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TITLE OF THESIS:

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY: A RATIONALIZATION OF THE ANXIETY GAP
BETWEEN YEAR 1 AND YEAR 3 SPANISH UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT UWI
ST. AUGUSTINE

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Abstract

A student's emotional state can have an impact upon their ability to learn effectively as environments that promote stress and anxiety are likely to disrupt the brain's acquisition and retention of information. It is therefore imperative that students learn how to positively regulate their thought processes in order to benefit from any learning experience.

This research was designed to gauge and rationalize a theorized gap in foreign-language anxiety among fifty-three Year 1 (males=5, females=25) and Year 3 (males=7, females=16) Spanish undergraduate students at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. Primary research was done using questionnaires that collected a blend of quantitative and qualitative data related to the students' feelings towards both class-specific activities and their overall performance in the target language. Supplementary consultation was garnered via secondary research articles.

The main findings of the study indicated that FLA principally manifested itself in the relevant students as a result of apprehension towards communication and negative evaluation which thereby debilitated overall performance. Furthermore, the year one respondents were found to possess higher levels of anxiety. This per the research, was deduced as being linked to the idea that the third-year participants exhibited more confidence in their competence and a potentially higher level of metacognitive ability. Thus, it can be argued that the level of foreign-language anxiety experienced in year one Spanish undergraduate students, significantly decreased at year three due to several social factors.

Key Words: Foreign Language Anxiety, Metacognition, Spanish-language, Evaluative Anxiety, Facilitative Anxiety, Debilitative Anxiety.

Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES	5
LIST OF APPENDICES	7
INTRODUCTION	8
<i>Rationale</i>	9
<i>Thesis Statement</i>	9
<i>Parameters</i>	10
<i>Objectives</i>	10
<i>Methodology</i>	10
<i>Chapter Outline</i>	12
CHAPTER 1 – LITERATURE REVIEW	13
<i>Foreign Language Anxiety</i>	13
<i>Facilitative and Debilitative Anxiety</i>	14
<i>The Causes of Foreign Language Anxiety</i>	15
<i>Evaluative Anxiety</i>	17
<i>Conclusion</i>	18
CHAPTER 2 – RESULTS	19
<i>Question 2</i>	19
<i>Question 3</i>	20
<i>Question 4</i>	22
<i>Question 5</i>	23
<i>Questions 6-20</i>	25
<i>Questions 21-45</i>	29

CHAPTER 3 – DISCUSSION	32
<i>The Manifestation of Foreign Language Anxiety</i>	32
<i>Rationalizing the Anxiety Gap</i>	33
<i>Metacognition</i>	34
<i>Facilitative or Debilitative?</i>	35
CONCLUSION	36
<i>Limitations</i>	36
<i>Recommendations</i>	37
WORKS SITED	38
APPENDIX A	40

List of Figures

Fig.	<u>Title</u>	Page
1	Graph showing the average number of years spent studying Spanish between Year 1 and Year 3 students.	19
2	Graph indicating the average perceived level of performance in key Language components between Year 1 and Year 3 males.	20
3	Graph indicating the average perceived level of performance in key language components between Year 1 and Year 3 females.	21
4	Graph plotting the average perceived levels of anxiety among Year 1 males, across classroom activities.	26
5	Graph plotting the average perceived levels of anxiety among Year 1 females, across classroom activities.	27
6	Graph plotting the average perceived levels of anxiety among Year 3 males, across classroom activities.	28
7	Graph plotting the average perceived levels of anxiety among Year 3 females, across classroom activities.	29
8	Graph showing the average extent to which Year 1 and Year 3 students experienced communicative apprehension.	30
9	Stack graph indicating the extent to which Year 1 and Year 3 students perceived anxiety affected their performance	31
10	Pie chart illustrating whether Year 1 students felt fear of judgement from peers.	31

Table	<u>Title</u>	Page
1	Have you ever felt anxious while interacting in Spanish?	22
2	Methods to reduce anxiety- Year 1 suggestions.	23
3	Methods to reduce anxiety- Year 3 suggestions	24

List of Appendices

Appendix	<u>Title</u>	Page
A	Foreign Language Anxiety Questionnaire	

Introduction

As modern society has become increasingly globalized, the ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language has converted into an asset. Concurrently, multi-lingual communication has further become a necessity for sustainability and growth as the sectors of business and commerce, fundamental to the economic stability of Trinidad and Tobago, are continually influenced by foreign cultures and markets. Efficient foreign language acquisition is, therefore, a crucial investment.

The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, through its Confucius Language Learning Institute provides students with the opportunity to learn a plethora of languages thereby enriching the nation's communicative prowess. Furthermore, this opportunity has presented itself in several courses such as the Spanish Language Programme, which seeks to prepare students with the oral, written and auditory skills needed for future employment endeavours.

Nevertheless, whilst acquiring these abilities are seemingly advantageous, from an academic perspective, the foreign language learning process has also been associated with the drawback of promoting anxiety. In fact, Young (qtd. in Occhipinti 6) stated that speaking in a foreign language was often cited by students as an anxiety provoking experience. Hence, the research being conducted investigates and rationalizes the latter phenomenon between year one and year three Spanish undergraduate students at the above-mentioned institute, as a means of understanding foreign language anxiety, its effects and how it can be improved to enhance a student's language acquisition process.

Rationale

The motivation for this study was inspired by the researcher's personal experience with anxiety as a result of furthering her education in the Spanish language at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. This observation thus prompted questions among fellow colleagues, some of whom shared similar sentiments but noted that their apprehensions eased as they progressed throughout their three-year course. It was then considered whether this anxiety was common and to what extent it either improved or worsened over the duration of the degree. Year one and year three Spanish undergraduate students, were thereby selected for the purpose of a comparative study that could observe how the former and latter differed on the anxiety spectrum.

Having established this, the researcher believes that it is essential to develop a better understanding of foreign language anxiety in order to improve the foreign language learning process among students. This research therefore seeks to explore this facet and enhance current documentation on the matter.

Thesis Statement

Within the context of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, it can be argued that the level of foreign-language anxiety experienced in year one Spanish undergraduate students, significantly decreased at year three due to several social factors.

Parameters

This study seeks to investigate and rationalize the foreign language anxiety gap between a total of sixty (n = 60) year one and year three Spanish undergraduate students of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine over the period of an academic year. Representative sample sizes were chosen for each group to facilitate the timely completion of the research paper.

The following dissertation incorporates a working understanding of foreign language anxiety, the factors that influence its prevalence among students, and the strategies that can be implemented to help alleviate this issue.

Objectives

- To identify the main causes of foreign language anxiety among students.
- To rationalize the decrease in anxiety from year one to year three.
- To uncover possible solutions to language acquisition challenges, beneficial to both students and instructors.

Methodology

The genre of the following investigation can be classified as socio-psychological in nature as according to Baron et al., it seeks to understand the causes of individual behaviour within a social context (6). Moreover, it incorporates the manner in which feelings, beliefs, and goals are constructed and how psychological facets, in turn, can influence an individual's internal and external interactions.

This yearlong empirical study conducted at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, included both primary and secondary research, with the focus aimed at examining and rationalizing the foreign language anxiety gap between year one and year three Spanish undergraduate students. It was believed that the use of a multi-faceted approach would better aid the researcher in attaining a holistic understanding of this concept within the field of foreign language acquisition. The primary source of information was gathered using questionnaires that were both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Additionally, secondary sources were cited in the form of academic articles which provided the researcher with a more theoretical analysis of the topic.

With regards to the primary research, a total of fifty-three ($n = 53$) questionnaires were distributed within the classroom context at different intervals as this seemed most natural and convenient to the respondents. Once permission was granted, the researcher explained her purpose for intervening during class hours, after which sufficient time was given by the classes' professor to each participant, for the completion of his/her questionnaire. This document comprised of questions that targeted each student's general perception of their performance in the four primary language components: Speaking, listening, writing and grammar. Furthermore, the questionnaire probed into whether anxiety was experienced using examples such as feeling panic whilst interacting with native speakers, loss of appetite before an exam and fear of making mistakes. This was done using a five-point Likert Scale ranging from "strongly agree," to "strongly disagree." (See Appendix A) Respondents to the questionnaire were random, anonymous and voluntary.

The sample size for the primary research method was initially set at sixty ($n = 60$) participants from the year one and year three Spanish courses. However, of this amount, only fifty-three were answered due to time constraints and the inability to meet all respondents after UWI's closure due to the COVID-19 outbreak. This total can be subdivided into thirty

(n = 30) year one and twenty-three (n = 23) year three participants. Furthermore, this data was analysed using numerical analysis.

Chapter Outline

- Chapter 1 reviews the literature associated with foreign language anxiety to establish a theoretical framework to support and challenge the presented research.
- Chapter 2 presents the major research findings that arose from the questionnaires.
- Chapter 3 discusses the findings of the previous chapter in relation to established literature on the matter.

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rapid globalization has increased the need for efficient foreign language acquisition at an exponential rate as it has given rise to more encounters and influence from persons of varying cultures. Among other factors however, the efficacy of the language learning process has been impacted on by the onset of a phenomenon known as foreign language anxiety. As such, this chapter seeks to review the literature associated with this occurrence, identifying its main causes and effects, as well as establishing whether there are noted improvements and solutions to guide the researcher's investigation.

Foreign Language Anxiety

Spielberger (482) defines general anxiety as an unpleasant emotional state that perpetuates feelings of apprehension and tension. Moreover, Doubek and Anders (qtd. in Král'ová 3) further postulate that this phenomenon can be triggered by internal and external stimuli which lead to both mental and physical behavioural symptoms. This, according to Twenge (1008) often occurs as a survival response to situations that an individual might perceive as threatening or fear inducing.

Foreign language anxiety on the other hand, (herein referred to as FLA), has been coined a "specific anxiety" as it relates apprehension to a particular situation (Scovel 134). This, Horwitz (qtd. in Král'ová 4) adds, is as a result of the anxiety being a multi-faceted occurrence influenced by self-perception, behaviours, feelings and beliefs specifically associated with second language acquisition. On this note, Macintyre and Gardner (92)

considered that the situational approach to FLA offered more meaningful and consistent results as respondents were often questioned about various aspects that influenced the exact process of foreign language learning.

Nevertheless, it has also been reported that although numerous studies have been conducted, results remain inconclusive as to the impact of FLA on the language acquisition method. Furthermore, based on these contradicting outcomes, researchers have presented findings that establish two potential conclusions, i.e. that the anxiety may facilitate or debilitate performance. (Alpert and Haber 207).

Facilitative and Debilitative Anxiety

Facilitative anxiety, as the name suggests, depicts anxiety as a positive force that may lead to not only improvement in performance but also motivation towards language learning. This developed drive, would thus influence students to tackle challenges associated with second language acquisition in a more rational way (Occhipinti 12). Debilitative anxiety, however, presents the opposite case whereby anxiety might exist as a negative force, demotivating the learner and resulting in behaviours of avoidance towards the foreign language.

In addition to this, a third perspective has been offered by Alpert and Haber who assert that anxiety might produce both effects (facilitative and debilitative) simultaneously, on the same individual (213). Scovel also attests to this fact by postulating that both forms of anxiety may function together (138) as each facet serves to motivate and warn, whilst the student continuously attempts to navigate through new knowledge acquired in the foreign language environment. Nevertheless, as a debilitative phenomenon, Horwitz et al. suggests

that FLA must be overcome for effective and advantageous language acquisition to be achieved. (129)

The Causes of Foreign Language Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety manifests itself in the same way that clinical anxiety exists, with symptoms such as sweating, palpitations, apprehension, and difficulty concentrating to name a few. To understand and conquer FLA however, researchers have turned to examining specific lingual and extra-lingual factors that can potentially contribute to its occurrence.

(i) Lingual Factors

Lingual factors refer to the general language system and encompass components such as morphophonemics (word structure), phonemics (units of sound), and syntax (sentence structure). Moreover, this facet also examines the way two languages (namely the native and foreign language) interact. To the latter point, several studies have concluded that where larger typological (symbol) distances are present, such as in the case of English versus Japanese (Kitano 9), there is an increase in FLA as learners often express uncertainty in recollecting and associating new letter forms with what their native language has already established. Young (428) also adds that FLA may arise in the distortion of sounds or inability to reproduce intonations that vary from the individual's native tongue. Sparks et al. further concurred and added that individuals with a poor grasp on their native language system were also observed to experience anxiety when presented with learning a foreign language as this disrupted their ability to properly form sentences structures when communicating (63).

Nonetheless, according to Alrabai, FLA is more frequently associated with being a psychological construct rather than linguistic (10) where the self-image, perception of others and perception of the language/ performance each have a significant role. Thus, extra-lingual factors are thought to influence FLA more intensively than their lingual cohorts as the language learning (extra-lingual) process more readily deals with the above-mentioned perceptions.

(ii) *Extra-lingual factors*

Extra-lingual factors as mentioned before and in the context of the study, refer to aspects of language learning that may induce FLA. Furthermore, they often pertain to an individual's beliefs and attitudes towards the foreign language as well as their perceptions towards interacting with others during the language acquisition process. Researchers Horwitz and Cope have established that communicating in a foreign language can threaten an individual's self-concept and ego, previously formed with the knowledge of their primary language (35). This, they expand, is often linked to limitations being placed on the learner's command of the foreign language, fomenting the inability to express one's self according to his/her formerly developed self-image. As such, Bennet (qtd. in Král'ová 7) adds, that this disparity between one's "true self," and, one's "limited self," often produces anxiety as a method to overcome such, "cognitive inconsistency," and compensate for a lack of foreign language competence. Macintyre, however, theorizes that while anxiety might arise, there is still no definite conclusion to indicate that FLA is as a result of poor competence (8). Static (age, gender, nationality, native language) and dynamic (language proficiency and motivation) variables are also posited to have some effect.

Evaluative Anxiety

Among the extra-lingual components mentioned above, FLA is reported to be most present in situations where the learner is under examination conditions or perceives that he/she is being evaluated. This perception that knowledge, performance and overall communication skills are being assessed is what Horwitz and Cope (14) assert produces the most stress among students thereby heightening FLA. Macintyre and Gardner (2) further expanded upon Horwitz's ideology stating that these self-centred emotions were often tied to feelings of inadequacy and a fear of failure. This ideology, thus lead to the development of Horwitz and Cope's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which contextualized FLA into three sub-categories:

- Evaluation apprehension, as explained above,
- Communication apprehension, stemming from the learner's inability to accurately express his/her thoughts or ideas; and
- Fear of negative social evaluation produced by the learner's desire to make a positive impression on others.

Aida and Zhao however, (qtd. in Misieng 45-46), both differed as they believed that test evaluation held no ground in the occurrence of FLA. In fact, through the application of Horwitz and Cope's Model in their own studies, both investigators produced varying scales with the conviction that their creation yielded more consistent results. Aida's four factor model for instance, measured FLA utilizing the components of: speech anxiety due to negative evaluation, performance anxiety, comfort-level speaking to natives as well as negative attitudes towards the foreign language class.

On this note, it should be considered that negative attitudes concerning language acquisition were also acknowledged by Horwitz (13) as likely to impact on FLA as studies

concluded that individuals who possessed unrealistic conceptions about language learning such as the belief that it required solely memorization and translation, were often overcome with anxiety once these expectations were not met.

Conclusion

Per the discussion above, it is evident that there is no concrete method of evaluating FLA, nor are the symptoms static in nature. Horwitz asserts this as well, admitting that anxiety related to foreign language acquisition is likely to vary within each learner population, due to variations in (but not limited to) proficiency, personality, beliefs and even culture (18).

Having said this, for the purpose of the dissertation and in order to rationalize the theorized anxiety gap between the year one and year three Spanish undergraduate students, considerations of whether FLA has manifested itself will be examined, with further insight into its facilitative or debilitating influence.

CHAPTER 2

RESULTS

The following chapter presents an analysis of the collected questionnaire data assessing whether the year one and year three Spanish undergraduate students at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine experienced FLA and to what extent. Further insight was also given into student performance and recommendations towards reducing this anxiety. As mentioned before, the questionnaires were distributed among thirty ($n = 30$) year one individuals and twenty-three ($n = 23$) year three students who were random, and voluntarily participated in the exercise. Of the thirty first year students, five ($n = 5$) respondents were male while twenty-five ($n = 25$) were female. Moreover, in relation to the third-year participants, seven ($n = 7$) were male and sixteen ($n = 16$) were female. It should be noted that all participants spoke English as their native language.

Question 2

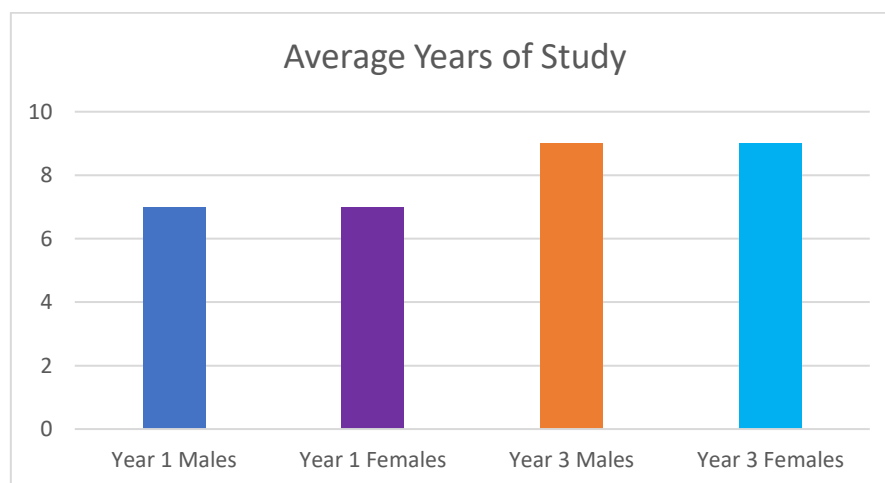


Fig 1. Graph showing the average number of years spent studying Spanish between Year 1 and Year 3 students.

The figure above depicts an estimate of the number of years that each of the above-mentioned groups indicated to represent their academic time spent studying Spanish. On average, the year one males and females were recorded to have studied the target language for seven years ($n = 7$), while the year three students studied for approximately two years longer.

Question 3

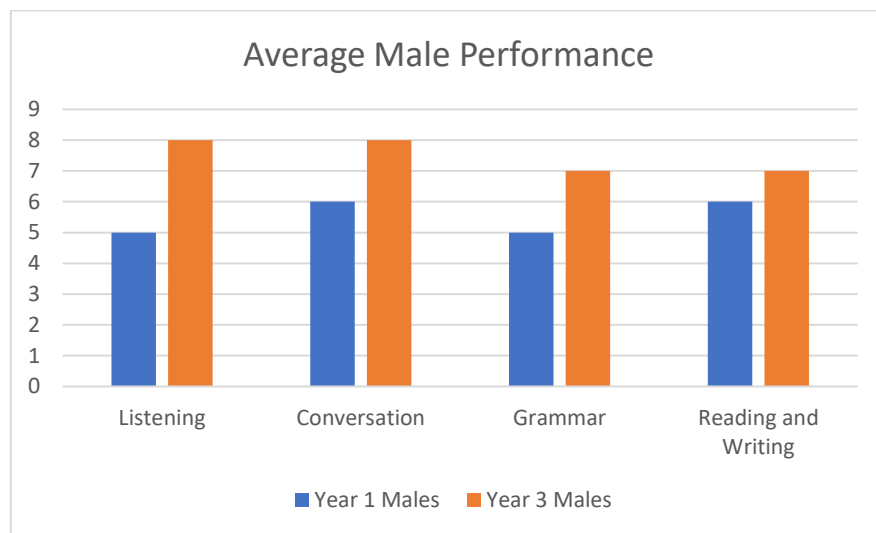


Fig 2. Graph indicating the average perceived level of performance in key language components, between Year 1 and Year 3 males.

Figure 2 describes the average levels of performance in Spanish as perceived by the year one and year three males of the undergraduate group. Students were asked to rate themselves on a scale from one to ten ($n = 1-10$) with ten equating to “excellent” performance and one being “poor.” This was done across the four main communication components of the course: namely Listening, Conversation, Grammar and Reading and Writing. From the data provided, it is apparent that the students of the third year generally recognized that their

performance was at a higher degree as indicated by their scores ranging from seven to eight (n = 7-8). One might infer that this would imply an above average level of comfort with the target language. The first-year male students however, ranked themselves lower, between the range of five to six (n = 5-6) thereby showing that their confidence and comfort in their competence might be lacking or at an average level.

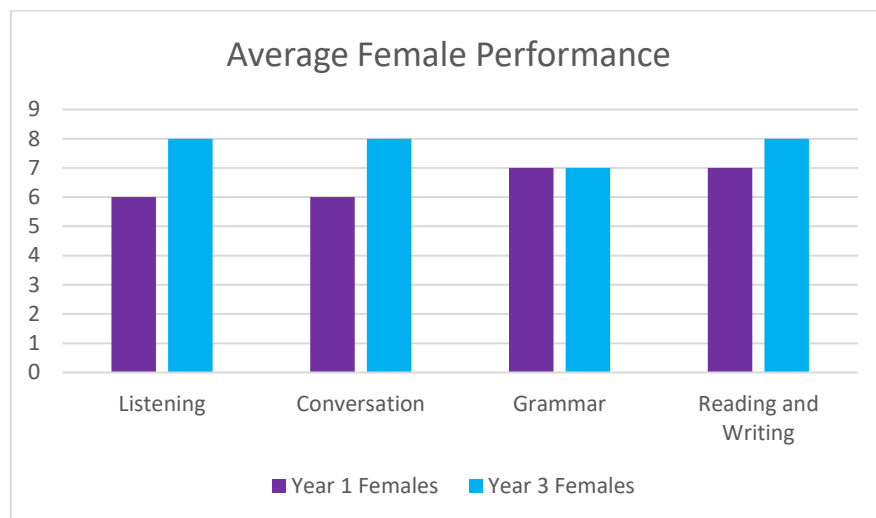


Fig 3. Graph indicating the average perceived level of performance in key language components, between Year 1 and Year 3 females.

With regards to the female groups, Figure 3 illustrates that there is a similar disparity between year one and year three respondents as it relates to perceived levels of performance across the relevant language components. The first-year females on one hand were shown to mainly rank themselves between six to seven (n = 6-7) which was slightly higher than their male counterparts referenced above. The third-year females however, again ranked themselves at a higher level (from 7-8) which one might posit is as a result of more experience which can equal to greater confidence and competence.

Question 4

Table 1

Have you ever felt anxious while interacting in Spanish?

Respondents	Yes	%	No	%	Sometimes	%
Year 1 Males	4	80	0		1	20
Year 1 Females	19	76	0		6	24
Year 3 Males	0		2	29	5	71
Year 3 Females	4	29	2	13	10	63

The data in Table 1 relays the responses of fifty-three male and female (n = 53) students between years one and three, when asked if they had ever experienced anxiety while communicating in the target language, Spanish. As per the results, it is evident that a higher percentage of year one students (80% male and 76% female) replied in the affirmative whereas amongst the year three group, no males replied “yes”, whilst solely four females (29%) agreed.

It should be noted as well that though no year one students responded in the negative, twenty-nine percent (29%) of the year three males, and thirteen percent (n = 13%) of the year three females were recorded as feeling no FLA. Furthermore, the data shows that there was a significant increase in the number of year three respondents who “sometimes,” experienced this anxiety. That being said, as compared to twenty percent (20%) of the males in year 1, seventy-one percent (71%) of the year three males were said to feel FLA once in a while. Additionally, in contrast to twenty-four percent (24%) of the females in year one, sixty-three percent (63%) of the third-year participants said they “sometimes” faced this anxiety.

Thus, from the presented Table, one can infer that, a higher percentage of year one students were recorded to have experienced FLA, whilst the year three participants ranged principally between “sometimes,” and not at all.

Question 5

Question 5 was qualitative in nature and asked students for their opinions on practices that they believed could be implemented personally or by lecturers in order to reduce anxiety when it came to foreign language acquisition.

Table 2

Methods to reduce anxiety – Year 1 Suggestions

	Personal	Teacher -related
Year 1 Students	More practice on a personal level to increase fluency and confidence	<p>Teachers should correct students in a friendly rather than harsh way.</p> <p>Teachers should speak slower and with basic words, gradually increasing in difficulty</p> <p>Work in smaller groups as they are less intimidating</p> <p>More one on one sessions</p> <p>Teachers should sometimes speak in English to facilitate students who are in their first year</p> <p>Fun and interactive activities to make the classroom setting more comfortable</p>

Per the table above, the investigator highlighted the responses that occurred most frequently among the year one participants. The information presented depicts that this student group attributed anxiety reduction more so to the efforts made by lecturers with less

of an emphasis on personal development. This is evident as respondents focused mainly on issues and improvements related to the way classes were delivered. One student even went as far as saying that, “Lecturers should be more reasonable. Some students are not ready to learn in classes that are taught only in Spanish.”

Table 3

Methods to reduce anxiety - Year 3 Suggestions

	Personal	Teacher -related
Year 3 Students	<p>Seek and use feedback from lecturers to gain a better understanding of how you can improve</p> <p>Practice outside of the classroom. Follow Spanish social media pages, read articles and watch shows in the target language</p> <p>Be conscious of your learning style and look for material using that method to increase your understanding</p> <p>Take advantage of study abroad opportunities</p> <p>Interact with native speakers to gain comfort</p>	<p>Be approachable but more candid when giving feedback</p> <p>Use more games and activities to create a more interactive environment</p>

Table 3 in contrast to Table 2, portrays the principal responses of the third-year students towards FLA reduction with a higher emphasis on personal methods. This year group through their responses indicated an understanding of how implementing metacognitive practices such as self-reflection after receiving feedback could help in the alleviation of anxiety. Furthermore, it should be noted that unlike many of the year one respondents, the third-year students preferred for lecturers to be franker with their advice in

order to aid in their development as a foreign language learner. One of many participants stated that, “The Spanish lecturers are very understanding but need to be less afraid of hurting feelings when giving recommendations.”

Questions 6 – 20

The following questions were presented via a 5-point Likert Scale whereby students were asked to rate their levels of FLA from one to five (n = 1-5) in specified areas of the previously mentioned language components. For the purpose of the following analysis, questions 6-20 were condensed and categorized to cover anxiety in the classroom setting as it related to activities that involved listening, conversation, class participation, assignments and exam-taking. The scale measured feelings of anxiety using the following gauge, Very relaxed (1), Moderately relaxed (2), Neutral (3), Moderately anxious (4) and Very anxious (5). (See Appendix A)

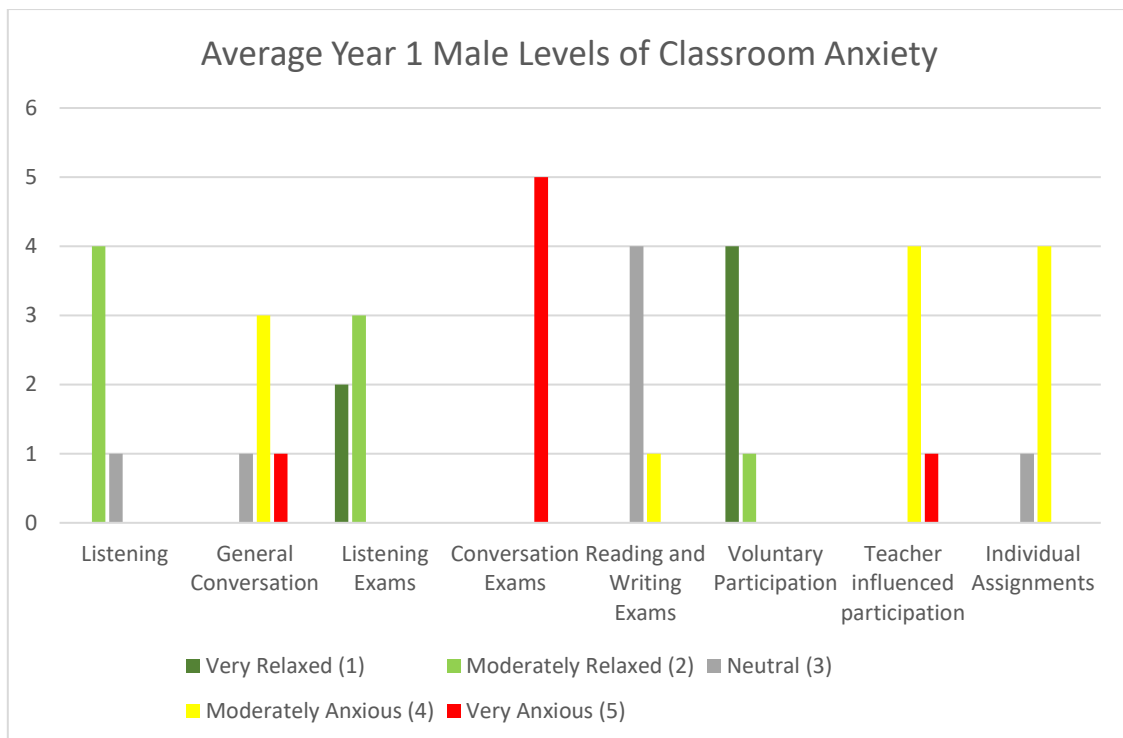


Fig 4. Graph plotting the average, perceived levels of anxiety among Year 1 males, across classroom activities.

As stated in the description above, Figure 4 relates the perceived levels of anxiety among year 1 males during specific inter-class activities. From the plotted data, it can be gathered that students were most relaxed when joining in activities that required minimal interaction such as listening and voluntary participation in class. Nevertheless, activities revolving around conversation were depicted as producing mainly “moderately” to “very anxious” results with one hundred percent (100%) of the students indicating that they felt “very anxious” during conversation exams. It should also be noted that individual assignments were ranked highly ($4/5 * 100 = 80\%$) as anxiety inducing.

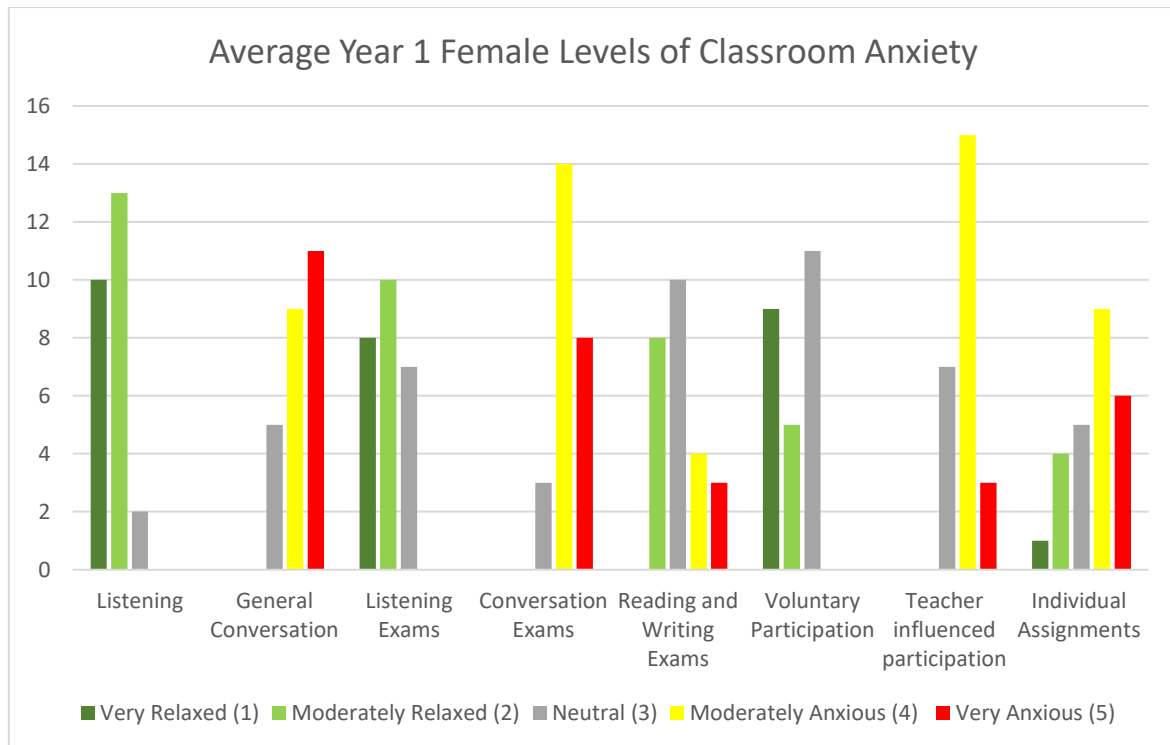


Fig 5. Graph plotting the average, perceived levels of anxiety among Year 1 females, across classroom activities.

Unlike their male colleagues, the year one females represented by Figure 5 displayed more relaxed attitudes over a wider variety of classroom activities. For instance, while the male year one respondents were predominantly relaxed during voluntary participation and listening exercises, the females demonstrated this sentiment across the same, in addition to individual assignments, and reading and writing exams. However, moderate to high levels of anxiety were once again noted in the ambit of conversation with thirty-six percent ($9/25 \times 100 = 36\%$) and forty-four percent ($11/25 \times 100 = 44\%$) of the first year female students feeling “moderately” to “very anxious” during general conversation in the target language. Moreover, in relation to oral exams, more than half of this group ($14/25 \times 100 = 56\%$) reported as feeling “moderately anxious,” while thirty-two percent ($8/25 \times 100 = 32\%$) were “very”.

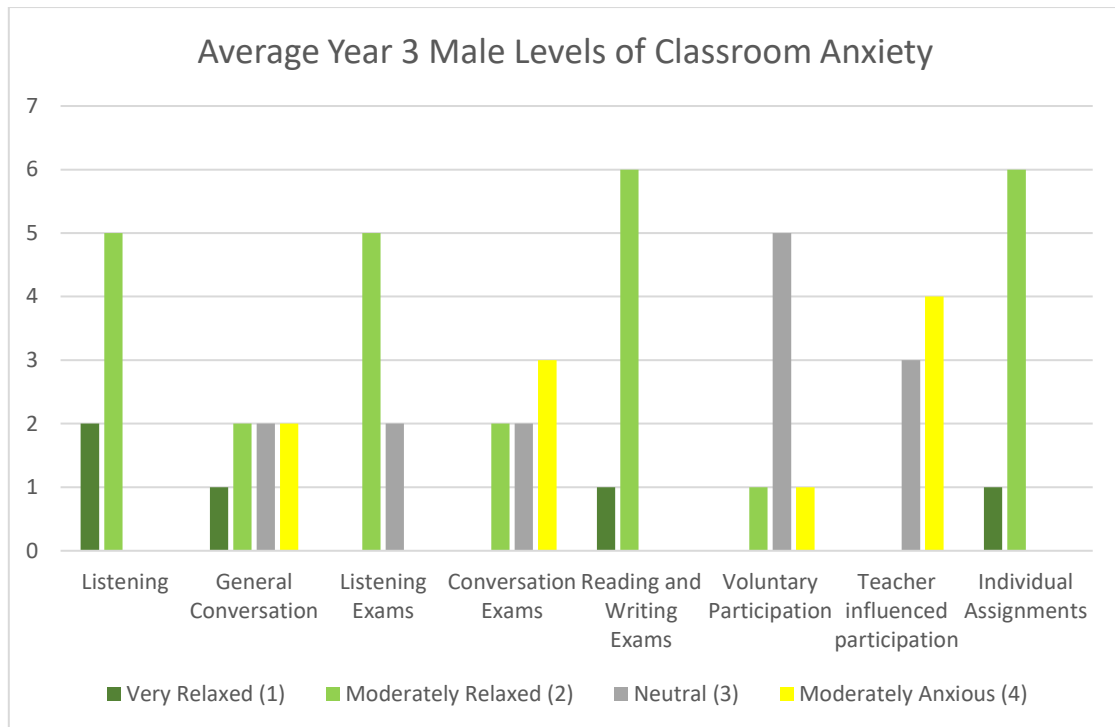


Fig 6. Graph plotting the average, perceived levels of anxiety among Year 3 males, across v classroom activities.

Among the third-year male students, Figure 6 relays that a generally relaxed attitude towards the various classroom activities could be established. Furthermore, the trend of anxiety still seems apparent on the conversation and participation spectrum, however, these were recorded to be moderate in nature.

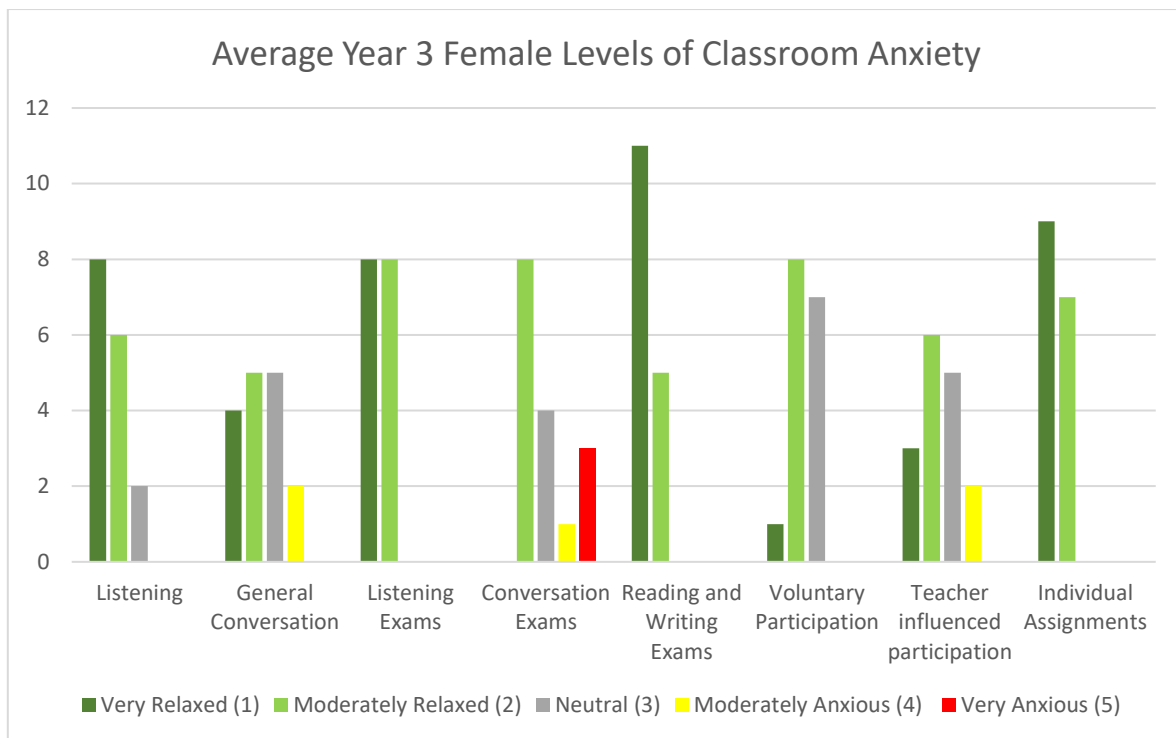


Fig 7. Graph plotting the average, perceived levels of anxiety among Year 3 females, across classroom activities.

The final figure for this section highlights the third-year female insights and illustrates that like their male colleagues, a more relaxed demeanour could be noted. Additionally, while anxiety is still prevalent, this again is in low, moderate amounts, with high anxiety solely being experienced by nineteen percent ($3/16 \times 100 = 19\%$) of this group during conversation exams.

Questions 21- 45

For this closing section, a similar 5-point Likert Scale was used to measure the student's relatability to common factors that arise from FLA. These aspects will be categorized into: communication apprehension, evaluative apprehension and negative social evaluation.

To begin, with regards to communication apprehension, the information gathered highlighted that a greater number of year one students either “agreed” (20%) or “strongly agreed,” (60%) with experiencing uneasiness when needing to interact in Spanish, especially when communicating with native speakers or during oral classes. Contrastingly however, Figure 8 below posits that a lower portion (30%) of the year three candidates agreed with this facet

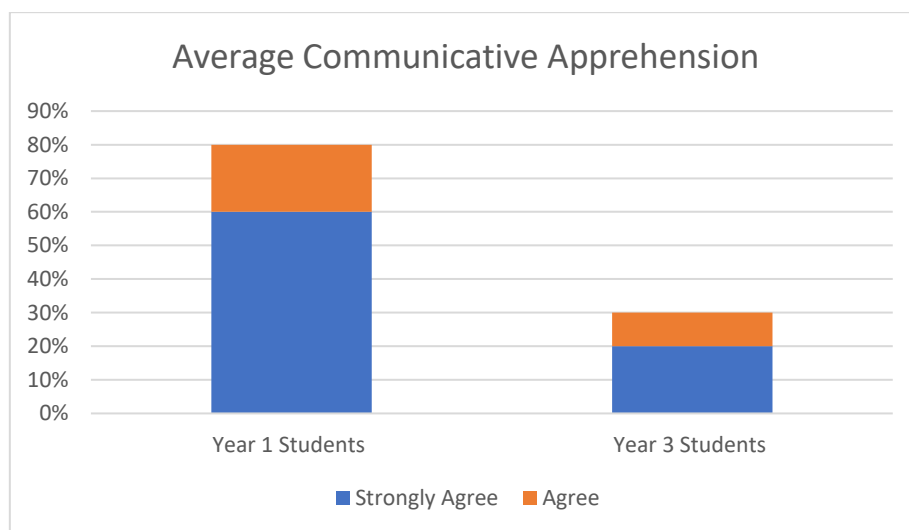


Fig 8. Graph showing the average extent to which Year 1 and Year 3 students experienced communicative apprehension.

In terms of evaluative apprehension, while both year groups in Figures 4-7 indicated levels of anxiety towards taking exams, this did not consider if students believed the apprehension affected their performance. To this point, findings in question 42 for example, relayed that a higher percentage of year one respondents mainly felt “neutral” (24%) or “agreed” (56%) with experiencing self-doubt that had an impact on their overall achievements while the third year respondents ranged from “strongly disagree,”(5%) to “neutral,” (35%).

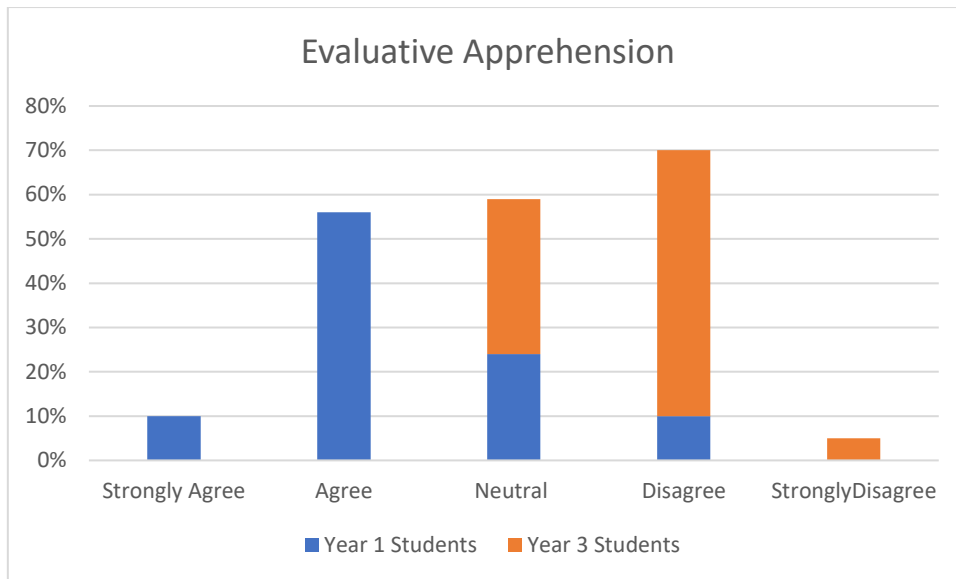


Fig 9. Stacked graph indicating the extent to which Year 1 and Year 3 students perceived anxiety affected their overall performance.

Lastly, the investigator will briefly examine the research with reference to negative social evaluation. On this note, less year three students found judgement from peers, to be anxiety inducing. In fact, most disagreed (70%) with being uncomfortable in the learning environment amongst colleagues. Nevertheless, when considering the year one students, it was noted that half (50%) agreed to fearing judgement with the remaining percentages ranging between “Neutral” (20%) and “Strongly agree” (20%) and “Disagree,” (10%).

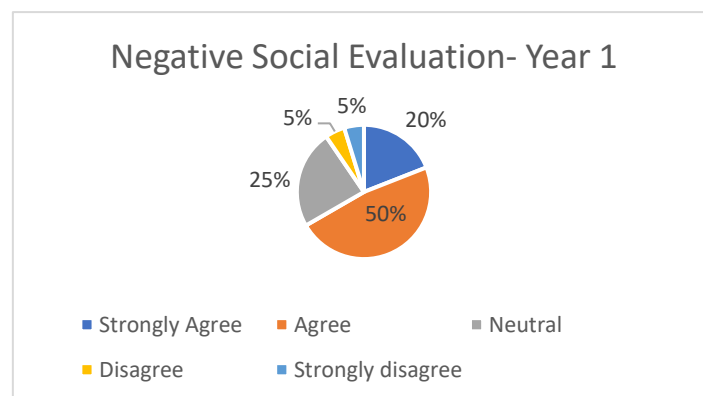


Fig 10. Pie chart illustrating whether Year 1 students felt fear of judgement from peers.

CHAPTER 3

DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter, the most significant findings of the investigation were presented. Following this, the researcher has attempted to synthesize the data with reference to past studies, discussing FLA between the participating groups and making note of differences in order to establish whether a gap in anxiety could be ascertained. Moreover, the recommendations to reduce anxiety as proposed by the respondents will be highlighted in order to rationalize why FLA has potentially decreased/increased from the first to the third year of Spanish language acquisition.

The manifestation of foreign language anxiety

As mentioned in Chapter 1, FLA is a specific anxiety (Scovel 134), characterized by attributing sensations of apprehension to the particular situation of foreign language acquisition. Per the investigative research, it was evident that this phenomenon occurred among the participants of both year groups (See Table 1). However, it is important to consider that higher levels of FLA were observed in the Year 1 respondents which therefore indicated that anxiety decreased at the third-year level. This outcome can be linked to differences in how the students perceived their overall competence (See Figures 2-3) and could further be accounted for due to variations in their feelings towards communication, and both social and test evaluation.

In fact, as compared to the third-year individuals, it is inferred from the results that first year students more intensively experienced moderate to severe anxiety across activities such as general and exam-based conversation (See Figures 4-5). They were also principally

shown to believe that this apprehension impacted upon their performance (See Figure 9) and was heightened by fear of judgement from peers (See Figure 10)

Having established this, the supposition gleaned by Horwitz and Cope (14) can thereby be applied to recognizing under which circumstances FLA became most apparent among the first-year group, i.e. where knowledge, performance and overall communication skills were being assessed, more stress and anxiety was felt. Likewise, this assessment could be gauged on both a personal (self-perception) and external level.

Rationalizing the anxiety gap

To comprehend the reduction in anxiety levels from the first to the third- year of Spanish language acquisition, the researcher observed the responses of the various participants when answering the question of how they believed FLA might be reduced (See Tables 2-3). These responses were then sectioned into two distinct categories as the students either gave feedback that was linked to personal changes or changes at the teacher level. From the results, the first-year suggestions were primarily teacher-centred whereas the third-year individuals had a greater number of recommendations aimed at personal growth. This difference can potentially denote a core reason for the decrease in anxiety among Year 3 students as the latter group possessing a focus on personal change exhibited that they possibly had more control over their thought processes (a phenomenon whose benefits will be explained with insight into the Metacognitive Theory).

Metacognition

The Metacognitive Theory, coined by John Flavell, refers to the premise that humans can regulate their thought processes through positive self-assessment. Furthermore, one who can successfully implement metacognitive strategies is considered to have a better chance at learning effectively and feeling less anxiety. However, this can be impacted upon by what the individual perceives as having control over his/her thoughts. Thus, one who believes that they themselves have this power is thought to possess the ideal “internal locus of control,” versus those who believe that external factors are responsible for how they feel. Additionally, Wells et al., further postulates that metacognition is of importance when considering anxiety and mood disorders as a healthier self-perception, linked to the regulation of thought processes, can promote both a healthier well-being and learning environment (4).

This ideology, can be applied to the present situation as the responses provided in Tables 2-3, exemplify that the first-year students barely link personal control of their thoughts to a reduction in anxiety. Instead, they possess what is called an “external locus of control” as they believe more can be done by the teachers (external factors) to reduce this feeling. Contrastingly, the third-year responses towards alleviating FLA indicated that these participants exhibited an “internal locus of control,” with an understanding of how to apply certain strategies such as reflection, and general awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in order to reduce the anxiety felt.

Thus, it can be said that differences in metacognitive ability might play a significant role in reducing or increasing FLA.

Facilitative or debilitating?

Building upon the idea that the difference (gap) in anxiety between the first and third-year students may potentially be as a result of varying perceptions on competence, communication, evaluation and metacognitive levels, it is important to therefore conclude as to if FLA in either group was facilitative or debilitating. As it relates to the first-year participants, it can be said that due to a lower assessment of competence as well as a higher level of apprehension towards communication and evaluation that FLA acted as a debilitating force which resulted in negative outcomes such as lower performance, symptoms of anxiety and a lack of confidence. Conversely, the lower levels of FLA among the third-year respondents, can be attributed to enhanced metacognitive practices which have aided in converting this anxiety into a facilitative entity as these students would be more likely to tackle foreign language acquisition with a better sense of self-perception and an understanding of how to internalize anxiety-provoking situations in a positive manner.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to rationalize the foreign-language anxiety gap between students of the first year and third-year Spanish undergraduate programme at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. It comprised of both primary and secondary research sources, the former being a questionnaire disseminated to all participants and the latter being research articles. The main findings of the study indicated that FLA principally manifested itself in the relevant students as a result of apprehension towards communication and negative evaluation which thereby debilitated overall performance. Furthermore, while each year group was observed to have experienced FLA, the year one respondents were found to possess higher levels of anxiety. This per the research, was deduced as being linked to the idea that the third-year participants exhibited more confidence in their competence and a potentially higher level of metacognitive ability, making them capable of transforming situations that would normally cause anxiety, into a learning experience that facilitated growth. Thus, it can be argued that the level of foreign-language anxiety experienced in year one Spanish undergraduate students, significantly decreased at year three due to several social factors.

Limitations

The researcher found it difficult to find secondary sources that pertained to foreign language anxiety within the context of English-speaking students learning Spanish. Instead, the utilized studies primarily dealt with the acquisition of English as a second language. Additionally, another limitation presented itself in the inability to make gender generalizations due to the unequal male-female ratio of respondents across both year groups. As such, the issue of FLA could not be analysed efficiently to discover trends and differences between both genders in relation to performance and reasons for anxiety.

Recommendations

A student's emotional state can have an impact on their ability to learn effectively as environments that promote anxiety are likely to disrupt the brain's acquisition and retention of information. Hence, in order to prevent emotional distress and alleviate occurrences of phenomena such as FLA, it is encouraged that teachers and by extension, schools, guide students towards developing their metacognitive ability. This can be done through seminars or incorporation into class sessions, whereby students learn about the importance of strategies such as reflection, meditation, and being cognisant of their preferred learning style to enhance their learning experience. This should ideally aid in promoting healthier thoughts to replace the negativity that anxiety-inducing situations tend to evoke.

Instructors can also solicit feedback from students during each academic semester in order to gauge how students feel during class. This would assist teachers in creating a more comfortable environment for persons to learn.

Additionally, further research can be conducted in both:

- 1.) The ambit of FLA among students learning Spanish as a second language, to better understand the trend and add to existing literature.
- 2.) The context of a larger study with equal male and female participants in order to make more accurate gender generalizations on FLA.

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Appendix A

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Participant,

You have been selected to partake in a research study on rationalizing the Foreign language Anxiety gap between Year 1 and Year 3 Spanish students. This will facilitate the completion of my Caribbean Studies Project course at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

Please note that your participation in this research project is voluntary and that you may decline partaking altogether or leave blank any questions that you do not wish to answer. If you agree to participate in this project, you are kindly asked to answer the questions as truthfully as possible.

Thank you for your assistance in this endeavour.

Best Regards,

Maryam Mohammed.

Foreign Language Anxiety Questionnaire

Gender: Female Male Non-Binary Year: _____

1.) What is your Native Language? _____

2.) Approximately how many years have you been studying Spanish? _____

3.) How would you rate your skills on a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being excellent and 1 being Poor) in the following components? ‘

❖ Auditiva: _____

❖ Conversación: _____

❖ Gramática Comunicativa: _____

❖ Lectura y Composición: _____

4.) Have you ever felt anxious while interacting in Spanish?

Yes No Sometimes

5.) What practices do you think a student / teacher can implement to reduce anxiety when it comes to learning / teaching a foreign language?

From a range of 1 -5, how do you feel during the following activities?

(1) Very Relaxed; (2) Moderately Relaxed; (3) Neutral; (4) Moderately Anxious; (5) Very Anxious

1	Open discussions based on voluntary participation	1	2	3	4	5
2	Speaking individually with the professor (in Spanish)	1	2	3	4	5
3	Making an oral presentation in front of the class	1	2	3	4	5
4	Volunteering your answer for a question	1	2	3	4	5
5	Being called on by a teacher to give an answer to a question	1	2	3	4	5
6	Oral exams	1	2	3	4	5
7	Classes conducted fully in Spanish	1	2	3	4	5
8	Listening to various types of audio	1	2	3	4	5
9	Listening exams	1	2	3	4	5
10	Doing in-class exercises individually	1	2	3	4	5
11	Doing group work	1	2	3	4	5
12	Reading aloud in class	1	2	3	4	5
13	Working on assignments	1	2	3	4	5
14	Reading & Writing Exams	1	2	3	4	5

On a scale of 1-5 (as it relates to your Spanish language courses), how would you rate yourself on the following statements?

(1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neutral; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly Agree

During class I am unable to focus on what is being taught	1	2	3	4	5
Getting good grades does not boost my confidence in my Spanish skills	1	2	3	4	5
My heart races off when I need to interact in Spanish	1	2	3	4	5
I feel panicked when interacting with native speakers	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling nervous causes, me to forget vocabulary/ grammar rules	1	2	3	4	5
I am afraid to make mistakes	1	2	3	4	5
I am afraid of being judged by my peers	1	2	3	4	5
I find myself thinking about how much smarter and more fluent other students are	1	2	3	4	5
I dread classes where I need to speak more	1	2	3	4	5
I would feel less self-conscious about speaking if I was more comfortable with my peers	1	2	3	4	5
I would volunteer more if I wasn't so afraid of making mistakes	1	2	3	4	5
I am more willing to speak when we discuss current events	1	2	3	4	5
I feel comfortable in class when I am prepared	1	2	3	4	5
I believe we need more interaction with native speakers	1	2	3	4	5
My professors are not approachable	1	2	3	4	5
I would feel less nervous if my professors were less intimidating	1	2	3	4	5
We need more hours of class time during the week for better practice	1	2	3	4	5

I always "cram" before exams	1	2	3	4	5
I worry before taking exams	1	2	3	4	5
I often feel like I could have done better in exams	1	2	3	4	5
When taking tests, my emotions do not interfere with my performance	1	2	3	4	5
Thoughts of doing poorly interferes with my performance on exams	1	2	3	4	5
Before an important exam I tend to tremble	1	2	3	4	5
I am unable to sleep properly knowing that I have an exam	1	2	3	4	5
I experience a loss of appetite prior to exams	1	2	3	4	5