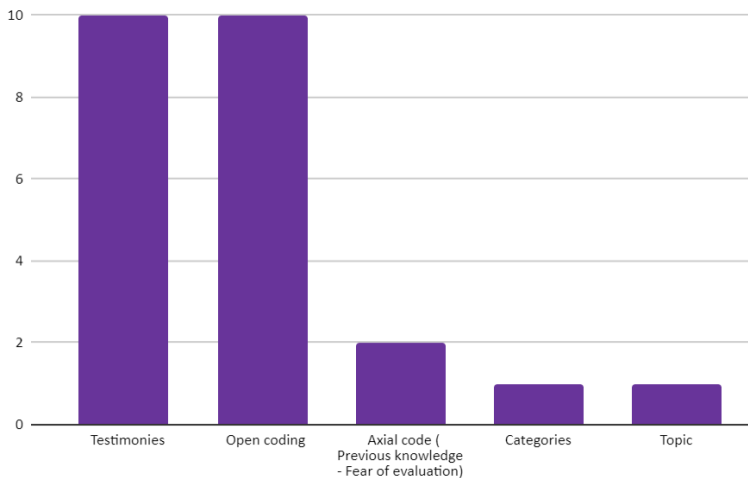


Figure 1. *Open codes and Axial codes.*

Note: This graph shows the percentage of all testimonials (10), open codes (10), axial codes (2), categories (1), and topic (1) that we discovered for this objective.

Therefore, a conversation club was established as part of the implemented strategy. During the execution of this technique, the participants were divided into three groups. To begin with, the students were asked questions about their interests to foster an atmosphere of trust among the participants. The questions designed for the first group were: What do you think about mathematics? What do you think about the subjects? For the second group, the following questions were asked: What is your catching sentences? Anyone here like to play soccer? Finally, the question was posed to the third group: Do we have the catching sentence? However, while students were answering this last question, a number of additional questions arose that prompted conversations on a variety of topics of personal interest, such as their favorite leisure time activities, the music they enjoy, their favorite artists, the films they like to watch, the sports they play and who their favorite people are. During the implementation of the conversation club, twelve

testimonies were obtained, twelve open codes, two axial, two categories, and a theme that responded to the second specific objective.

Identify eleventh-grade students' interests in using English as a second language inside the class.

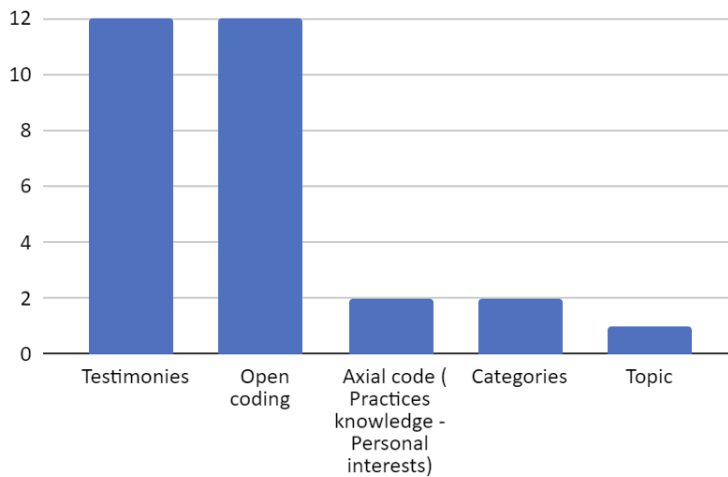


Figure 2. *Open and axial codes*

Note: The previous bar graph shows the total of testimonials (12), open codes (12), axial codes (2), categories (2), and topics (1) collected for this second objective

After participating in the conversation club, we held a working session with the focus group. During this session, we asked questions to elicit participants' experiences. These questions included: How was your experience with being nervous or afraid to speak within the conversational club? What was the level of fear and nervousness about speaking you experienced in the different moments of the conversational clubs? Did your fear and nervous levels decrease during conversational clocks, and why? What did you like the most about the conversational club? What do you like about this type of activity compared to other activities done in class, and what do you think is good about this activity that we have just done? Through the implementation of the focus group, fifteen testimonies were obtained, fifteen open codes, two axial, two categories, and a theme that responds to the third specific objective.

Explore the impact of conversational clubs on students' anxiety levels.

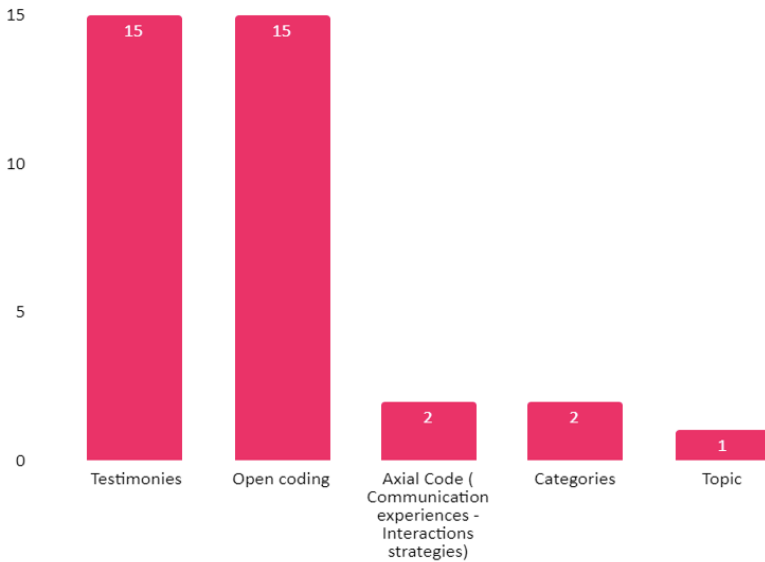


Figure 3. *Open codes and Axial codes*

Note: The previous graph shows the testimonials (15), open codes (15), axial codes (2), categories (2), and theme (1) that were collected during this last objective

Findings

Speech Anxiety and Its Implications for Communicative Competence

Development

The findings indicate that speech anxiety is a significant barrier to the development of communicative competence in second language learners. Fear of public speaking is a well-documented psychological phenomenon (Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Saraç & Doğan 2024) when applied to language learning, it can severely delay oral skill development. The data reveal that students experience heightened anxiety

when speaking English, particularly when faced with formal or evaluative contexts. The reluctance to participate, hesitation in forming responses, and resorting to their native language underscore the extent to which anxiety affects spontaneous communication.

During the interview, the students were asked about what they considered to be the causes of anxiety; student Frank said: *"I think because, when you forget a word, you get nervous because you do not want to make mistakes."*¹ On the other hand, Xilena considers that *"Not being able to pronounce words well and also the fact that it is very difficult for me to speak in public and so on."*² These findings align with previous studies on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (Horwitz, 2001; Hasan, 2024), which emphasize that students' emotional responses to speaking situations impact their cognitive processing, limiting their ability to retrieve and produce language efficiently. Furthermore, the psychological pressure of forgetting words and being unable to recover them in real time exacerbates their anxiety, leading to avoidance behaviors such as minimal verbal engagement or code-switching to their native language.

When mentioning to the students that an interview would be conducted in English, some felt uncomfortable and nervous. Maria is one of the students who expressed how she felt when she heard that the interview would be in English; she said: *"I felt nervous because it is difficult to speak the language, so you always get nervous when you speak English."*³

The anxiety manifestation in EFL students is an obstacle to fluency. If students forget one or more words in a conversation and cannot express their ideas, they become tense and stressed. (Horwitz & Cope, 1986)

Thus, the research design, based on an interpretative case study approach, provides valuable insights into how these experiences manifest uniquely among different learners. Rather than treating anxiety as a uniform phenomenon, the study reveals its variability depending on individual personality traits, prior language exposure, and the perceived stakes of the communication scenario. This nuanced

¹ I think because, when you forget a word, you get nervous because you don't want to make mistakes

² Not being able to pronounce words well and also the fact that it is very difficult for me to speak in public and so on.

³ I felt nervous because it's difficult to speak the language, so you always get nervous when you speak English

understanding underscores the necessity of pedagogical strategies tailored to mitigate language anxiety and foster confidence in oral expression.

Personal Interest as a Catalyst for Second Language Acquisition

Learning a second language is acquired through the student's teaching and practice dispositions towards the language. During the conversation club, different questions were implemented on topics of personal interests, which allowed for creating a safer environment among students, since by talking about topics about their interests they help develop their knowledge and generate motivation to practice with the language for this reason, during the conversation club, questions were asked to the students about what sports they like, to which the student Julián responded: *"I like to play soccer too because it makes me happy and I like to try to make a goal for this friend."*⁴

During the focal group, there were questions that responded to these topics implemented in the conversation club, allowing the students to express how they felt when discussing topics of their interests. In this case, María, through a question about what they liked about the conversation club, responded: *"Practicing English is for me the best activity because you can know, for example, a new word you don't know. You can talk with the other people about what you like"*.⁵ This allowed students to respond about the importance of practicing English to improve their learning process.

By embedding conversation practice within contexts that matter to students, the learning experience becomes more situated and meaningful. The interpretative case study approach in this research underscores that learners' identities and self-perceptions are deeply intertwined with their willingness to engage in communicative acts. This highlights the need for language curricula to incorporate flexible, student-centered frameworks that cater to diverse interests and motivational drivers.

⁴ I like to play soccer too because it makes me happy and I like to try to make a goal for this friend.

⁵ Practicing English is for me the best activity because you can know, for example, a new word you don't know. You can talk with the other people about what you like

Conversational clubs as an interaction strategy improve anxiety levels in EFL students.

Throughout the application of different questions asked in a structured format within the focus group, Ani, an eleventh-grade student and apprentice in the English language, mentions, *“Before this activity, I felt kind of nervous because I did not know how I was going to do it so I was a little afraid of making a mistake.”*⁶ in terms of talking about your experience with nervousness levels during the club application. Likewise, when asked if the nerves and fear had decreased, the student Julian spoke, *“When you talk with the other people, you take away the nervousness, the fear, and you feel confidence, and you can talk more.”*⁷ In this order of ideas, the student Maria *“I felt good, and I feel like it is a different experience where you kind of challenge yourself to learn to speak this language.”*⁸ Mentioning the sensations experienced during the conversation.

Bearing in mind these elements, an additional theoretical implication is that language anxiety is not merely an individual psychological issue but a socially constructed experience. The classroom environment, power dynamics, and perceived judgment from peers and instructors all contribute to anxiety levels. Research by Yahya (2013) supports this, highlighting that students’ linguistic anxiety is often exacerbated by classroom-based assessments, peer evaluations, and instructor feedback mechanisms. In this study, the gradual exposure to conversational practice in a supportive setting appeared to recalibrate students’ perceptions of their linguistic abilities, shifting from a fear-based response to one of self-efficacy and confidence.

Discussion

Speech anxiety delays the development of communicative competence.

The findings of this study contribute to a deeper theoretical understanding of language anxiety and engagement by emphasizing their interconnectedness with cognitive, affective, and social factors. While previous research has extensively

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⁷ When you talk with the other people, you take away the nervous, the fear, and you feel confidence and you can talk more

⁸ I felt good and I feel like it's a different experience where you kind of challenge yourself to learn to speak this language

documented the existence of language anxiety (Horwitz, 1986; Liu, 2011), this study highlights the dynamic interplay between anxiety, personal interest, and structured social interaction.

When you converse with someone in any language, you expect to be fluent; you expect to find all the words to express your ideas. Anny expresses her frustration when she cannot find the correct words in English. (Anny, interview, 2024). If you forget one or more words in a conversation or speech, you begin to become tense and stressed, much more so if it is in an academic environment in which you feel observed and evaluated by your teacher and classmates. Students face two common problems in English class activities: difficulty remembering vocabulary or answering questions asked by another person and feeling anxious when the teacher asks them to speak this language. Somehow, the authority figure (knowledge) of the teacher makes the student feel that he or she is in a threatening or difficult situation. (Erdiana et al, 2020)

The interpretative case study approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how individual students navigate these challenges within specific classroom and extracurricular settings. This methodological perspective reinforces the argument that second language acquisition is not a linear process but a complex, multidimensional experience influenced by emotional, cognitive, and social variables.

Student Frank argues that he feels anxious because he is worried about mistakes related to the use of the language and the pronunciation (Frank, interview, 2024). Yahya (2013) reported that EFL students suffer from linguistic anxiety due to lack of preparation for class, communication, apprehension with teachers, questions from teachers, feedback from peers, and corrections in a classroom. Classroom environment, exams, and negative attitudes toward English classes.

The proper pronunciation of words is one of the difficulties students have when acquiring a second language. The fact that they have to learn new phonemes entirely different from those of their mother tongue generates a small quantity of anxiety. If we add the shyness or insecurity that some have, this becomes an impediment to developing oral expression.

The nerves and stress that students feel cause them to underestimate their abilities and undervalue their knowledge. They usually say, "I do not know anything" or "I am not capable," when in reality, they do have the basis to answer a question in a basic way.

Since the speakers or learners are anxious, they need help to express ideas and thoughts fluently. Spontaneous oral communication in a second language can be affected by linguistic anxiety. Horwitz (2004) and Hasan, (2024) state that anxiety in the classroom arises due to a situation or event, such as speaking in public, taking an exam, or participating in class.

Research by Oya et al. (2004) reported that extroverted students had better oral performance, and those with higher levels of anxiety made more mistakes. The above leads us to interpret that the shyness and insecurity of some students do not favor their oral production. Hence, Ely (2006) says that anxious students are less likely to actively and voluntarily participate in class activities, especially oral ones; these students may present a mental block (Liu, 2011).

Personal interest in implementing practical knowledge in the second language acquisition process

The implementation of practical knowledge in second language acquisition plays a crucial role in fostering student engagement and enhancing learning outcomes. Selecting topics that resonate with students' interests can significantly increase their motivation and active participation in the classroom, facilitating both linguistic and cognitive development.

According to Van Driel (2000), "Practical knowledge is an integration of knowledge, conceptions, beliefs, and values that teachers develop when creating an environment full of teaching and learning." Connecting with Black (2000), who maintains that this refers to knowledge that allows carrying out the practical aspects of teaching within any context.

The practice goes hand in hand with learning since when practicing a language, new knowledge is acquired, and the use of the language increases in the students' process; if this is not carried out in an environment conducive to the practice of the

language that is being learned, learning full of gaps will be reflected with a misuse of the components that house said language. An eleventh-grade student, through the focus group conversation, mentioned that it is crucial to participate in regular English practice, and failure to do so can increase the likelihood of forgetting the language since constant practice leads to language improvement. "This is where practical knowledge takes leadership in learning a new language, since through it, different conceptions can be achieved for developing the context in which it is being learned.

On the other hand, motivation also becomes important with this topic since, when practical knowledge is included in the classroom to develop topics of personal interest, an environment must also be created that, in addition to being practical, also incorporates motivation.

Luis, an eleventh-grade student, commented that talking about topics they like motivates them more. In this case, one refers to more than just the academic sphere when practicing a language. Instead, it is known that learning a foreign language involves different aspects in which communicative competencies can be developed, in which, according to the testimony acquired, there are functions that the language provides for different linguistic and social purposes, such as interpersonal relations in which issues such as the personal interest that each person has in learning a second language are addressed, and the acquisition of lexical components that are achieved throughout the learning process.

Gardner and Lambert (1973) show that the interest in acquiring a new language has some academic aspects (the activities designed for the student's learning) and also the learning acquired by oneself, in which it is essential to learn to involve the language to be acquired in one's daily routine (researching about the language, listening to music, watching videos, watching films, attending conversation clubs and even learning to think in the language). They also encourage us to avoid the basics of everyday life but to attract large and small cultural aspects or relevant topics and, therefore, catch our attention to maintain a daily motivation to learn something new every day in this second language.

When asked how he practices his English, Julian, an eleventh-grade student, said, "I like the easy way to practice English, like to improve your language vocabulary."

Accordingly, different pedagogical strategies can be used to learn a second language. All the required skills (speaking, listening, writing, and reading) must be considered when practicing it. It is known that linguistic skill tends to be more complex at the time of acquiring it; for this, it is necessary to create an environment in which the student can be the protagonist of his or her learning, that is, encourage strategies such as debates, performances, expositions with topics of their interest that help them discover new vocabulary and improve their linguistic level so that they can feel motivated and confident in their performance (Julian, conversational club).

Beyond its impact on student engagement, the integration of practical knowledge in second language acquisition, this study showed that, personal interest in implementing practical knowledge in the second language acquisition process, also fosters critical thinking and adaptability, essential skills in today's globalized world. When students interact with real-world topics that align with their interests, they are more likely to analyze, interpret, and apply linguistic structures in meaningful contexts. This process enhances their language proficiency and equips them with the ability to navigate diverse social and professional environments where multilingual communication is an asset.

Improvement of oral communication experiences of EFL students through interaction strategies

As an essential teaching-learning tool within the classroom, a set of communicative processes are carried out to express ideas, thoughts, and doubts. It is there where students learning a new language can experience nerves, fear, and anxiety when communicating in a foreign language. Ani, an eleventh-grade student and apprentice in the English language, mentioned before the conversation that she experienced some anxiety because she was not sure how to carry it out, which generated a particular fear of making a mistake. (Annie, focus group 2023). According to Gedikli and Basbay (2010) and Wu et al., (2025) students often experience anxiety and worries about their ability to speak, and this is for different reasons. Even when they want to express themselves, they often fear making mistakes. The inability to find the right word can also cause restlessness. For this reason, teachers must recognize the need to establish interactive environments that enhance students' experiences when speaking a new language.

Lomas (1994) states that each class constitutes a communicative environment where the teaching and learning process occurs through constant interactions. To foster these interactions, students must cultivate the skills required to communicate in the target language inside and outside the classroom. This goal can be achieved through various communication-focused activities like conversation groups.

Through the interactions that take place there, it is essential to improve these communicative processes to develop the learning of a new language, interaction strategies inside and outside the classroom with environments conducive to students interacting without fear and with topics with which they feel more comfortable such as conversational clubs that in the student word when you interact with other people, you experience a decrease in anxiety and fear, allowing you to feel safer and express yourself more easily. (Julian, focal group, 2023) This creates an interest in producing their communicative skills while allowing them to improve. According to Govea Piña (2007), these contexts could be beneficial for students to practice the target language and hone their learning skills by interacting with the language in an environment that differs from the academic environment. They tend to experience less pressure in these places because they are not constantly evaluated for their performance.

María states that she experienced a positive feeling and describes the situation as a unique experience in which she challenged herself to learn to speak this language (Maria, Focus group, 2023). Here, we can see the importance of generating appropriate interaction spaces for effective communication and accessible pressures for students who feel confident when communicating in a foreign language. It is of vital importance for them to feel safe and interested in being able to express themselves without fear; it is where the teachers can motivate their students to be interested and feel safe when they interact with the language that in Gedikli and Basbay (2010) words teachers have the responsibility of establishing a welcoming and safe environment that facilitates the reduction of students' communication time and improves their oral skills. This highlights the teacher's fundamental role in creating favorable environments for learning, especially in developing students' oral expression skills. The role of teachers is to assist students in acquiring the skills that will enable them to interact effectively in the target language. This is especially important in higher education, where students are expected to assume greater responsibility in their learning processes, and teachers must provide the appropriate tools to use the language both inside and outside the classroom. (Govea Piña, 2007).

Conclusions

Speech anxiety is an intrinsic phenomenon in second language acquisition, shaped by learners' confidence and linguistic competence. Its manifestation varies across contexts and student profiles, making it essential to explore strategies that address this emotional and cognitive barrier. In this regard, conversational clubs serve as a valuable pedagogical approach, offering a low-anxiety environment that fosters spontaneous communication and self-assurance. By reducing linguistic apprehension, these clubs contribute to the progressive development of discursive ability, making them a flexible and adaptable strategy for different educational levels.

The interactive and cooperative nature of conversational clubs promotes a more organic learning experience, allowing students to negotiate meaning, refine their oral skills, and embrace mistakes as part of the learning process. From an interpretative perspective, it is crucial to acknowledge that each student experiences speech anxiety uniquely, shaped by their individual learning history and social interactions. Therefore, English teachers must go beyond standardized approaches and implement activities that align with students' interests, facilitating authentic communication. Creating conversation clubs centered on meaningful topics empowers students to engage in real-world exchanges, extending their language practice beyond the classroom and fostering intrinsic motivation.

Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of contextualizing pedagogical interventions. Future research should explore the implementation of conversational clubs in private education settings, broadening the understanding of their impact across different socio-educational contexts. By considering students' diverse backgrounds, interests, and linguistic trajectories, educators can tailor language learning strategies that not only enhance communicative competence but also cultivate confidence and a sense of agency in language acquisition.

By presenting these findings within a more theoretically grounded framework, this research underscores the need for pedagogical interventions that prioritize anxiety-reducing strategies, personalized learning experiences, and socially supportive environments. Future research could further explore how different learner profiles—such as introverted versus extroverted students—respond to various anxiety-reduction techniques, thereby contributing to a more differentiated understanding of second language acquisition processes.

Despite its contributions, this study presents certain limitations that should be considered in future research. The findings are based on a specific public education context, which may not fully represent the diversity of experiences in private institutions or other educational settings. Additionally, the study primarily relied on qualitative data, which, while rich in interpretative depth, may benefit from complementary quantitative analyses to further substantiate the observed patterns. Factors such as individual personality traits, prior exposure to English, and socio-affective variables were not deeply explored, leaving room for further investigation into how these elements influence speech anxiety. Future studies should incorporate a broader range of participants and mixed-methods approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, exploring the long-term impact of conversational clubs on students' oral proficiency and confidence over extended periods would offer valuable insights into the sustainability and effectiveness of this strategy in language acquisition.

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