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STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING ANXIETY IN EFL CLASSROOM: AN ACADEMIC REVIEW

**ESTRATEGIAS PARA REDUCIR LA ANSIEDAD EN LAS
CLASES DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA**

Karina Fernanda Sotomayor Cantos
Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo, Ecuador

María Belén Baños Coello
Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo, Ecuador

Jorge Andrés Córdova Pintado
Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo, Ecuador

Luis Alfredo Camacho Castillo
Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo, Ecuador

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Strategies for Reducing Anxiety in EFL Classroom: An Academic Review

Karina Fernanda Sotomayor Cantos¹ksotomayor@uteq.edu.ec<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6134-1875>Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo
Ecuador**María Belén Baños Coello**mabanos@uteq.edu.ec<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7312-3058>Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo
Ecuador**Jorge Andrés Córdova Pintado**jcordovap@uteq.edu.ec<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6255-7455>Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo
Ecuador**Luis Alfredo Camacho Castillo**lcamacho@uteq.edu.ec<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1192-2804>Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo
Ecuador

ABSTRACT

Anxiety is a significant issue in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, impacting learners' performance and overall language acquisition. This theoretical review examines recent research findings and effective techniques for reducing anxiety in EFL settings. Drawing on qualitative methodologies and empirical studies from the past five years, the review highlights various factors contributing to anxiety, including low self-esteem, fear of mistakes, and pressure from peers and teachers. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) emerges as a valuable tool for measuring anxiety, focusing on exam anxiety, communication anxiety, and fear of poor grades. The review identifies several strategies to alleviate anxiety, such as creating a supportive environment, delaying error correction, providing ample speaking practice opportunities, and incorporating relaxation techniques. Additionally, interventions like game-based learning, music instruction, and cooperative learning activities demonstrate promise in reducing anxiety and enhancing motivation among EFL learners. The review underscores the pivotal role of teachers in mitigating anxiety by offering effective feedback, facilitating speaking practice, and fostering a welcoming classroom environment conducive to language acquisition. Ultimately, the review emphasizes the importance of understanding and addressing anxiety to promote successful language learning outcomes in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *anxiety, effective techniques, EFL classroom, language learning, teacher role*

¹ Autor principal.

Correspondencia: ksotomayor@uteq.edu.ec

Estrategias para Reducir la Ansiedad en las Clases de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera

RESUMEN

La ansiedad es un problema importante en las aulas de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL), que afecta el desempeño de los estudiantes y la adquisición general del idioma. Esta revisión teórica examina los hallazgos de investigaciones recientes y técnicas efectivas para reducir la ansiedad en entornos de inglés como lengua extranjera. Basándose en metodologías cualitativas y estudios empíricos de los últimos cinco años, la revisión destaca varios factores que contribuyen a la ansiedad, incluida la baja autoestima, el miedo a cometer errores y la presión de compañeros y profesores. La Escala de Ansiedad en el Aula de Idiomas Extranjeros (FLCAS) surge como una herramienta valiosa para medir la ansiedad, centrándose en la ansiedad ante los exámenes, la ansiedad por la comunicación y el miedo a las malas calificaciones. La revisión identifica varias estrategias para aliviar la ansiedad, como crear un entorno de apoyo, retrasar la corrección de errores, brindar amplias oportunidades de práctica oral e incorporar técnicas de relajación. Además, intervenciones como el aprendizaje basado en juegos, la enseñanza de música y las actividades de aprendizaje cooperativo resultan prometedoras para reducir la ansiedad y mejorar la motivación entre los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera. La revisión subraya el papel fundamental de los profesores a la hora de mitigar la ansiedad al ofrecer retroalimentación eficaz, facilitar la práctica del habla y fomentar un ambiente acogedor en el aula que propicie la adquisición del idioma. En última instancia, la revisión enfatiza la importancia de comprender y abordar la ansiedad para promover resultados exitosos en el aprendizaje de idiomas en las aulas de inglés como lengua extranjera.

Palabras claves: ansiedad, técnicas efectivas, aula de inglés como lengua extranjera, aprendizaje de idiomas, rol del profesor

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INTRODUCTION

As students enter the world of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, they set out on a path that goes beyond simple language learning. In the pursuit for comprehension and fluency, worry stands as a powerful barrier that may inhibit growth and kill motivation. Learning a new language can be exciting, but it can also be stressful and cause self-doubt in a lot of EFL students.

Anxiety is an unhealthy way to show emotion in people. We experience trepidation, worry, and fear when we are apprehensive. We sweat, tremble, battle, and our hearts race. In general, anxiety can be described as a complicated term that depends on assessments of perceived risks in specific circumstances as well as one's sense of self-efficacy. (Tobias, 1997)

It can stem from various causes, for instance: fear of mistakes, performance pressure, linguistic challenges, cultural differences, negative past experiences, peer comparison, teacher expectations, and others.

Anxiety can take many different forms in the dynamic environment of the EFL classroom, where language barriers disappear, and cultural subtleties converge. This can make it difficult for students to express themselves clearly and participate completely in the learning process. There is no denying the influence that anxiety has on language learners, whether it comes from performance anxiety during speaking exercises, a fear of making mistakes, or a sense of overload from unknown grammar rules.

This article aims to shed light on the complex relationship that exists between anxiety and language learning in EFL classrooms by providing a thorough analysis of several methods for reducing anxiety in students. Using the knowledge gained from this study, we set out on a quest to find novel ways to help EFL learners develop resilience, self-assurance, and language skills.

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodologies applied in the present article review. It discusses the research strategy in terms of data collection, research article selection for sample, and analysis to compile a publishing review.

The current study is a theoretical review that uses a qualitative methodology to help identify some effective anxiety-reduction techniques for EFL classrooms. A search was conducted in the Google Scholar database with a temporal restriction of the last five years (2019–2024) to gather the articles that



were included in the literary review. Citable documents and the type of literature (articles) were also considered. The investigation was completed in March 2024

After applying the previously indicated criteria to the search, a particular focus was put on titles that discussed methods or approaches for lowering anxiety in EFL classes. Each article's abstract, findings, and conclusion were read to determine which ones fit the requirements of the investigation. Excluded explicitly were articles published before 2019 and those whose technique was applied to anxiety in a different subject.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this literature review, 10 articles were included that referred to the aforementioned criteria. This sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Analyzed sample

Database	Year of publication	Authors	Title
Scholar Google	2020	Sayeed Asif Akramy	Speaking Anxiety in an Afghan EFL Setting: A Case Study of an Afghan University.
Scholar Google	2020	Netta, Trisnawati & Helmanda	Indonesian efl students' strategies in dealing with speaking anxiety in public speaking course.
Scholar Google	2021	Öztürk, & Öztürk	Reducing Speaking Anxiety in EFL Classrooms: An Explanatory Mixed-Methods Study.
Scholar Google	2021	Takako Inada	Teachers' Strategies for Decreasing Students' Anxiety Levels to Improve Their Communicative Skills
Scholar Google	2022	Ahmed, Ampry, Komariah, Hassan, Thahir, Hussein, & Zafarani	Investigating the Effect of Using Game-Based Learning on EFL Learners' Motivation and Anxiety
Scholar Google	2021	Öztürk Elçin	An Investigation on Metacognitive Listening Strategy Use and Listening Anxiety in EFL Classrooms
Scholar Google	2020	Abdurahman, & Rizqi	Indonesian Students' Strategies to Cope with Foreign Language Anxiety
Scholar Google	2020	Mir, Meigouni, & Shirkhani	Oral Communication Strategies Used by Iranian EFL Learners and their Relationship with the Learners' Self-efficacy Beliefs and Anxiety Level
Scholar Google	2020	Asmalı, & Dilbaz	Singing as an Anxiety-Reducing Strategy for Learners Struggling with Different Levels of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety
Scholar Google	2020	Topkçu, & Başbay	The Impact of Collaborative Activities on EFL Learners' Speaking Anxiety Levels and Attitudes

The results of the literary review are described below:

According to certain research, anxiety is a significant issue in EFL classrooms and can be caused by a variety of complex factors, including low self-esteem and confidence, a fear of making mistakes and drawing ridicule, and competitiveness (Jackson, 2002).

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) is one of the useful tools for measuring anxiety. This measure is based on three variables: exam anxiety, communication anxiety, and fear of receiving a poor grade (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986); this tool was used in some articles analyzed below.

Akramy (2020) conducted a qualitative study which explores the experiences of seven Afghan EFL students regarding speaking anxiety. Three main themes emerged: students' perceptions of anxiety in speaking, reasons for speaking anxiety, and the effects of speaking anxiety on performance along with coping strategies. Participants reported both positive and negative perceptions of speaking anxiety, with some seeing it as a motivator while others viewed it as a hindrance to performance. Reasons for anxiety included on-the-spot correction by teachers, low proficiency, and insufficient time for activities. Coping strategies included daily speaking practice, watching videos of English speakers, creating a relaxed atmosphere, and using relaxation techniques like deep breathing and body language. The study suggests recommendations for teachers to create a supportive environment, delay error correction, and provide more opportunities for speaking practice. Future research is needed to explore speaking anxiety from broader perspectives and include the perceptions of both students and teachers in various contexts.

Netta et al., (2020) explored foreign language anxiety (FLA) among university students during English presentations, aiming to identify moments of high anxiety, coping strategies employed, and changes in strategies across different anxiety levels. Stimulated recall was used with five non-English major students, revealing varying anxiety levels and coping strategies. Moments triggering anxiety included the beginning of presentations and random selection for speaking. Anxiety led to forgetfulness and careless actions, despite adequate preparation. Strategies to reduce anxiety included relaxation techniques and positive thinking. Lower anxiety students exhibited a wider range of coping strategies compared to highly anxious ones, who tended to employ monotonous and avoidance strategies. These



findings suggest the importance of addressing individual anxiety levels and teaching diverse coping mechanisms to alleviate FLA in language learning contexts.

Öztürk et al., (2021) investigated the impact of incorporating mini-speeches, presentations, and scaffolded feedback on reducing English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' speaking anxiety. The participants were 52 university freshman students, and data were collected over a 14-week oral communication course. Pre- and post-tests using a foreign language speaking anxiety scale (FLSAS) were conducted for quantitative analysis, along with qualitative data from reflection reports and a focus group interview. Results showed a significant decrease in participants' EFL speaking anxiety by around thirty percent. Feedback sessions were particularly effective, leading to increased self-confidence, more speaking opportunities, and learning from mistakes. The study employed a mixed-method design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, to comprehensively understand the impact of the intervention. The process involved mini-speeches, presentations, and scaffolded feedback, resulting in decreased anxiety levels among EFL learners.

Inada (2021), aimed to investigate how teachers in Japan managed students' foreign-language classroom anxiety (FLCA) to improve their communication skills, particularly in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with six teachers and identified various strategies they used to decrease students' anxiety levels. These strategies included increasing opportunities for speaking practice, creating a risk-free classroom environment, utilizing group dynamics effectively, and employing an English-only rule in the classroom. The teachers also suggested ways to decrease stress levels and increase speaking practice through pair/group work. Overall, the study emphasized the importance of creating a positive learning environment and encouraging students to be independent learners. The findings suggest that implementing these strategies could help decrease students' anxiety levels and improve their communication skills in the target language.

Ahmed et al., (2022), investigated the effects of game-based learning on Iranian EFL learners' language anxiety and motivation. Fifty-eight intermediate EFL participants were divided into control and experimental groups. Questionnaires were administered as pre-tests, followed by game-based learning for the experimental group and traditional instruction for the control group. Post-tests revealed reduced anxiety and increased motivation in the experimental group. The results support previous research on



the effectiveness of game-based learning in language education, showing improvements in vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and speech act learning. The study suggests that game-based learning can enhance motivation, reduce anxiety, and improve language learning outcomes among EFL learners.

With a survey methodology, Öztürk (2021) sought to investigate students' metacognitive listening methods, listening anxiety, and potential relationships between these two research topics in English as a foreign language (EFL) courses. Using convenience sampling, the study's participants were 112 first-year students enrolled in a listening and comprehension course at a Turkish university. They have an upper-intermediate proficiency level. There were 45 male pupils and 67 female students, ages ranging from 18 to 20. The Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale was utilized to gauge participants' listening anxiety, and the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire was employed to determine which strategies they applied. Descriptive statistics and a statistical tool were used to analyze the gathered data. The results showed that the participants' foreign language listening anxiety was moderate. Problem-solving strategies were shown to be the most frequently utilized metacognitive listening strategies, whilst mental translation strategies were found to be the least frequently used. Additionally, a weak positive correlation was discovered between the individuals' use of listening strategies and their level of listening anxiety. Moreover, there was no discernible difference in the kinds of metacognitive listening strategies used by low, moderate, and high anxiety learners.

The objectives of Abdurrahman and Rizqi (2020) were to pinpoint the precise times when students experience the greatest levels of anxiety, look into their coping mechanisms, and note how these mechanisms vary depending on the stage of language learning at which the students are. Five 18–20-year-old non-English majors from two distinct classes at a public institution in Indonesia participated in the study, which involved them giving English presentations. Two English language teachers assisted the authors as they served as observers and interviewers for the course of three weeks of this qualitative study, which was divided into three sessions. The results indicate that they exhibited varying degrees of nervousness, which led to multiple mishaps throughout the presentation. Those with high anxiety levels tended to use coping mechanisms that were repetitive and resignation-based. According to this study, before starting a new term or semester, teachers should consider how anxious their pupils are. When dealing with extremely nervous learners, they can introduce them to different coping mechanisms.



Meigouni and Shirkhani (2020) researched the oral communication strategies (OCS) used by Iranian intermediate EFL learners and the correlation between these strategies' use and the learners' anxiety levels and self-efficacy views. In order to do this, convenience sampling was used to choose 160 individuals. There were 88 female and 72 male participants in the sample. Participants' ages ranged from eighteen to thirty-five. The Oral Communication Strategy Inventory, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, the General Self-Efficacy Questionnaire, and the Quick Placement Test were the four tools used. Furthermore, the findings indicated a substantial negative correlation between the learners' anxiety level and OCS and a significant positive correlation between the learners' OCS and their self-efficacy views. The results suggest that OCS can help EFL learners feel more confident in their abilities and experience less anxiety.

Asmali and Sayin (2020) investigated whether teaching English songs may improve students' performance on foreign language exams and reduce classroom anxiety among foreign language learners. There were 161 tenth graders (16–17 years old in Turkey) among the participants. The study commenced with the administration of a pre-test, the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS), which identified the participating classes as high anxiety (two classes) and low anxiety (two courses). In two experimental classrooms, four songs selected by the students through voting were taught to them over the course of four weeks. The design included a post-test as well. The findings showed that teaching students' favorite English songs in regular English sessions reduced FLCA for all students, while those with greater anxiety levels benefited more. Additionally, the results indicated that using song instruction improved students' performance on foreign language exams because there was a drop in FLCA.

The impact of cooperative learning activities on the anxiety levels and attitude of English-speaking EFL learners was studied by Topkçu and Başbay (2020). Nine 18–19-year-old preparatory school students with a B1 proficiency level who enrolled in the English Language and Literature Department of a state university in Turkey participated in this six-week action research study. The pre-test and post-test measures were the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale and the Attitudes Towards English Course Scale. Data was also gathered through focus group interviews and weekly evaluation forms. The results imply that the fear of making mistakes is the primary cause of worry. Anxiety can also be caused by incorrect



vocabulary choice, mispronounced words, and possibly even by mockery from peers. Students believe that preparatory strategies, such as learning about the subject and preparing oneself for vocabulary selection and sentence structure, are crucial. Learners look for welcoming, engaging classrooms that eliminate or drastically lower their fear. Additionally, the findings demonstrated that group work activities reduced students' fear and fostered a favorable attitude toward speaking in a classroom setting.

CONCLUSION

All in all, mastering English as a foreign language is an achievable goal. However, learning how to deal with anxiety plays a relevant role in a successful learning process. Students tend to feel anxious at the beginning of planned presentations or when selected randomly. The situation gets worse when they are corrected by teachers right in the middle of the speech, since anxiety rises, as a result of their low level of proficiency and the pressure of the limited time they have to perform. When the anxiety is high, learners can not remember what to say even if they prepared beforehand. The main reason for it is that they fear mistaking when selecting the words, or even mispronouncing them, as they believe their classmates could find that laughable.

Among the strategies that help learners to reduce anxiety are: feeling relaxed and having positive thoughts, practicing on a daily basis, listening to music, playing games, and watching videos, which also increases self-confidence. They can also research deeply on the subject, the vocabulary and sentence structure to use. On the other hand, teachers also play a significant role to help learners cope with anxiety by providing effective feedback, giving them more opportunities to speak in pairs or groups, to self-correct, teaching them using songs of their choice, and helping them use oral communication strategies. All of these can be combined with a classroom environment where students feel free to make mistakes but feel welcome to engage and learn at the same time.

Besides, to engage pupils successfully in the English learning process instructors must use the dynamic of the group efficiently, and motivate them to communicate only in English, which will ultimately lead them towards the goal of educators around the world, which is to see students become independent learners.



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