LANGAUGE ANXIETY AND THE CLASSROOM ELEMENTS THAT PROVOKE IT

by

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Declaration of Authorship

I declare that this (project/thesis/dissertation) is my own work and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain material published or written by a third party, except where permission has been obtained and/or appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.

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Dedication

To Elaine k. Horwitz, your soul, passion, and dedication for teaching and exploring second language learners inspired me to dive more into a subject that is close to my heart, which is anxiety. May your soul rest in peace!

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, who has been my source of inspiration and strength throughout my life. I hope that this achievement will complete the dream that you had for me all those years.

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Abstract

Language anxiety is prevalent in second\foreign language classrooms. This study investigates the language skills that provoke students' anxiety. It also explores which of the three types of classroom configurations (pair work, small group work, or whole group discussion) provoke the most language anxiety in second language classes. The study involved 28 "Bridge Program" students who were taking non-credit English classes to increase their proficiency level in the four language skills in order to pass the necessary requirements to be accepted into university credit-bearing classes. To conduct this study, two data collection cycles were used to answer the research questions. For cycle one, participants self-reported their levels of language anxiety pre- and post- task completion using an "axometer", which can be referred as an "anxiety thermometer". An axometer is a scale with a range of values from one to ten, whereby marking "one" means participants were self-reporting that they were 'not anxious at all', while marking "ten" meant 'extremely anxious'. For cycle two, participants were asked to self-report their anxiety levels after spending ten minutes in whole group discussion, small group work, and pair work. The results of cycle one demonstrated that students reported that writing is the language skill that provokes the greatest anxiety. Moreover, it indicated that students are less anxious when the task is accomplished regardless of their fear of losing marks, errors, and social anxiety pre and post the task. Thus, students are leaning toward a 'downward trend' which refers to having a lower anxiety level after completing a given task. In the second phase of the study where the question involved participants' feelings toward group configurations, students self-reported that small group work provoked the greatest amount of anxiety, while working in pairs incited the lowest.

Keywords: anxiety, second language anxiety, classroom configuration, Axometer, upward trend, downward trend, self-report, ESL\EFL

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Before addressing the linguistic and pedagogical questions of this study, we need to ask a few very basic questions: What is anxiety? What is language anxiety? Is there such a thing as 'second language anxiety'? The Encyclopedia of Psychology (2000) defines anxiety as an emotion characterized by strong feelings of tension, worries, and some physical changes such as increased blood pressure, sweating, trembling, dizziness, and rapid heartbeat. In other words, it is characterized as an internal dysfunction that some individuals suffer emotionally or socially. That is, anxiety is a type of worry that mainly focuses on the fear of the future (Asif, 2017), while language anxiety is a mental block that language learners experience due to anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Researchers believe that language anxiety is mainly related to one's self-perception toward acquiring a second language. Horwitz et al. (1986) emphasized that language anxiety is a complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning. In other words, the uniqueness of the learning process effects students' willingness to learn the second language. If students are learning in a positive environment, they will achieve. However, when students are having negative feelings in the classroom, they may be demotivated to learn and it could cause anxiety. Thus, researchers believe that students' beliefs, attitudes, and self-perception play a significant role in second language anxiety.

There are various elements that trigger students' anxiety within the classroom. First, the fear of communication, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation work in tandem to produce adverse emotion (Horwitz et al., 1986). Second, using the second language in the classroom can be anxiety provoking because EFL\ESL learners struggle to use accurate pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary due to their first language (Wang, 2014). Third, one's beliefs play an important role in achievement; therefore, learners' and teachers' beliefs could be a major contributor to language anxiety (Yong, 1991). For instance, if students are willing to acquire the language and the teacher supports and accepts them regardless of their errors, students' motivation level will increase. Finally, personality plays a role. Hanifa (2018) proposed that affective factors include students' feelings, personality, and self-perception. Thus, students worrying about being called upon or mocked because of their differences is anxiety provoking.

Despite the various triggers for language anxiety, there is not any research that focus on focus on the role of the four language skills and classroom configurations in provoking

students' anxiety, especially in the gulf region. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore students' anxiety levels in the four language skills of speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Additionally, the study investigates three types of classroom configurations used widely in second\foreign language classrooms and their role in provoking anxiety (pair work, group work, and whole class discussion). At the end, this study provides classroom instructors with insight on effective ways to help students lower their anxiety in the classroom by making conscious choices that take into consideration learners' language anxiety.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the following chapter, key concepts will be defined such as anxiety, second language anxiety, and classroom configurations. The sub-sections describe anxious learners, explore types of anxiety, factors that provoke anxiety among learners, and the effects of anxiety on students. Finally, the last section of this chapter offers an overview of the benefits and drawbacks of three classroom configurations, which are whole class discussion, group, and pair work.

2.1. Introduction to Anxiety

2.1.1. Concept of anxiety.

Anxiety can be defined on several levels: state, trait, or situation specific. As a state, The Encyclopedia of Psychology (2000) defines anxiety as an emotion characterized by strong feelings of tension, worries, and some physical changes such as increased blood pressure, sweating, trembling, dizziness, and rapid heartbeat. In other words, it is characterized as an internal dysfunction that some individuals suffer emotionally or socially. Atkinson et al. (1971) define anxiety as a state of apprehension, a vague fear that is associated with an object, or a situation (As cited in Asif, 2017, p.160). Anxiety can be classified as a phobia, which is feeling of fear (Asif, 2017).

2.1.2. Anxious learners.

To begin describing anxious language learners, the following story of the 'cracked pot' is analogous to the plight of anxious language learners. Despite the growing of beautiful flowers, the cracked pot feels distress and ashamed of its flaws (As cited in Gregersen & Maclntyre, 2014, p.1-2).

A water bearer carried two equal, large pots over his shoulder. However, one of the pots had a crack on the side. At the end of the walk from the stream to the bearer's master's house, the water in the cracked pot always arrived half full. This situation occurred over two years, where the bearer delivered one-and-a-half pots full of water. The perfect pot was proud of fulfilling its purpose each day, which is delivering a full pot. While the cracked pot was ashamed of its flaw and imperfection of delivering half the water.

After two years of delivering half the water, the cracked pot spoke to the bearer expressing its negative feelings by saying 'I am ashamed of myself and I want to apologize to you.'

The bearer replied 'Why? What are you ashamed of'?

The cracked pot said 'for these past years, I have only delivered half of my load because of the crack that kept the water leaking all the way back to the master's house. Because of my flaw, you do not get full value from your efforts.' The water bearer felt sorry but he asked the pot to notice the growing flowers along the walking path.

On the way back, the cracked pot noticed the beautiful growing flowers on his side of the path. The water bearer said to the pot 'did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, and not on the other's pot side? I have always known your flaw and I used it to grow these flowers which have permitted me to decorate the master's table. You have watered the flowers every day on the way back, without you the master would never have these beautiful flowers at his house.'

This story parallels the lived experiences of many language learners because even though positive outcomes are evident in their language development, they still feel ashamed of their flaws. Anxious learners feel distress and tend to focus on their flaws, potential failures, and others' perceptions about them rather than their own efforts and accomplishments (Gregersen & Maclntyre, 2014).

2.1.3. Defining language anxiety.

Besides being a general state of emotion, anxiety can also be situation specific, as is evidenced in language learning anxiety. Some language learners claim to have a mental block while learning a foreign language; however, they may also be highly motivated in other learning situations (Horwitz et al., 1986). Language anxiety deals with learners' psychology; their feelings, self-esteem, and self-confidence (Clement, 1980; Trang, 2012). In addition, Howritz et al. (1986) emphasized that 'language anxiety is a complex of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process (p.129).' Language learners use the language to express themselves in the classroom; therefore, self-expression is linked to self-concept. In other words, Maclntyre and Gardner (1991) define language anxiety as the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when using a second language for the purpose of self-expression. Adding to that, Language anxiety is the psychological tension that learners experience while performing a task (Trang, 2012; Zhang, 2001). According to Salem and Al Dyiar (2014) foreign language anxiety is linked to students' fear of failing in achieving their goals. Researchers believe that students' beliefs, attitudes, and self-perception play an important role in increasing or decreasing anxiety.

Language anxiety can be classified into three stages. The first stage refers to the input stage. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) state that learners' affective filter at the input stage must be low so that learners can receive the content without any interference. According to Asif (2017) the second stage refers to the process stage, which can also cause anxiety especially when the information is highly complex, and students rely on their memory rather than using the language communicatively. The final stage is considered the most anxiety provoking, which is the output stage (Salem & Al Dyiar, 2012). Students are required to produce and use the language in order to communicate. The authors also emphasized that during the output stage, students' anxiety is varied based on their proficiency level.

2.1.4. Types of anxiety.

Anxiety can be a general term used to describe anxious learners; thus, it is important to distinguish the three types of anxiety (Kralova & Soradova, 2015). Horwitz (2001) classified anxiety into three categories: trait, state, and situation-specific anxiety. According to Riasati (2011) trait anxiety is the tendency of being an anxious individual regardless of the situation to which a person is exposed. In other words, trait anxiety is linked to personality traits or persons' characteristics, which can be permanent and difficult to cope with (Scovel, 1978; Kralova & Soradova, 2015). Riasati (2011) emphasized that a person who deals with trait anxiety will more likely be hindered during the second/foreign language process.

The second type of anxiety referred to state anxiety (Riasati, 2011). In other words, state anxiety is related to a specific situation that learners can be exposed to during the learning process (Spielberger, 1983; Kralove & Soradove, 2015). For example, Riasati (2011) exemplified state anxiety as that which can be aroused in students in the classroom when they are called on by the teacher. Learners might not be ready or prepared to answer. However, the author emphasized that learners could overcome state anxiety over time based on the learning environment.

The third type of anxiety that has been proposed by Woodrow (2006) and Messi (2012) is situation-specific and it is mainly aroused by a specific event (as cited in Sanaei et al., 2015). Researchers believe that language anxiety is considered situation-specific because it occurs continuously in the learning process of a second/foreign language context, specifically, when learners perform or use the language (Horwitz, 2001; Maclntyre & Gardner, 1993; Baran-Lucarz, 2011).

2.1.5. Factors generating language anxiety.

To identify where anxiety initially starts from, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) propose that 'initially, anxiety is an undifferentiated, negative affective responses to some experience in language class' and that 'with repeated occurrences, anxiety becomes reliably associated with the language class and differentiated from other context (p.297).' Thus, the following section highlights the major factors that trigger students' anxiety within the classroom. Several factors are related to students' personality traits and beliefs. Other factors could be related to the teacher, such as the way instructions are provided or having a clash of beliefs between the learner and teacher.

Horwitz (1986) established three aspects related to foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. According to the author, communication is the most significant aspect of the language that provokes anxiety. Kralove and Soradova (2015) define communication apprehension as the fear of talking to and in-front of others. To elaborate more, communication apprehension is a type of shyness characterized by the fear of communication with others (Horwitz et al., 1986; Asif, 2017). Communication can be anxiety provoking when learners suffer because of reduced ability to retrieve vocabulary and difficulty in understanding instruction; thus, learners' willingness to communicate is negatively affected (Riasati, 2011). In terms of pronunciation issues, Wang (2014) emphasized that EFL/ESL learners struggle to use the accurate pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary due to their L1. Therefore, students are highly anxious to produce the second language in communicative contexts.

In language classes, performance evaluation is common and can lead to test anxiety (Asif, 2017). Test anxiety reflects learners' fear of failing to perform (Kralova & Soradova, 2015). Various types of activities and tests used in the classroom by the teacher provoke anxiety, specifically, speaking activities and assessments (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). Horwitz et al., (1986) proposed another type of anxiety provocation, which is fear of negative evaluation. The authors define it as "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (p.128).

Yong (1991) cited that learners' and teachers' beliefs are major contributors to language anxiety. For example, if a learner believes that with several practice exposures, effective learning will be achieved, they will be highly disappointed when that does not happen. Because teachers are the key source in the classroom, their beliefs, and expectations

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about learning a language are important, but when teachers' beliefs are negative or clash with those of their learners, it can be a major source of anxiety (Young, 1991). In sum, unrealistic beliefs held by the teacher or learners about themselves and/or the learning experience are anxiety provoking.

Hanifa (2018) proposed that affective factors include students' feelings, personality, self-perceptions, and motivation in the classroom. Learners' worrying about being called "wrong, stupid, or incomprehensible" is anxiety provoking, especially when performing speaking tasks (Brown, 2001; Wang, 2014). In other words, language learners fear that others will mock them because of their differences in terms of pronunciation, background, and culture. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) believe that anxiety is often generated by ones' negative, self-degrading thoughts and the fear of potential failure.

A final source of anxiety within the classroom is error correction (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). Learners believe that teachers' main role in the classroom is to indicate their errors, which can lead to feeling ashamed or embarrassed. Gregersen (2003) emphasized that when learners make errors in the classroom, they tend to become more anxious, and participate less because they are trying to maintain or protect their social image among their colleagues.

2.1.6. Significance of anxiety in language learning.

"Foreign language classroom anxiety results in a litany of specific manifestations that work together to debilitate learners' progress" (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014, p.6). This section highlights the effects of language anxiety on students in four categories: physical, emotional\affective, linguistic\cognitive, and social.

Anxious learners experience various physical symptoms when their anxiety is high such as increased heartbeat, sweating, tension, and trembling (Horwitz et al., 1986). However, Gregersen and MacIntyre (2014) believe that these symptoms are caused because of the negative thoughts that learners experience when they assume that they are going to fail a task. Therefore, thoughts of failure create an emotional response which leads to physical responses in anxious learners.

Self-esteem and self-confidence are linked to anxiety because students who have high levels of anxiety will feel embarrassed and shy to interact with others (Riasati, 2011). According to Gregersen and MacIntyre (2014) anxious learners experience insecurities when

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speaking, panic at being unprepared, worry that they will fail, and being overwhelmed for various reasons such as grammatical or pronunciation aspects.

Maclntyre (1998) emphasized that anxiety can affect students' proficiency level because when students are anxious in a language classroom, their motivation level decreases and will affect students' willingness to participate or learn. Riasati (2011) emphasized that students with anxiety feel less motivated to participate in communicative activities in the classroom and are less interested to talk with their colleagues. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), students with high levels of anxiety are unwilling to communicate in the classroom. Therefore, they do not share their personal experiences in the classroom. In addition, Horwitz et al. (1986) emphasize that anxious learners will remain silent in the classroom for the majority of the time because students want to maintain their social image among their colleagues. Because anxious students fear of being judged on their pronunciation or accent, their social skills will be affected.

2.2. Language Anxiety Across Skills

In ESL\EFL classrooms, speaking is considered the skill that most often provokes higher levels of students' anxiety (Kim, 2009; Price, 1991; Gregersen, 2014). Suleimenova (2012) emphasized that speakers of a second language experience feelings of stress and nervousness while communicating in the target language, and learners claim that a 'mental block' occurs during speaking activities whether in formal or informal situations.

Speaking anxiety can occur in ESL\EFL classrooms for various reasons. Based on a study conducted by Riasati (2011), students are anxious about making errors because they lack adequate preparation time in the classroom and have low self-confidence. In addition, Tien (2018) indicated that learners speaking anxiety is affected because of their grammar accuracy, vocabulary knowledge, pronunciation, and fluency.

Even though learners experience their highest level of anxiety while speaking in ESL\EFL classroom, other language skills are also anxiety provoking in these classes (Gregersen & Maclntyre, 2014).

2.2.1. Listening.

For effective communication, listening is an important skill that learners must obtain. According to Rivers (1981) listening is a transitory event in which learners translate the words in their mind into an oral context. In other words, learners respond to spoken words that they tend to translate using their cognitive skills. Therefore, if students lack vocabulary

knowledge, the message in the oral activity could be misunderstood (As cited in Gregersen & Maclntyre, 2014).

There are various reasons why listening can be an anxiety provoking task to second language learners. Gregersen and Maclntyre (2012) believe that the speed of native speakers while communicating is one of the key components for anxiety. Hence, second language learners tend to find it difficult to understand every word of the speaker. In addition, listening tasks can provoke students' anxiety not only when the vocabulary is unfamiliar, but also when the task is difficult to achieve (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Golchi, 2012). Finally, Golchi (2012) also emphasize that on standardized tests, the listening section is one of the most anxiety provoking for students because the speaker tends to use difficult vocabulary and speak quickly. Thus, students do not follow the intended message very well.

2.2.2. Reading and writing.

Reading anxiety occurs when the text is difficult and needs several cognitive skills such as stretching and stressing attention, memory, and compression (Sellers, 2000; Gregersen and Maclntyre, 2014). Saito et al. (1999) proposed that unfamiliar scripts or writing texts are the major source of anxiety in ESL\EFL because students experience difficulties decoding the words (As cited in Zhao et al., 2013). According to Horwitz et al. (1999), reading provokes students' anxiety when the materials are related to specific cultures that are not familiar to ESL\EFL students.

In terms of writing in a second language, learners are required to use the target language to express their ideas and thoughts which could be anxiety provoking for several reasons. According to a study conducted by Hassan (2011), students with low self-esteem experience higher levels of in writing anxiety because they are not confident in delivering their ideas (as cited in Kara, 2013). In addition, writing is a skill that learners must acquire and it needs time and effort (Golda, 2015). The author also emphasized that students who had less exposure to English causes anxiety among ESL\EFL students. Since writing is a skill that students are required to acquire in academic settings, they need to learn how to organize their ideas, gather information, and finally combine ideas to produce effective writing texts (Kara, 2013; Golda, 2015).

2.3. Classroom Configurations

Researchers and language educators believe that creating a communicative environment is a powerful way to facilitate learning in second language classrooms (Fryer et

al., 2020; Jeon, 2022). In other words, students learn effectively when they are having a conversation in the classroom, especially with their peers. Therefore, the following section will introduce the most common classroom configurations that are used in second/foreign language classrooms; they are 1) whole class discussion, 2) group, and 3) pair work.

Whole class discussion is referred to as dialogic discourse, academically productive talk, or accountable talk (O'Connor et al., 2016). In other words, whole class discussion is carried out when students share their thoughts and ideas in a communicative setting with the entire class.

Group work is referred to as collaborative learning, which is defined as a variety of instructional practices where a number of students (roughly four to five) work together to apply their knowledge of the course material for the purpose of answering questions, solving problems, or engaging in projects (Colbeck et al., 2000; Monk-Turner & Payne, 2005).

Are two heads better than one? This is a question raised by Taylor (2009) in order to investigate the potential benefits and drawbacks of pair work. Pair work is defined as the interaction that occurs among two speakers to achieve shared goals (Hyde, 1993; Mishra & Oliver, 1998).

2.3.1 Benefits of classroom configuration.

According to Johnson and Johnson (1997), cooperative interaction in group work is essential for demonstrating and acquiring effective skills (as cited in Baskin et al., 2005). Group members gain various skills such as task prioritization, time management, teamwork spirit, effective communication skills, and it also improves students' abilities to express themselves (Jones, 2007).

Chang and Mao (1999) believe that students learn more in group work than the traditional teaching strategies because students are interacting with other group members, which facilitates learning. According to Harrison (1999), several classroom activities are more effective when they are accomplished as a group because members can share their various perspectives, ideas, and thoughts to solve a problem and that having these different perspectives is a powerful tool to making effective decisions (as cited in Baskin et al., 2005).

In terms of social benefits, working and interacting with others fosters students' abilities to socialize, especially in safe environments because they can share their ideas and thoughts without having the fear of being judged (Monk-Turner & Payne, 2005). Socializing with group members can increase students' motivation toward learning (Davis, 1984;

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Hansen, 2006). Interacting will not only improve social skills, but it also develops negotiation of meaning skills (Pica et al., 1991; Mishra & Oliver, 1998). The authors believe that negotiation of meaning improves comprehensible input and output among speakers.

In terms of thinking skills, Jones (2007) emphasized that working with others promotes deep learning qualities; for instance, students develop effective cognitive abilities. When students develop cognitive skills, it allows them to self-evaluate as well as assess other group members (Jones, 2007). Students in group work activities are usually working on brainstorming ideas, solving problems, and evaluating/assessing their own learning; therefore, their critical thinking skills will improve (Monk-Turner & Payne, 2005). Students often favor working with their partner because they have to reflect on their own learning, especially when receiving feedback on grammatical errors (Dobao, 2012; Kosinski & Azkarai, 2020).

2.3.2. Drawbacks of classroom configuration.

Even though working in the three classroom configurations have various benefits, others may argue that there are some drawbacks to each one of them. First, according to Jones (2007), many learners prefer working individually because they fear being judged. Second, group work could be time consuming, especially for courses that follow a specific timetable (Monk-Turner & Payne, 2005). Thus, some educators rely on traditional instructional strategies such as lecturing. Third, Millie and Cottell (1998) argued that teachers struggle grading individual students when they are working in teams (as cited in Monk-Turner & Payne, 2005). Fourth, in ESL/EFL classrooms, if students are using a similar mother tongue, Harmer (1991) and Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) argued that students will use their first language to communicate in group rather than the target language (as cited in Vela et al., 2013). Finally, in regard to whole class discussion, the activity only lasts for a few minutes and only students with high levels of proficiency participate, while others remain silent during the discussion (Applebee et al., 2003; O'Connoret al., 2016).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study explored the following questions:

1. Which skill provokes language students to experience the greatest anxiety in EAP classes?

2. What group configuration provokes the most language anxiety in EAP classes?

3.1. Participants

The population of this study was composed of 28 students divided into two groups of 11 and 17 who were enrolled in a non-credit English for Academic Purposes class at a small university in the United Arab Emirates. The purpose of this "Bridge Program" is to increase English proficiency in the four language skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in order to pass the necessary requirements to be accepted into university credit-bearing classes. For this, students must pass standardized tests such as TOFEL, AMSAT, and/or IETLS. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 20, came from a variety of countries, and spoke numerous languages, including different dialects of Arabic, Hindi, Bengali, Chinese, Urdu, and Malayalam. Twelve were female and the remaining 16 were male. Their proficiency level in English was high intermediate. Participants hoped to pursue a range of different careers upon termination of the program including psychology, computer science, finance, and engineering, among others.

3.2. Instruments and Procedures

According to Burns (2009), action research is an effective way to identify issues and problems that affect the teaching and learning process. It also help educators bring changes within the classroom that produce positive outcomes. Therefore, this study is considered action research, which aims to identify two aspects of the classroom that provoke students' anxiety level.

To answer the question concerning the variability in levels of language anxiety provoked via reading, writing, speaking, or listening, the researcher calculated the difference between the pre- and post- assessments to ascertain whether the trend of the learner's anxiety was upward, downward, or stayed the same. To explore the role of group configurations in the provocation of language anxiety, participants responded in numerical form on a scale from one to ten, but rather than responding as a pre and post measure, they self-reported after having experienced the configuration in question for ten minutes. In both cases, participants

were also given an open-ended written interview question asking them to elaborate on their numerical response. These answers provided narrative data for coding into reoccurring themes. Before data collection began, IRB approval was granted and informed consent was provided by participants.

For cycle one, participants self-reported their levels of language anxiety pre- and post-task completion using an "axometer" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991) or in other words, "anxiety thermometers". "An axometer is a single-item, visual analog scale with a range of values from one to ten printed along the side of a thermometer figure" (p. 298). It is a pictoral representation of a thermometer on which participants drew a line to indicate their self-perceived level of anxiety. By marking "one" participants were self-reporting that they were 'not anxious at all', while marking "ten" meant 'extremely anxious.'

Starting in the sixth week of the semester and over a period of two weeks, participants attended four classes under four different conditions (see Table 1 below). The variables manipulated were the language skill being focused upon and the group configuration in which the classroom tasks were carried out. Before each class began, participants were asked to mark their level of language anxiety on a blank anxometer as a pre-test measure. The class was then carried out using the conditions from Table 1 and they were then again asked to self-report their level of anxiety on a different blank anxometer as a post-test measure. The differences of anxiety levels pre and post the activities were calculated to ascertain whether anxiety increased or decreased, and to what extent. On the sheet of paper containing the post-test axometer, there was also a space for participants to further elaborate on why they answered with the number that they indicated.

Table 1

Language Skill and Group Configuration Conditions by Class Period

Skill	Time	Activity description
Reading	30 minutes	In pairs, participants read two passages and worked on an activity sheet. Subsequently, in a whole class discussion led by the instructor, participants shared their responses.
Writing	30 minutes	In groups, participants worked on an essay (topic provided by instructor: "Working from Home"). Each group wrote an outline for their essay, including the main ideas, pros, cons, and recommendations.

Listening	30 minutes	Individually, participants worked on three listening tasks that included listening to recordings and then answering related questions. Subsequently, in a whole class discussion led by the instructor, participants shared their responses.
Speaking	30 minutes	Individually, students made five minutes presentations to the whole class.

For cycle two, to answer the research question pertaining to their levels of language anxiety concerning group configurations, participants were asked to rate their anxiety levels on an axometer after spending ten minutes in whole group discussions, small group work and pair work. Like the axometers for the language skills, the sheets of paper with the axometer on it also provided space for participants to respond to an open-ended question about why each person felt as they did. Subsequently, percentages were calculated for each of the three group configurations based on the number of participants who reported the greatest anxiety in each specific arrangement.

In both cases, the narrative data from the open-ended question was collated and coded for common themes to justify reasons and factors generating participants' anxiety in the classroom.

Chapter 4: Results

The following section provides the results of the data obtained from the axometer pertaining to participants' levels of anxiety concerning the four language skills and the three kinds of group configurations.

4.1. Language Skills Results

Table 2 contains the results the average anxiety level of each language skill that participants self-reported in the pre-and post-test. Table 3 contains the results of the trends of language anxiety that participants self-reported for each of the four language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. To obtain this data, the difference between the pre and post measures of language anxiety were calculated and placed in a table (See Appendix A). When the difference between pre- and post- tests was positive, this was considered an upward trend; when the difference was negative, this was deemed a downward trend. Those participants whose self-reported axometers showed no difference between pre- and post-measures were referred to as "no change". The number in parenthesis reflects the average number of points that anxiety increased or decreased among participants.

Table 2

Average Self-reported Pre-test Score by Participants for Each Skill

Reading	4.7
Writing	6.5
Listening	3.4
Speaking	6.4

Table 3

Language Skills Trends

	Upward trend	Downward trend	No change
Reading	6 (2.6)	15 (2.6)	7
Writing	5 (1.6)	15 (2.3)	8
Listening	6 (1.7)	14 (2.0)	8
Speaking	3	16	9

4.2. Classroom Configurations Results

Table 4 summarizes the percentage of participants who reported feeling the highest amount of anxiety from among each of the three group configurations.

Table 4

Percentage of Participants Reporting Highest Level of Anxiety Per Group Configuration

Whole class	18%
Small group	43%
Pair work	14%
Equal anxiety whole class and small group	25%

Chapter 5: discussion

The following section discusses the results of the data obtained from the axometer pertaining to participants' levels of anxiety concerning the four language skills as well as the results of the impact of the three kinds of group configurations on students' anxiety.

5.1. Language Skills Self-report

On a daily basis, we experience various events that could have positive or negative outcomes. Some people have the tendency to anticipate that the outcome will be negative, which could be a factor that triggers anxiety (Herwig et al., 2007). According to Leonard (2021), anticipatory anxiety refers to concern about a future event or situation. In other words, people with anticipatory anxiety feel anxious about a specific situation before the event takes place, and focusing on negative outcomes. For this reason, it was important to ascertain the level of anxiety that participants felt before the task began. This score, found in Table 2, represents participants' level of anticipatory anxiety. It is not surprising that the productive skills (writing and speaking) generated more anticipatory anxiety than the receptive skills (reading and listening) as this is consistent with previous research on the topic of which skills provoke the greatest anxiety. Notice from Table 2 that speaking and writing had very similar pre-test scores: 6.5 and 6.4, respectively, and that reading and listening trailed far behind with average scores of 4.7 and 3.4, respectively. Also, it is important to remember is that this study was done in the context of an academic writing course, so participants will likely perceive the writing skill as the one in particular on which they will be evaluated.

An individual's level of anxiety will vary after the event, either increasing or decreasing or remaining stable. An upward trend is indicative of feeling more anxious after the task; a downward trend reveals that students feel less anxious after accomplishing the task. The last type is where students pre- and post-anxiety measurement did not change. Table 3 shows the trends from pre-test to post-test—that is to say, it reveals how participants' level of anxiety changed once they had completed their tasks. The fact that there were more than double the number of positive trending results as compared to the negative trending results underscores the anticipatory nature of language anxiety. Before taking on the challenge of reading, writing, speaking, or listening in English participants were less anxious as they finished the task.

Participants' open-ended narrative responses provided various reasons for their anxiety level to increase or decrease after completing the given task in the four language skills. Some participants claimed that the environment and people in the classroom played a large role in their pre- post-anxiety levels. From their narratives, the majority of them dislike speaking or reading in front of others. Relatedly, participants also feared making errors, especially while preforming speaking and writing tasks because they assumed that neither their colleagues nor the teacher would understand the message they tried to deliver. Several participants feared losing grades, even if they completed the given tasks.

On the other hand, there were also other reasons that are related to external factors that increase or decrease students' anxiety. First, one student wrote that his low attention span was the main reason because he was easily distracted and maintained low levels of concentration while performing the task. Another stated that the amount of sleep they had is a factor for anxiety because it was an integral factor in being able to focus on the task or feel fatigue. Even though students in the bridge program had various reasons or factors for their level of anxiety, the majority believe that they feel good and comfortable when the task is completed.

5.2. Classroom Configurations Self-report

Participants were more anxious when they were required to work in small groups than working in pairs or in a whole group. In fact, 43% self-reported having the highest levels of anxiety on the axometer when working with a few other people. On the other hand, 18% of participants are the least comfortable when working with the whole group. The least amount of language anxiety felt among participants was when working in pairs. This group made up 14% of the sample population. Therefore, the less members that students engage with, the less anxious they feel.

Based on students' responses in the open-ended questions, there are several reasons that made them the most anxious when they are working in small groups. For instance, one student felt that group members did not take enough responsibilities, especially when the work was tough. Another participant reported that working with average proficiency level students provokes anxiety. Even though students agreed that working in group eased the work and made it faster to accomplish the task, participants also suggested that communicating with various personalities is difficult and that some group members argue when they have a disagreement. Finally, one participant commented that small groups were

the most anxiety provoking because sharing ideas with others is intimating and group members might not accept it.

Concerning the anxiety generated by whole class discussion, several reasons were provided for scoring in second place. For example, one participant felt comfortable discussing issues in class but was fearful that their answers might be wrong and lead to embarrassment. Another participant feared being called out, especially when they do not have an adequate answer. Still other students become distracted with whole group discussions. Several participants claimed to dislike communicating with the entire class and feel anxious by the large number of students participating and sharing their ideas. The number of students in the classroom could be the main reason that students feel anxious to share their own ideas which could be exacerbated by the fear of being unaccepted or unappreciated.

Working in pairs was the least anxiety-provoking of all the group configurations. Among the reasons is that it is easier to work with friends because they can communicate with one personality, whom they know very well. Working with one student was also perceived as being faster because there are fewer opinions with which they have to deal. Lastly, participants commented that making errors in front of one individual is less embarrassing than doing the same in a larger group. To conclude, the smaller number of students to work with, the less anxious is felt.

Chapter 6: Conclusion, Implications and Limitations

This section offers a brief summary of the findings of the two research questions. It also provides limitations and ideas for future research as well as implications for teachers.

6.1. Summary of Findings

The present study explored how the four language skills and classroom configurations can provoke students' language anxiety. Using several tasks given by the instructor, students self-reported their anxiety levels pre- and post-activities in the skills of writing, speaking, reading, and listening. In addition, group work, pair work, and whole class discussion were explored in order to investigate the most anxiety provoking situations in second\foreign language classrooms.

To sum up, the first question focused on the language skill that provokes students' anxiety in EAP classes. Productive skills (writing and speaking) provoked students' anxiety more than receptive skills (reading and listening). Based on the pre- and post-test given to students to measure their anxiety levels, the results indicated that regardless of the factors generating anxiety, students felt less anxious when they completed the given task, as demonstrated in the 'downward trend' that self-report results evidenced. This is a clear indication that much of language anxiety is anticipatory; this is to say, learners project that they will not achieve the results they desire, so they feel anxious. Once the task is complete, the results showed that most of learners' anxiety dissipates.

The second research question examined three types of classroom configurations that are widely used in ESL\EFL classrooms: group work, pair work, and whole class discussion. EAP students reported that working in small groups provoked the greatest anxiety—more than working in pairs or in a whole classroom discussion. Participants' preferences tended toward pair work.

6.2. Implications

Although language anxiety involves students' personal perception of the second language, teachers can play an effective role in lowering students' anxiety through various ways. First, teachers must acknowledge students' anxiety and factors that generate or provoke it using pre-tests, observations, one-on-one sessions, and introduction activities at the beginning of the course. For instance, students can create their own silhouettes that describe their personality and reflect on it through writing about their strength and weaknesses.

As cited in Gregersen and MacIntyre (2012), educators must remain cognizant that anxiety can cause various physical, emotional, linguistic, or social affects. The aforementioned point help teachers choose and design their materials that will be based on students' anxiety, interest, proficiency level, cultural and knowledge backgrounds. If students are highly anxious during speaking activities, the teachers could use small group work or a classroom configuration that will help students lower their anxiety.

Even though activities are chosen based on students' anxiety, teachers must take into consideration the way they assess students because the majority of second language learners are anxious about being judged. Informal assessment, self-assessment, peer-assessment, and games are effective to help students lower their fear of evaluation.

To sum up, teachers must be aware of students' anxiety and the factors that generates it. Then, create materials that suits their students in order to lower the anxiety level within the classroom configuration as well as the four language skills. Finally, creating positive relationship in the classroom will aid in lowering students' anxiety level. Thus, Young (1991) believe that the affective filter is low when students feel 'club membership' and 'target language group identification.'

6.3. Limitations

Even though the results of the study are not generalizable; it can be transferred to similar education context. Therefore, there are few limitations that makes the study more successful. First, group configuration data was collected only one time for each type of grouping. Future research might want to explore the classroom configurations in more than one or even a few sessions. The members of the group could be different in each session in order to investigate whether the members of the group have an effect on students' anxiety because some students worked with their friends; hence, they were less anxious to communicate with them. Additionally, future studies might want to explore each language skill using a specific classroom configuration. For instance, a speaking task could be given in group work, pair work and whole group settings and the same for listening, reading and writing. This would allow more nuanced findings.

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Appendix A

Language skills self-report results

Reading

	Pre	Post	Differences
Student #1	2	4	+2
Student #2	3	1	-1
Student #3	8	7	-1
Student #4	8	4	-4
Student #5	7	2	-5
Student #6	5	3	-2
Student #7	8	10	+2
Student #8	5	10	+5
Student #9	10	5	-5
Student #10	3	2	-1
Student #11	5	7	+2
Student #12	3	1	-2
Student #13	1	1	0
Student #14	1	1	0
Student #15	5	7	+2
Student #16	5	4	-1
Student #17	8	3	-5
Student #18	1	1	0
Student #19	10	7	-3
Student #20	6	6	0
Student #21	4	1	-3
Student #22	1	1	0
Student #23	3	2	-1
Student #24	2	2	0
Student #25	1	1	0
Student #26	3	2	-1
Student #27	8	9	+1

Student #28	5	4	-1

Writing

	Pre	Post	Differences
Student #1	4	3	-1
Student #2	10	10	0
Student #3	7	6	-1
Student #4	10	8	-2
Student #5	4	2	-2
Student #6	9	7	-2
Student #7	8	3	-3
Student #8	8	10	+2
Student #9	1	1	0
Student #10	7	5	-2
Student #11	6	9	+3
Student #12	10	4	-6
Student #13	1	1	0
Student #14	3	1	-2
Student #15	4	5	+1
Student #16	10	7	-3
Student #17	2	3	+1
Student #18	1	1	0
Student #19	6	6	0
Student #20	9	10	+1
Student #21	10	7	-3
Student #22	1	1	0
Student #23	5	4	-1
Student #24	8	6	-2
Student #25	1	1	0
Student #26	10	9	-1

Student #27	10	10	0
Student #28	8	4	-4

Listening

	Pre	Post	Differences
Student #1	3	4	+1
Student #2	6	8	+2
Student #3	5	3	-2
Student #4	7	8	+1
Student #5	1	2	+1
Student #6	3	2	-1
Student #7	3	6	+3
Student #8	4	2	-2
Student #9	5	3	-2
Student #10	7	5	-2
Student #11	9	5	-4
Student #12	1	1	0
Student #13	2	1	-1
Student #14	1	1	0
Student #15	4	6	+2
Student #16	6	3	-3
Student #17	6	1	-5
Student #18	2	1	-1
Student #19	7	4	-3
Student #20	2	1	-1
Student #21	1	1	0
Student #22	1	1	0
Student #23	1	1	0
Student #24	2	2	0
Student #25	1	1	0

Student #26	1	1	0
Student #27	3	2	-1
Student #28	2	1	-1

Speaking

	Pre	Post	Differences
Student #1	2	4	+2
Student #2	6	4	-2
Student #3	9	4	-5
Student #4	9	6	-3
Student #5	1	1	0
Student #6	1	1	0
Student #7	1	2	+1
Student #8	8	4	-4
Student #9	10	8	-2
Student #10	9	6	-3
Student #11	10	9	-1
Student #12	10	10	0
Student #13	1	1	0
Student #14	3	1	-2
Student #15	1	1	0
Student #16	7	1	-6
Student #17	9	3	-6
Student #18	6	1	-5
Student #19	10	8	-2
Student #20	9	10	+1
Student #21	10	9	-1
Student #22	1	1	0
Student #23	7	5	-2
Student #24	9	8	-1

Student #25	1	1	0
Student #26	10	10	0
Student #27	10	10	0
Student #28	10	3	-7

Table 3: classroom configurations self-report results

	Whole class discussion	Group work	Pair work
Student #1	0	5	2
Student #2	5	6	2
Student #3	0	4	2
Student #4	0	5	0
Student #5	3	1	0
Student #6	0	2	0
Student #7	0	7	2
Student #8	1	1	0
Student #9	1	0	2
Student #10	7	4	1
Student #11	9	0	5
Student #12	3	4	0
Student #13	6	6	0
Student #14	0	0	2
Student #15	0	4	3
Student #16	6	6	0
Student #17	5	7	4
Student #18	0	0	2
Student #19	8	8	7
Student #20	7	7	2
Student #21	5	5	4
Student #22	5	7	2
Student #23	0	5	2

Student #24	3	5	1
Student #25	7	4	5
Student #26	5	2	2
Student #27	10	10	6
Student #28	1	1	3

Vita

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