

“You feel a little bit embarrassed, but you get over it”: EFL students’ beliefs and emotions about speaking

IRATI DIERT-BOTÉ

University of Lleida

ORCID: 0000-0002-6964-5996

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ABSTRACT: Drawing on positive psychology (PP), i.e. the study of how people flourish and thrive (MacIntyre et al., 2016), this paper¹ aims to analyse the elements which learners regard as most important to have positive and enjoyable experiences in the English classroom. The participants are first-year university students enrolled in an English for Specific Purposes course that were inquired about their life-long trajectories studying English and their experiences in an ESP course which followed a communicative approach. The data were obtained through an open-ended question from a questionnaire (pre- and post-); eight semi-structured interviews; and four focus groups. The answers from the open-response items were analysed at a macro-level through Domain and Taxonomic Coding (Saldaña, 2016) and afterwards the interviews and focus groups were content-analysed to deepen the understanding of students’ responses at a micro-level. The analysis reveals that oral activities are the aspect which students value most positively; yet, some report negative emotions due to lack of practice and to negative beliefs about speaking tasks and about their own capabilities. Findings suggest that extensive speaking practice along the course, as well as a supportive teacher, a positive classroom atmosphere and an effective classroom management can increase students’ self-confidence and positivity.

Keywords: language learners’ beliefs; language learners’ emotions; foreign language speaking; communicative language teaching; positive psychology

“Te sientes un poco avergonzado, pero lo superas”: creencias y emociones de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera sobre speaking

RESUMEN: Basándose en la psicología positiva (PP), i.e. el estudio de cómo las personas prosperan (MacIntyre et al., 2016), este artículo analiza los elementos que los alumnos consideran más importantes en el aula para tener experiencias positivas durante el aprendizaje de inglés. Los participantes son universitarios de primer año matriculados en un curso de Inglés para Fines Específicos (IFE), a los cuales se les preguntó sobre su trayectoria aprendiendo inglés, y, más concretamente, sobre sus experiencias en el curso de IFE, en el cual se adoptó un enfoque comunicativo. Los datos se obtuvieron a través de dos preguntas abiertas de un

cuestionario (pre- y post-); ocho entrevistas semiestructuradas; y cuatro grupos focales. Las respuestas de los ítems pre- y post- del cuestionario se analizaron a nivel macro a través de la Codificación Taxonómica y de Dominio (Saldaña, 2016) y, posteriormente, se analizó el contenido de las entrevistas y grupos focales para profundizar en las respuestas a un nivel más micro. El análisis revela que las actividades orales son el aspecto que los estudiantes valoran más positivamente; sin embargo, algunos reportan emociones negativas debido a la falta de práctica y a creencias negativas sobre dichas actividades y sobre sus propias capacidades lingüísticas. Los resultados sugieren que la práctica oral extensa a lo largo del curso, así como una buena relación profesor-alumno, un ambiente de clase positivo y una gestión eficaz del aula pueden aumentar la positividad y la autoconfianza de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: creencias del aprendiz; emociones del aprendiz; producción oral en lengua extranjera; método comunicativo; psicología positiva

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, scholars have advocated for more holistic understandings of the language learner, the language classroom and the language learning process (Dörnyei, 2010; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; van Lier, 2000). This integrative view has allowed the exploration of the language learner from both the psychological and the social plane. In this line, research has shown that internal aspects, such as learner's emotions and beliefs, and external contexts, such as the physical space, the type of tasks or the interactions with peers and teachers, are constantly interacting in complex ways (Aragão, 2011; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Diert-Boté & Martín-Rubió, 2018; Mercer, 2011); yet, research on language learner's beliefs has been more extensive, whereas emotions were considered until fairly recently as "the elephants in the room –poorly studied, poorly understood, seen as inferior to rational thought" (Swain, 2013, p. 11). Nevertheless, the blossoming of Positive Psychology (PP) in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has not only resulted in an increased attention towards FL emotions, but it has also allowed to focus on emotions other than anxiety, particularly positive emotions such as enjoyment and other PP-related concepts such as resilience, flow, well-being, hope, optimism, creativity and foreign language self-constructs.

Given that PP empirically studies the ways people can flourish and thrive (MacIntyre et al., 2016), the goal of this paper is to explore what elements are fundamental, from the learners' viewpoint, in order to have positive and enjoyable experiences in the classroom. This is done by adopting a macro-micro perspective by using multiple data sorts with different scopes in order to delve into first-year university students' beliefs, self-beliefs and emotional experiences, particularly in relation to oral tasks.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The interconnection between beliefs and emotions

Due to the predominance of the cognitive paradigm in the field of SLA and education in general, the interconnection between emotion and cognition and the role that the former plays in language learning processes were overlooked until fairly recently. However, some

authors like Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) advocated for the need to recognize the importance of emotions and their link to cognition and learning, a point that is supported by research from different fields such as neuroscience (Barrett, 2017). Despite being investigated as different phenomena, research has shown that beliefs and emotions appear to be highly interconnected. Aragão (2011) remarks that “in languaging, or linguistic activity, students construct realities and articulate how they *feel* and *think* [emphasis added] about learning a new language” (p. 302), something which was also shown in Diert-Boté and Martin-Rubió (2018). This interconnection can be perceived in that emotions such as anxiety or embarrassment are often related to beliefs students have constructed about themselves (self-beliefs) and the environment; for instance, the feeling of being embarrassed when speaking in front of the class might be originated by the belief that a classmate will laugh at one’s performance (Aragão, 2011) or by the conception that the classroom is a judgmental environment and the fear of criticism refrains the learner from speaking in class (Diert-Boté, forthcoming). Similarly, learners’ beliefs about their perceived experiences of success (and failure) in the foreign language class also seem to be closely related to their emotional experiences in such context (Mercer, 2011).

It seems, therefore, that emotions and beliefs are connected processes that are part of one’s sense of Self, which is composed of numerous interconnected and interacting cognitions, affects and motivations, a constellation (Dörnyei, 2010) which contributes significantly to leading learners’ behaviours, performances and approaches to learning.

2.2. Positive Psychology in SLA

Emotion research tradition in SLA had been reduced to the study of negative emotions, namely anxiety (Dewaele, 2002; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Horwitz et al., 1986). As a more integrative view of the learner gained momentum, emotions research also started to widen horizons by focusing on other emotions apart from anxiety. PP studies how people can function optimally and achieve desirable outcomes even during unfavourable circumstances by promoting long-lasting resources, such as resilience, to flourish and thrive even in aversive conditions (MacIntyre et al., 2016). Fredrickson (2003), in her broaden-and-build theory, posits that positive emotions such as interest, pride, love or joy, contrary to negative ones, result in action tendencies that “...broaden people’s momentary thought-action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources” (Fredrickson, 2003, p. 219). Apart from positive emotions, the role of self-constructs, beliefs and self-beliefs have also been found to be important in flourishing and in re-constructing positive mindsets (Leung, Mikami and Yoshikawa, 2019; Pajares, 2001).

PP principles were introduced in SLA by MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012), who argued that, due to the broadening function of positive emotions, learners who experience positive emotions are more likely to be aware of everything that occurs in the classroom, including language input, which permits them to absorb it better. On the contrary, negative emotions narrow the learner’s perspective, and, therefore, the range of potential language input is more restricted. MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) also point out the teacher’s potential to influence students’ emotions and to create a safe environment in which negative emotions are lessened, an aspect which has been remarked by other authors as well (Aragão, 2011;

Yoshida, 2013). Perhaps the most exhaustively studied area in PP in the SLA field has been learners' foreign language enjoyment (FLE) vis-à-vis foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA). Horwitz et al. (1986) were the first to conceptualize FLCA as situation-specific and multifaceted: "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). Since then, research on FLCA has been gaining interest as students tend to feel vulnerable and judged due to their lack of full language command (Arnold, 2007), especially in the oral domain, probably due to the "saliency and high 'public visibility' of oral performance" (Mercer, 2011, p. 162). Recently, scholars have studied anxiety from a dynamic perspective over different timescales (Boudreau et al., 2018; Gregersen, 2020) and in relation to FLE. Results suggest that FLE and FLCA are two separate dimensions and therefore it is possible to experience them simultaneously, and has provided evidence of how emotions fluctuate dynamically in a complex interplay between internal and external variables (e.g. Boudreau et al., 2018; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

Following the PP principles of understanding how learners can flourish and thrive by experiencing high levels of positivity in class, this study focuses on FLE and FLCA by delving into the aspects of the English language class which participants consider to be the most positive based on their experiences. The questions guiding the research are:

What aspects do learners value most positively of any English class they have had throughout their lives?

What aspects do learners value most positively of an ESP course which follows a communicative language teaching methodology?

Since preliminary results from these two questions indicated that oral tasks were recurrently mentioned by the participants, and, in general, they were very positively rated, another research question arose:

What beliefs do learners articulate and what emotions do they report to experience in relation to oral tasks at the beginning and at the end of the ESP course? What are the reasons that might explain the changes (if any)?

3. CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Data were gathered from first-year students enrolled in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course offered by a public Catalan university, with ages between 18 and 22 years old. Students were not required to have a certain language level to enrol in the course, but results from an Oxford Placement Test showed that students' level ranged from A1 to C1. All the students enrolled in this course provided their written consent to participate in this project.

There were two groups in the subject with different methodologies (monolingual and translanguaging), although both groups used a communicative approach. This approach aims to engage learners in communication to help them develop their communicative competence, rather than to control syntactical and phonological patterns (Savignon, 2002). The course was

designed so that students could understand and produce oral and written texts from the field of economics and business in English. For this reason, authentic materials that promoted both oral and written communicative competence were created. The assessment was based on three final tasks (oral presentation, sales pitch and formal business letter), two exams (mid-term and final) and a portfolio. Careful attention was devoted to each of the tasks and students had to perform many practical activities in order to learn how to create final quality products. These activities included reading information about how to make good oral presentations/sales pitches, watching several performances, and self-recording several times. Students were also encouraged to participate frequently in class, so they also practiced their English speaking skills by discussing among themselves and the teacher.

The data employed in this study have been obtained by means of open-response items, focus groups and interviews. This data triangulation has permitted gaining insights at multiple levels and going beyond the knowledge acquired by one single data sort, thus ensuring more quality research (Flick, 2018). The open-response question was collected from a questionnaire passed the first day of class (coded ‘pre-Q’) and just before the course finished (coded ‘post-Q’). This question stated: “Indicate some aspect(s) you remember positively of any English class you had throughout your life. Think about a lesson you liked and explain why it was good”. The post-question was the same but focused on specific aspects from that course. 87 responses were obtained in the pre-question (41 in ‘mono’, 46 in ‘trans’) and 79 in the post-question (33 in ‘mono’, 46 in ‘trans’). The second data collection method was two focus groups conducted in week 7 of the course (March 2017) with seven students from the ‘monolingual group’ (coded ‘FG1’) and with eight students from the ‘translanguaging group’ (coded ‘FG2’). The last method by which data were gathered was eight individual interviews (coded ‘int.’) with four students from both groups that were conducted in the middle of the course (April 2017). In the focus groups and interviews, participants were asked about previous experiences learning English and their current experience in the course. Both were conducted in Catalan, and the questionnaire could be answered either in Catalan, Spanish or English; therefore, the answers have been translated into English. The two teachers of the course, who were also members of the project, chose the students for the qualitative data (interviews and focus groups) based on the perceived students’ willingness to participate in these qualitative sessions, and also based on their class attendance. Thus, students who did not attend class regularly were discarded, as they might not have had enough information about the course to give detailed opinions about the methodology and about specific activities.

The analysis of the data involved a twofold process that combined macro and micro perspectives of analysis. Firstly, the data from the open-ended question were transcribed and subsequently codified with Atlas.ti. The analytical process followed Boyatzis’ (1998, p. 11) four stages: (1) sensing themes – recognizing the codable moment; (2) doing it reliably – recognizing the codable moment and encoding it consistently; (3) developing codes; and (4) interpreting the information. The researcher-generated codes were renamed and organized using Domain and Taxonomic Coding. Domains are categories which categorize other categories, and a taxonomy is a list of elements classified under a domain (Saldaña, 2016). An external researcher was asked to codify the data individually and the computed inter-rater reliability was of 83%. This more macro analysis provided information on the bigger picture of students’ beliefs about important aspects of language learning. In order to

gain a deeper understanding of the learners' experiences that might explain their responses, a micro analysis was performed. Data from the interviews and focus groups were fully transcribed and content-analysed in order to delve into the learners' emotional experiences, beliefs and self-beliefs in relation to EFL speaking.

4. FINDINGS

Results are divided into two sections: the first one revolves around the task, especially speaking tasks, which is the domain with the highest frequency in both the pre- and the post-answers; the second section is devoted to the other themes brought up by the participants which are likely to be potentially influential factors upon the task development, namely: the teacher, the classroom management, and the classroom atmosphere.

4.1. Tasks

4.1.1. Findings from the pre-question

Table 1 (see below) displays the Domain and Taxonomic Coding for 'task' for the pre-question. In their answers, students especially highlight speaking and discussing in class via debates or activities which imply interacting orally with their peers. Videos and films are also an activity which students report to enjoy, as well as games. Some students also mention working with songs, learning vocabulary, giving oral presentations and learning grammar. At the bottom of the list, listening, reading, phonetics and writing letters to a penfriend are also mentioned.

Table 1. Task: pre-Q Domain and Taxonomic Coding

	R. FREQUENCY (%)	TAXONOMY	R. FREQUENCY (%)
		Speaking/discussing	30.2
		Videos and films	18.7
		Games	15.1
		Songs	7.5
		Oral presentation	5.7
Pre-Q	43.2	Grammar	5.7
		Vocabulary	3.8
		Listening	3.8
		Reading	3.8
		Phonetics	1.9
		Creative tasks	1.9
		Penfriends	1.9

Some of the pre-answers related to oral tasks are: “I like speaking quite a lot in class because then you gain fluency in the language” (Guillem, pre-Q), “the most interesting and productive lessons that I’ve attended are those in which we spoke with a native and we learnt phonetics and to pronounce correctly” (Naia, pre-Q) or “I remember when I gave an oral presentation and I did well, and I also like it when we do activities to overcome embarrassment when speaking” (Clara, pre-Q). Clara brings up a key point that appears recurrently in the interviews and focus groups, which is the connection between speaking activities and negative emotions such as embarrassment or anxiety. Indeed, whilst the Domain and Taxonomic Coding has allowed to create a big picture that shows that students tend to enjoy speaking activities, interviews and focus groups allows us to give voice to students that do not feel that way when speaking in English in public. These are a few examples:

Excerpt 1

“I don’t participate because I feel awkward. I think that what scares you with English is making a fool of yourself [...] we don’t participate in class out of pleasure” (Anna, int.).

Excerpt 2

“Many of us don’t master English and then maybe it causes embarrassment or something like that... the fact that what if I screw up? I’d better not say anything” (Pol, int.).

Excerpt 3

“I’m very embarrassed about making mistakes or saying something which the others won’t understand, or about mispronouncing something... when I read aloud, for example, I repeat words without realizing, or I ask how to pronounce them” (Laura, FG1).

Excerpt 4

“I’m very shy and I have a hard time when I have to speak in English. In high school I was much much much shyer, but now more or less I’ve already... haha I prepare it quite a lot at home and memorize it and then when it’s time to do it then it’s better” (Gisela, FG1).

Excerpt 5

“I find speaking in English very hard, especially in an oral presentation because I’m very shy, I mean, I learn it by heart and when I’m there in front of the class I go blank” (Tatiana, FG2).

These five testimonies show the adverse effects that negative emotions such as embarrassment and anxiety can have on foreign language learning. As Fredrickson (2003) posits, negative emotions narrow individual’s repertoire of action in order to cause a particular reaction such as fight or flight: while Anna and Pol exemplify a ‘flight’ response, by which they avoid speaking so as not to “make a fool of themselves or “screw it up”, Gisela and Tatiana show a ‘fight’ strategy by memorizing the text from the oral task at hand, probably an oral presentation. Moreover, Laura says that she repeats words without being aware of it

and Tatiana reports being so nervous that she goes blank when having to speak in English. These two last statements appear to further reinforce the idea that negative emotions make learners less aware of everything that occurs in the classroom, including language input (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012) and, in this case, language output. Nevertheless, these ‘reactions’ are not automatic, but constructed in view of previous experiences (Barrett, 2017) and intimately related to various beliefs and self-beliefs that they hold. For Anna, the belief that she will make a fool of herself keeps her from participating, as for her speaking in English is not something “pleasant”. Pol holds the self-belief that one avoids speaking when s/he does not have a sufficient level of English; this appears to be connected to the belief that making mistakes provokes negative emotions like embarrassment, a belief which is also shared by Laura. Gisela and Tatiana attribute their anxiety to their self-belief of shyness. These instances show that some students feel very insecure with their English level and appear to have low EFL self-concepts in the speaking domain.

These negative emotions associated to EFL speaking might be also related to lack of or little oral practice. In interviews and focus groups, students report that during their lives they have been exposed to a large amount of grammar and little speaking. In connection to this, a student explains the following: “I think that the oral part helps a lot because in high school all the time you do grammar exercises and so on and then people are not so used to speaking” (Gabriel, int.). Similarly, another learner mentions: “all our lives we’ve had the student’s book and the workbook, you know? and here it’s more practical [...] I think it’s better because you can watch a video and see the mistakes in the pronunciation or the way they speak” (Ivan, int.). In one of the focus groups, students also highlight the contrast between high school and the ESP course in terms of grammar and speaking:

Excerpt 6 (FG1)

Researcher 1	do you find any differences between this subject and for example what you did in high school?
Laura	yes
Aitor	here it’s focused on writing and speaking
Laura	[yes]
Marta	[yes] here we don’t do grammar
Researcher 1	and in high school?
Marta	[yes more grammar]
Gisela	[more gram- more grammar]
Maite	[grammar yes]
Laura	[grammar the important] thing was grammar [...]

Laura and we didn’t speak at all we didn’t do speaking activities

Researcher 2 oral presentations maybe

Laura oral presentations but everyone was reading the paper haha

Participants’ statements indicate that they have a tradition of learning grammar in school with little practice of oral skills, and in some cases, as Laura highlights, in the few oral tasks that they had to perform (mostly oral presentations), students tended to read from the script, and therefore the oral presentation task resembled more a read aloud activity than an actual presentation.

4.1.2. Findings from the post-question

Despite the fact that some students feel insecure and anxious in a more communicative context, as excerpts 1-5 have shown, most students seem to have enjoyed the change in the teaching methodology. This can be seen in the post-answers (see Table 2 below), given that ‘task’ remains the item with the highest frequency. Whereas in the pre-question, ‘speaking/discussing’ and ‘oral presentation’ represent 35.9% of the total of tasks, in the post-question, the activities related to oral tasks (oral presentation, speaking/discussing, sales pitch and self-recordings) increase to 68.4%. Apart from this type of tasks, watching videos, writing business letters, and, to a lesser extent, studying grammar, vocabulary and topics related to are business activities which students have highlighted, as well as the extensive use of IT throughout the course.

Table 2. Task: post-Q Domain and Taxonomic coding

	R. FREQUENCY (%)	TAXONOMY	R. FREQUENCY (%)
		Oral presentation	30.2
		Speaking/discussing	17.6
		Sales pitch	15.9
		Videos	12.7
Post-Q	53.2	Writing	6.2
		Self-recording	4.7
		Grammar	4.7
		Vocabulary	3.2
		Business aspects	3.2
		IT use	1.6

The oral presentation and the sales pitch were key tasks in the subject and results show that in the post-answers students valued them highly positively: “[I liked it] when we had to give an improvised presentation in front of all the class” (Ariadna, post-Q), “I enjoyed working on the sales pitch because I think that until the degree, English subjects are too focused on grammar” (Èric, post-Q) and “[I like] public practice of oral expression. I remember a very productive lesson in which we did a debate and everyone participated in English” (Irina, post-Q). The communicative approach adopted in this course seems to have been positively assessed by most of the students, even by Anna, Pol, Gisela, Laura and Tatiana. Their post-questions are in stark contrast with the unwillingness to speak in English that they had expressed at the beginning of the course, given that they highlight speaking-related aspects as being the most positive of the course in the post-question:

Excerpt 7

“When we had to do an improvised presentation in front of the class” (Anna, post-Q)

Excerpt 8

“The fact that the teacher insisted that we spoke in English because the only way to learn is by making mistakes, so you don’t have to be embarrassed about making mistakes” (Pol, post-Q)

Excerpt 9

“The class where the teacher played the videos of the presentation because she played mine and I got over the embarrassment that I felt before” (Laura, post-Q)

Excerpt 10

“Self-recording videos talking about a topic is a good activity because, apart from practicing English, in the end you get more fluent and gain confidence when speaking. It’s good to play them in class because you feel a little bit embarrassed, but you get over it and pay attention to mistakes” (Gisela, post-Q)

Excerpt 11

“The oral presentation, because I have put a lot of effort to improve the mark with respect to the presentation in the first semester, and I have finally achieved it and I see that I can do it now. However, it is still hard and embarrassing for me to speak in public, even more in a language which I don’t get to fully master” (Tatiana, post-Q)

These answers suggest that, by means of extensive oral practice, students can change their perceptions regarding oral tasks as well as the emotional experiences attached to them. Whereas in the interviews and focus groups these participants expressed negative emotions

and low self-concepts with regard to EFL speaking, post-answers reflect a positive change in some of the students’ self-concepts by the end of the course. At the beginning, Pol was reluctant to speak because of the belief that making mistakes was something that one should be embarrassed of; here this belief appears to have changed because he seems to have understood that making mistakes is a natural process of language learning. Similarly, Laura, who was very insecure and afraid of making mistakes, seems to have developed certain resilience and to have “overcome the embarrassment” of speaking in English after her experience. Gisela points out that although some activities like self-recording videos might be intimidating, in the end they are useful in terms of cognitive development, i.e. to advance in learning (“you gain fluency” and “[you] pay attention to mistakes”), and of emotional development, i.e. to overcome embarrassment and to gain confidence. Ultimately, Tatiana articulates the belief that speaking in English is still hard and embarrassing for her; yet there has been a change in her self-beliefs, as whereas in the FG2 she reported high insecurity and anxiety (she went “blank”), she now has a more positive self-concept because she has seen that she “can do it now”. Apart from these cases, other students also reported positive emotional effects of oral practice:

Excerpt 12

“I enjoyed the day of the presentation about the university, because you overcome the embarrassment of speaking in English and you practice how to speak in public” (Joan, post-Q)

Excerpt 13

“[I liked it] when we did the presentation due to the fact that you start getting over the fear of speaking in public” (Gala, post-Q).

The analysis has shown that students have generally had positive experiences in this communicative language teaching context, and some students even report having been able to overcome negative emotions associated to speaking in English thanks to the course. Yet, a more complete picture of the experiences in the ESP course can be constructed by analysing the other aspects that students mentioned in both the pre- and post- open-response item, which are the teacher, the classroom atmosphere and the classroom management.

4.2. Teacher, classroom atmosphere and classroom management

Table 3 below summarizes other aspects which participants mentioned in their pre- and post-answers and which, despite having a lower frequency than tasks (and speaking tasks), provide information about the students’ beliefs, emotions and overall experiences in the English language classroom.

Table 3. Other factors: pre- and post- Domain and Taxonomic Coding

DOMAIN	R. FREQUENCY (%)	TAXONOMY	R. FREQUENCY (%)	
Pre-Q	Teacher	Rapport	37.9	
		Nativeness	24.1	
		Delivery/Language use	20.7	
		Management/Organisation	10.4	
		Knowledge	6.9	
	Class management	16	Group work	55
			English language use	30
			Dynamism	15
	Atmosphere	12	Participation/interaction	46.6
			Positive environment	40
			Self-improvement	6.7
			Keeps attention/motivation	6.7
	Nothing good	3.2		
	Other	0.8		
Post-Q	Atmosphere	Positive environment	39.1	
		Participation/interaction	30.4	
		Self-improvement	26.1	
		Keeps attention/motivation	4.4	
	Teacher	16.6	Rapport	47.6
			Management/organization	38.1
			Delivery/language use	9.5
			Knowledge	4.8
	Class management	10.3	Group work	76.9
			English language use	7.7
			Diversity of tasks	7.7
			Dynamism	7.7
	Nothing good	0.8		
	Other	0.8		

These results show that the role of the teacher is very important for the students, especially their building-rapport capacity, which is the highest code in the pre- and post-responses. Although some students had remarked the importance of classroom atmosphere in their pre-answers, after the course this domain increases substantially and becomes the most valued before 'teacher'. This indicates that many students have enjoyed the positive environment of the class, a good level of participation and interaction, a sense of self-improvement and, eventually, an atmosphere which keeps them attentive and motivated. It is important to highlight that although 'self-improvement' maintains the third position within the taxonomy, there has been a considerable increase

in its frequency. Classroom management aspects seem to be fairly important for the participants as well, particularly working in groups, being encouraged to use English in class and making the lessons dynamic. Therefore, success of oral tasks in this course might not be completely understood without the presence of these three elements (classroom atmosphere, teacher and classroom management). As shown in Table 3, a positive and healthy classroom atmosphere is an aspect which students value greatly of this course, as many have emphasized the good classroom environment in both groups. Some students have also linked the positive atmosphere to speaking tasks. For instance, Aitor remarks the positive environment during oral presentations, and David and Mario emphasize the enjoyment during oral presentations and the sales pitch:

Excerpt 14

“I liked the day of the oral presentations because there was a very good atmosphere” (Aitor, post-Q)

Excerpt 15

“Presentations, because it was never boring and students could participate actively in class” (David, post-Q)

Excerpt 16

“I would have liked to practice the sales pitch more, as not everyone could practice in class and we all had a really good time when listening to the way the others sold the products” (Mario, post-Q)

Another factor which has appeared to be considerably important for students in the course is the teacher, whose role appears to be highly significant for the learners, particularly the capacity of building rapport. The way the teachers from the two groups have interacted and related with their students is therefore very likely to have had an effect on the students’ positive experiences with speaking. For instance, Pol (int.) points out that “you cannot force anyone [to speak], you know? The teacher encourages people to speak, asks them, and now, with her, people are more active and try to participate more”. In the same vein, these participants mention the following in their post-questions:

Excerpt 17

“The most important thing is the kindness and enthusiasm that the teacher had to teach us and to make us participate and speak” (Ramon, post-Q)

Excerpt 18

“Above all, that the teacher encouraged us to speak to each other in English, and that the teacher herself spoke it all the class” (Jessica, post-Q)

Excerpt 19

“The teacher’s effort so that everyone participated and spoke in English during the class” (Magda, post-Q)

Ultimately, classroom management is the last factor which students assess very positively, and, within it, group work is, by far, the most cited aspect. As Aina (int.) highlights: “in a smaller group it’s not that awkward, especially when you do it with people that you know well, because we are not close to everyone in the class”. In the responses, as well as in interviews and focus groups, students stress that they enjoy working in groups or in pairs especially to practice speaking, as it is less embarrassing to speak in front of two or three people than in front of the whole class:

Excerpt 20

“I think group work is positive because it’s easier to work with classmates, and those of us who are embarrassed feel more supported” (Lluc, post-Q)

Excerpt 21

“I like lessons in which the teacher divides us in groups and we have to interact with each other, for instance the class when we did the last sales pitch of the products from the dossier” (Sara, post-Q)

Excerpt 22

“The class sessions when we do activities in group and this way we can practice English and have a good time” (Mateu, post-Q)

These findings suggest that the success of certain activities in class, particularly of oral tasks, cannot be understood without the wider context of the classroom. The change in the perception of oral tasks from something threatening to something less embarrassing and even enjoyable might have not been possible if these other elements had not been present as well. If the teachers had not been attentive and had not encouraged students to speak, if the atmosphere created during oral activities had been unsafe and uncomfortable and if the class had not been organized in a way that allowed students to practice speaking in small groups in a more relaxed way, probably the tasks would not have been so fruitful and, as a result, students would not have enjoyed them that much.

5. DISCUSSION

This study has shed light on the aspects of the English language learning class which students find more enjoyable and to which they attach more importance based on their life-long experiences and on the ESP course they were enrolled in. The analysis of the pre-open-ended questions has shown that the aspects which participants value the most in an

English class are: (1) interactive and entertaining activities which involve speaking, much more than the traditional grammar or vocabulary learning; (2) a supportive teacher who is skilful at building rapport with them; (3) a positive classroom environment that fosters discussion and participation; and (4) an effective management of the class that promotes group work. As shown in the post-answers, learners encountered these factors in the ESP course and rated them very positively, especially the amount of oral practice. Thus, it seems that the elements that they expected to find in an enjoyable class were met in this course.

This macro perspective was nuanced by a micro analysis of the participants’ interviews and group discussions. These have shown that “enjoyment for one might not be enjoyment for all” (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016, p. 227), as some students report experiencing negative emotions such as embarrassment and anxiety when speaking. The experience of negative emotions was most probably constructed (Barrett, 2017) through their years of EFL/FL speaking, as students displayed some strategies that they seem to frequently adopt when having to deal with oral tasks. These strategies narrowed their thought-action repertoire by producing ‘fight’ (speaking but having previously memorized the text) or ‘flight’ (remaining silent) responses as they conceived this type of task as threatening (Fredrickson, 2003). This conceptualization of oral tasks and subsequent negative emotions were also connected to irrational beliefs about learning (a tendency towards ‘awfulizing’ the speaking situation), dysfunctional self-beliefs about their own proficiency and capabilities (a tendency to self-rate negatively their own linguistic abilities) (see Oxford, 2015), and beliefs of perfectionism (a tendency to regard mistakes very negatively and to think that peers would judge them; see Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016), which tend to increase language anxiety (see Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). The last factor that seems to have been influential in the experience of negative emotions is a tradition of learning English mostly through grammar which has not enabled learners to forge high EFL speaking self-concepts. Consequently, as results from this study indicate, when students are confronted with a more communicative approach, in which their productive skills play a more determining role, they tend to feel defenceless and vulnerable in the new context.

One of the most interesting findings is that the students who had reported negative emotions in relation to speaking activities eventually assess them as the most positive aspect of the course. The fact that they could mention anything about it but they choose speaking-related aspects is very relevant as this suggests that negative emotional experiences can be positively changed. Pol, Laura, Gisela and Tatiana show how FLE and FLCA can be experienced simultaneously, as other studies have shown (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). Participants explain that the most enjoyable experience they have had of the course is related to speaking, but at the same time they acknowledge that they have experienced negative emotions such as anxiety and embarrassment during the performance of that task. For instance, Laura and Gisela were embarrassed when the teacher played the videos of themselves speaking, but they managed to overcome negative emotions and remember this episode as one the most enjoyable ones. Similarly, Tatiana claims that she still feels anxious when having to speak in English in public, but she conceives the oral presentation as the most enjoyable task because she regards it as a triumph. This further shows that experiencing real success is the ultimate route to self-esteem (Arnold, 2011) and to enjoyment (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2014).

Changing emotional experiences of the learners into more positive ones is neither a simple nor an automatic process, especially if they have been constructing and accumulating negative experiences in relation to FL speaking throughout their lives. Nevertheless, insights from this course seem to indicate that with the appropriate conditions, or affordances (van Lier, 2000), this change can be achieved. On the one hand, extensive oral practice through adequately-designed activities seems to have helped learners to get accustomed to speaking tasks. At the beginning, students lacked self-confidence and emotional resources to face a communicative language teaching environment; nevertheless, through intense practice, they have developed resilience, which has helped them to successfully face adversity and resist in times of emotional, cognitive and/or physical stress (Oxford, 2015). On the other hand, if we conceive the classroom as an ecology (van Lier, 2000) or a complex system (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008) in which all its elements or agents interact, then it is interesting to observe the role of the multiple agents present in the classroom. The findings show that a supportive and rapport-developing teacher, a positive and safe classroom climate, and an effective classroom management (particularly group work) seem to have been particularly influential in terms of oral tasks enjoyment. Thus, this macro-micro perspective has revealed that it is probably the accurate mixture of several factors which might have facilitated the learners' re-construction of negative emotions and beliefs and an increase of enjoyment in oral tasks, even in those students initially reluctant to FL speaking.

6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Despite these encouraging findings, the study has some limitations. Firstly, the sample for the pre- and post- open-response item was not very large, particularly in the post question, as not all the students attended the sessions in which the questionnaire was distributed. However, since these data were analysed qualitatively, the sample size does not need to be as big as in purely quantitative/statistical study. Secondly, only a few students participated in interviews and focus groups and therefore the amount of data is limited. Moreover, it was not possible to conduct a detailed follow-up of each learner's evolution of their beliefs and emotional experiences and, hence, findings in this regard should be taken with caution.

Several pedagogical implications can be derived from this study. It would be interesting for teachers to get to know their students' preferences in language learning, as well as to explore their emotions and (self-)beliefs in relation to specific tasks, such as oral ones, given that each learner may have different interests. Many of the observations and activities provided in Gregersen and MacIntyre (2014) on learning styles, motivation or beliefs can be useful to get better acquainted with the students. Moreover, based on the PP question regarding how humans can flourish and function positively despite negative emotions and problems, educators should not aim to eradicate anxiety, but to find a balance between anxiety and enjoyment and to help students flourish in times of cognitive and emotional stress (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Thus, overprotecting learners and avoiding their exposure to 'threatening' situations such as public FL speaking might be counterproductive, because lack of practice is likely to create insecure learners with low self-concepts. In the end, students themselves also seem to realize that in order for learning to occur, they need to get out of their comfort zone; as Gisela says: "you feel a little bit embarrassed, but you get over

it”. Therefore, it is on the teacher’s hands to furnish students with the tools and resources they need to face these adverse situations successfully and to become more emotionally intelligent. In turn, the teacher should also attempt to create a positive and safe welcoming environment which facilitates positive emotions and in which students are willing to take risks with language, to explore and to play.

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