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**“EXPLORING THE CAUSES OF FEAR OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING:  
A PRE-SERVICE CASE STUDY”**

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## **Exploring the causes of fear of foreign language learning: A pre-service case study**

*Estudio de las causas del miedo en el aprendizaje de idiomas: Un caso de estudio previo a la prestación de servicios*

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### **ABSTRACT**

Fear is a crucial variable that influences either positively or indirectly the acquisition of foreign languages, usually among teachers of language preservation. This research aims to explore the causes of fear in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) and how it manages to impact both on teaching and on the acquisition of the foreign language. The mixed method collected data from 19 participants who offered their services through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. The results indicate that the most common fears a student may experience through language acquisition are fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of speaking in public, these barriers to creating effective communication through the use of English. These fears lead to lower levels of self-confidence and low participation. The study highlights the importance of implementing inclusive teaching methods, psychological support, and activities where they enable students to face their fears. It is crucial to address these issues in order to establish an effective and positive EFL learning environment.


*Keywords:* fear, emotion, EFL students, mistakes

### **RESUMEN**

El miedo es una variable crucial que influye positiva o indirectamente en la adquisición de lenguas extranjeras, generalmente entre los profesores de preservación del lenguaje. Esta investigación tiene como objetivo explorar las causas del miedo en el aprendizaje de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) y cómo se logra impactar tanto en la enseñanza como en la adquisición de la

lengua extranjera. El método mixto recogió datos de 19 participantes que ofrecieron sus servicios a través de encuestas, entrevistas y observaciones en el aula. Los resultados indican que los miedos más comunes que un estudiante puede experimentar a través de la adquisición del idioma son el miedo a cometer errores, el miedo a una evaluación negativa y el miedo a hablar en público, estas barreras para crear una comunicación eficaz mediante el uso del inglés. Estos temores conducen a niveles más bajos de confianza en sí mismos y de participación. El estudio destaca la importancia de aplicar métodos de enseñanza inclusivos, apoyo psicológico y actividades que permitan a los estudiantes enfrentarse a sus miedos. Es fundamental abordar estos problemas para establecer un entorno de aprendizaje de EFL eficaz y positivo.

*Palabras clave:* miedo, emoción, Estudiantes de EFL, errores

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## INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is shaped by various factors, including methodologies, emotions, and beliefs (Santos et al., 2020). Among these, emotions play a crucial role, with fear being particularly prevalent among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. Fakhruddin (2022) identified fear as a common emotion in language learning, stemming from factors such as fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, or negative perceptions about the new language. This fear often manifests as reluctance to engage in classroom interactions, driven by a desire to avoid errors and conceal vulnerabilities in front of peers. Zain et al. (2023) claimed that fear acts as a significant barrier, diminishing students' interest and enthusiasm for language learning.

Language is the cornerstone of human communication, enabling the exchange of ideas, thoughts, and emotions. With countless languages worldwide, English has emerged as a global lingua franca. It is widely spoken as a second or foreign language and has become integral to various fields, including science, aviation, tourism, technology, and education. Mastery of English enhances employability and offers global opportunities (Ilyosovna, 2020). However, fluency requires not only linguistic skills but also a genuine interest in learning the language.

In Ecuador, the government has made significant efforts to improve English education. Initiatives like the "English for All" project and the "It's Time to Teach English" campaign sought to enhance teacher training and evaluate pedagogical methodologies. These initiatives highlighted the need for Ecuadorian teachers to achieve a B2 level of proficiency. Despite these efforts, many teachers remain at a basic level, which hampers students' ability to acquire necessary language skills. The government's attempt to introduce English as a primary language in schools has faced challenges, including inconsistent implementation and insufficient institutional support (Ledesma, 2024). Nonetheless, the global significance of English underscores the importance of strengthening teacher competencies and fostering a more robust foundation for students.

Fear is a persistent challenge in foreign language learning, as students grapple with abandoning the familiar structure of their native tongue for a new linguistic framework. These emotions often result in barriers to learning and engagement. Daud et al. (2022) found that this fear, observed across diverse cultural contexts such as Iraq, Malaysia, and Japan, restricts students' ability to develop essential language skills. Similarly, novice teachers, whether native or non-native speakers, often experience fear when teaching a foreign language (Gannoun & Deris, 2023). This highlights the widespread nature of this emotion in the language learning and teaching process. Addressing this issue requires a deeper understanding of the causes of fear and its impact on both students and educators.

For that reason, this research aims to explore the underlying causes of fear in foreign language learners and its implications for language acquisition and teaching. By identifying specific triggers of fear and anxiety, the study seeks to propose innovative solutions to improve

current teaching methods and learning experiences. The research questions guiding this study are: 1) What are the main causes of fear in foreign language learning? and 2) How does fear affect students' ability to communicate in a foreign language? By addressing these questions, this research hopes to contribute to the development of improved methodologies that cater to the diverse needs of language learners, creating a more inclusive and effective educational framework.

## **Literature Review**

### **Fear**

Fear is an unpleasant emotion or thought that we have when we are frightened or worried by something dangerous, painful, or bad that is happening or might happen. (Cambridge, 2024). It is a basic emotion that each human contains and has experienced in different ways, being a physiological response, we show from the moment we are born as it is a very important factor for survival. (Martin-Vivar, 2023). It is caused by the perception of a danger, future, past, present, real or inanimate. Fear is one of the main emotions that comes from the sensation of risk or threat, and terror is the maximum expression of fear and anxiety that comes from the fear of the future.

According to the behavioral concept fear is something that has been learned and the concept of deep psychology is a conflict that remains unfinished. Also, it is an emotion of survival that allows one to respond and think quickly to hostile situations (Gómez, 1993). Physically fear is a defense mechanism that stimulates changes in the body when it feels it. As fear is present in the body the person begins to create adrenaline showing skin of a pale color, where the blood is forced to flow quickly to all the muscles of the body generating a great energy in the human organism where the person has the strength to face threats or pressures of life. It is mostly for self-defense because the human being tries to predict things or scenarios that cause him a possible pain and help him to have a strategic behavior and make decisions in a subjective way of unknown but probable situations. (Dodhy, 2017)

There is a small relationship between fear and anxiety. Fear is the liberator of anxiety where the person is forced to choose between two alternatives in which if one is chosen the other is automatically eliminated, being the first approach that is given in an attractive and comfortable position, on the other hand, avoidance occurs in an opposite or unpleasant position (Reyes et al., 2017).

### **Fear in EFL**

Teaching a foreign language by a novice teacher, whether native or not, feels fear and anxiety when he begins to teach in the classroom. Anxiety within the language is the fear that occurs when a student is learning a foreign language. The fear that the student generates is to doubt whether he will understand the language or if the performance shown is sufficient. Anxiety is one of the main causes of fear in language learning, on the one hand, fear and anxiety can sometimes be useful because the student is seen in competition with his peers who do not want to

stay at the end and manage to improve in the language he is learning, but fear is formed by negative emotions such as discomfort, doubt, frustration, tension, being an effective cause that obstructs the learning process (Hu & Wang, 2014).

Students feel fear mostly in the language class towards communication and participation during classes, regardless of whether students are already skilled in the language, they still feel that fear along with anxiety when speaking in the target language. Moreover, students create psychological barriers that prevent them from both using and acquiring the foreign language. On the other hand, language-related activities can create fear among students depending on their difficulty, whether it is at the time of speaking or waiting for their turn to speak, because fear only creates more fear, causing the student to perform poorly in the educational field (Rahmat, 2020). Luo (2018) established seven variables or causes that students consider to be the cause of fear. These are age, motivation, perception, difficulty of the foreign language, self-realization, ability to learn the self-taught language, expectation of the language class, and perception of the importance of the foreign language.

Fear about the foreign language where people mostly do not feel competent at all to handle it, that is, they feel fear about the situation which can be a whole unknown world. Three varieties of this type of anxiety can be found: when the student does not have sufficient skills for mature communication, when the student feels that there is a possibility of failing to produce a positive social impression, Finally, fear about the tests or fear of failure to achieve what was expected (Workie, 2020).

The major causes of fear in students during the oral communication of a foreign language affecting fluency. Several possible factors cause fear in students such as lack of vocabulary that prevents the student to respond adequately something within the classroom classes due to the short time given by the teacher when answering the question asked, another serious factor is the timidity and fear of expressing your knowledge and in a way receive a negative response that makes you speak inaccurately, not only the student being the only one who can stimulate that feeling but the environment where he is and people around him (teacher, colleagues) Fear of negative or mocking comments when communicating because the student seeks approval from the people they meet (Vargas & Méndez, 2023).

Fears within the education system are seen as barriers or difficulties that students encounter while learning a foreign language. Within language learning, the most common is the fear of making mistakes, comparing students to fear of failure where within this fear can affect self-confidence, causing negative emotions such as frustration and anger. Furthermore, in the ability where most fear of making mistakes is at the time of speaking, hindering the production of language. Within this fear are other causes of fear during foreign language learning such as the fear of evaluation, anxiety produced by a possible failure to show skills in an unknown language,

and negative evaluation, these being both internal and external factors which influence the learning of a foreign language (Salihoğlu, 2024).

Segovia (2021) conducted a study with students from the Lima Institute of Higher Education in learning English as a foreign language, showing that students feel fear and anxiety for three main reasons. The first is for the examinations, students always feel pressured during their study for the examinations, and the main fear is the results of the examination, since this result influences their future in a negative way which causes frustration at the same time. The second cause is the negative evaluation of the peers, on the basis that the students at all times are compared and feel third in competition with the other students causing anxiety to improve at all times and not stay behind. The third cause is fear of not being able to communicate in the foreign language that you have already been taught.

According to a study of second-year university students at the Begemidir School of Teacher Education in Ethiopia revealed that students have negative experiences about speaking skills within the language classroom. Students experience anxiety as a barrier to speaking in English, and the students form negative ideas that lead to not trying or finding other ways to understand the language. One of the conclusions reached is that apart from the student the teacher has the power to eliminate this anxiety within the students and create a motivation in class by teaching English in a way that shows that the teacher handles the language and being patient during the course, In addition, it was concluded that there must be continuous participation during the class to develop their speaking ability being one of the fastest ways to learn a language and teach without prejudice to create a warm and friendly environment for language development (Workie, 2020).

Daud et al. (2022) carried out a study in which Chinese students in English-speaking classes were asked about the causes of fear in foreign languages. The study analyzed that students feel influenced by fear in the English-speaking class, and because of this, they have obtained negative results for the lack of communication that this emotion causes. Besides, it is divided into 3 sections as they handle the fear within each. In communicative apprehension, students feel more comfortable when they have native speakers in their English-speaking classes and conclude that they do not use much of the language learned for fear of ridicule. In fear of an educational evaluation, participants show a low level of self-confidence, which prevents them from using the language to communicate in class because they think they will always be judged on their performance during the class. The anxiety test shows that participants show concern and emotion. Worry involves negative self-evaluations, negative thoughts that are very common in classes, and your inner feelings. On the other hand, the emotion shows a reaction based on the nervous system which is more physical where the student may present nausea, dizziness, sweaty palms, etc. The majority of participants agreed that they experience at least one of these reactions when communicating in a foreign language, which complicates their use.

## METHODOLOGY

### Method

This mixed method study (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007) was divided into three parts, the first part was the elaboration and application of a questionnaire from which quantitative data about the causes of fear in language learning were collected. The qualitative data was divided in two, by observation and an interview with the participants that were obtained by the quantitative data of the first part, allowing to know deeply in which skill the students feel fear at the moment of communicating.

### Context and Participants

This study was carried out in a public university in Ecuador, located in the province of Los Ríos. The research was carried out towards pre-service English teachers and consisted of 19 participants, 15 women and four men, with previous studies of the English language between two and five years old, who are doing their practicum. On the other hand, three participants were selected for the qualitative method based on their first observation in the classroom and the challenges they presented when communicating in a foreign language.

### Data Collection Instruments

#### Survey

Developed with a four-point framework (1 totally agree, 2 agree, 3 disagree, 4 totally disagree), consists of 22 questions sent through Google forms in the Spanish language being the mother tongue of the participants and are divided into the different skills to learn a foreign language: speaking, listening, reading and writing, Age, gender, and time spent learning English are considered. This type of managed format allowed for quantitative analysis of data on fear in communication skills.

#### Interview

Semi-structured interviews were used for a detailed analysis of the survey presented to participants. The interviews included five primary and follow-up questions, which lasted approximately five minutes. The questions were related to fear and anxiety when expressing or communicating within the classroom by oral ability, how students feel when speaking a foreign language, managing their fears in front of other people, the limitations or barriers that students place upon themselves to participate, providing information about fear and its causes based on participants' experiences.

#### Classroom Observation

A checklist was made for the observation of the 3 participants who were chosen previously and applied it during their presentations and oral interventions where it is taken into account, body language (before, during and after their class participation), fluency in speaking another language, precision of vocabulary use, and fear indicators (rapid speech, tone of voice, and tension). In

addition, comments were added to each participant regarding their ways of demonstrating fear when they speak, the same comments that helped identify the different causes of fear.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Quantitative Data**

The analysis was done using the statistical program SPSS 25. res et al. (2020) mentioned that SPSS software is one of the most widely used worldwide for qualitative research in the research disciplines, allowing the organization and examination of data related to the research topics, Enhancing the collection and interpretation of the analysis of the data provided. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequencies, were calculated to summarize the causes of fear in participants and the reasons that cause it.

#### **Qualitative Data**

This analysis followed the grounded theory procedures. Grounded theory is a method of investigation that enables the generation of theory from data, it is used extensively to discover aspects such as social processes (social relations and group behaviors). Moreover, the grounded theory is based on strategies with an inductive approach to data analysis where they offer information, improve understanding, and give a guide for action (Noble & Mitchell, 2016). After the data analysis based on the Grounded theory, the data were transcribed and analyzed to find connections between them, allowing to identify the causes of fear more accurately and with their respective foundations put into practice.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethics is a systematic method for understanding, examining, and differentiating aspects of good and evil, negative and positive, related to well-being and interactions between conscious individuals. Ethical decisions are implemented through theories, methods and formal norms of behavior, similar to those implemented in work and religious areas (Rich, 2010). This study followed the procedures of ethical considerations (Mirza et al., 2023). The research was carried out with participants who agreed on the objective of the study and each procedure. Participants received the information necessary for their voluntary participation. Moreover, participants were given and signed a letter of consent in which they demonstrated their understanding about the study and their voluntary participation. All data collected was kept private and used only for study purposes with the respective pseudonyms of each participant to ensure their privacy.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Quantitative Data**

To address the purpose of the study, which seeks to identify the causes of fear in foreign language learners and its implications for language acquisition and teaching. The questionnaire focuses on four categories (speaking, listening, writing, understanding) of communication, each

category has its own statements. The responses were measured using a Likert scale consisting of four levels (1 = disagreement - 4 = agreement).

According to Table 1, the responses given by participants show that fear of speaking is the most common among other communication skills and it is where the causes of such fears can be obtained. Specifically, 42.1% were in total agreement with the statement: "I feel anxious when I have to speak in English in front of my colleagues". 52.6% were totally in agreement with the statement: "I avoid speaking English because I am afraid to make mistakes". 47.4% were in total agreement with the statement: I get nervous when speaking English with native speakers. 57.9% agreed with the statement: I feel ashamed when my pronunciation is incorrect while speaking English. 42.1% were in total agreement with the statement: I hesitate to speak English during class discussions because I fear being judged. 52.6% were in total agreement with the statement: I feel nervous when the teacher asks me a question in English. 36.8% disagreed with the statement: I'm worried they'll laugh at me for my English accent.

**Table 1**  
*Fear of Speaking*

Category 1: Fear of speaking							
Statement	1	2	3	4	Mean	Std. Dev.	
I feel anxious when I have to speak English in front of my classmates.	1	3	7	8	4,75	3,30	
I avoid speaking English because I am afraid to make mistakes.	0	6	3	10	4,75	4,27	
I get nervous when speaking English with native speakers.	0	1	9	9	4,75	4,92	
I feel embarrassed when my pronunciation is incorrect while speaking English.	1	2	5	11	4,75	4,50	
I hesitate to speak English during class discussions because I fear being judged.	1	4	6	8	4,75	2,99	
I feel nervous when the teacher asks me a question in English.	1	5	3	10	4,75	3,86	
I'm worried they'll laugh at me for my English accent.	3	7	4	5	4,75	1,71	

Note: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, 4= strongly agree

Based on Table 2, the responses given by participants about the fear of writing resulted in 47.4% agreeing with the statement: I feel overwhelmed when I have to write an essay or article in English. 52.6% were in agreement with the statement: I worry about making grammatical mistakes in my English writing. 36.8% disagreed with the statement: I avoid writing in English because I'm afraid of being criticized. 42.1% agreed with the statement: I feel nervous when asked to write a letter or formal document in English. 52.6% were in total agreement with the statement: I'm afraid my English vocabulary is too limited to be expressed effectively in writing.

**Table 2**  
*Fear of Writing*

<b>Category 2: Fear of writing</b>						
<b>Statement</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>
I feel overwhelmed when I have to write an essay or a paper in English.	1	2	9	7	4,75	3,86
I worry about making grammatical mistakes in my English writing.	3	1	10	5	4,75	3,34
I avoid writing in English because I'm afraid of being criticized.	3	7	6	3	4,75	1,79
I feel nervous when asked to write a letter or formal document in English.	2	2	7	8	4,75	2,77
I am afraid that my English vocabulary is too limited to be expressed effectively in writing.	1	1	7	10	4,75	3,90

Note: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, 4= strongly agree

As observed in Table 3, the responses given by participants about fear of hearing resulted in 42.1% being totally in agreement with the statement: I feel anxious when I have to hear someone speak English quickly. 47.4% agreed: I'm afraid I won't understand what someone is saying when they speak English. 57.9% disagreed with the statement: I get nervous when I listen to audio materials in English (for example, podcasts, lectures). 52.6% agreed with the statement: I am afraid key points are overlooked when listening to English speakers during conversations. 42.1% disagreed and agreed with the statement: I feel uncomfortable when I have to listen to group discussions in English.

**Table 3**  
*Fear of hearing*

<b>Category 3: Fear of hearing</b>						
<b>Statement</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>
I feel anxious when I have to listen to someone speak English quickly.	1	4	6	8	4,75	2,99
I fear that I will not understand what someone is saying when they speak English.	1	5	9	4	4,75	3,30
I get nervous when I listen to audio materials in English (for example, podcasts, lectures).	2	11	3	5	5,25	4,03
I fear that key points are missed by listening to English speakers during conversations.	1	3	10	5	4,75	3,86
I feel uncomfortable when I have to listen to group discussions in English.	2	8	8	1	4,75	3,77

Note: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, 4= strongly agree

According to Table 4, the responses given by participants about fear of understanding resulted in 63.2% agreeing with the statement: I feel anxious when I read long texts in English because I may not understand them. 57.9% agreed: I am concerned about misunderstandings about important information in English exams or tests. 47.4% agreed with the statement: I'm afraid I can't follow instructions written in English. 47.4% agreed with the statement: I am frustrated when I find unfamiliar vocabulary in English texts. 36.8% agreed with the statement: I get nervous when I try to understand complex ideas or abstract concepts in English.

**Table 4***Fear of Understanding*

Category 4: Fear of understanding						
Statement	1	2	3	4	Mean	Std. Dev.
I feel anxious when reading long texts in English because I may not understand them.	4	3	12	0	4,75	5,12
I am concerned about misunderstandings of important information in English exams or tests.	3	3	11	2	4,75	4,19
I'm afraid I can't follow instructions written in English.	4	6	9	0	4,75	3,77
I get frustrated when I encounter unfamiliar vocabulary in English texts.	4	3	9	3	4,75	2,87
I get nervous when I try to understand complex ideas or abstract concepts in English.	2	4	7	6	4,75	2,22

Note: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, 4= strongly agree

**Qualitative Data**

Fear affects students' ability to communicate in a foreign language because it hinders their class participation. During the observation, we could notice that these students did not participate actively in class, leading them to a low grade of class performance. In the following part, we identify the most common fears that students experience in class.

**Fear of making mistakes**

The fear of making mistakes was the most recurrent among the participants because all three showed insecurities when speaking in English to not receive any kind of negative response. This is the most common in previous events when an error was made. According to Salihoğlu (2024), the fear of making mistakes in language learning is a limiting condition that decreases levels of self-confidence because if you make a mistake, you can provoke negative feelings such as stress, depression, and anger. Moreover, this fear affects the ability to speak, producing difficulties during the production of language.

Participant responses (interviews) illustrate this concern clearly. Karla admitted, "I don't feel confident yet to do that," highlighting her hesitation to engage in spoken English. Similarly, Mauricio described how fear affects cognitive processing, stating, "The mind is blocked because there is no confidence to commit them at all." Judeline reinforced this anxiety, explaining, "I'm afraid to make mistakes and feel judged." These statements reflect how the anticipation of errors generates a psychological barrier, reinforcing insecurity and limiting effective communication.

The fear of making mistakes shows students in their most vulnerable form because by observation, if a student makes a mistake, he is afraid to make it again which does not allow him to communicate at all, changing his way of moving, his pauses for the mistake made (hum, ham), and his lack of confidence to continue speaking in front of his audience.

**Fear of negative validation**

Two of the three participants showed that the fear of being evaluated negatively by their peers or teachers has a great influence when learning a foreign language and any activity related

to it. Daud et al. (2022) defines the fear of a negative validation as the feeling of being judged or valued negatively by other people, such as the anxiety or uncertainty, on the other hand, within education the fear of negative evaluation is a challenge because it can eliminate students' expectations at the moment of communicating contributing to the sense of anxiety, Preventing active participation in the classroom and repressing speech performance, this strategy being the most useful for learning a foreign language.

Participants' responses (interviews) further illustrate this challenge. Karla expressed how self-consciousness prevents her from participating, stating, "I'm ashamed, I don't feel confident yet to do that. I'm too ashamed because, in some parts, I know how my colleagues are." Similarly, Judeline highlighted her concern about how others perceive her mistakes, explaining, "It is shameful and frightening to be seen in a bad way for having said something wrong or mispronounced." These statements reflect how the fear of negative evaluation can lead to avoidance behaviors, reducing students' willingness to engage in language learning activities and ultimately hindering their progress in acquiring a foreign language.

The fear of negative validation shows that participants feel pressured by the thoughts of the people around them in the classroom to show themselves as ignorant about what is being said at the time. This fear is a limitation of their active participation and repressing interactions.

### **Fear of speaking in public**

All the participants mentioned that they had experienced moments where they felt fear and anxiety at the moment of feeling the glances on them and being the focus of attention in an instant when it was their turn to speak, which proved difficult at the time of applying the foreign language. One of the biggest fears a student feels is speaking, and more when speaking in public, making it difficult to communicate. This may be due to a number of factors such as lack of preparation, lack of practice, fear of being the center of attention, people around you, size of the audience, some past events, or dissociation from memory. The fear of speaking in public is very common among students because they do not feel confident enough to communicate in front of an audience and feel comfortable, creating uncontrolled impulses that make them notice the little comfort that the student feels (Workie, 2020).

Participants' responses (interviews) further illustrate these concerns. Karla expressed how overwhelming the situation felt, stating, "I feel nervous and I feel like I'm intimidated by so many looks and as if I repress myself." Similarly, Mauricio highlighted how the added challenge of speaking in a foreign language intensified his nervousness, explaining, "It gives me a little bit of nervousness, and adding another language that is a little more complicated attacks me enough and leaves me speechless." Judeline also shared her anxiety about public perception, saying, "I'm embarrassed because they will think that I pronounce my vocabulary wrong or I may have some error when expressing myself to an audience." These statements reflect how the fear of public

speaking not only limits students' ability to express themselves but also heightens their self-consciousness, ultimately hindering their confidence in using the foreign language.

The fear of speaking in public usually occurs when performing activities such as oral presentations or exchanging ideas verbally with other peers. In addition, through their observations they demonstrate this fear with their body language and tone of voice, feeling uncomfortable to see many people exerting pressure by the gaze focused on the participant.

## CONCLUSION

This study has shown that students' experiences learning English as a foreign language (EFL) are significantly shaped by their fear. The results show that the main worries of pre-service teachers are fear of speaking in front of an audience, fear of making mistakes, and fear of receiving a poor grade. These anxieties frequently lead to avoidance behaviors, decreased engagement in class, and impaired communication skills. Furthermore, outside influences like instructor expectations, peer criticism, and bad language learning experiences exacerbate pupils' psychological barriers.

The participants' most common fear, which had a major influence on their readiness to speak in English, was the fear of making mistakes. Anticipating mistakes causes worry, self-doubt, and a reluctance to participate in speaking activities, as prior research indicates. Students' potential to become fluent is further limited when they refrain from taking chances with language production out of fear of receiving unfavorable feedback from teachers and peers. One of the biggest challenges was the fear of public speaking, as pupils expressed feeling overwhelmed and intimidated when forced to use English in front of others. These worries make learning a foreign language difficult, especially when paired with anxiety and low self-esteem.

It is crucial to use pedagogical techniques that promote a secure and encouraging learning environment to solve these problems. Instructors must embrace student-centered approaches, integrating exercises that promote involvement without worrying about criticism. Students can gain confidence in their ability to use English by receiving positive feedback, encouraging group projects, and incorporating communicative tactics. Schools should also concentrate on helping students become emotionally resilient by providing them with direction and support to help them deal with the anxiety that comes with learning a language.

Additionally, courses on psychological aspects of language acquisition should be incorporated into teacher preparation programs. This will enable aspiring teachers to recognize and address fear-related obstacles in the classroom. Reducing anxiety and fostering a more interesting and successful language-learning experience can also be achieved by encouraging students to embrace growth mindsets, which view errors as a necessary component of learning rather than as failures.

In conclusion, the research shows that fear in English as a foreign language (EFL) students is the result of various psychological, social and pedagogical factors, which significantly hinder their ability to communicate verbally. These causes limit the active participation of students, an essential element for effective language learning. Therefore, the importance of implementing innovative methodologies that promote a safe and comfortable learning environment where students can express themselves and participate without fear of being judged, thus facilitating their communicative and academic development, is emphasized.

One limitation of this study is the scarcity of studies focusing on this topic within Ecuador. This gap in the local academic literature constrains the depth of discussion and analysis possible, as there are few existing studies or data sources to draw upon for a comprehensive comparison or to validate findings. Consequently, this research primarily relies on generalized data and studies conducted in contexts that may not fully represent the specific conditions and variables present in Ecuador. This limitation highlights the need for increased scholarly attention to this area within the region to enrich future research and understanding.

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