



NECESIDADES DE LOS ESTUDIANTES DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA Y SUS IMPLICACIONES EN LA ANSIEDAD AL HABLAR: UN ANÁLISIS EN UNA UNIVERSIDAD PÚBLICA DEL ECUADOR

EFL LEARNERS' NEEDS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS ON SPEAKING ANXIETY: AN ANALYSIS IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN ECUADOR

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RESUMEN: La ansiedad al hablar y las necesidades comunicativas de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) condicionan su participación oral en el aula universitaria, un aspecto poco estudiado en Latinoamérica. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar las necesidades de habla de los estudiantes y examinar sus implicaciones en el nivel de ansiedad en el aula de lengua extranjera, así como su relación estadística. Se aplicaron dos instrumentos a 166 estudiantes del curso de Nivelación de una universidad pública del Ecuador: un cuestionario contextual de necesidades y la Escala de Ansiedad en el Aula de Lengua Extranjera (FLCAS), mediante un diseño cuantitativo, descriptivo y transversal, con muestreo por conveniencia, estadística descriptiva, alfa de Cronbach y correlación de Pearson. Los resultados evidenciaron un nivel de ansiedad predominantemente moderado ($M = 103.98$; $DE = 19.49$; $\alpha = .93$), con 77.7% en el rango moderado y 13.9% en el rango alto. El cuestionario de necesidades reveló ansiedad moderada relacionada con el habla ($M = 3.16$; $\alpha = .83$) y competencia oral autopercebida más baja ($M = 2.89$; $\alpha = .91$). El miedo a errores gramaticales o de pronunciación ($M = 3.44$) y el olvido de palabras ($M = 3.40$) fueron los indicadores más marcados; la conversación sin preparación (32.5%) y las presentaciones orales (25.9%) fueron las situaciones más ansiógenas, mientras que la práctica oral (51.2%) y el tiempo de preparación (42.2%) fueron las necesidades de apoyo más señaladas. La correlación de Pearson mostró que las necesidades autorreportadas y la ansiedad estandarizada fueron mayormente independientes entre sí ($r \leq .18$). Se concluye que ambas variables coexisten en esta población, pero son dimensiones relacionadas, aunque estadísticamente distintas, por lo que las decisiones

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curriculares deberían atenderlas por separado, priorizando la práctica oral progresiva, el tiempo de preparación y la retroalimentación flexible.

Palabras clave: *ansiedad al hablar en inglés; análisis de necesidades; FLCAS; educación superior; Ecuador; inglés como lengua extranjera*

ABSTRACT: Speaking anxiety and communicative needs shape EFL learners' oral participation in university classrooms, an aspect still underexplored in Latin American contexts. This study aimed to analyze students' speaking needs and examine their implications for their levels of foreign language classroom anxiety, while also identifying the most anxiety-provoking situations, coping strategies, support needs, self-perceived oral competence, and the statistical relationship between the two variables. Two instruments were administered to 166 students enrolled in the Nivelación course at a public university in Ecuador: a contextual needs-analysis questionnaire and the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). A quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional design was used, with non-probability convenience sampling, descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, and Pearson correlation. Results showed a predominantly moderate level of anxiety ($M = 103.98$; $SD = 19.49$; $\alpha = .93$), with 77.7% of participants in the moderate range and 13.9% in the high range. The needs questionnaire revealed moderate speaking-related anxiety ($M = 3.16$; $SD = 0.85$; $\alpha = .83$) and comparatively lower self-perceived oral competence ($M = 2.89$; $SD = 0.77$; $\alpha = .91$). Fear of grammatical or pronunciation errors ($M = 3.44$) and forgetting familiar words ($M = 3.40$) were the most prominent indicators. In contrast, unprepared conversation (32.5%) and oral presentations (25.9%) were the most anxiety-provoking situations. More speaking practice (51.2%) and preparation time (42.2%) were the most frequently reported support needs. The Pearson correlation analysis showed that self-reported needs and standardized anxiety scores were largely independent of one another ($r \leq .18$ in all cases). The findings suggest that both variables coexist in this population but represent related, statistically distinct dimensions, and that curricular decisions should address them separately, prioritizing gradual oral practice, preparation time, and flexible feedback.

Keywords: *speaking anxiety; needs analysis; FLCAS; higher education; Ecuador; English as a Foreign Language*

INTRODUCTION

English has become an important academic and professional resource in higher education. University students may need English to access specialized literature, engage with international research, pursue postgraduate opportunities, participate in academic mobility, and communicate in increasingly multilingual professional environments. Consequently, university English courses are expected to promote more than receptive knowledge of vocabulary and grammar; they should also prepare students to communicate effectively in academic, social, and professional



situations. Hidayati (1) claims that needs analysis research in higher education has shown that language programs are more relevant when curricular decisions are connected to students' actual communicative requirements, current abilities, and learning contexts, rather than being based exclusively on generalized assumptions about learners.

Speaking is particularly challenging among the core language skills because students face issues such as a lack of motivation, a poor learning environment, and insufficient practice. Moreover, Huwari (2) highlights that a lack of practice is the most significant factor influencing students' English-speaking skills in the classroom. For those reasons, students feel anxious about speaking. On the other hand, learners might retrieve vocabulary rapidly, construct comprehensible utterances, control pronunciation and grammar, and organize ideas. This becomes clear in a college setting when students must respond to unexpected questions, take part in debates, give presentations, or explain academic concepts. Mede (3) emphasized that research on college-preparatory classes has found that many students need more realistic speaking tasks, suitable teaching materials, more practice, and opportunities to speak English in real-life situations.

Speaking anxiety may also interact with learners' perceptions of their own competence. Limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, low grammatical automaticity, reduced fluency, and problems understanding questions can increase the cognitive effort required during oral communication. Under pressure, students may struggle to access linguistic knowledge that they can otherwise recognize or use in less demanding situations. Recent university research has linked foreign-language anxiety to difficulties with recalling information, selecting appropriate language, concentrating on tasks, and demonstrating existing knowledge (4). Other studies have linked speaking anxiety to perceived oral proficiency, exposure to English, confidence, fear of evaluation, preparation, and opportunities for authentic practice (5).

Foreign language classroom anxiety refers to the feelings of nervousness, apprehension, tension, and worry that learners may experience when learning or using another language in a classroom environment. To examine this affective variable, Horwitz et al. (6) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), a 33-item self-report instrument measured through a five-point Likert scale. The tool was designed to assess how learners feel when they are nervous in class, especially when they must speak in front of others. The FLCAS has three connected parts: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension focuses on learners' discomfort when speaking or interacting in the target language; test anxiety involves worry about language assessments and academic performance; and fear of negative evaluation refers to concern about being judged, corrected, or ridiculed by teachers or classmates.

Hutchinson (7) argued that necessities, lacks, and wants are three different elements. Necessities are the things learners must do in the target situation; lacks are the gaps between the necessary competencies and the learners' actual competencies; and, finally, wants are the learners' priorities. Long (8) emphasizes that needs analysis should be context-sensitive and grounded in



evidence from the population for whom the instruction is designed. This method aims to help learners understand the tasks they consider important, the affective challenges they face, and the support they need to be more engaged and successful. There are several solutions to this problem, such as oral practice, planning time, group and pair work, constructive feedback, activities aligned with learners' levels, and a comfortable environment for speaking.

The Ecuadorian context deserves particular attention because much foreign-language anxiety research has been concentrated in Asian and Middle Eastern settings. A recent review of studies published between 2004 and 2023 found that China, Japan, and Iran accounted for a substantial share of the available research, underscoring the need for evidence from less-studied contexts, including Latin America (9). Research conducted in Ecuador has identified fear of making mistakes, fear of judgment, shyness, and lack of confidence as factors that may inhibit participation in English. However, that evidence was obtained primarily from school-age learners rather than students in public higher education (10). More recent studies conducted directly with Ecuadorian polytechnic university students have partially addressed this gap, identifying foreign language anxiety related to online interaction, remote-teaching conditions, and gender differences among undergraduate English learners (11), while anxiety has also been documented among pre-service English teachers in Ecuadorian higher education, with academic and financial stressors emerging as leading predictors (12).

According to Ortega et al. (13), Ecuadorian university research has also emphasized that meaningful teaching practices, suitable resources, positive classroom environments, and attention to learner perspectives support motivation and engagement. Although Nivelación students are institutionally classified as A1, classroom-level observation indicates considerable internal heterogeneity. Some students enter the course already holding B1 or B2 language certifications, a relevant contextual feature of the sample, though not a variable formally tested in the study. Based on this rationale, this study aims to analyze EFL learners' speaking needs and examine their implications for students' level of foreign-language classroom anxiety among students enrolled in the Nivelación English course at a public university in Ecuador. It also sought to identify anxiety-provoking situations, perceived causes, coping strategies, support needs, and self-perceived oral competence.

The following research questions were addressed in the study:

1. What speaking needs, perceived deficiencies, learning preferences, self-perceived oral competence, and support needs do students report?
2. What level of foreign language classroom anxiety do students report, and what coping strategies do they use to manage it?
3. Which speaking situations and factors do students perceive as most anxiety-provoking?
4. How do students' self-perceived competence and reported needs relate to their level of speaking anxiety?



By combining the results of a contextual needs analysis questionnaire and a reliable anxiety instrument, this study may help inform decisions regarding task choice, sequencing of speaking instruction, pair/group work arrangements, feedback provision, and anxiety-aware teaching approaches in public Ecuadorian higher education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study followed a cross-sectional, descriptive, quantitative needs-analysis design. Two self-report instruments were administered concurrently during regular class sessions to characterize students' speaking needs and foreign language classroom anxiety at a single point in the academic term. 166 students from different majors enrolled in the Nivelación course participated in this study. The participants were from Mechanical Engineering/Maintenance/Automotive Engineering (35.5%), Health Promotion (32.5%), Chemical Engineering (15.7%), Agroindustry (12.7%), and Tourism (4.1%). An important detail is that the students were selected via nonprobability convenience sampling. Moreover, some students already hold international certifications such as B1 or B2, but most were categorized as A1 by the institution. This showed the heterogeneity in proficiency already defined in the introduction.

This study applied two instruments. The first was a custom contextual needs-analysis questionnaire, developed by the research team following the necessities–lacks–wants framework (7) and administered as an online form. It comprised 24 items organized into five labeled dimensions plus two additional item clusters: (a) a five-item speaking-anxiety subscale (e.g., nervousness speaking in front of the class, avoidance of participation, forgetting known words, fear of grammar/pronunciation errors, fear of ridicule), rated on a five-point frequency scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always); (b) Dimension 2, a single-choice item identifying the oral activity that generates the most anxiety; (c) Dimension 3, single-choice items on the main perceived difficulty for speaking and the main reason for limiting classroom interaction; (d) Dimension 4, single-choice items on strategies used before speaking and the conditions under which anxiety decreases; (e) Dimension 5, single-choice items on the support, activity format, confidence-building conditions, and feedback timing students prefer; and (f) a five-item self-perceived oral competence subscale (e.g., maintaining a simple conversation, pronouncing clearly, using appropriate vocabulary), rated on the same five-point scale.

The second instrument was the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (6), a standardized 33-item self-report scale measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly agree to 5 = Strongly disagree), covering communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Nine items are reverse-worded and were reverse-scored before analysis so that higher total scores consistently indicate higher anxiety, following the scale's original scoring procedure (6). Both instruments were administered in Spanish, participants' first language, to minimize comprehension-related measurement error.



Both questionnaires were distributed online during class time and completed anonymously; no personally identifying information was collected. Participation was voluntary, and the confidentiality statement embedded in both instruments informed students that their data would be used exclusively for research purposes. Completion of each questionnaire took approximately 15–25 minutes.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, to characterize each dimension of both instruments. Internal consistency was estimated using Cronbach's alpha for the FLCAS total scale, the questionnaire's speaking-anxiety subscale, and its self-perceived competence subscale. Total FLCAS scores were classified into low, moderate, and high anxiety ranges using study-defined descriptive intervals, not clinical cutoffs, as detailed in the Categories subsection of the Results. All analyses were conducted using Python (pandas and NumPy for data management and descriptive statistics; SciPy for Pearson correlation coefficients).

RESULTS

A total of 166 Nivelación students participated, selected primarily from different majors such as Mechanical Engineering/Maintenance/Automotive Engineering (35.5%), Health Promotion (32.5%), Chemical Engineering (15.7%), and Agroindustry (12.7%), with the remaining 4.1% distributed across other programs, including Tourism.

Descriptive statistics and internal-consistency estimates for the three continuous measures used in this study, the FLCAS, the needs-questionnaire speaking-anxiety subscale, and the self-perceived oral competence subscale, are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and internal consistency of continuous measures.

Measure	N	M	SD	Cronbach's α
FLCAS (total)	166	103.98	19.49	.93
Speaking-anxiety subscale (needs questionnaire)	166	3.16	0.85	.83
Self-perceived oral competence subscale (needs questionnaire)	166	2.89	0.77	.91

Speaking Needs, Self-Perceived Competence, and Support Preferences

Self-perceived oral competence was measured with a five-item subscale. As shown in Table 2, item means ranged from 2.78 to 3.04 on a 1-to-5 scale, with all five items clustering near the scale midpoint of 3.0. Use of appropriate vocabulary was rated highest ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 0.90$), followed by pronouncing words clearly and correctly ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 0.81$), maintaining a simple conversation ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.96$), producing clear messages with few pauses ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 0.90$), and feeling confident participating in conversation, which was rated lowest ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 0.96$). Standard deviations ranged from 0.81 to 0.96 across the five items.

**Table 2. Self-perceived oral competence - item-level statistics.**

<i>Item</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Use of appropriate vocabulary	3.04	0.90
Pronounce words clearly and correctly	2.93	0.81
Maintain a simple conversation	2.88	0.96
Produce clear messages with few pauses	2.81	0.90
Feel confident participating in conversation	2.78	0.96

Support needs and pedagogical preferences are summarized in Table 3. More speaking practice was the most frequently selected support option (51.2%), followed by better pronunciation instruction (24.7%). For the preferred format of oral production activities, small groups formed by affinity were selected most often (39.2%), followed by pair work (26.5%); whole-class exposure was selected least often (2.4%). Time to prepare was the condition most frequently selected as helping to ensure safer participation (42.2%). Feedback-timing preferences were more evenly distributed: collective feedback was selected by 34.3% of students and individual/private feedback by 33.7%, with the remaining students selecting a combination of both (18.7%), written comments (7.2%), or a rubric with explicit criteria (6.0%).

Table 3. Support needs and pedagogical preferences.

Support needed	%	Preferred format	%	Safer-participation	%	Feedback preference	%
More practice	51.2	Small groups (affinity)	39.2	Time to prepare	42.2	Collective (whole class)	34.3
Better pronunciation	24.7	Pairs	26.5	Safe environment	22.9	Individual/private	33.7
More vocabulary	14.5	Individual	24.7	Level-appropriate activities	17.5	Combination	18.7
More time	7.2	Outside classroom	7.2	Clear instructions/support	11.4	Written comments	7.2
Small-group activities	2.4	Whole class	2.4	No interruptions	6.0	Rubric	6.0

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety and Coping Strategies

The FLCAS produced a mean total score of 103.98 (SD = 19.49; possible range 33–165; $\alpha = .93$). Using the study-defined descriptive intervals reported in the Categories subsection, 77.7% of participants scored within the moderate-anxiety range and 13.9% within the high-anxiety range, with the remaining 8.4% in the low-anxiety range. The needs questionnaire's five-item speaking-anxiety subscale produced a mean of 3.16 (SD = 0.85, $\alpha = .83$). At the item level, fear of grammatical or pronunciation errors was rated highest ($M = 3.44$), followed by forgetting familiar words while speaking ($M = 3.40$) and nervousness about speaking in front of the whole class (M



= 3.23). Avoidance of participation despite knowing the answer ($M = 2.92$) and worry about being ridiculed or judged by classmates ($M = 2.78$) were rated lowest. Both the classification and item-level results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. FLCAS anxiety-level classification and speaking-anxiety subscale item-level means.

Anxiety category	Score range	%	Speaking-anxiety subscale item	M
Moderate	78–121	77.7%	Fear of grammatical/pronunciation errors	3.44
High	122–165	13.9%	Forgetting familiar words while speaking	3.40
Low	33–77	8.4%	Nervousness speaking in front of the class	3.23
			Avoidance of participation	2.92
			Worry about being ridiculed/judged	2.78

Coping strategies are summarized in Table 5. Practicing beforehand and writing down what to say were the two strategies used before speaking that were selected most frequently, each by 30.1% of students, followed by memorizing (24.7%). Improvising (7.8%) and avoiding participation (7.2%) were selected least often. Having time to prepare was the most frequently selected condition for decreasing anxiety (45.2%), followed by using written notes (22.3%).

Table 5. Coping strategies before and during speaking activities.

Strategy used before speaking	%	Condition when anxiety decreases	%
Practice beforehand	30.1	Time to prepare	45.2
Write down what to say	30.1	Use notes	22.3
Memorize	24.7	Ungraded activity	12.7
Improvise	7.8	Teacher support	12.0
Avoid participating	7.2	Small groups	7.8

Anxiety-Provoking Situations and Perceived Factors

Table 6 summarizes the situations and perceived factors students associated with speaking anxiety. Unprepared conversation was selected most frequently as the most anxiety-provoking speaking situation (32.5%), followed by oral presentations (25.9%); role-play was selected least often (9.0%). Regarding the main perceived difficulty for speaking, pronunciation (31.3%) and limited vocabulary (29.5%) were the two most frequently selected options. The reasons for limiting classroom interaction selected most frequently were incorrect pronunciation (28.3%), embarrassment or fear of ridicule (27.7%), and insufficient time to organize ideas (24.7%).

**Table 6. Anxiety-provoking situations and perceived factors.**

Anxiety-provoking situation	%	Main difficulty for speaking	%	Reason for limiting interaction	%
Unprepared conversation	32.5	Pronunciation	31.3	Incorrect pronunciation	28.3
Oral presentation	25.9	Limited vocabulary	29.5	Embarrassment/ridicule	27.7
Debate on complex topics	16.9	Lack of confidence	15.7	Not enough time to organize ideas	24.7
Oral evaluation	15.7	Fear of mistakes	13.9	Fear of making mistakes	14.5
Role-play	9.0	Grammar	9.6	Fear of being judged	4.8

Relationship Between Needs and Speaking Anxiety

To examine whether students' reported needs carry implications for their level of speaking anxiety, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed between the needs questionnaire's self-perceived competence subscale, its speaking-anxiety subscale, and the FLCAS total score (Table 7). Self-perceived competence was not significantly correlated with the FLCAS total score ($r = .070$, $p = .371$). Self-perceived competence showed a weak, statistically significant negative correlation with the needs questionnaire's own speaking-anxiety subscale ($r = -.176$, $p = .024$). The needs questionnaire's speaking-anxiety subscale was not significantly correlated with the FLCAS total score ($r = .042$, $p = .588$).

Table 7. Pearson correlations between needs-related and anxiety-related measures.

Variables	r	p
Self-perceived competence – FLCAS total	0.070	.371
Self-perceived competence – needs-questionnaire anxiety subscale	–0.176	.024
Needs-questionnaire anxiety subscale – FLCAS total	0.042	.588

Overall, these results indicate that students' self-reported needs and their measured level of speaking anxiety were largely independent in this sample: only one of the three tested relationships reached statistical significance, and its effect size was weak. The clearest association appeared between the two subscales of the same instrument (competence and anxiety within the needs questionnaire). At the same time, neither needs-related measure showed a meaningful relationship with the standardized FLCAS score.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined EFL learners' needs and their implications for speaking anxiety among 166 A1 students enrolled in preparatory English courses at an Ecuadorian public university. The FLCAS produced a mean score of 103.98 ($SD = 19.49$, $\alpha = .93$), with 77.7% of participants in the moderate-anxiety range and 13.9% in the high range. The following findings detailed below show that anxiety was a repeated feature of participants' classroom experience rather than an



isolated response, and that a genuine, moderate gap in self-perceived competence accompanies it. The needs questionnaire's anxiety subscale reached this result ($M = 3.16$, $\alpha = .83$), while self-perceived oral competence was relatively lower ($M = 2.89$, $\alpha = .91$), especially for confidence in participating in conversation ($M = 2.78$).

At the item level, the FLCAS results point to assessment pressure, communication apprehension, and cognitive interference: concern about failing accounted for 71.1% of high-anxiety responses, speaking without preparation and forgetting known information each accounted for 60.2%, and anxiety despite preparation accounted for 57.8%. These findings align with the original conceptualization of classroom anxiety as involving communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (6), and with recent evidence that anxiety interferes with concentration, retrieval, and linguistic selection during performance (4). In the questionnaire, fear of grammatical or pronunciation errors was the highest-rated anxiety indicator ($M = 3.44$), but the most frequently cited speaking difficulties were pronunciation (31.3%) and limited vocabulary (29.5%). These results reveal perceived lacks in pronunciation, lexical access, and confidence that represent concrete learning needs (14) and align with recent research linking speaking anxiety to limited linguistic knowledge, low perceived competence, and insufficient preparation (15).

The clearest convergence between the two instruments concerned preparation. Unprepared conversation (32.5%) and presentations (25.9%) were the most anxiety-provoking activities. In comparison, 45.2% of students reported reduced anxiety when given time to prepare, a pattern reinforced by the FLCAS items on unprepared speaking and unexpected questions (16). Consistently, practicing beforehand and writing down what to say were students' two leading coping strategies (30.1% each), well ahead of avoidance (7.2%), indicating an existing, preparation-based coping repertoire.

Contrary to what the title's framing might suggest, a correlational analysis found that students' reported needs and their standardized anxiety scores were largely independent: self-perceived competence was unrelated to the FLCAS total ($r = .07$, $p = .371$) and to the needs questionnaire's own anxiety subscale only weakly ($r = -.18$, $p = .024$). This indicates that needs and anxiety, while clearly coexisting and conceptually connected, are not strongly predictive of one another statistically. Pedagogically, this means addressing students' reported needs should not be assumed to directly reduce standardized anxiety scores, even though both domains merit instructional attention.

Because the present study was conducted with Spanish-speaking participants, it is worth noting that a Spanish-language version of the FLCAS has been independently validated with secondary-education students in a neighboring Latin American country, supporting the scale's psychometric adequacy beyond its original English-language development (17). This null-to-weak pattern also contrasts with part of the broader literature: a correlational study among educators, also using Pearson's coefficient, found a significant relationship between oral communication skill level and speaking anxiety (18), and a study with future primary-school teachers identified fear of negative



evaluation and lack of confidence, both closely related to self-perceived competence, among the main reported causes of language anxiety (19). Similarly, a study with Turkish EFL learners found self-perceived communication competence to be a significant negative predictor of classroom anxiety, explaining part of the variance alongside tolerance of ambiguity (20). Taken together, these mixed results suggest that the strength of the needs–anxiety relationship may vary across populations, instruments, and specific competence measures rather than reflecting a single, universal effect — reinforcing the case for testing it directly, as this study has done, rather than assuming it.

Students' preferences reinforce this need for deliberate, separate attention to both domains. More speaking practice (51.2%) and pronunciation support (24.7%) were the most requested forms of help; small groups (39.2%) and pair work (26.5%) were strongly preferred over whole-class exposure (2.4%). This matches intervention research showing that structured interaction, scaffolded feedback, and gradual exposure support more manageable speaking experiences (10,13), and extends earlier Ecuadorian evidence identifying mistakes, shyness, and fear of judgment as barriers to participation (10). Pedagogically, these results support gradual progression from planned to spontaneous oral communication, vocabulary banks, sentence frames, and brief planning time, followed by rehearsal in pairs or small groups before larger-group and spontaneous exchanges. A flexible feedback approach is also warranted, since preferences split almost evenly between collective (34.3%) and individual feedback (33.7%).

Some limitations were found in this study. According to the institution, the Nivelación students were categorized as A1. Still, some already have international certifications such as B1 and B2, highlighting the internal heterogeneity of proficiency defined in the introduction. This was not considered a tested variable, but it should be assessed in future studies and in higher-level groups, alongside objective oral performance measures. Both instruments drew on self-report, and competence was not corroborated through an objective speaking assessment. The cross-sectional design precludes conclusions about causality or changes over time, while the single-institution sample limits generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, integrating the FLCAS with a contextual needs-analysis questionnaire and directly testing their statistical relationship offers a more complete and more honest account of the intensity, sources, and pedagogical implications of speaking anxiety in this A1 preparatory cohort than either instrument could provide alone.

CONCLUSIONS

Nivelación students report a genuine, measurable communicative need rather than a diffuse concern. Self-perceived oral competence fell below the scale midpoint ($M = 2.89$, $\alpha = .91$), with confidence to participate in conversation rated lowest ($M = 2.78$) and use of appropriate vocabulary rated highest ($M = 3.04$). Students most frequently identified the need for additional speaking practice, pronunciation support, and preparation time, and expressed a clear preference for pair or small-group work over whole-class exposure.



The students' level of foreign language classroom anxiety were corroborated by two instruments (FLCAS: $M = 103.98$, $\alpha = .93$; needs-questionnaire anxiety subscale: $M = 3.16$, $\alpha = .83$). This anxiety appears associated with linguistic performance concerns, particularly fear of grammatical or pronunciation errors and forgetting familiar vocabulary, more than with social judgment from peers, and students rely primarily on preparation-based coping strategies rather than avoidance. Notably, the implications of students' reported needs for this anxiety were found to be limited in statistical terms, since needs- and anxiety-related measures were largely independent of one another, suggesting that both domains coexist but warrant separate instructional attention rather than a single combined intervention.

Unprepared conversation and oral presentations appeared as the speaking situations most frequently associated with anxiety. Meanwhile, incorrect pronunciation, embarrassment, and insufficient time to organize ideas were the most reported limiting factors. In conjunction with the preceding findings, these results suggest that anxiety in this population is closely tied to the demands of spontaneous, real-time oral production rather than speaking in general. This study supports context-specific evidence from a public Ecuadorian university. This setting remains underrepresented in the foreign language anxiety literature. It offers a replicable, low-cost diagnostic approach that combines a standardized anxiety scale with a contextual needs questionnaire, supporting more informed instructional decisions in similar EFL settings across Ecuador and the broader Latin American region.

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