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Strategies to motivate learners to engage in speaking and overcome anxiety: a case study at the Open Language Courses

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**Dissertação de Mestrado em
Didática de Inglês**

Orientada pela Professora Doutora Margarida Pereira Martins

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DEDICATION

To my brother. May you find your peace.



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Strategies to motivate learners to engage in speaking and overcome anxiety: a case study at the Open Language Courses

ABSTRACT

Anxiety and motivation are both known to be important factors in the success of foreign language learning. Anxiety can have a negative effect on language learning by causing stress and inhibiting the ability to perform, while motivation plays a positive role by providing the drive and desire to learn and succeed. Research has shown that high levels of motivation can help to counteract the negative effects of anxiety, making it easier for students to learn and perform well in a foreign language. Overall, the balance between anxiety and motivation is an important aspect of foreign language learning, and understanding how these factors interact can help educators and students to create a more effective and successful learning environment.

This research aims to examine practical and effective methods for motivating English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at the tertiary level to participate in speaking activities, by taking into account the complex relationship between motivation and anxiety in the foreign language learning context. The study will use a combination of questionnaires and interviews to identify specific factors that influence students' level of anxiety and motivation in the language classroom, and to explore strategies that may positively influence their willingness to engage in speaking activities.

Keywords: Anxiety, motivation, EFL, speaking, willingness

Estratégias para motivar os alunos a participar na comunicação oral e a superar a ansiedade : um estudo de caso nos Curso Livre de Línguas

RESUMO

A ansiedade e a motivação são conhecidas por serem importantes para o sucesso na aprendizagem de línguas estrangeiras. A ansiedade pode ter um efeito negativo na aprendizagem de línguas, causando estresse e inibindo a capacidade de desempenho, enquanto a motivação tem um papel positivo ao gerar a vontade e o desejo de aprender e ter sucesso. Vários estudos têm demonstrado que elevados níveis de motivação podem ajudar a contrabalançar os efeitos negativos da ansiedade, facilitando a aprendizagem e o desempenho dos alunos em uma língua estrangeira. No geral, o equilíbrio entre a ansiedade e a motivação é um aspeto importante no processo de aprendizagem de línguas estrangeiras e compreender como esses fatores interagem pode ajudar educadores e alunos a criar um ambiente de aprendizagem mais eficaz e bem-sucedido.

Este estudo visa examinar métodos práticos e eficazes para motivar os alunos de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira (EFL) no nível terciário a participar em atividades de expressão oral, tendo em conta a relação complexa entre motivação e ansiedade no contexto de aprendizagem de línguas estrangeiras. O estudo usará uma combinação de questionários e entrevistas para identificar fatores específicos que influenciam o nível de ansiedade e motivação dos alunos na sala de aula de línguas e explorar estratégias que possam influenciar positivamente a sua vontade de participar nas atividades orais.

Palavras-chave: Ansiedade, motivação, EFL, oralidade, disposição

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

FLA –Foreign Language Anxiety

FLCAS –Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

WTC– Willingness to Communicate

INTRODUCTION

1. Background

Many of the students that arrive at the Open Language Courses are able to communicate in writing, but feel anxious about doing so through speaking; many are still reluctant to participate in speaking activities, especially when asked to do so in front of others. Students may refrain from speaking due to lack of vocabulary and grammar or insecurities regarding pronunciation, but it can also be due to a previous lack of practice in schools and courses, as many teachers focus more on grammar exercises, reading and listening comprehension, vocabulary input and writing than they do on speaking, although speaking plays a crucial role within the process of second language learning and teaching.

Moreover, Thornbury argues, “shortage of opportunities for practice is identified as an important contributing factor to speaking failure” referring to practice as “interactive speaking” and pointing out the “lack of genuine speaking activities” as an issue (2005, p. 28). He further states that “a language is best learned through using it, rather than learned and then used” (2005, p. 119). Therefore, if not enough dedication is spent on real-life speaking situations, students will naturally lack the ability to convey meaning properly, as well as the ease of doing so naturally.

Hence, the role of a language teacher is to foster situations that promote meaningful communication and prepare students for real-life scenarios, whilst motivating them to discover and use the language. Furthermore, in today’s globalised world, where the English language has taken on such an important role, it is essential to focus more attention on developing language learners’ speaking skills to facilitate communication. After all, as McDonough, et al. emphasise, “the primary function of a language is for interaction and communication” (2013, p. 158). If language learners are not challenged to use the language in interactions with others and in front of others, then we will be failing to help them better master the speaking skills that will ensure they communicate well in this global world.

Despite the importance of challenging students to speak, Horwitz et al. argue that “teachers and students generally feel strongly that anxiety is a major obstacle to be overcome in learning to speak another language” (1986, p.125). In addition, several studies show that anxious learners are less willing to engage in activities and are likely to be less successful in their language learning journey (Aida, 1994; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b; Gardner, 1985; Lightbown & Spada, 2006). That said, if students lack self-confidence or have a high level of anxiety, it is necessary to

provide students with more opportunities to engage in speaking English and encourage them to do so in front of others gradually, rather than shy away from the challenge. Teachers must create not only opportunities for speaking to take place, but also an environment that does not negatively impact motivation and willingness to speak. As Oxford suggests, “the affective side of the learner is probably one of the most important influences on language learning success or failure” (1990, p.140). Therefore, it is important to work on building a relationship with students and between students, so that they feel more comfortable taking risks and stepping out of their comfort zone.

Motivation plays a vital role in leading students’ performance and as Dörnyei (2005) indicates, it is responsible for the primary interest in learning a foreign language, but above all necessary to maintain it throughout the process. Motivation is “why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, how hard they are going to pursue it” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p.4). Students who enrol in the Open Language Courses often express a desire to develop their speaking skills, however, while they are at a level where their knowledge of language is sufficient to provide a more developed thought, most will choose to take on a less active role when it comes to speaking activities. This lack of motivation or willingness to engage in speaking can have various causes. Dörnyei & Ushioda (2011) point to several factors that can demotivate students, such as the teacher, reduced self-confidence and the attitude of peers. It could also be related to the task or topic at hand, lack of reward, anxiety, lack of self-drive or even be the result of the teacher’s choice of strategy, among others.

I believe that teachers play a key role in helping students in these courses to engage positively in speaking activities. Teachers need the commitment and creativity to experiment with different strategies as well as create a safe environment for everyone, ensuring that students have a positive experience with speaking activities and are unafraid of making mistakes. Nonetheless, while anxiety and/or insecurity can contribute to a reluctance to actively participate, it is worth noting that these students have made a deliberate choice to enrol in the course, and at their age, they should have the willingness and capability to overcome these obstacles.

2. Statement of the problem

As Richards affirmed, “the mastery of speaking skill in English is a priority for many second language or foreign language learners” (2008, p.19). Students in the Open Language Courses often generally state that the reason for joining the course is primarily to develop their speaking skills. Although the vast majority of these students have had a lot of exposure to the English language, many are still reluctant to participate in speaking activities, especially when asked to do so in front of others.

Experiencing anxiety when speaking in front of and with others is natural, however, the English language has become not only a means of communication with the world, but also a means of communication and learning within higher education environments. Therefore, it is crucial for students at a tertiary level to overcome their insecurities when it comes to speaking the target language in front of others.

3. Research aims

This dissertation, as part of the Master’s Degree in English Didactics at Universidade Aberta and NOVA FCSH, aims to explore classroom strategies that can positively impact students’ motivation to engage in speaking activities, helping learners overcome foreign language speaking anxiety in order to enhance their communicative competence. The goal is to challenge students not only to speak in the target language, in front of others, but also to motivate them to communicate and express themselves publicly so as to improve their speaking skills.

This study is based on the fact that while students at a tertiary level may have anxiety issues that cause unwillingness to speak, they can be challenged to step out of their comfort zone, given the right environment and opportunities. By implementing activities that challenge learners to engage, that take them out of their comfort zone without contributing to increased anxiety or demotivation, I believe that their willingness to communicate will increase.

4. Relevance of the study

The impetus for this study resulted from direct observations of students enrolled in English in the Open Language Courses. As a language teacher I was able to observe students' difficulties in

engaging in speaking activities and oral interactions in the class. To address this issue, I implemented various strategies such as creating a positive learning environment, encouraging students to take part in unprepared speaking moments and bringing in controversial topics for debate. These strategies were successful and as a result, an action-research plan was put into practice. It is hoped that the research findings can assist future EFL teachers to support learners at a tertiary level to encounter speaking in English in front of others in a more natural way. More than addressing the causes of anxiety or unwillingness to speak, this study proposes a variety of practical strategies designed to motivate students to overcome issues regarding speaking and subsequently improve their speaking ability. The primary aim of the curriculum in this particular educational context should be to enhance students' speaking skills; as a result, the current syllabus needs to be updated as it still places a lot of emphasis on grammar. Students need greater practice communicating in scenarios that reflect the current communication demands. In light of this, teachers need to provide students with multiple communication opportunities that facilitate the development of their communication skills, which may be improved via the use of technology, and work towards influencing students' willingness to communicate.

5. Strategies to be applied

During this work, the following strategies will be applied:

- i) Encourage prepared speaking activities (e.g. podcasts; group presentations);
- ii) Encourage unprepared speaking moments (e.g. impromptu speeches);
- iii) Encourage group discussion on controversial topics;
- iv) Create an environment where learners feel at ease to participate.

6. Research questions

To explore this hypothesis, two research questions were identified. The first to understand how the learners perceived speaking in English prior to the course; the second to understand, from their point of view, how the strategies applied throughout the course impacted their motivation to speak.

- i) What factors contribute to students' unwillingness to participate in speaking activities?
- ii) Have the strategies applied positively impacted their anxiety and motivation to speak?

7. Outline

This dissertation is divided into five chapters and is structured as follows:

- Firstly, the background and aims of this case study are introduced;
- Chapter one reviews the theoretical literature crucial to the research;
- Chapter two presents the research methodology adopted, as well as the participants and the context, and describes the instruments and procedures for data collection and analysis. It also describes the strategies implemented in this case study;
- Chapter three presents and analyses the research results of the questionnaire and group interviews;
- Lastly, the main findings and discusses future implications are summed up.

Chapter 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. The importance of the speaking skill

Knowledge of the English language is essential for effective communication in this global world, where the English language has reached the status of a universal language not only for communication but also for instruction. As Ur (1996) states, “of all the four skills [listening, speaking, reading and writing], speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as speakers of that language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing” (p.120). Although learners should master all four skills in English, oral communication is the goal of most students when they choose to learn a language.

Moreover, Goh and Burns stated that, “the development of good speaking skills is no longer a bonus for language learners, but an essential aspect of their language-proficiency development because it has a direct impact on the personal and professional success of many of them” (2012, p.21). That said, knowing how to communicate effectively in English is a requirement that today goes beyond personal satisfaction, as it is a language that not only allows one to communicate with other people around the world, but a mandatory language in many jobs. However, the ability to communicate in a foreign language results from construction of competence through exposure and comprehensible input, as argued by Krashen (1982), but also through interaction, which is both the means and the objective of learning a foreign language. Therefore, for learners to develop proficiency, they must orally interact and communicate in the target language.

2. Willingness to communicate

One of the most common problems teachers face is students’ unwillingness to engage in communication in the target language. Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is defined as “a learner’s readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons using a L2” (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). According to MacIntyre et al.’s (1998) heuristic model for WTC (see Figure 1.1), there are various factors conditioning WTC and the model suggests a linear relationship between psychological, linguistic and communicative variables.

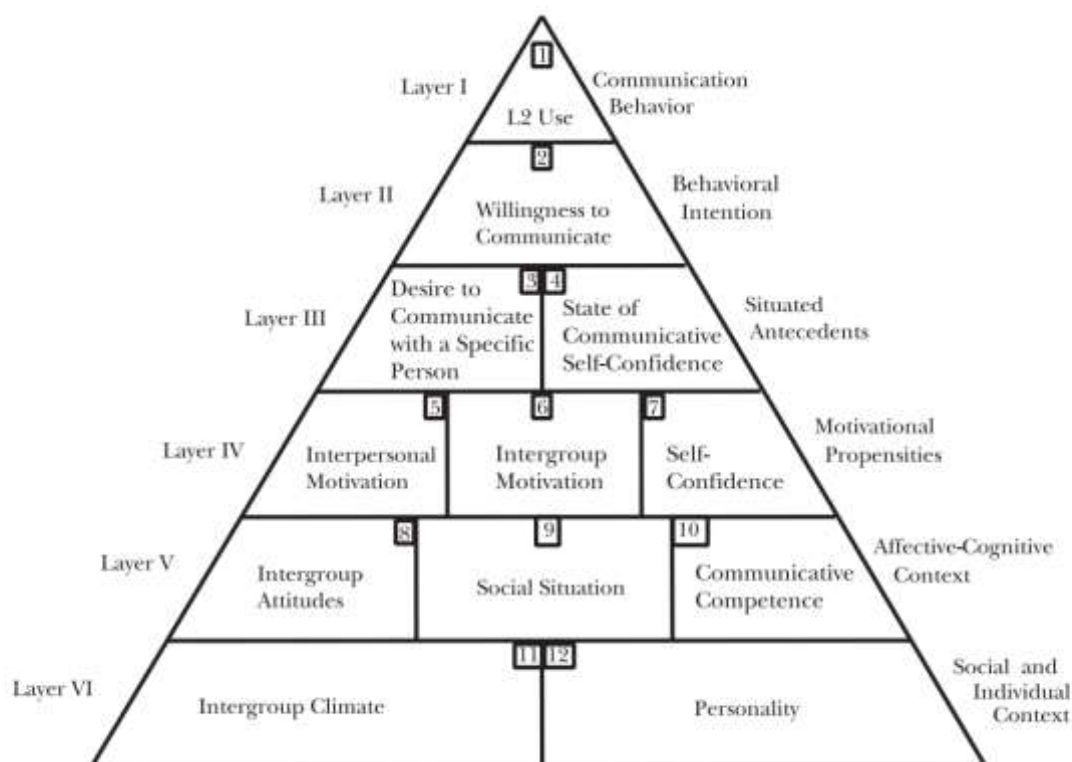


Figure : 1.1: MacIntyre et al. (1998) Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC

The extent to which learners are prepared to initiate communication becomes crucial in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching/learning contexts, as the demand for communicatively competent users of English increases due to globalisation. In this sense, variables such as learner personality, intergroup climate and attitudes, motivation and self-confidence need to be taken into account when aiming to enhance learners' communicative competence as they sustain WTC in a foreign language.

3. Affective factors that influence learners' speaking ability

In the process of learning a foreign language, both cognitive and affective factors are involved, and when "both are used together, the learning process can be constructed on a firmer foundation" (Arnold & Brown, 1999, p 1). According to Krashen (1982), affective factors such as motivation, self-confidence and anxiety greatly contribute to the success or failure of foreign language learning. Motivation directs learners' behaviour in the learning process, self-confidence helps students take risks while anxiety is a barrier. Furthermore, these elements are often

interrelated, and a higher level of anxiety will certainly undermine both self-confidence and motivation, especially with regard to speaking in the target language.

Moreover, as early as 1980 Stevick argued that “success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom” (1980, p.4), acknowledging not only that individual emotions are important criteria in influencing students’ ability to learn, but also the connections that are established in the classroom between learners and their peers and between learners and teacher. That said, in order to encourage learners to engage in speaking, it is important to promote a learning environment that takes into consideration, in addition to cognitive features, affective aspects, as they are of paramount importance in the language learning process. As outlined by Damasio “certain aspects of the process of emotion and feeling are indispensable for rationality” (Damasio, 1994, as cited in Liston, 2012, p. 122). This view highlights that emotions play a critical role in cognitive processes such as learning, problem-solving, reasoning and memory. Thus, it is important to recognise that emotions and cognitive processes are intertwined and that both are essential for students to fully participate in their learning process.

3.1. Motivation

As stated by Brown (2014) , motivation has been identified as one of the most determining affective factors in foreign language learning. According to Gardner, motivation is the “extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity” (1985, p.7). Gardner presented a model for motivation that divides into instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation is when knowledge of English is a means to achieve a social or economic goal, while integrative motivation is when the “individual is learning a second language in order to learn about, interact with, or become closer to, the second language community” (Gardner, 1985, p.54). Although many students seem to enrol in language courses due to instrumental motivation, it is integrative motivation that is responsible for sustaining long-term success when learning a second language.

The Self-determination theory provides two other views, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The first concerns the “pleasure and satisfaction” an individual feels while carrying out an activity,

stating that motivation comes from within. Extrinsic motivation, however, is driven by an exterior motive to the individual, “such as receiving an extrinsic reward” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p.23). Edward Deci (1975) defines intrinsic motivation as one whose apparent reward lies in activity itself. Learners are motivated by the feeling of competence and autonomy it provides them, thus assuming full responsibility for choosing to learn the language. When the drive to engage in language learning is external, then often this might not lead to the best result. The passion for learning the language comes from the learner’s intrinsic goals and often, without intrinsic motivation, engaging students is a challenge, as “intrinsic motivation is clearly superior to extrinsic” (Maslow, 1970, as cited in Brown, 2014, p.160). When students understand that learning is a positive experience in itself, then they become more self-determined and engaged. Dörnyei (2005) conceptualizes motivation through his *L2 Motivational Self System* theory, in which he states that the learner motivation is linked to future views of themselves: the *Ideal L2 Self* is related to the type of language learner one hopes to become; the *Ought-to L2 Self* represents the attributes one believes are needed to achieve that goal, and the *L2 Learning Experience*, which, unlike the other components, concerns motives related to the immediate environment and experiences that involve the student. Dörnyei further explains that the school context, the syllabus, the tasks chosen, the learner’s peers and the teacher are all “important facets of the learning experience” (2019, p. 25). Harmer also argues that “the motivation that brings students to the task of learning English can be affected and influenced by the attitude of a number of people” (2001, p. 52). Of these people , both the attitude of peers and teachers are equally important for student motivation as well as for the creation of a positive learning environment. He also adds that the confidence in the method is also crucial in motivating both the learner and the teacher, thus contributing to the success of the teaching and learning process.

3.2. Self-esteem | Self-confidence

Rubio asserts that self-esteem “is a psychological and social phenomena in which an individual evaluates his/her competence and own self according to some values, which may result in different emotional states” (2007, p. 5). In other words, it refers to the beliefs and opinions we have of ourselves and the value we believe we have as a person. This belief influences our

emotional state, which can impact our decision-making process. Self-confidence has been defined in a number of ways in literature on the subject, but the American Psychological Association offers two definitions: “trust in one’s abilities, capacities, and judgment” and “a belief that one is capable of successfully meeting the demands of a task” (APA, n.d.). Therefore, self-confidence is the belief a person acquires in being able to do and /or accomplish something, while self-esteem seems to be more a belief of our self-worth.

However, many researchers use the terms self-confidence, self-evaluation, self-worth, self-appraisal, and self-satisfaction interchangeably. According to Dörnyei, self-confidence and self-esteem are closely linked, since both place a strong focus on the assessment that the individual makes of his own qualities:

self-esteem and self-confidence are like the foundations of a building: if they are not secure enough, even the best technology will be insufficient to build solid walls over them. You can employ your most creative motivational ideas, but if students have basic doubts about themselves they will be unable to ‘bloom’ as learners.

(Dörnyei, 2001, pp.86-87)

Brown also asserts that the term self-esteem refers to self-confidence and states that,

self-esteem is probably the most pervasive aspect of any human behavior. It could easily be claimed that no successful cognitive or affective activity can be carried out without some degree of self-esteem, self-confidence, knowledge of yourself, and self-efficacy—belief in your own capabilities to successfully perform that activity.

(Brown, 2014, p.144)

Broadly, believing in oneself and one’s abilities influences the way one acts in the face of challenges. Therefore, in a complicated process such as language learning, it can determine success or failure. As Cao asserted, “confident learners are more likely to participate meaningfully in class activities” (Cao, 2011, as cited in Edwards & Rogers, 2015, p.2). Students must thus feel confident in their abilities to be able to take risks and engage in activities that promote their linguistic development without hesitation.

Young (1990) stated that learners with low self-esteem have higher levels of language anxiety, especially in relation to oral communication, indicating that self-esteem is correlated with anxiety. Additionally, MacIntyre et al. (1998) noted that the learner's willingness to communicate in a foreign language is greatly influenced by their level of self-confidence. That said, if the goal is to encourage learners to participate more actively in speaking, we should address this issue in lessons. It is obvious that if students approach each stage of their learning

process with confidence in their skills, they will undoubtedly lessen any barriers that might prevent a more successful outcome, such as anxiety resulting from their insecurities.

3.3. Anxiety

Anxiety can be considered one of the most significant affective variables that hinder the learning process (Arnold & Brown, 1999; Brown, 2014; Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 2008; Horwitz et al., 1986, Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a, 1991b, MacIntyre 2002; Onwuegbuzie, 2000; Young 1990). Spielberger and Reheiser stated that

anxiety was defined by Freud (1924) as “something felt”, a specific unpleasant emotional state or condition that included apprehension, tension, worry, and physiological arousal. Freud (1936) equated objective anxiety with fear, which he considered to be an emotional reaction that was proportional in its intensity to a real danger in the external world (Spielberger & Reheiser, 2009, p. 273).

Spielberger defined anxiety as a “feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (Spielberger, 1983, as cited in Horwitz, et al. , 1986, p.125). He proposed and differentiated two types of anxiety “trait anxiety is conceptualized as a relatively stable personality characteristic while state anxiety is seen as a response to a particular anxiety-provoking stimulus such as an important test” (Spielberger, 1983, as cited in Horwitz, 2001, p.113). In other words, *trait anxiety* refers to a persons’ natural stable tendency, whereas *state anxiety* is an emotional response to a particular stimulus that affects behaviour at that given time, but that is transient. However, another term, *situation-specific anxiety*, also emerged to refer to anxiety as a psychological reaction triggered by a well-defined situation such as public speaking (Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b). According to MacIntyre and Gardner, “situation-specific anxiety can be considered to be the probability of becoming anxious in a particular type of situation, such as [...] when speaking a second language” (1994, p. 2).

3.4. Foreign Language Anxiety | Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) propose a situation-specific construct related to learners’ negative emotional reactions to the process of foreign language learning. While Horwitz et al. agree that foreign language anxiety (FLA) is related to *communication apprehension*, *test anxiety*, and *fear of negative evaluation* by peers and teacher, they believe it is far more

complex than the combination of these factors and define FLA as “a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process” (1986, p. 128).

Additionally, MacIntyre and Gardner defend that “initially, anxiety is an undifferentiated, negative affective response to some experience in language class,” however, if not addressed, “anxiety becomes reliably associated with the language class and differentiated from other contexts” (1991c, p.297). This particular type of anxiety, therefore, negatively impacts learners’ motivation to engage in the language learning process (Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre, 1999; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a). As performance in foreign language learning is related to measures of anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to identify and measure learners’ anxiety, which consists of three main components: Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation and Test Anxiety; the FLCAS has been widely used as a standard measurement tool to explore foreign language anxiety.

Although anxiety has a predominantly negative connotation, some research points out that anxiety need not necessarily be considered *debilitative*; it can also be *facilitative*, this is, a positive anxiety, which keeps students alert, motivating them to strive harder to overcome the difficulties encountered (Scovel, 1978; Young, 1986). Indeed, Ohata stated that several experienced language teachers argued in relation to learners that “if they don’t feel any pressure or anxiety, they would not do anything after all” (2005, p.144), reinforcing the idea that a certain level of anxiety can somehow fuel motivation.

However, most research on anxiety indicates that it negatively affects the performance of foreign language learners, even more so in relation to speaking ability (Ellis, 2008; Horwitz et al. , 1986; Young, 1991). High levels of FLA can prevent learners from speaking the target language with ease, inhibiting them from fully expressing their opinions and ideas. As Horwitz et al. mention, “the more anxious student tends to avoid attempting difficult or personal messages in the target language” (1986., p.126) and describe the cognitive functions of speaking in a foreign language as “complex and nonspontaneous mental operations are required in order to communicate at all, any performance in the L2 is likely to challenge an individual’s self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic”

(1986 p. 128), emphasizing that learners emotions and beliefs about their abilities affect their communicative development in the foreign language. Young (1991) adds that when learners are required to use the language orally without much preparation and in front of others, some tend to *freeze up* or even produce unexpected oral errors.

3.5. The role of teachers | Learning Environment

Many language learners suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety to some extent and as teacher we need to help students overcome this. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), teachers may either focus on helping learners cope with the situations that cause their anxiety or they can foster a more anxiety-free learning environment that enables students to communicate in the target language in a more relaxed manner (Horwitz et. al, 1986). As Arnold puts it, “in educational contexts it is important to keep in mind that emotions, thinking and learning are inextricably linked” (Arnold, 2011, p. 3). Therefore, she contends that as teachers we need to address affective issues and “provide a supportive atmosphere in which we can better encourage learners to work hard to reach their learning potential” (2011, p.6). This can be achieved through various strategies , such as providing individual feedback, offering praise and recognition, creating a welcoming environment and fostering a sense of community that encourages students to engage and reach their full potential. The results of the study by Aida (1994) also corroborate the fact that teachers play an important role when it comes to reducing the anxiety level of learners, as they are the ones able to take steps towards creating a friendlier and more collaborative environment.

Creating a classroom environment that fosters a sense of community is essential for student success. This includes creating a space where students feel comfortable to express their ideas and opinions with their peers, and where there is mutual respect for the diversity of abilities and perspectives (Kitano, 2001; Dörnyei, 2001; White, 2007).Furthermore, to establish a sense of belonging, it is important for learners to feel the teacher’s concern for them goes beyond the learning process and that there is a more personal connection being established so as to build trust. This can be achieved by expressing genuine interest in the learners, paying attention to their needs and concerns, whether they are related to their education or their personal lives, and treating them with respect as individuals. When learners feel that their teacher is approachable

and cares about their well-being, they are more likely to be more actively involved and motivated in their studies.

Although the notion of motivation is founded on the assumption that each person is motivated differently (Williams & Burden, 1997), there is little doubt that the teacher plays a crucial role in both fostering the optimum learning environment and determining student motivation for foreign language learning. Williams and Burden (1997) emphasize that the interconnection that is established between learners and teachers is important to increase learners' individual self-esteem and motivation to engage, stating that trust is crucial to the process. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2001) defend that a good rapport is essential and affirm that the teacher's personality and behaviour can promote or hinder student motivation, adding that a key element to keep students engaged and willing to participate is the enthusiasm that they convey to students. In short, the social climate of a class is extremely important both for student motivation and reduction of learner anxiety, and the teacher has a key role in establishing a safe learning environment.

4. Speaking strategies

While teaching speaking skills is essential for language learning, it is important to not only create a pleasant environment that motivates students to engage in the learning process, but also to provide opportunities for meaningful, real-life activities that will further motivate students to speak (Thornbury, 2005). Although they may feel nervous, students should practice speaking in front of groups so they can communicate in English when debating and expressing ideas in public, both in academic and informal settings. Consequently, teachers should concentrate on developing the ability to speak effectively, which will aid students in accomplishing success not only in the classroom, but also in their future personal and professional lives.

Fear of speaking in English for these students can result in communication problems that have an impact on their academic, (future) professional and social lives. That said, it is necessary to address the issue by providing students with opportunities that will gradually help them overcome their fears, as well as provide proper feedback that will enhance their speaking ability (Ölmezer-Öztürk & Öztürk, 2021). These might include both prepared and unprepared public speaking moments in class, group discussions on topics they can relate to, or making podcasts to

share information or views on a subject and to stimulate discussion among peers, among other options.

Additionally, encouraging and maintaining student engagement extends beyond concerns with teacher and peer interactions or establishing a low-threatening environment. When it comes to engaging students in the learning process, motivation is a crucial factor. It is defined as "the combination of effort, desire to attain the objective of learning the language, and positive attitudes toward learning the language" (Gardner, 1985, p. 10). This desire can be stimulated if the topics are of interest to students and enhanced by the way they are explored (Harmer, 2001). Students at a tertiary educational level expect to be challenged in different ways than they were during secondary education; they expect a different experience that is pleasant, but that mainly allows them to be more independent and develop skills for their future.

4.1. Prepared public speaking moments

According to Lucas, "many people who converse easily in all kinds of everyday situations become frightened at the idea of standing up before a group to make a speech" (2001, p.9). When learners are asked to speak English in front of the class without preparation, the reactions are usually of apprehension as most dislike being put under the spotlight. However, if no efforts are taken to address these limitations, students will not succeed in achieving their objective of learning a foreign language, which is to successfully communicate. The popular saying that practice makes perfect is, in many cases, valuable advice that can help individuals build both confidence and a positive attitude towards speech performance (O'Hair, Stewart, & Rubenstein, 2011). That said, one strategy that can help boost students' confidence is to allow them enough time to prepare and rehearse before giving presentations and/or speeches, and guide them , if necessary (Harmer, 2001).

Podcasts are a good way for less confident students to begin sharing their thoughts with an audience, as they do not require a vis-à-vis interaction (Sze, 2006); they also contribute to an improvement in pronunciation and intonation through practice (Ducate & Lomicka, 2009; Sze, 2006). They require students to logically organize their thoughts on a topic and, as argued by Richards (2008), it is through speaking that one demonstrates the ability to use the language to deliver their opinions. These can be individual thoughts or conversations in pair/group that

are broadcasted to peers and that can foster further meaningful communication as peers comment on what is heard; as argued by Harmer (2001), people communicate because they expect a reaction to what they say. In addition, students are quite familiar with the structure of the podcast due to its popularity among young people, and using them in class can improve learners' motivation (Wulan, 2018). Dudeney and Hockly (2007) also emphasize that creating podcasts, although demanding, is rewarding for learners; they take a more active and autonomous role in their learning process, using both their knowledge of the language and technology to personalise content. Additionally, when students develop more self-confidence, they can advance to vodcasts, which is a video podcast where they will be putting a face to the voice, exposing themselves more.

Oral presentations are also an effective communicative activity that has been used in the English as a foreign language classroom to help develop learners' language abilities (Thornbury, 2005). Presentations, whether individual or in groups, also assist students in gradually gaining confidence in speaking the language in front of others. Moreover, in group presentations, as learners interact with one another to make decisions on the presentation itself, they also increase their communicative competence, as it is through meaningful interaction that content emerges (Ellis, 2000; Nunan, 2004). Additionally, group work can contribute to develop a friendlier atmosphere by fostering relationships (Douglas, 2011). Furthermore, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages also states that productive activities such as oral presentations, "have an important function in many academic and professional fields" (2020, p.60). Another point is that oral presentations are not only about the use of oral language, but also communication with body language (eye movement, facial expressions, gestures, which "are an intrinsic part of expressing meaning" (Burns & Claire, 2003, p.8) that can be improved through practice.

4.2. Unprepared speaking moments

Burns describes "competent speakers of English must be able to handle several complex processes and skills simultaneously, usually in real time, where they may not be able to plan in advance" (2016, p.2). An impromptu speech is precisely a speech that is delivered with little or no formal preparation, requiring students to think quickly and speak spontaneously (Lucas,

2001). Yale (2014) highlights impromptu speeches as an important vehicle to promote students' ability to communicate effectively, particularly in organisational environments, and the majority of students in these courses aim to develop their linguistic competence specifically to be able to succeed in professional settings. However, speaking without preparation occurs often in a variety of settings; we do so without prior preparation every time we express an opinion, respond to a question, or interact verbally with people; hence the importance of practicing it within the context of EFL.

While speaking without much preparation can contribute to exacerbating learners' anxiety, in a study by Gerardelli, more than 80 Chinese EFL students found the impromptu speech activities to have "contributed in increasing their confidence in giving a short speech in English without much preparation, helping them to gain a better understanding of how to organize their speeches, and increasing their awareness of the importance of nonverbal communication" (2017, p. 60).

According to its origins, the term impromptu means "in readiness," therefore prepared for something. Although delivering an impromptu speech is given without much prior preparation, a good impromptu speech requires the speaker to be prepared and the only way to do this is through practice, which in turn will help learners overcome their anxiety, or at the very least, help them to gradually deal with it better. That said, and given the fact that most speaking in real-life is indeed impromptu, there is need to focus on developing spontaneous oral production skills as a way of improving students' oral communicative skills. According to Williamson (2008), impromptu speaking is a great practice for developing both fluency and confidence while expressing ideas.

4.3. Group discussions on controversial topics

Nunan stated, "speaking is the way in which we express or exchange thoughts and feelings through using language" (2003, p.48), and controversial topics allow learners to practice while discussing issues that can cause an emotional response while presenting different views, which learners need to be able to discuss objectively and respectfully. Learning to sustain a productive discussion is a skill required both inside and outside a classroom. It is important to be able to present ideas, comprehend opposing points of view, and know how to avoid highly charged

emotional reactions. However, even though discussing sensitive and controversial issues offers a number of advantages, many teachers avoid addressing them in class precisely because of their sensitive nature (Haynes, 2009).

Notwithstanding, according to the Council of Europe (2016), it is crucial to address controversial issues in the classroom, and higher education is the perfect setting to examine ideas in-depth and engage in debate about opposing viewpoints with maturity and respect. As Burrton (2006) argues, controversial issues should be welcomed, not avoided, as long as they are properly handled. Furthermore, he defends that addressing current issues strengthens students' critical thinking and is essential to creating more effective citizens. At a time when the English language has become a communication tool used to negotiate and convey meaning across borders, functioning as the global lingua franca in diverse contexts, Byram (2008) contends that teachers should bring real-world issues to the forefront of the classroom in order to help language learners develop as intercultural speakers who can act as more active and responsible citizens within the global community.

Additionally, today's learners are interested in what is happening around the world and want such issues addressed in the classroom (Oxfam, 2006). Therefore, by tackling contentious issues, we provide students with the chance to practice critical thinking while also motivating them to engage in meaningful oral communication. Moreover, higher education institutes aim to develop "critical thinking, creativity and moral reflection" in today's students as they are necessary skills to help learners become "engaged citizens" capable of navigating a "complex global environment" (Schlueter, 2016). Thus, creating opportunities for learners to converse about topics where there are likely to be divergent viewpoints will not only help learners to develop their oral skills, but also important skills needed for active citizenship.

4.4. Seating arrangements | Standing

Classroom seating is a dynamic that is often overlooked; however, the way students are seated in the classroom can impact the degree of interaction and motivation of students, so it should be considered when seeking to promote student involvement in the learning process (Fernandes et al., 2011). How seating is arranged influences behaviour, ensures attentiveness, encourages participation and facilitates social interaction between peers (Fernandes et al., 2011; Richards &

Lockhart, 1984; Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008). Furthermore, appropriate seating arrangements can help to reduce anxiety levels among students. For instance, placing students in small groups can encourage them to be more willing to speak. Richards and Lockhart also point out that, despite their best efforts, teachers will interact with and solicit participation from students more frequently who are within their visual scope, this is, within their *action zone*, and they contend that students who are “located within the teacher's action zone and are likely to participate more actively in a lesson than students who fall outside the action zone”(1984, p.139).

Therefore, teachers should adjust their action zones according to each particular task.

In this specific teaching context, seating arrangements are viewed through the lens of engagement or apathy; the focus is less on disruptive behaviour or distraction and more on how seating might facilitate or impede oral participation and interaction, as different arrangements encourage different social interactions (Harmer, 2007; Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008). That said, in this specific teaching environment, the layout is regimented in rows of desks, which is not ideal for moments of greater student interaction; separate tables, circles or the horseshoe format is more ideal for speaking or group work activities (Harmer, 2007). In addition, desks arranged in rows may lead more passive or shy students to seek the back rows, which can affect their ability to be more involved and learn. A solution to foster more interaction can be to rearrange desks in accordance with the activity to be carried out or to simply challenge students to stand up and use the available space to engage with their peers as they do outside the classroom.

When it comes to enabling learners to speak with confidence, we need to consider both vocal delivery (intonation, speed, pause, projection) and nonverbal communication (eye contact, body language), as all of these elements contribute to perceived effectiveness (Burns, 2016; Burns & Claire, 2003; Harmer, 2001; Thornbury, 2005). Speaking is as much about the words we choose as it is about how we say those words, and how the message is backed up by nonverbal signals; additionally effective communication relies on engaged listening. Some of these components may also be impacted by where students are sitting in classroom. For instance, when students who lack confidence sit in the back rows, their voices are often not clearly heard and as a result, their ideas or thoughts may be disregarded, which would further undermine their confidence, or they may use the back row to hide and avoid participating . On the other hand, if students are seated near to one another, they will not

need to project their voice much and may even choose not to establish eye contact (they simply speak without lifting their heads).

If these factors are so important in helping students improve their verbal and nonverbal communication, then perhaps the simple act of standing up to speak can lead students to be more aware of all these elements in supporting their messages. I have been applying this specific strategy since the beginning of my journey as a language teacher in the Open Language Courses and have noticed that as soon as learners stand up in front of the class, although anxiety may increase, the effort to clearly state their thoughts changes. Students must project their voices to ensure their peers hear them clearly, they need to be aware of the pace (speed, intonation, pause) of their voice to correctly convey their message and keep listeners engaged, and they must establish eye contact so peers know they are addressing them, while being mindful about their body language, which can help or distract from the message. While they may feel uncomfortable at first, they gradually come to perceive it as something that comes naturally and the progress in paying attention to these elements is apparent.

Chapter 2. METHODOLOGY

1. Participants and context

The participants in this study, most of which aged between 17 and 30, were students attending the B2 Open Language English Courses. These courses are a paid extracurricular course administered at a higher education institution, and each level commits to two lessons per week, running from 6:30 pm to 8.30 pm, throughout the semester. Classes are mostly synchronous but require asynchronous work to be able to meet the requirements of the level. The courses are available not only for learners and staff of the institution itself, but also the general public, however, as shown in Table 2.1, the vast majority of the participants were linked to the institute in question, and most were students in the second study cycle. That said, 60 per cent of the students attending the B2 level were over the age of twenty-five.

Table : 2.1: Online Questionnaire : Personal information | Contact with language

Category	Answers	Students	
		N	%
Age	17-20	5	16,7
	21-25	7	23,3
	26-30	7	23,3
	Over 30	11	36,7
Affiliation to Institution	Student	14	43,3
	Former Student	5	16,7
	Employee	1	3,3
	Erasmus	0	0
	Research fellow	2	6,7
	Other	9	30
Cycle Of Study	1st-Undergraduate	7	23,3
	2nd-Masters level	8	26,7
	3rd-Doctoral level	2	6,7
	post-Doctoral	1	3,3
	Other	0	0
	Not applicable	12	40

The questionnaire was completed by 30 students, however due to time constraints, the strategies were only applied to one B2 class of fourteen students. In this class, three of the pupils were Brazilian, while the rest were Portuguese; the vast majority were under 30 years of age. Regarding their affiliation to the institution, six students were undergraduates, two were master's students, one was a PhD student, one was a physics researcher, and the

remaining four were non-students, two of whom had previously attended the institution and obtained a Master's degree. Participants who were students at the institution came from different areas of study as can be seen in Table 2.2, including languages.

Table : 2.2: Field of study of participants in class

Learner	Field of study
A	1st cycle degree in Industrial Engineering and Management 1st cycle degree in Nursing
B	1st cycle degree in Biomedical Sciences
C	1st cycle degree in Mechanical Engineering
D	1st cycle degree in Languages and Business Relations
E	1st cycle degree in Biology
F	1st cycle degree in Mathematics
G	Master in Economics Master in Data science for Social Science
H	Master in Languages and Business Relations
I	Doctorate in Information and Communication in Digital Platforms
J	Researcher in Physics

2. Research design

Specifically, it is a case study, aimed at understanding a given phenomenon within a real-life situations (Yin, 2009). This study focused on the use of several teaching methods and strategies to a small group of students in order to encourage them to overcome their fear of speaking in a foreign language and develop their self-confidence while speaking in the target language, a complex phenomenon in language classrooms. The results are expected to widen the range of study in this area and permit further exploration into its theoretical foundation. Berg (2000) defends that “case study methods involve systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social settings, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how it operates or function” (p. 225). That said, this case study uses both quantitative (student questionnaire) and qualitative (journals/interviews) methodologies so as to gather the needed information about the learners’ attitude towards speaking in

English prior to the course and to understand if strategies applied were effective in motivating students to orally engage. Integrating quantitative and qualitative research in a single study allows the researcher to “bring out the best of both paradigms while also compensating for their weaknesses” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p.205), thus the qualitative data allow to extend and complement the quantitative data obtained.

3. Data collection instruments and procedures

The research employed three types of instruments to collect data from participants: an online questionnaire, a journal and a semi-structured interview. An online questionnaire was conducted at the beginning of the course to understand the students’ motivation in wanting to improve and deepen their knowledge of the English language, as well as to comprehend how they felt in relation to speaking in the target language. Students were asked to keep journals throughout the course, where they would record their thoughts following an oral activity, with the aim of helping them refer to these thoughts during the interview phase. The group interview was carried out after the end of the course and the data collected in the interview aimed not only to complement the data collected in the questionnaires, providing more details regarding motivation and attitudes of the participants in relation to speaking in the target language (triangulate findings), but mainly to collect respondents’ thoughts regarding the strategies applied during the course and how effective, or not, they were in motivating learners to overcome any anxiety issues. In addition, as Ryan et al. (2009) argue, semi-structured interviews provide a chance to explore responses that were not anticipated. All of this was done following an informed consent from both the head of the department where the study was carried out (Annex 1) and the students involved (Annex 2).

3.1. Online questionnaire

The online questionnaire (see Appendix 1), mostly composed of closed-ended questions, was carried via Google Forms and is divided into six sections. As Dörnyei (2010) states, questionnaires can be divided into sections to collect considerable amount of information using little resource and time. The purpose of the first section is to encourage respondents to read the questions carefully and to emphasize the value of providing truthful answers to the

survey, as “respondents are often unmotivated, slapdash, hasty, and insincere” (Dörnyei, 2010, p.11). The second section aimed to collect personal information to determine if the respondents had an affiliation to the institution and to ascertain their cycle of study, or if they were from the general public, that is, people already inserted in the job market. The following section is intended to learn more about student’s previous exposure to the English language, including how long it was covered in their compulsory education and whether or not they continued to invest in their language studies by attending private lessons. The fourth section is to better understand respondents’ self-perception of their proficiency in the four language skills so as to determine what they consider their weaknesses to be. Section five primarily aimed to comprehend their motivation to further their English language studies, as well as to determine their choice to do so at this particular institution. If the reason for their choice is the credibility of the institution, then we have more of an obligation to take a closer look at how student’s expectations are being met.

The last section was inspired by the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) from Horwitz et al. (1986). However, the intent of this section was to measure students’ anxiety level, but rather to explore the underlying causes of anxiety related to speaking, as well as to understand students’ motivation for engaging in speaking activities and the factors that may influence or hinder this. Therefore, the statements were designed around five categories, as can be seen in table 2.3 , to better understand which factors best explain students’ reluctance to engage in speaking.

As sometimes respondents tend to intentionally avoid providing the truth (Dörnyei, 2010), the statements did not appear under their specific category in the questionnaire itself, nor were they grouped together, so as not to add any indicators that might affect the answers provided. Respondents were asked to evaluate the 15 statements using a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5).

Table : 2.3: Online Questionnaire: Attitude towards speaking in English

Category	Questions	Corresponding number in questionnaire
Anxiety	I feel nervous when speaking English in front of others.	1
	I feel anxious about oral presentations in English.	6
	I'd rather speak with a partner than in front of the class.	11
Social (fear of judgement)	I worry about judgment from my peers.	2
	I shy away from orally engaging in class because I worry about making mistakes.	7
	I feel others will not value my opinions or thoughts.	12
Confidence in Abilities (lack of self-confidence)	I feel insecure about my pronunciation.	3
	My confidence in speaking is low due to lack of previous practice.	9
	I feel insecure about my vocabulary and/or grammar knowledge.	13
Motivation	I make an effort to always speak in English during pair/group work.	4
	I am reluctant to orally engage if the topic is not interesting.	8
	I welcome all opportunities to develop my speaking skills.	14
Classroom environment issues	I orally participate more in classes where there is a more relaxed learning environment.	5
	My oral interaction is influenced by my relationship with my teacher.	10
	I feel more at ease to speak in smaller classes.	15

3.2. Journal

Learners were encouraged to keep a journal and to make an entry following the synchronous and asynchronous moments when oral activities took place. The main goal was to record their thoughts and feelings regarding the activity itself so that they could discuss them with the group during the interview phase. However, these notes were also intended to help students develop awareness of their progress in terms of anxiety and motivation throughout the course. Moon defended that “reflection is part of learning and thinking. We reflect in order to learn something, or we learn as a result of reflecting” (2004, p.186). It is hoped that as learners reflect on their emotions and thoughts at each moment, they will begin to understand

that the more they engage, the easier it is to overcome anxiety and the better they become at expressing their thoughts and opinions. As Moon identifies, one of the many purposes of journal writing is “to increase active involvement in learning and personal ownership of learning” (1999, p. 190).

The first entry was completed in class after an impromptu speech challenge to ensure learners understood the journaling task. While the idea was for them to have the freedom to ponder on the activities as they wish, learners frequently require a few prompt questions to direct the activity. Students were therefore asked to reflect on their feelings when the activity was presented, their feelings when they had to stand in front of the class and present their ideas on a given topic with only a five-minute preparation, and their feelings at the conclusion of class after all students had given speeches. They were also invited to consider how the activity may improve their speaking skills through this practice. The entries were written by learners after the class.

3.3. Group interviews

The group interviews were carried at the end of the language course. The 12 learners, who agreed to the interview, were divided into two groups, and one hour was allocated for each session. The number of participants in the group is less than the number of participants in that responded to the questionnaires, however, as Creswell noted, one should “not minimize the importance of a sample because of its size.” (2012, p.553). Group interviews provide a way to collect data from multiple participants at once, allowing for a wide range of perspectives and experiences to be gathered in a relatively short period of time. One of the main advantages of group interviews is that they allow for the emergence of group dynamics, which can provide valuable insights into the topic being studied. This can lead to a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives, and can provide a more nuanced view of the topic being studied, as participants are able to share their perspectives, offer feedback and challenge each other (Kruger, et al., 2009).

Group interviews were especially crucial for this case study because they not only offered an opportunity to elaborate on and discuss the topics covered in the questionnaire, but they also gave participants a chance to express and share their opinions on the teaching methods used

in class and analyse potential causes for their reluctance to speak, which could be used to develop future techniques to overcome speaking anxiety or demotivation.

The process began, as suggested by Dörnyei (2007), with an introductory phase that serves not only to welcome the participants, but also to ensure they understand the purpose of the interview and how it will be carried out. The semi-structured interview consisted of a set of pre-established questions (see Appendix 2) designed to guide the group discussion towards the topic however, new questions emerged as the participants' responses progressed. The idea behind providing these questions was to get them to reflect, but not limit their response, therefore, they have an open-ended nature. The predetermined questions were divided into three stages: engagement, exploration and exit questions. The engagement question aimed at establishing the topic, the exploration questions sought to gather the data required for the research, and the exit questions ensured participants had the opportunity to contribute any pertinent information.

Audio recordings were not transcribed verbatim. Although verbatim transcriptions provide an accurate and detailed record of the collected data, as they capture all of the spoken words, including nonverbal cues such as pause and filler words, which can be important to understand the context and meaning conversation (Guest et al., 2012), they can lead to an overwhelming amount of data that can be difficult to analyse. Instead, edited transcriptions were used to focus on the most important parts of the data rather than including every word that was spoken, therefore nonverbal cues and names were omitted, which makes it more readable. Additionally, edited tapescripts can help to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

4. Data analysis

The organisation and interpretation of data was carried out in two distinct stages. First, the quantitative data were organised into graphs and tables, so as to transform the data into information (Vilelas, 2009) that allowed the research to have a clearer view of the participants and their motivation to deepen their studies of the English language, as well as to understand information in the light of the theoretical framework on anxiety and willingness to engage in speaking, which would provide a first answer to research question 1.

As the statistical data obtained from section six of the questionnaire applied a five-point Likert Scale , in order to facilitate the analysis of the data collected, Dörnyei's (2007) recommendation for data reduction was used. Therefore, three variables were used instead of five: Disagree (1) Neutral(2) and Agree (3). The starting variables 1 and 2 are represented by the value Disagree (1), whereas the initial variables 4 and 5 from the scale that was provided to the students in the questionnaire are represented by the value Agree (2). The reason for not including the neutral answers into the other two variables was made because it would have affected the interpretation of the results and conclusions drawn from the research. By not including neutral responses in the other two variables, it allows for a clearer and more direct comparison between participants who disagree and participants who agree with the statement. It also allows a more accurate representation of opinions and attitudes of the participants and facilitates the understanding and interpretation of the results, simplifying statistical analysis.

The next step was regarding the qualitative data. The recordings needed to be transcribed so that one may be able to read and explore the data collect to make sense of information obtained. This "is the point when the researcher gains a sense of what is relevant and what falls outside the scope of the investigation" (Dörnyei , 2007, p. 244); often a challenge for novice researchers. That said, in order to answer research question 2 and supplement the answers to research question 1, the data were organised into two categories: speaking in the target language and strategies applied, that were then subdivided (see figure 2.1). The coding phase is a process of labelling the information into groups or categories so as to be able better identify the information (Dörnyei, 2007).

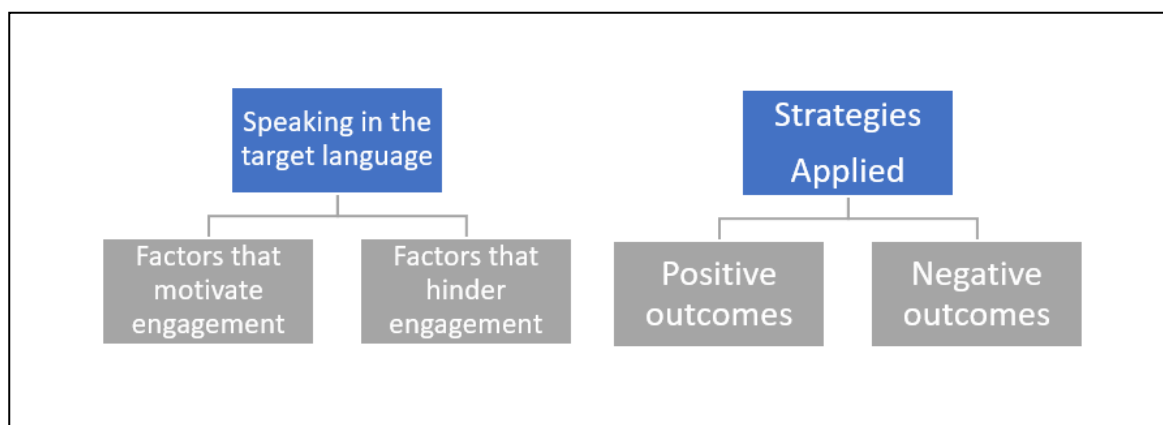


Figure : 2.1: Group Interview Categories

5. Implementation of Strategies

The following classroom strategies are to be implemented with the aim of helping learners overcome their anxiety as well as increasing their motivation to engage orally:

5.1. Podcasts

The podcast challenge was presented to the group at the beginning of the semester. For this activity a class Padlet was created as it is a straightforward platform where students could easily record and upload their podcasts, in addition, it also allowed for peer feedback. The first assignment was individual, and students had two weeks to produce a two-minute podcast. As the students in the course study or work, the deadline was negotiated with them to ensure they had enough time to plan and carry out the activity well. The first assignment was to talk about a topic they are enthusiastic about, in the hopes that this would enhance their motivation. The more technologically proficient students were welcomed to use other forms to record their podcasts, but they had to be posted on the class Padlet. In this type of activity, students can simply record themselves reading a script without giving voice placement any thought, which might make the end result sound unnatural. Hopefully, upon listening to themselves speak, students would understand the significance of speed, intonation and word stress in conveying a message. In this sense, the two-week deadline allowed for multiple recordings before submitting their finished work. Additionally, it was expected that anxiety would not interfere with delivery given that students would be conveying their thoughts, opinions, and feelings to the class without having to face anyone.

The second task required participants to create a vodcast either individually, in pairs or in groups of three. The deadline for this activity would be longer, not only because of the additional complexity of the activity itself (video editing; time management if in pairs/groups), but also because it was assigned at a time when students were being assessed for other curriculum units. The video component was included in this podcast to draw students from hiding, i.e., the listeners would now be able to see the face behind the voice, which will compel learners to focus more than on paralinguistic features; they also need to be pay closer attention to eye contact and body language (gestures, facial expressions). Students would be

able to review their videos privately in their homes, without the added pressure of peer criticism, and make any required changes before sharing them with others. Furthermore, according to Knoll (2014), self-recorded videos not only allow learners to monitor their performance regarding language and non-linguistic competency, but they also provide students the chance to assess one another collaboratively, and encourage critical reflections among teachers and students. Students can learn from both their own mistakes and those of others, as well as learn from the examples provided by their peers and through feedback from peers and teachers. Moreover, in an era of technologically advanced and of technically savvy students, it is critical to incorporate technology as a tool not only to enrich learning practice and change the dynamics of the learning environment, but also to motivate learners to take on a more active role.

5.2. Oral presentations in Group

As a requirement of the current syllabus, learners need to give a group oral presentation towards the end of the semester. Groups were decided after a month of lessons, therefore, at the beginning of the semester, learners were encouraged to vary who they sat with in order to get to know their peers better for informed group formation. Working with others brings many challenges, so it was important for students to feel at ease or be able to better identify with those they will be working on a project that corresponds to 30 per cent of the overall course grade. To allow the students to better prepare for this specific task, in-class moments were designated for the elaboration of their final oral presentation. Learners had to brainstorm topics within their groups, negotiate final topic and organisation, research information, delegate tasks and decide on visual presentation. The assessment criteria were explained to the students since this may affect their motivation and involvement in the project (see table 2.4). Oral presentations incorporate language skills, discourse skills, organisational skills and even multimedia management. Hence, it is important that learners clearly understand that it is not just about what is said, but also about how the presentation is delivered.

In order to prepare students to be able to deliver a final strong presentation, mini presentations on other group work were also carried out throughout the semester. These would not only serve as trial runs, but mainly as moments of critical reflection, and to also help students gradually

overcome any inhibitions issues. Furthermore, “the experience of standing up in front their colleagues and speaking for a sustained turn is excellent preparation for real-life speaking” (Thornbury, 2005, p.94). Oral presentations are a good way to help learners develop skills needed both in the field of work and in academia, where they will be required to express their knowledge and understanding of topics. In addition, they foster learner autonomy, creativity and team spirit. That said, creating opportunities for multiple oral presentations is beneficial not only in helping students develop their oral speaking proficiency in English, but in general.

Table : 2.4: Group Oral Presentations: Criteria

Group assessment:

Criterion	Points
Time Each member had equal speaking time	1
Topic Interest Novelty	2
Organisation Well organized Smooth transitions between elements	1
Visuals Proper function Clear Aesthetically pleasing	1

Individual assessment of each member:

Criterion	Points
Pronunciation Intonation Stress Individual sounds	2.5
Delivery Speed Projection Fluency	2.5
Vocabulary Range Appropriacy	4
Grammar Range Appropriacy	4
Readiness Content Knowledge Engagement	1
Body Language Eye contact	1

5.3. Impromptu Speeches

The first impromptu speech activity took place without any prior notice or presentation of structure. Students were asked to take a topic card from a bag and write some key notes on the back of the card related to the topic to present in a one-minute speech to their peers. This initial activity can be compared to the metaphor of ripping off a bandage itself, that is, knowing that they will have to stand up in front of others and deliver a speech without much prior preparation can clearly make them feel uncomfortable, however, with time, it is expected that they realise

that this same feeling of discomfort does not last much and that, with practice, these feelings tend to disappear.

The activity was followed by analysis of examples of impromptu speeches in groups (mobile visualisation) to outline the structure. After reviewing the structure and the importance of a good opening, students were requested to assign a new topic to one of their peers. The purpose of asking students to select topics was not only to get them more involved in the lesson, but also to encourage them to take responsibility for the position they would be placing their peers in, i.e., they needed to think of a topic that would facilitate their peers' speech rather than hinder it as all students suffer from some form of anxiety when speaking in front of others, therefore, the aim was mainly to foster empathy, a necessary skill for an intercultural speaker. The students had five minutes to organize their thoughts by drafting an outline of the speech according to the structure previously analysed; this time they were to deliver a two-minute speech.

Lucas (2001) argued that even if students spoke about the same topic, none of the speeches would be the same, because the way learners organize ideas is different. In view of this, the third activity, which was carried out two weeks after the first approach to impromptu speeches, was on a quote – “An eye for an eye will make the whole world blind” (Gandhi, 2000-2001) , since the previous lesson scheduled was on the topic of crime and punishment. The next impromptu speech challenge, which took place three weeks later, was a variation of this very thought. Students were asked to think about a piece of advice to give to their peers. While the topic was the same, which put learners at a similar vantage point, it also allowed for more personalisation, as the best advice one can offer others often comes from personal experience. In this sense, speaking through the lens of personal experience, it was expected that this would contribute to reducing the anxiety that learners may feel.

The last impromptu challenge was scheduled for the end of the semester; they had five minutes to prepare a two-minute speech. By this time, students would not only have had several opportunities to practice speaking in front of the class, but they would also have developed stronger connections with each other, so it was expected that they would feel more confident when delivering that last speech. In addition, the teacher has had the chance to get to know the students better and, thus, was able to prepare topic cards that appealed to their interest. While the very essence of an impromptu speech is to deliver a speech on the spur of the moment, this

does not mean that the speaker need not be educated about the subject. In fact, if students do not have enough adequate prior knowledge on the issue, this will contribute to increasing their anxiety; therefore, choosing topics that students are interested in or familiar with will assist them to organise their thoughts and keep their nerves in check.

5.4. Group discussions on controversial topics

The first group discussion on a controversial topic was integrated into the general theme of the lesson. After several tasks on Crime and Punishment that aimed to explain Personal and Impersonal Passive, an introductory discussion was held. Students were required to discuss in pairs the appropriate punishment for each of the crimes committed as part of a reading comprehension assignment, which they would then share with the class. For instance, if the crime was public vandalism, what punishment would they consider appropriate? This was followed by an open class discussion on crime and punishment in Portugal to encourage them to share their views and thoughts on the judicial system and laws of the country, so that, at this stage, they would already be publicly presenting arguments and supporting them.

As debates are considered to be potentially effective in enhancing learners reasoning and argumentative skills (Malloy et al., 2020); following this exchange of views, the class viewed a short video on debating skills to understand the concepts of motion, proposition, opposition, as well as the structure of a debate. Students were divided into two groups (for/against) and received a language handout to assist in the discussion. After reviewing language, the motion was presented: The death penalty should be an option in more serious crimes. Students had to brainstorm arguments and examples within their groups, as well as potential counterarguments the other group could make in order to be prepared. The debate followed.

The second group discussion moment occurred two weeks later. In this lesson, students were grouped together and asked to suggest a list of three controversial issues that they believed were important to address. After reaching a decision, they exchanged list with other groups, who then had to choose one of the topics. The first task was based on Harvard's Project Zero Circle of Viewpoints (2015), which encourages students to consider the subject from as many angles as they can. To achieve this, they must brainstorm what different stakeholders might say about the issue at hand, taking into account factors such as education, location, age, religion,

political/social landscape, among other things. This activity aimed to help students understand that any topic can result in several points of view that are impacted by multiple factors. By understanding this, students were expected to develop a more empathetic respect for differing opinions. Groups presented their thoughts to the class; comments and queries were encouraged to generate further discussion.

5.5. Seating arrangements | Standing

Regarding seating arrangements, the following strategies were implemented:

- a.) In order to better get to know everyone in the class and establish relationships with all of their peers, students were advised to switch up who they sat with. Furthermore, the rotation method was implemented to ensure that students with different abilities would collaborate with one another at some point, which would enhance cooperative learning.
- b.) In general, students sat at selected desks that are in rows facing the whiteboard and teacher (traditional lecture setup), however, despite the difficulties in moving the furniture, the following seating arrangements were put into practice in accordance with the work to be completed:
 - Pair work: Row format is maintained, and students were asked to work with the peer closest to them;
 - Group work: For certain activities, tables were arranged in a square format so that students were facing each other while working; for other activities, students were invited to get up and use the space available to interact with their peers;
 - Discussions/Debates: There were times when the horseshoe format was used and times when the row format was maintained, however, two rows were joined together and students were asked to sit on opposite sides of the row, facing each other.
 - Gather information: When students need to gather information from peers they could choose those nearest to them or walk around the class to obtain information from others.

c.) It is essential to normalize standing in front of others during communication periods so that students can gradually gain the confidence to speak in front of others in English and also learn to use the necessary elements to ensure that the message is conveyed. For this reason, the teacher sat in one of the rows, while students were requested to go to the front of the class:

- every time they had to read something aloud (e.g. a text they write);
- every time a group or individual student had to present ideas to the class;
- for any role-play-based activity;
- to inform, solicit or negotiate with members of the class about miscellaneous issues (e.g. asking peers to change the date of an assessment; informing peers of an interesting campus activity, etc.).

5.6. Learning environment

The following strategies were applied to establish a more encouraging and nonthreatening learning environment in the classroom:

- a.) Teacher immediacy, both verbal and nonverbal, can boost learning and motivation while reinforcing good behaviour and reducing anxiety (Richmond et al., 2006). As a result, everyone in the class—including the teacher—was addressed by their first name; personal anecdotes were used to introduce or illustrate specific tasks; humour—as opposed to sarcasm—was embraced; the teacher maintained a closer proximity to students by moving around the classroom, joining groups as they worked, providing assistance where necessary; the teacher was an empathic listener and inquired about students' personal feelings and situations; deadlines were negotiated in accordance to students' needs; and praise and adequate feedback was be offered.
- b.) It is important that students feel comfortable and supported in the classroom, where tolerance and acceptance of mistakes is the norm to ensure learners feel at ease to take risks because they understand they will not be ridiculed (Dörnyei, 2001). That said, it was made clear to students that making mistakes is a natural part of learning and that what is most valued is the effort to participate and engage. Following speaking opportunities, indirect feedback was given rather than direct correction, so that attention was not

placed on errors, reinforcing the value of fluency over accuracy and highlighting the importance of effort; as Dörnyei stated, “the most effective means towards promoting effort attributions is the feedback we give to our students” (2001, p.121). Furthermore, scaffolding strategies were used to move students from more dependant speakers to independent speakers.

- c.) Cooperative learning promotes a sense of community since it requires students to work together in order to achieve a common goal. For that, they need to understand that the success of one person is dependent on the success of the group. This concept is known as positive interdependence, which is described as “linking students together so one cannot succeed unless all group members succeed. Group members have to know that they sink or swim together” (Johnson et al., 1998, p. 4). This ensures that group members are committed to helping each other. Therefore, encouraging cooperative learning through the creation of small groups is essential to maximizing learners’ language development (Dörnyei , 2001; Johnson et al.,2014). As a result, group work was given preference, and groups consisted of students with different capacities in order to enhance learning and encourage peer interaction. The final oral assessment was also to be carried out in groups for the very reason of peer interaction and support.

Chapter 3. RESULTS

1. Results of questionnaire

The results were divided into four sections. In the first, students' contact with the language is presented. The second is a self-evaluation of their language skills. The third section focuses on their expectations for the course, as well as their reason for continuing to invest in developing their English proficiency. The fourth will address the participants' attitudes towards speaking.

1.1. Contact with language

Ninety per cent of the respondents are of Portuguese nationality, which means that they studied the language at school for at least five years, this being a compulsory subject from the fifth to ninth year. Some may have taken it up in tenth and eleventh grade as an option since the study of two foreign languages is part of secondary education and some may have had it as an extracurricular subject during elementary school, hence, as shown in Table 3.1, over 40 per cent of respondents studied English at school for between five to eight years. Additionally, as they are Portuguese, we are aware that their exposure to the English language is increased as a result of the absence of dubbing in television shows and movies in Portugal.

Twenty per cent also stated to have had curriculum units at the University taught in English, which is not a high number per se, however, programmes taught in English are becoming more common at master's and doctoral level, not only because the majority of scientific works are published in English but also primarily to prepare students to gain access to a more international experience and open doors to international students. As a result, in a few years, this number will surely increase. Furthermore, 36.7 per cent of those surveyed responded that English is already the dominant language spoken in their current place of employment. In the globalised world we live in, organisations are increasingly connected, with English being the universal language of communication, therefore, the need for professionals fluent in the language will only increase. Additionally, a fair number of participants reported using English in their social lives more than 30 per cent of the time, which may be a result of a more diverse social environment.

Half of the respondents have had private English lessons to improve their language proficiency, which can be seen from two different perspectives. On one hand, they still feel insecure about their language proficiency despite having English as a compulsory subject at school, and on the

other hand, they acknowledge the value of learning English for their personal and professional development. The reason these learners may feel insecure could be due to the fact that English classes at school did not focus on the development of speaking skills, despite the change in curriculum goals that was initiated in 2001 to standardize learning policies in a global Europe through the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning, which emphasizes oral interaction and the development of oral skills. It is also noteworthy that half of the students who invested in advancing their English language studies were Open Language Courses participants at the higher institute where the study is being conducted. If we look at Figure 3.1, we can see that 36.7 per cent did so due to the institutes' credibility, therefore, if students rely on this specific institution to assist them in developing their language skills, it is reasonable that the institute understands and meets the needs of today's English language learners.

Table : 3.1: Contact with language

Category	Answers	Students	
		N	%
Nationality	Portuguese	27	90
	Other	3	10
Years studied English from 1 st to 12 th year at school	Less than 5	4	13.3
	5-8	13	43.3
	More than 8	12	40
	Uncertain	1	3.3
Attended private English lessons	Yes	15	50
	No	15	50
Years attending private English lessons	1-4	13	86.7
	5-10	5	13.3
	Over 10	0	0
At the Open Languages Courses at University	Yes	9	50
	No	9	50
Are any of your curriculum, units taught in English?	Yes	6	20
	No	24	80
If you are already working, is English the language of communication?	Yes	11	36.7
	No	19	63.3
How much do you contact with and/or use the English language in your social life (media, family, friends, peers, etc.)?	Less than 10%	12	40
	10% to 30%	8	26.7
	31% to 40%	6	20
	41% to 50%	3	10
	More than 50%	1	3.3

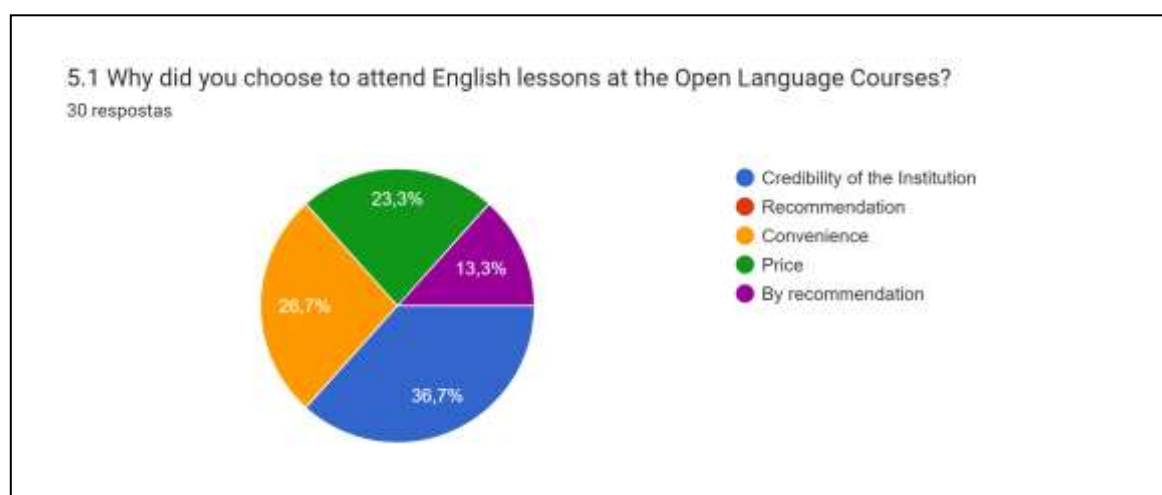


Figure : 3.1: Reason for choosing the Open Language Courses

1.2. Self-evaluation of language skills

The students had to select between *not confident* (needs work), *somewhat confident* (minor issues), and *confident* (at ease) when it came to their perception of their level of proficiency. Figure 3.2 demonstrates that learners are more assured in their receptive skills than in their productive skills. Most respondents placed themselves in the *somewhat confident* category for receptive skills whereas the majority placed themselves in the *not confident* category for productive abilities. A closer examination at the percentage of the productive skills reveals that writing and speaking are areas in which 53.3 per cent and 70 per cent of respondents said they lacked confidence, respectively, hence, the desire to develop writing and speaking skills could be a possible reason behind their choice to continue studying English.

The lack of confidence of the participants in this study in oral skills is considerably high, as 21 out of 30 respondents said they were not confident, eight were not very confident and only one affirmed to be confident about speaking abilities. However, in the EF English Proficiency Index, which analyses data from 2.1 million adult non-native speakers of English in 111 countries and regions, Portugal ranks ninth, in the *very high proficiency* band, which corresponds to CEFR level C1 (2022, EF EPI).). Therefore, respondents' negative opinions about their speaking abilities may just reflect a lack of confidence, which does not necessarily correspond to a lack of ability. Learners may well have a good level of command in English to express themselves orally, but believe it is not suffice for effective communication due to insecurities.

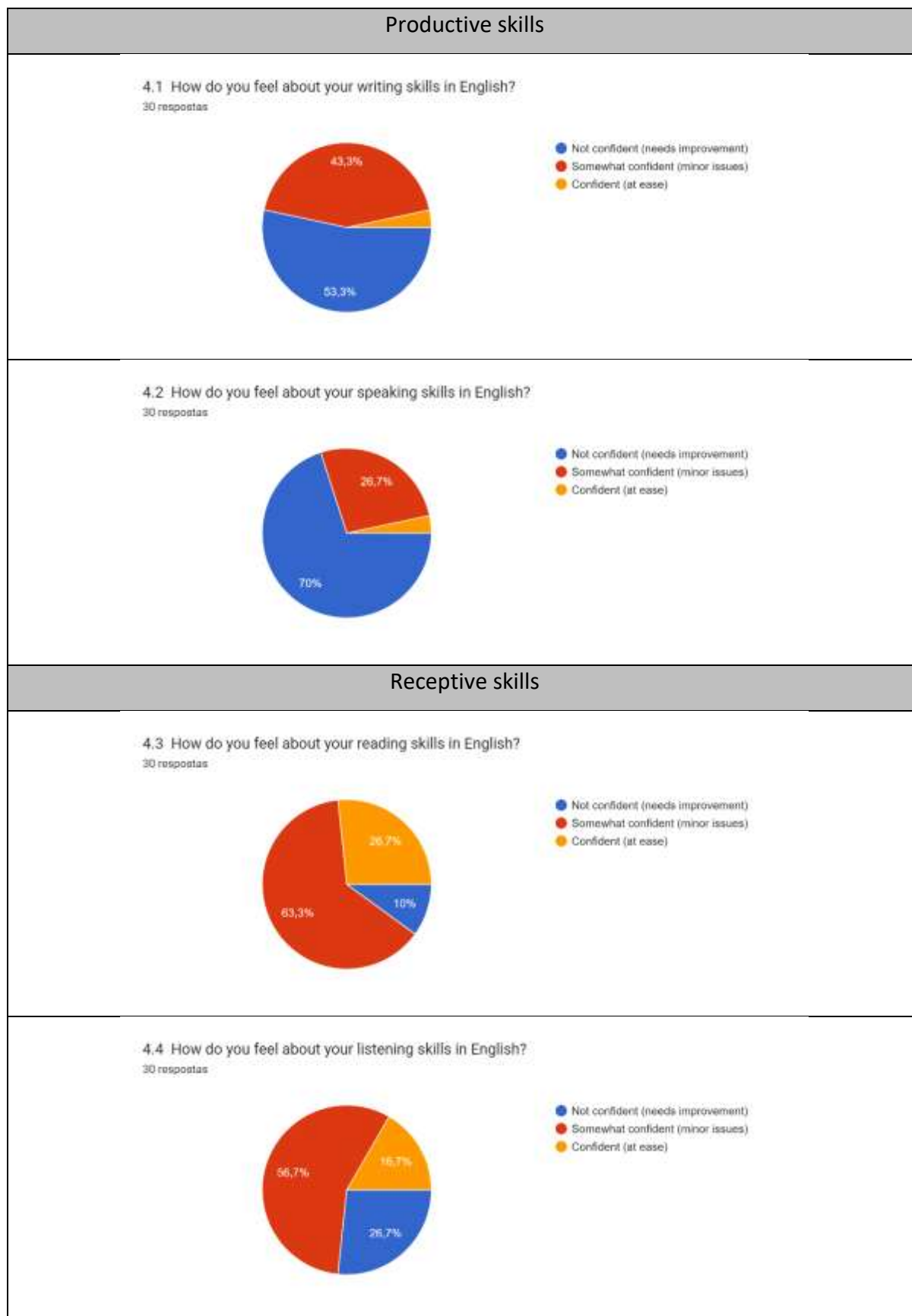


Figure : 3.2: Self-evaluation of language skills

Learners may well have a good level of command in English to express themselves orally, but believe it is not suffice for effective communication due to insecurities. They may value accuracy over fluency, which in turn hinders them from feeling confident in their ability to use the language effectively. To determine if a learner's perspective is related to lack of knowledge or merely a lack of confidence, it would have been useful to gauge their speaking abilities at the start of the course.

1.3. Expectations and reason for continuing studies

The main reasons given for wanting to increase their competence may be broken down into the following categories: career, communication, academic, interest/pleasure in learning the language. The results (see Table 3.2) indicate that, from a macro perspective, these learners are mainly instrumental; from a micro perspective, they are extrinsic (Gardener, 1985; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), as the vast majority want to learn the language with the aim of future employment opportunities. Only 20 per cent of respondents said they were studying to be able to interact with people more effectively, and only one claimed to be learning it for enjoyment. No one stated being interested in the language itself.

Table : 3.2: Reasons to further develop language proficiency

Category	Answers	Students	
		N	%
What is the main reason to further develop your proficiency?	Because I need for my future career	13	43.3
	To add to my CV	4	13.3
	To apply for a job outside Portugal	3	10
	Because it is a requirement in my workplace	2	6.7
	Because I believe it is necessary to communicate in this global era	5	16.7
	To be able to communicate better with family/Friends/colleagues	1	3.3
	For academic purposes	1	3.3
	To apply for Erasmus	0	0
	To apply to a course outside Portugal	0	0
	Because I enjoy it	1	3.3
	Because I am interested in the language	0	0
Other	0	0	

Ushioda argues that “intrinsic motivation not only promotes spontaneous learning behavior and has a powerful self-sustaining dynamic but also leads to a qualitatively different and more effective kind of learning than extrinsic forms of motivation” (2008, p.21). That said, the absence of intrinsic motivation, which arises from the learner self and not from an external factor, may explain why learners are hesitant to participate in oral activities, as they lack the inner drive to truly engage in tasks and take a more significant role in their own learning process.

When asked what their top priority is in terms of language development, it is clear that they have enrolled in the course to develop their speaking skills, with 70 per cent of participants responding that it is to be able “to communicate effectively and appropriately in real life circumstances” (see Table 3.3). Therefore, since mastering oral communication is the primary objective, speaking should be given the greatest emphasis when developing the syllabus for these courses. Additionally, given the students' motivational styles and the nature of the learning environment, it is important for the activities to be interesting and challenging not only to involve students, but also push them towards their goal, hence the need for strategies that can be effective in improving speaking skills. Furthermore, there is no doubt that the ability to speak English has a higher status nowadays as it has become the language of international communication, providing a more promising future for those who are proficient in doing so, which in hindsight is the main reason why students are learning the language.

Table : 3.3: Main priority in developing proficiency

Category	Answers	Students	
		N	%
What is your main priority in this course in terms of English language development?	To communicate effectively and appropriately in real life situations	21	70
	To develop my writing skills	4	13.3
	To pronounce English correctly and intelligibility	2	6.7
	To develop my grammar knowledge	1	3.3
	To acquire more vocabulary	1	3.3
	To better understand the content and underlying meaning in texts	1	3.3

1.4. Attitude towards speaking in English

When analysing the answers to last part of the questionnaire, as can be seen in Table 3.4, over 70 per cent of respondents agreed that they feel anxious when speaking in English in front of other people in and outside the classroom or if they have an assignment that requires them to do so. However, these students have been quite exposed to the language and are also at a level where they should have enough linguistic background to be able to express themselves fluently. The tables that follow should help clarify some of the potential reasons for this concern.

Table : 3.4: Attitude towards speaking in English | Anxiety

Category	Questions	Disagree		Neutral	Agree	
		N	%	N	N	%
Anxiety	I feel nervous when speaking English in front of others.	3	10	4	23	76.6
	I feel anxious about oral presentations in English.	2	6.6	2	26	86.6
	I'd rather speak with a partner than in front of the class.	6	20	7	17	56.6

According to the findings in Table 3.5, peer criticism is one of the main reasons why students experience anxiety. Although 66.6 per cent claimed to be concerned about what others may think of them, few (13.3%) agreed that this fear was related to peer acceptance of their ideas or viewpoints. It can be deduced that the cause of their anxiety and unwillingness to speak in the target language may be as straightforward as the thought of exposing their proficiency to peers given that almost half (46.6%) of the participants claimed they were reluctant to participate out of fear of making mistakes, which could be due to the fear of ridicule, this is, the potential reactions and assessments of other students regarding their own knowledge of English.

Table : 3.5: Attitude towards speaking in English | Social

Category	Questions	Disagree		Neutral	Agree	
		N	%	N	N	%
Social (fear of judgement)	I worry about judgment from my peers.	5	16.6	5	20	66.6
	I shy away from orally engaging in class because I worry about making mistakes.	7	23.3	9	14	46.6
	I feel others will not value my opinions or thoughts.	15	50	11	4	13.3

In Table 3.6, 76.6 per cent of the respondents stated feeling insecure about their pronunciation. For many students, pronunciation plays an important role in learners Ought-to L2 Self, so much that they strive to have a native-like pronunciation and feel insecure when they fall short of this objective. This is often due to a lack of understanding that pronunciation is distinct from accent. Rather than focusing on developing a clear and accurate pronunciation, FL learners may strive for a specific accent; therefore, pronunciation becomes a significant cause of anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). It can be inferred that these specific learners believe that incorrect pronunciation can be the determining factor in aforementioned peer evaluation. That said, the same number of respondents also admitted to feeling insecure about their vocabulary and grammar knowledge; thus, linguistic problems such as lack of vocabulary and knowledge of grammar may also discourage oral interaction. The fact that 24 out of 30 students stated that their confidence in speaking was poor owing to lack of practice further demonstrates that students' anxiety about interacting with people in a foreign language is partially a product of their prior learning experiences. Again, this could be an indicator that despite speaking being a crucial ability to master while learning a foreign language, learners frequently are not given many opportunities to improve their speaking skills in classroom, as greater focus is placed on teaching vocabulary and grammar, which may even be the result of the few speaking exercises provided in coursebooks adopted.

Table : 3.6: Attitude towards speaking in English | Confidence in abilities

Category	Questions	Disagree		Neutral	Agree	
		N	%	N	N	%
Confidence in Abilities (lack of self-confidence)	I feel insecure about my pronunciation.	5	16.6	2	23	76.6
	My confidence in speaking is low due to lack of previous practice.	4	13.3	2	24	80
	I feel insecure about my vocabulary and/or grammar knowledge.	1	3.3	6	23	76.6

In terms of motivation, as shown in Table 3.7, 19 out of the 30 respondents stated they make an effort to speak the target language while engaging with their peers during activities. Three respondents said they make no effort, and eight respondents opted for a neutral position regarding this statement. Although this equates to 63.3 per cent of students who claim to put forth an effort, it still falls short of the 21 respondents who stated that they were attending

the course in order to be able to communicate effectively in English (see Table 3.3) and the 22 who need to do so in order to advance in their current or future careers (see Table 3.2). However, if students are not willing to put in the effort, they should not expect to achieve their own goals, since their participation in the learning process is a key factor in achievement. As Dörnyei stated, “without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long term goals, and neither are appropriate curricula and good teaching enough on their own to ensure student achievement” (2005, p. 65). Interestingly, although only 19 claimed to make an effort to speak in English during activities, 25 said they would appreciate any opportunity to develop speaking skills. Therefore, this suggests that learners fail to understand that interacting with others during activities is, in fact, an opportunity to hone this specific skill. Additionally, 12 out of 30 participants agreed that the choice of topics also influence their motivation to engage orally, while seven dismissed this factor as important and eleven had no real view on the matter. Nonetheless, even though less than half of participants identified this as a deciding factor, the result is nevertheless noteworthy. It is important to awaken student motivation by choosing topics that meet their interest, as interest is a very important factor that drives learning. If students fail to see the value of a particular topic, they may not be motivated to engage. Furthermore, as choice is linked to personal responsibility (Collins and Hoyt, 1972 in Deci 1975), if students are given the chance to choose a topic, it may make them more accountable regarding their own participation.

Table : 3.7: Attitude towards speaking in English | Motivation

Category	Questions	Disagree		Neutral	Agree	
		N	%	N	N	%
Motivation	I make an effort to always speak in English during pair/group work.	3	10	8	19	63.3
	I am reluctant to orally engage if the topic is not interesting.	7	23.3	11	12	40
	I welcome all opportunities to develop my speaking skills.	1	3.3	4	25	83.3

The results in Table 3.8 demonstrate that classroom environment issues are a significant factor in encouraging oral engagement as more than 80 per cent of respondents agreed with the

assertions, while only 5.5 per cent disagreed and 13.3 per cent chose neutrality. More than 86 percent said class size is a determinant of their willingness to orally engage. In this regard, class sizes in the Open Language Courses can range from around 12 to 30 students. Having said that, higher class numbers, along with predetermined seating arrangements, may make it more difficult for students to develop strong enough peer ties to feel comfortable speaking up in class. It is also evident that learners consider a more relaxed learning environment fundamental in encouraging oral participation, since 25 out of 30 students said they “participate more in classes where there is a more relaxed learning environment”, while only one disagreed with the statement and four chose neutrality. As these specific classes are held at the end of a workday, it is often a challenge to motivate learners to actively engage; therefore, a more pleasant and relaxed environment can be a driving factor. Additionally, more than 70 per cent of participants stated that the teacher-student relationship is also a significant factor. As a result, it is crucial to foster a strong relationship with students in order to enhance their motivation and encourage greater oral engagement.

Table : 3.8: Attitude towards speaking in English | Classroom environment issues

Category	Questions	Disagree		Neutral	Agree	
		N	%	N	N	%
Classroom environment issues	I orally participate more in classes where there is a more relaxed learning environment.	1	3.3	4	25	83.3
	My oral interaction is influenced by my relationship with my teacher.	3	10	5	22	73.3
	I feel more at ease to speak in smaller classes.	1	3.3	3	26	86.6

If we take a look at the general responses for the aforementioned parameters, it becomes evident that classroom environment issues are a significant factor in stimulating students’ oral participation. It is also evident that respondents’ anxiety about speaking in the target language appears to be caused by a lack of confidence, with an average of 77.7 per cent of respondents agreeing with the statements. Having said that, it appears that fostering a relaxed and trusting classroom environment—one in which learners can participate without fretting about negative peer or teacher evaluation— could be the key to assisting learners in overcoming their anxiety

about speaking the target language in front of others. Over time, an increase in their confidence will ultimately result from higher participation and practice.

2. Results of group interviews and journal entries

The conclusions drawn were based on both group interview data (see Appendix 3) and journal entries provided by participants in the experimental group class. The group interview data were analysed and organised into categories, and the findings were supplemented by the additional insights gained from reading the learners' journal entries. At the beginning of the discussion, participants were prompted to share their motivations for taking the course and their attitudes towards speaking in English in front of others. Each participant was questioned in turn and requested to provide their name to facilitate their identification in the recording during the remainder of the interview. This initial stage served as a starting point for a more open-ended discussion on problems and strategies related to anxiety, willingness, and motivation in speaking the target language.

2.1. Motivation to improve English proficiency

Regarding learners' motivation to improve their English, it is clear that these students are driven by instrumental reasons. Most students wish to develop their language proficiency so they can work abroad and gain access to better job opportunities and higher salaries that are available in foreign countries. Learner L shared that she believes that opportunities in Portugal are limited, and that the only way of to secure a well-compensated job for many is by seeking employment abroad, as the government does not seem to be investing in their future.

Other learners acknowledged the significance of mastering English as a means of improving communication and building connections in today's globalised world. They referred to English as the "global", "international" and "universal" language that is widely spoken and understood in many countries. Additionally, they stated it is a required language in certain industries in their home country.

Learner E and B both expressed that their lack of proficiency in English is hindering their academic progress as in their field of study there is an abundance of literature in English. Additionally, both learners have curriculum units taught in English and, therefore, the desire to

improve their language proficiency is driven by their need to succeed in their studies. There is definitely a correlation between English language proficiency and some fields of study, such as science and technology, as academic literature and resources are primarily in English.

2.2. Attitude towards speaking in English in front of others

The overwhelming majority of respondents reported feeling anxious when speaking English in front of others, but some mentioned that this is not limited to English and also occurs when speaking their native language, mainly due to fear of peer judgment, as stated clearly by both Learner B and Learner L.

Before the course, speaking in English in front of others was scarier. I was much more afraid than I am today, I believe. I was afraid students and teachers would not understand me; I was afraid that they would judge my mistakes.

(Learner B)

In general, I hate speaking in front of other people cause I 'm constantly thinking what other people are thinking about what I am saying, and this is something I feel in any language, so in English you have that extra level of stress cause it's not your native language, so I am always thinking am I saying this right, are the others going to notice and that is how I am.

(Learner L)

The learners cited a lack of vocabulary and grammar competence, lack of knowledge about a particular topic, the time it takes to organise thoughts in English, as well as fear of judgement from peers and teacher as contributing factors to their increased anxiety when speaking in English. Therefore, students' willingness to engage is both affected by a lack of confidence in their abilities and fear of negative evaluation from others. This is consistent with findings from studies that have shown that both of these factors can have a significant impact on language learners' anxiety and ability to communicate effectively in a second language (Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre, 1999; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a). Speaking anxiety is therefore closely related to the idea of revealing one's lack of proficiency in the language to others.

Many of the learners also stated that with time and practice, and after getting to know their peers better, their anxiety became more manageable, and that they were able to feel more comfortable and confident in their interactions. Some specifically stated that they felt more comfortable engaging in speaking activities after attending this course (see Appendix 3). That

said, the strategies implemented in this study seem to have had a positive impact on students' willingness to participate in speaking activities.

Learners responses to the second engagement question —How do you feel about speaking in English in front of others? —already contribute with relevant information regarding what hinders speaking, which helps to answer research Q1.

2.3. Factors that contribute to difficulty in speaking in English in front of others

In response to exploration question 1—Why do you think so many individuals struggle when speaking in front of others in English?—students also provided a variety of explanations for why people might be reluctant to speak in English in front of others. These included:

- lack of interest in the subject at school;
- lack of prior language study because some students chose a different language option during their studies;
- thinking in Portuguese first and then translating;
- the lack of good quality education in their country of origin;
- fear of judgment;
- lack of speaking practice in English classes at school.

Learner N asserted that most likely his difficulties in speaking English are a consequence of his lack of interest in the subject due to immaturity. He now acknowledges the importance of the language in his professional life, as he previously mentioned that he enrolled in the course to be able to improve his English proficiency to better follow conversations and also open doors to possible future opportunities abroad.

Three learners (E,I,M) chose French as the language option and therefore had less years of English. Only one student, Learner I, presented a reason for this choice, stating it was because of an interest in learning another language. That said, Learner C also opted for another language, Spanish, not out of interest in the language, but as a way to improve his grades in order to achieve a higher average to apply to university.

Learner G pointed out that the reason may lie in the fact that students first think in L1 and then try to translate their thoughts into English. This can be problematic as there is a natural tendency to try to translate word for word, which might result in errors and slow down the

speed and fluidity of their speech. Additionally, struggling to find the correct word may lead to frustration and a lack of confidence in ones' abilities.

According to Learner B, the English language is taught at a very basic level in her home country, leading to low proficiency among students who have studied it for many years. To achieve a higher level of proficiency, students must have access to and be able to afford private lessons. Learner E corroborated the thought and added that she noticed the difference in proficiency when studying in Portugal.

Learner J mentioned that the fear of being judged by others is a source of anxiety when speaking in public, particularly when speaking in English, as there is a greater risk of making mistakes. Learner C, F and L also mention the fear of judgement; however, Learners F and L add that pressure was related to correct pronunciation. That said, in Learner F's response, it is clear there is a confusion between pronunciation and accent when he states: "the teachers care about pronunciation a lot, you need to sound British". Learner L adds that teachers were often "more focused on whether we say it the right way than in a clear way". It is important to understand that clear pronunciation and comprehensibility are more important than sounding native and that the ability to communicate effectively depends on elements such as individual word stress, intonation, rhythm, etc., rather than accent. Having a foreign accent when speaking in English does not necessarily impede intelligibility or communications skills. What is noteworthy in the responses to this exploration question is that eight out of the twelve interviewees point to the lack of speaking experience in English classes as the culprit for their unwillingness to speak in the target language. They stated that the primary focus of the lessons was on grammar , reading comprehension and listening, indicating a need for more emphasis on oral practice. Two of the participants (Learners K and L) add that speaking moments were restricted to evaluation moments, which occurred once every period. This could be a result of large classroom sizes that make it difficult for teachers to provide more opportunities for students to orally interact. It is also possible that teachers prioritise teaching to the test, viewing it as the primary goal of the course. However, without much speaking practice, students may graduate with a good understanding of English grammar and vocabulary, but lack the necessary skills to effectively communicate in spoken English.

Learners' responses to the first exploration further contribute with relevant information regarding to what hinders one's willingness to engage in speaking.

2.4. Factors that influence learners' motivation to engage in speaking

The factors influencing learners' motivation to engage in speaking were varied among the participants. Some cited personal goals, while others emphasized the importance of the learning environment. Learner J emphasised the role of a positive and comfortable environment in encouraging oral participation, and Learner K added that the absence of judgment from peers and teachers also played role. Learners G and M also shared that their experiences in other language courses reinforced the idea that the learning environment is key in motivating students to orally engage. Learner L added that the reaction of others to what she says may discourage her from continuing to orally engage, and that class size also plays a role in her comfort level when speaking up. Both Learner F and L also expressed that they feel more at ease in smaller groups. Learner I highlighted that the topic of conversation is important, as did learner F , but he also emphasised that the environment can greatly affect a person's comfort level. He mentioned that the fact students could sit on a table while speaking in front of the class helped him feel more relaxed when sharing his thoughts. Overall, it is clear that in a comfortable and supportive environment, where there are opportunities for positive interactions and a sense of community, students are more likely to participate and take risks. Students' responses to this exploration question contributed not only to complete the list of factors that hinder speaking, but also to adding factors that helped to understand what might promote speaking.

2.5. Reflections on impromptu speeches

Many students found the impromptu speech activities challenging because of the limited time for preparation and the lack of prior reflection on a specific topic, or even lack of interest. Despite this, most students embraced the challenge, recognising the benefits of practicing unprepared speaking. Some Learners, such as G, N and B, even noted that the activity mirrored the unpredictable nature of real-life conversations. Additionally, Learners F and I mentioned that the activity helped them to organise their thoughts and expand their vocabulary. Learner E , who had never been challenged to speak at school due to her shyness, particularly appreciated the

opportunity and safe environment provided by the course and found the experience to be positive. Similarly, Learner K found this activity to be particularly beneficial for her language development, emphasizing that the most important part of language learning is to be able to communicate. Learner J added that the experience helps you recognise other speaking moments, such as group oral presentations, to be less stressful as there is enough time to prepare for the delivery. In contrast, Learner L, did not have a fondness for impromptu speeches, but through practice became less overwhelmed.

Overall, the results indicate that the majority of students had positive perceptions of the impromptu speech activities. Despite some challenges such as lack of time for preparation and the unpredictability of the topic, students recognised the benefits of practicing unprepared speaking.

Furthermore, while the impromptu speech activity may have caused some anxiety due to its challenging nature, students generally reported that the anxiety was overcome with time. Learner L, in her journal entry, she described her confidence as “normalised”, noting that while she still made mistakes or struggled to find the right words, over time her reaction to these moments became more normal and she no longer felt like making a mistake was “a crime”, as she had perceived it before joining the course.

Learner A, also corroborated this thought and stated that,

[...] the idea of talking about a subject without any preparation scared me, and made me feel a little nervous. In the first impromptu speech, I felt that I wasn't at ease and my confidence in my language skills was low. However, through the continued practice, I have become a more confident person, and above all, I am not afraid to speak English (in public) anymore.

(Learner A)

Additionally, Learner N adds that impromptu speeches are,

[...] a good way to push you to talk in front of others about something you have no prior experience of, and this forces you to learn to manage your embarrassment and improve on daily conversations.

(Learner N)

furthermore, Learner K argues the reality of,

[...] the teacher obligating us to do this every week was what helped me to be able to speak in English more at ease in front of others. She always encouraged us and made us feel comfortable even when we made mistakes. Sometimes we have to do things we do not like to be better and improve, and I am really thankful because she made me feel much better about speaking English in public.

(Learner K)

This supports the basic hypothesis that, given a supportive learning environment, students are willing to step outside their comfort zone. Despite the anxiety that comes with speaking a foreign language, students appreciate the challenge and will participate in speaking more readily when given the correct tools and a supportive environment. This highlights the importance of creating a positive and encouraging environment for language learning in order to maximise students' engagement and willingness to take on the challenge of speaking a foreign language. It is also worth noting that it is important to be mindful of students' personal limits and to tailor the approach accordingly in order to ensure that students are not pushed beyond their capacities.

2.6. Experience with podcast assignments

Most students admitted to recording themselves multiple times before submitting their final podcast, as listening to themselves helped identify and address issues such as thought organisation, pronunciation, speed of delivery and vocabulary. The process of recording themselves several times proved to be a valuable learning experience for the students as they were able to understand their own strengths and weaknesses as speakers. Through trial and error, students were able to improve their speaking skills, which in turn will help them become more confident and proficient communicators. As Learner A stated, the process of preparing the podcast requires students to organise and structure their thoughts. This will contribute to enhancing their communication skills, as when thoughts are organised in a meaningful and logical sequence, students will be able to express themselves more effectively and confidently. Students considered the first podcast assignment, which only required a voice recording, to be less challenging than the subsequent podcast assignment. They were able to conceal their nervousness behind the screen, and as Learner C noted, there was no need to memorise as they could read from a script. That said, Learners L and I chose to forgo scripting and instead only jotted down a few points, preferring to speak more spontaneously. This, however, did not free them from multiple recordings.

Only two students (Learners I and L) shared their podcast experience, which they also did not script meticulously. They did the activity together and described the experience as positive and similar to a regular conversation between two people discussing a given topic. Initially,

their drive towards perfectionism had led them to make multiple recordings, but they decided to abandon this approach and instead took on a more natural and relaxed approach. They also added that they made an effort to interact in English while planning the activity to practice more and avoid the cognitive burden of having to translate L1 thoughts into the target language.

Overall, the use of podcast creation as a learning tool has been shown to be effective. Podcast activities provided a chance for students to engage more actively in their learning process by allowing them to choose the topic they wanted to discuss and make important decisions in the editing of their final product, i.e., making decisions about thought organisation and error correction, which helped them develop greater language awareness.

Despite the fact that Learners I and L had previously reported feeling anxious when speaking in the target language to others, during the podcast and vodcast task they focused on delivering a well-thought-out speech and did not exhibit any visible signs of anxiety, as shown in Appendix 4. They, along with all other participants, performed exceptionally well. It can be inferred that when given the opportunity to organise their thoughts, students are able to effectively manage their foreign language speaking anxiety and are able to clearly share thoughts with others.

2.7. Thoughts on the group discussions

The students reported that they enjoyed participating in group discussions and debates, even when they had to argue a viewpoint different from their own. They found it enlightening to be exposed to a wide range of perspectives and ideas, which helped them to broaden their understanding of different viewpoints. As Learner K pointed out, she developed a more respectful view of other people's perspectives by having to argue a viewpoint different from her own. This can be an important life skill as it helps to understand and appreciate the diversity of opinions in the world around them. Learner J pointed out they are so-called controversial issues precisely because they do not "have one correct point of view", defending the need to understand the various perspectives on a given topic. Learner A added that her peers presented new perspectives, which led her to re-evaluate her opinion.

In terms of language development benefits, the students claimed that by discussing topics they had not previously addressed in English, they were able to improve their vocabulary as they needed to find new words to express their arguments effectively. As Learner M stated, “it was challenging to find the right words to argue your point, so it is a very good way not only to get people to talk, but to learn new words”, adding that this was not limited to just controversial issues but with any topic that had not been previously discussed. Learner G mentioned that “if I talk about the environment, I can talk without thinking much but with these more serious issues, it’s harder, you have to be more focused and listen to people”. This is important because, it shows that learners are aware of the challenges of discussing more complex topics and that it requires more focus and attention. This can lead to improved listening skills and the ability to engage in more meaningful and nuanced conversations, which can be beneficial for their personal and academic development. As Learner L stated in her journal,

It was a dynamic way to learn new vocabulary, and also to learn to defend and argue for your points of view. This can be very helpful for me in the future, concerning my professional career, to be able to present my ideas and to defend them to my superior.

(Learner L)

Learner I also referred to this point in his journal. He stated that,

[...] it was a very important activity for my future given that it was a nice way to learn how to give my opinion about a certain topic and to stand for my position.

(Learner I)

In her journal, Learner A noted that one of the benefits of discussing controversial issues is that it is an effective way to foster critical thinking among students. She also suggested that this approach should be adopted by other teachers. Through engaging in discussions on complex topics, students are encouraged to analyse and evaluate information, consider multiple perspectives, and form their own opinions. This process helps to develop their critical thinking skills, a key skill that is highly valued both in academic and professional fields.

During the group interview, an intriguing point was brought up by Learner J, who stated that “emotions play a part” when discussing controversial issues. He, and other participants, argued that the desire to have one’s opinion heard, driven by the adrenaline, can override concerns about language barriers or anxiety, as he stated, “your emotions push you to speak”.

Learner F also stated in his journal that,

Despite having vocabulary issues and needing more time to think because of my issue, which always create a fear of being misunderstood, the activity created a need for me to speak. I felt I had to and it was a good way to push myself.

(Learner F)

Learner N additionally added in the discussion that controversial issues were an effective way to promote oral interaction among students, which is the main objective for language learners. He further mentioned that he found this activity to be less anxiety-inducing as it was conducted in an informal setting, arguing that while the topics may have been more difficult to discuss, he felt less nervous because the activities were not being formally assessed and therefore he did not feel the pressure about making mistakes. In other words, the absence of formal assessment leads students to engage in oral communication in a more relaxed and casual manner, allowing them to focus on improving their language skills through practice, rather than worrying about achieving a good grade. Therefore, when learners are not being formally assessed, they may feel more comfortable taking risks and experimenting with language. Learner E added to the discussion that, although she has insecurities about speaking , the fact that it was a group discussion made her feel more comfortable.

2.8. Comments regarding seating arrangements and standing

When asked about standing to speak to others, most students reported feeling intimidated at first, but that it became less so as they became more familiar with their peers. Learners A and C also noted that understanding that their peers were not there to judge them helped them feel less anxious. Learner F added that the more one practices, the more it feels “natural” and that “the psychological barrier will also change”. Learner J stated that confronting the fear of speaking the target language in front of others, while intimidating, helped him to grow.

The students also acknowledged that standing in front of the class to speak had an impact on their speaking development. Learner N said he had to speak more clearly, louder and make sure he was understood. Learner A stated it helped with her intonation, Learner C said it helped with voice projection, and Learner L said it made her more aware of her body movements.

Learners B and C also noted that public speaking in English classes helped them in other areas of their lives. Learner B said it was good practice for university, and Learner C said it improved his ability to manage stress when speaking in public.

Overall, speaking in front of the class can be a challenging and intimidating experience for students, but it can also be a powerful tool for language development. By facing the fear of speaking in front of others, students can improve their communication skills, become more aware of different aspects of their speech and grow as language learners.

Regarding the seating arrangements, students had different views. Learners B,C and I found the current row setup useful for viewing the board(or screen) and taking notes, but preferred the U-shape or allocated table for the group activities. Learner M preferred the U-shape for better communication with others. Learners G and K favoured the semi-circle layout for better visibility of all group members. Learner A suggested a closer seating arrangement to foster a more relaxed environment. Learner E noted that when sitting in the front she only needed to speak to the teacher, but that sitting in the back required her to project her voice.

Learner G shared a workplace experience where seating arrangements impacted her confidence. In rows, she felt uncomfortable speaking because she was unable to see facial expressions and gauge reactions. Changing the layout to allow everyone to be seen improved her confidence. However, Learner L had an opposite view, feeling that facing others increased anxiety and preferred rows where the only person to face was the teacher.

In conclusion, according to learners opinion, the seating arrangements in language classrooms play an important role in students' performance. An effective layout can improve comfort, focus, confidence, while a poorly designed one can cause distractions, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Sitting in rows, for instance, can aid notetaking and attention to the teacher, but can also limit opportunities for group discussions and interactions with peers. On the other hand, group arrangements such as U-shape or semi-circles can foster collaboration, improve communication skills, and encourage participation, but may also increase anxiety levels for some students. Therefore, it is essential to find the right balance and cater to the diverse needs and preferences of students for optimal learning outcomes. That said, the seating arrangement must be flexible and adaptable.

2.9. Views on oral presentations

The vast majority of students favoured group oral presentations for several reasons, including Learners K and N who had to present solo due to unforeseen events. The reasons were :

- shared pressure and responsibility among group members;
- ability to reorganise thoughts while others are presenting;
- the provision of peer support in case of difficulties;
- the opportunity for additional oral practice during preparation;
- possibility of negotiating the part to present.

According to Learner N, despite doing it alone and not having to align his thoughts with his peers, he acknowledged he missed out on the collaborative aspect of group work. The interactions and exchange of ideas with peers, are in his opinion, the most important aspect of taking a language course as they provide opportunities to learn how to negotiate, debate and communicate effectively with others. Learner A also highlighted the advantage of collaboration in group oral presentations, where having multiple perspectives can lead to better results. Learner M added that working in groups is a natural practice for real-life situations where individuals typically work as part of a team rather than alone.

However, Learner G presented a drawback of group oral presentations, which involves aligning the topic with others. She argued that when a person has to speak about a topic they are not comfortable or familiar with, extensive preparation is necessary as it cannot be done effortlessly on the spot in the event one forgets a point. This could be an additional problem for students who struggle with speaking a foreign language in front of others. Thus, while group oral presentations are mostly advantageous and help students deal with foreign language speaking anxiety, it is crucial that the group chooses a topic where all members feel comfortable with so they can improvise or speak from experience if they stray from the prepared script.

Learner F also mentioned that it could be challenging to acknowledge and agree with input from all members. This can lead to disagreements within a group, which can negatively affect the presentation and the group dynamic. To address these challenges, it is crucial to establish clear communication and decision-making processes from the start, and for each member to

take an active role in contributing to the presentation and considering the input from their peers.

That said, there is no doubt that group oral presentations provide the advantage of building language learners 'confidence and reducing anxiety. By working together, students can learn from each other, practice their language skills, and receive support and feedback from their peers. Group presentations also create a collaborative learning environment, allowing students to develop teamwork and communication skills that are valuable beyond the classroom.

2.10. Additional thoughts

When asked the exit question—Is there anything else you would like to add about foreign language anxiety or motivation to speak in English? —students mainly cited the classroom environment in class and the relationship with their teacher and peers as being crucial factors. The atmosphere in the classroom and the level of comfort and trust they had with all elements in class were deemed essential to overcoming anxiety and fostering motivation.

According to Learner M, students who enrol in non-mandatory language courses must have a personal goal motivation to engage and participate, but a supportive class environment and well-structured lessons are equally important in promoting engagement and participation.

Learner J believes that the comfort level when learning a new language is paramount, and it can be enhanced by structured lessons and a positive relationship with the teacher. Learner A also noted that having positive relationships with both the teacher and peers contributes to feeling at ease and being more willing to participate in activities.

Learner C highlighted the importance of an equal relationship between the teacher and the students, rather than a superior one, for creating a comfortable learning environment. Learner A added that a distant or hierarchical relationship between the teacher and students can hinder the formation of a supportive relationship that helps build confidence and encourages participation.

Learner B clarified that the supportive relationship she had formed with the teacher in a previous course level was the driving force behind her decision to re-enrol in the course.

Additionally, Learner F, along with Learners E, M, emphasized that the ability to address the teacher by their first name sets the tone for a more equal and positive relationship. Learner C also

noted that a smaller class size can contribute to a more familiar atmosphere, where individuals know each other by their first names.

Learner K appreciated the consistent presence of activities aimed at promoting speaking. Learner N also valued being pushed to speak in class, as he believes it is the most effective way to practice and develop language skills. Learner I wrote in his journal that the course greatly helped him improve his English, attributing this success to the numerous oral activities that required him to talk and defend his perspective. Similarly, Learner L stated in her journal that even though she was “obligated” to practice speaking in front of others, it was still a positive experience. Overall, it seems that the students appreciated the encouragement and opportunities to participate in speaking activities, and the supportive learning environment facilitated their acceptance of these activities.

Therefore, a supportive learning environment, characterised by positive relationships with peers and teachers and a sense of equality, can encourage students to take risks and participate in speaking activities. As Learner J notes, a supportive environment can help learners reach their goals, such as improving their English.

I have achieved my goal, which was to improve my English, with the benefit of being surrounded by good people.

(Learner J, in his journal)

CONCLUSIONS

1. Conclusions

Effective communication skills are a crucial part of language development, and participating in class is a vital aspect of this process. Classroom activities such as discussions, group work, and other interactive activities provide students with valuable opportunities to practice speaking and refine their language abilities, as well as build their confidence in using the language. Class participation helps students to develop the tools they need to express themselves clearly and effectively in both academic and professional settings.

However, speaking is by far the most anxiety-inducing skill for foreign language learners, since, according to MacIntyre and Gardner (1991c), speaking in front of others is among the greatest anxieties of all; and having to speak to an audience in English (a foreign language) further exacerbates the problem (Diener et al., 2010). This is due to the fact that it requires the learner to actively engage in the language, as opposed to simply understanding it or reading it passively. This active engagement can lead to feelings of self-consciousness and fear of making mistakes, which can be particularly pronounced in a classroom setting where the learner has to speak in front of others. Nevertheless, it is important to note that , through practice and exposure, these anxieties can be reduced, and ultimately overcome.

The participants in this study seem motivated to improve their language skills, as they have voluntarily enrolled in the language course. Nonetheless, when having to expose themselves orally, they are reluctant to do so. The research findings indicate that the students' lack of confidence in their language abilities, such as insufficient vocabulary and grammar, as well as a lack of prior speaking experience, has led to a fear of being judged by their peers and teachers, which explains their reluctance to speak the target language in front of others, providing the answer to Research Question 1.

As numerous studies have shown, affect has a profound impact on language learning, and its influence cannot be underestimated. Affect encompasses a range of individual and interpersonal factors that play a crucial role in determining the success of language learning. Individual factors such as motivation, anxiety, self-esteem and willingness to engage and take risks all have a significant impact on the learner's ability to acquire and use the target language.

High levels of motivation and self-esteem can lead to increased engagement and willingness to take risks in language learning, while high levels of anxiety and low levels of self-esteem can hinder the learner's ability to communicate effectively.

Interpersonal elements such as empathy, teacher-learner rapport, and peer-to-peer rapport are also critical to the language learning process. A positive teacher-learner relationship and effective peer-to-peer interactions can foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment, leading to greater language acquisition and fluency. Conversely, a lack of rapport can lead to a lack of engagement and motivation, and ultimately hinder language learning.

Thus, it is important for language educators and learners alike to understand and acknowledge the role that individual and interpersonal factors play in language learning in order to foster a positive and successful learning experience.

Furthermore, according to Damasio (1994), emotions and reason are intertwined in the brain, thus it is not reasonable to separate affect and cognition from the learning process. If teachers overlook the emotional aspect of language learning, it can result in identity conflicts and make the cognitive aspect more challenging. By properly integrating emotions and cognition, students become more engaged and motivated in the learning process. That said, it is important to challenge students in their learning journey to promote growth. While anxiety and self-doubt may exist, failure to address these emotions can impede growth. To overcome these barriers, a supportive learning environment that fosters motivation and confidence in speaking in the target language is crucial.

Additionally, to sustain student engagement, it is necessary to offer novel topics that challenge them and break away from repetitive debates. Engaging students in discussions on real-world issues not only adds variety but also provides an opportunity for vocabulary development.

Real-world issues harness the emotions as a driving factor to engage them in speaking.

Furthermore, Byram (2008) argues that teachers should incorporate real-world issues in a language classroom to cultivate intercultural speakers as responsible and activate citizens in this globalised world. He believes that merging foreign language education with citizenship education is crucial in promoting students' critical awareness in this more globally connected world.

Furthermore, in today's tech-savvy world, it is essential to utilise technology as a tool to engage and inspire students. Given that students have a strong understanding of digital devices, as well as a strong connection, incorporating technology into the learning process can boost motivation and enhance their speaking abilities. Utilising podcasts and vodcasts, for example, provides students with the opportunity to independently access and practice their speaking skills in a self-directed manner.

In both academic and professional settings, the ability to effectively communicate and present ideas, opinions, and information is a critical skill. As these learners will need to perform these tasks in the target language, it is important for these language courses to include opportunities for real-world interactions. This will help students develop confidence and competence needed for success in these types of situations. Furthermore, incorporating authentic, real-life scenarios into the language curriculum can enhance students' engagement and motivation, as well as provide them with a more meaningful and relevant learning experience. As Kumaravadivelu (2005) underscores, language teaching should prioritize the development of communicative competence, which involves not only knowledge of the system but also the ability to use it effectively in different situations and contexts.

With the goal of encouraging students to speak in front of others without letting anxiety and insecurities hinder their learning process, various strategies were implemented that considered all previously mentioned. The study found that implementing these strategies had a beneficial effect on the participants' learning experience, boosting their self-esteem and encouraging more active participation. These participants viewed the supportive learning environment, along with the opportunities provided, as critical in inspiring them to engage in oral activities, answering Research Question 2. Thus, taking affective factors into account not only motivated students but also played a vital role in pushing them outside their comfort zone and making them more confident in speaking activities, which was a significant contribution to their language growth.

2. Pedagogical implications of the study

As Horwitz stated, "tension and discomfort related to language learning call for the attention of the language teaching profession" (2001, p.122), defending that it is important to

acknowledge that language learning can be potentially stressful for students and that teachers must take on a more active role in addressing this issue. Aida (1994) also emphasises the need for strategies to help anxious students overcome language anxiety. It is crucial to provide a supportive environment to help students overcome anxiety and motivate them to orally engage, but also necessary to challenge them to engage and provide opportunities that foster oral practice, and gradually help to overcome any limitations. As Kumaravadivelu (2005) argued, teachers must be skilled facilitators of learning who are able to create a supportive and challenging learning environment for their students. They should adapt the curriculum to meet the unique needs and interests of individual learners, while also encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning.

Horwitz (2001) highlights the importance of addressing the tension and discomfort that often accompany language learning. He argues that language teachers should be proactive in addressing anxiety-related issues. This requires a delicate balance between creating a comforting atmosphere and challenging students to push beyond their comfort zone. By providing specific opportunities for oral practice, teachers can gradually help students overcome any limitations they may have and foster confidence in speaking. It is essential for language teachers to understand that language learning can be stressful for students, and that it is their responsibility to create a supportive and growth-oriented environment.

Based on the findings, there are several recommendations for teaching English at the tertiary level with the aim of promoting a more favourable attitude towards speaking the target language:

- Establish a positive and inclusive classroom environment where all participants recognise that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process and should be viewed as opportunities for growth rather than a source of criticism towards others or embarrassment. By fostering a culture of growth mindset, students feel more comfortable taking risks and engaging in the learning process, knowing that mistakes will not lead to negative consequences. This supportive environment not only boost students' confidence but also encourages them to actively participate and take ownership of their learning journey. Furthermore, the absence of hierarchy and an emphasis on equality can foster a sense of belonging, where students feel valued and

appreciated for their unique strengths and abilities. This, in turn, can lead to greater collaboration and engagement;

- Provide ample opportunities for students to practice their language skills in low stakes settings. These types of opportunities allow students to use the language in a more relaxed and less pressured environment, allowing them to gain confidence and develop their skills. Low-stakes activities might include group discussions, debates, podcast, vodcast or other speaking activities that are not graded or evaluated. By providing these opportunities students, students can try out their skills and make mistakes without the fear of negative consequences, allowing them to gain experience and build their confidence, as well as develop their language skills;
- Provide real-life scenarios to make learning meaningful and relevant. Real-life opportunities can take many forms, such as oral presentations in groups or debates, where students can apply the language they have learnt to realistic situations. This can not only increase the relevance of the material but also help build their confidence in using the language. For example, students can present on a topic related to their interest or current events, simulating a real-life scenario where they would need to communicate their ideas effectively. Additionally, these types of opportunities can help students develop important public speaking and communication skills, which are valuable in both academic and professional settings;
- Provide unprepared speaking moments where students have to think on their feet and respond to unexpected prompts. These types of activities can help students develop their improvisational skills and increase their confidence in speaking the language spontaneously. Impromptu speeches can take various forms, such as answering questions or delivering a brief presentation. By forcing students to think and speak without much preparation, they can build their ability to respond to new and unexpected situations, which is a valuable skill in any setting. Additionally, these activities can boost their oral fluency and overall proficiency in the language, as they are required to communicate quickly and effectively;
- Incorporate real-world issues into classroom discussions, as it can serve a dual purpose. Not only does it inspire students to actively participate and improve their speaking

skills, but it also helps them grow as global citizens and effective intercultural communicators. By discussing current events and global challenges, students can broaden their perspective, learn about other cultures and perspectives, and develop their critical thinking skills;

- Integrate technology to enhance language learning. The advancements in technology have revolutionised the way we approach learning, and this holds true for language learning as well. There are a multitude of tools and resources available to support language learning that can provide learners with additional opportunities to sharpen their language skills and make the learning process more engaging and enjoyable. Additionally, engaging in hands-on activities with the use of technology such as creating podcasts or vodcasts promotes a self-directed learning as students take responsibility over the final outcome of their projects. This type of learning activity allows students to demonstrate their understanding and mastery of the language in a creative and meaningful way. The process of creating podcasts or vodcasts requires students not only to use the language but also to plan, organise and present information in an engaging and practical manner. Furthermore, it helps develop critical thinking, communication, collaboration, which are transferable to other areas of their lives.

3. Limitations of the study

Studies play a crucial role in gaining knowledge and insight into various topics. Nevertheless, like any method, studies have limitations that can stem from several sources. One such limitation in the present study was the sample size. Although the questionnaire was administered to thirty students, the strategies were only implemented with a class of fourteen and only twelve students took part in the group discussion. It would have been valuable to apply the strategies to a larger group of students and also obtain input from more participants regarding the feasibility and effectiveness of these strategies.

Furthermore, I did not have the opportunity to teach or observe a class of the same level where the strategies were not implemented, to contrast with the control group. It would have been insightful to examine the changes in both groups in terms of their willingness to participate in speaking activities in front of others throughout the course.

Another limitation concerns the design of the instruments. The study did not incorporate classroom observations through taking down notes after each session. However, in retrospect, it would have been a valuable addition to include observations of students' behaviour during oral activities throughout the course, as well as tracking their development. The use of student journals provided their perspective, but it would have been interesting to compare their experiences to my own observations.

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ANNEXES AND APPENDIXES

ANNEX I: DEPARTMENT CONSENT FORM

Consent Letter to Head of the Department

Pedido de autorização ao Diretor do Departamento de Línguas e Culturas da Universidade de Aveiro.

Exmo. Prof. Doutor _____,

Eu, Elsa Cristina Morais Vilela Filipe, sou aluna do Mestrado em Didática do Inglês, na Universidade Aberta em colaboração com a Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova, Lisboa. Neste momento, encontrou-me na fase do projeto de investigação para a dissertação intitulada *Strategies to motivate learners to engage in speaking and overcome anxiety: a case study at the Open Language Courses* (Estratégias para motivar os alunos a participar oralmente e a superar a ansiedade: estudo de caso nos Cursos Livres). Esta investigação tem como base os alunos que frequentam cursos de Inglês como opção livre no ensino superior, mais propriamente no nível B2 de Inglês, nível que tenho vindo a lecionar nesta instituição. Tem como objetivo explorar estratégias de sala de aula que possam impactar positivamente na motivação dos alunos para se envolverem mais em atividades que visam desenvolver sua competência comunicativa e superar a ansiedade de falar na língua estrangeira.

Assim, venho, por este meio, solicitar autorização para desenvolver o meu projeto de investigação durante o 1º semestre do presente ano letivo 2022/2023 nesta instituição com os alunos dos Cursos Livres a frequentar os níveis B2.1 e B2.1, com início em setembro e término em janeiro de 2023. Irei solicitar autorização à colega que leciona o nível B2.1, e aos alunos dos níveis em questão (B2.1 e B2.2), para recolher dados por via de um questionário online para incluir no meu estudo. Aos alunos da turma B2.2 irei aplicar as estratégias no decorrer do semestre e solicitar que mantenham um registo sobre as mesmas. No final do curso de Inglês, solicitarei a autorização de alguns elementos dessa turma para uma entrevista a fim de abordar os efeitos da metodologia implementada no desenvolvimento de suas habilidades orais e níveis de ansiedade.

As informações obtidas serão referidas na minha dissertação e eventualmente em artigos académicos e conferências, contudo a instituição e os alunos, permanecerão anónimos em qualquer circunstância. Se houver questões a colocar estarei disponível para esclarecer através do e-mail elsa.vilelafilipe@gmail.com.

Aveiro, 26 de setembro, 2022

Elsa Vilela-Filipe

Eu, _____, Diretor _____, declaro que fui informado dos objetivos do projeto de investigação intitulado "*Strategies to motivate learners to engage in speaking and overcome anxiety: a case study at the Open Language Courses* (Estratégias para motivar os alunos a participar oralmente e a superar a ansiedade: estudo de caso nos Cursos Livres) e autorizo Elsa Cristina Morais Vilela Filipe a desenvolvê-lo com as turmas de nível B2 dos Cursos Livres a decorrer neste departamento.

Data: _____

Assinatura: _____

ANNEX II: STUDENT CONSENT FORM

Numerical code:

Explanation and Informed Consent Form for Participants

Dear Student,

I am currently doing a research study for my master's dissertation in English Didactics, entitled "Strategies to motivate learners to engage in speaking and overcome anxiety: a case study at the Open Language Courses".

The research aims to better understand the factors that cause anxiety and affect motivation to speak in English of the Open Language Course students at the B2 level, but mainly to explore classroom strategies that can positively impact students' motivation to engage in speaking and overcome speaking anxiety in order to enhance learners' communicative competence.

I will be asking you for the following things:

- a.) To provide personal information;
- b.) To answer a questionnaire;
- c.) To keep a journal regarding speaking activities;
- d.) In addition to the aforementioned parts, I may ask you for a follow-up interview.

All information you provide will be solely for the purpose of this study and will be safely kept under my supervision. Your personal information will not be used in the study, and you will be referred to by a numerical code, along with a pseudonym whenever needed.

Participating in this study is not an obligation and there will be no negative impact on the relationship with me as your teacher, nor on your grades. That said, your thoughts and comments will surely provide valid information that will not only help me in my study but that will also help other language teachers improve foreign language instruction.

Kind regards,

Elsa Vilela-Filipe

Numerical code:

Researcher's Contact Information:

If you have any further questions regarding your participation in this study, please feel free to contact me.

elsa.vilelafilipe@ua.pt | elsa.vilelafilipe@gmail.com

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

In order to participate in the study, **you must be at least 18 years old**. If not, please do not sign the form.

Please select an option:

- Yes, I am willing to provide personal information and answer questionnaires regarding this study. I am also willing to participate in the follow-up interview, if needed, and allow recording.
- No, I am not willing to participate in this study.

Student's name in print: _____

E-mail: _____ Contact number: _____

Date : __/__/2022

Signature :

APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE

Section 1 | Explanation

This questionnaire aims to understand the anxiety and motivation of the B2 English language learners at the Open Language Course in relation to speaking in English. **All your answers are very important**, therefore, **please read each part carefully and answer honestly**. Your input is much appreciated! Thank you for participating in this study.

Section 2 | Personal Information

2.1 Please provide full name

2.2 E-mail

2.3 Nationality

- Portuguese
- Other

2.4 Please choose an option

- A resident in Portugal
- On a student visa
- On a work visa
- Other

2.5 Age

- 17-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- Over 30

2.6 Affiliation to the institution

- Student at the University
- Former student at the university
- Employee at the University
- Erasmus student
- Research fellow
- Other

2.7 If a student at the university, what is your cycle of study?

- 1st-Undergraduate
- 2nd -Masters level
- 3rd-Doctoral level
- Post-Doctoral
- Other
- Not applicable

Section 3 | Contact with language

3.1 How many years did you study English during your compulsory studies as a part of the curriculum (from 1st to 12th grade)?

3.2 Have you ever attended private English lessons/courses?

- Yes
- No

3.3 If yes, how many years?

- 1-4
- 5-10
- Over 10

3.4 Were any of these at the Open Language Courses at the university?

- Yes
- No

3.5 Are any of your curriculum units taught in English or have been in the past?

- Yes
- No

3.6 If yes, please name curriculum units.

3.7 If you are already working, is English the language of communication?

- Yes
- No

3.8 How much do you contact with and/or use the English language in your social life (media, family, friends, peers, etc)?

- Less than 10%
- 10% to 30%
- 31% to 40%
- 41% to 50%
- Over 50%

Section 4 | Assessment of your English

4.1 How do you feel about your writing skills in English?

- Not confident (needs improvement)
- Somewhat confident (minor issues)
- Confident (at ease)

4.2 How do you feel about your speaking skills in English

- Not confident (needs improvement)
- Somewhat confident (minor issues)
- Confident (at ease)

4.3 How do you feel about your reading skills in English?

- Not confident (needs improvement)
- Somewhat confident (minor issues)
- Confident (at ease)

4.4 How do you feel about your listening skills in English?

- Not confident (needs improvement)
- Somewhat confident (minor issues)
- Confident (at ease)

Section 5 | Interest in this course

5.1 Why did you choose to attend English lessons at the Open Language Courses?

- Credibility of the Institution
- By recommendation
- Convenience
- Price

5.2 What is your main reason to further develop your English proficiency?

- To apply for Erasmus.
- To add to my CV.
- To apply for a job outside Portugal.
- To apply for a course outside Portugal.
- To be able to communicate better with family/friends/colleagues.
- Because I am interested in the language.
- Because I believe it is necessary to communicate in this global era.
- Because I enjoy it.
- Because I need it for my future career.
- Because it is a requirement in my work place.
- For academic purposes.
- Other

5.3 What is your main priority in this course in terms of English language development?

- To acquire more vocabulary.

- To pronounce English correctly and intelligibly.
- To develop my writing skills.
- To better understand the content and underlying meaning in texts.
- To communicate effectively and appropriately in real life situations.
- To develop my grammar knowledge.

Section 6 | Attitude towards speaking in English

6.1 Please read each statement carefully and choose an option for each.

Neutral= nor agree, nor disagree

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel nervous when speaking English in front of others.					
I worry about judgement from my peers.					
I feel insecure about my pronunciation.					
I make an effort to always speak in English during pair/group work.					
I orally participate more in classes where there is a more relaxed learning environment.					
I feel anxious about oral presentations in English.					
I shy away from orally engaging in class because I worry about making mistakes.					
I am reluctant to orally engage when the topic is not interesting or relevant.					
My confidence in speaking is low due to lack of previous practice.					
My oral interaction is influenced by my relationship with my teacher.					
I'd rather speak with a partner than in front of the class.					
I feel others will not value my opinions or thoughts.					
I feel insecure about my vocabulary and/or grammar knowledge.					
I welcome all opportunities to develop my speaking skills.					
I feel more at ease to speak in smaller classes.					

APPENDIX II: GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Engagement Question

1. Why is it important for you to learn English?
2. How do you feel about speaking in English in front of others?

Exploration questions

1. Why do you believe so many people struggle while speaking in front of others in English?
2. Which factors could influence learners' motivation to engage in speaking?
3. What are your thoughts in relation to the impromptu speech activities?
4. How did the podcast activities help you develop your speaking skills?
5. Do believe addressing controversial issues is important in an English lesson? How did this contribute to your engagement in speaking?
6. Did standing up to speak effect your motivation to engage? Was it positive in improving your speaking skills? Did the various seating arrangements promote speaking ?
7. Did presenting your oral presentation as a group make you feel better about this assessment moment, or would you rather have done it alone?

Exit question

1. Is there anything else you would like to add about foreign language anxiety or motivation to speak in English?

APPENDIX III: TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEWS

Por questões de proteção de dados, as transcrições serão mantidas com o autor.

For data protection reasons, the transcripts shall be kept by the author.

APPENDIX IV: EXAMPLE OF STUDENTS' WORK

Por questões de proteção de dados, os exemplos dos trabalhos dos alunos serão mantidas com o autor.

For data protection reasons, examples of students' works shall be kept by the author.