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The Teaching of English as a Foreign/International Language
(M. Ed.)

**Attitudes and Beliefs on Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety;
a Mixed Methods Study on Young Greek EFL Learners**

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Abstract

The current study explores the perceived effect of specific speaking activities, along with personal factors, on the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) levels of 201 young, EFL learners attending private language schools in Greece. With a survey and a focus group interview as the methods of enquiry, the current research attempts to combine generalizable data from quantitative research with detailed insights from qualitative research, in order to shed light on the factors that potentially influence FLSA, as participants themselves understand it and report it. Through the statistical analysis of quantitative data, preparedness, game-based speaking activities, interaction pattern and interlocutor are revealed to have a statistically significant effect on FLSA levels. Preparedness, games, group or pair work and discussions with classmates are reported to incite lower levels of FLSA, in comparison with spontaneous speaking activities, individual presentations and interactions with unfamiliar speakers, which are associated with higher FLSA levels. Age, motivation, foreign language learning experience and use of the target language in daily life are also shown to correlate with FLSA. Focus group interview data delve into the stressful experiences of five Greek teenagers, over the course of their English language learning journey, as well as the factors that precipitated them. The five EFL learners share their perspectives on classroom practices that affect FLSA and describe what an ideal stress-free lesson looks like. The findings obtained are used to draw pedagogical implications, with the intent of helping EFL educators become aware of the degree of FLSA their learners experience, as well as the classroom practices that hold the potential to affect it.

Key words: Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA), interaction pattern, preparedness, interlocutor, speaking games, Greek EFL learners

Αγγελική Μεγαρίτη

*Άγχος Ομιλίας στην Ξένη Γλώσσα: Μια Έρευνα Μικτών Μεθόδων σε Νεαρούς Έλληνες Μαθητές
Αγγλικών*

Περίληψη

Η παρούσα έρευνα εξετάζει την επίδραση συγκεκριμένων προφορικών δραστηριοτήτων, παράλληλα με προσωπικούς παράγοντες, στα επίπεδα Άγχους Ομιλίας στην Ξένη Γλώσσα (FLSA), όπως το αντιλαμβάνονται 201 νεαροί μαθητές Αγγλικών, που φοιτούν σε φροντιστήρια στην Ελλάδα. Συνδυάζοντας δεδομένα ποσοτικής και ποιοτικής έρευνας, επιχειρεί να ρίξει φως στους παράγοντες που επηρεάζουν εν δυνάμει το Άγχος Ομιλίας στην Ξένη Γλώσσα, όπως το αναφέρουν οι ίδιοι οι συμμετέχοντες. Μέσω της στατιστικής ανάλυσης ποσοτικών δεδομένων, η προετοιμασία, τα παιχνίδια, το μοτίβο αλληλεπίδρασης και οι συνομιλητές παρουσιάζονται να επιδρούν σημαντικά στα επίπεδα FLSA. Η προετοιμασία, τα παιχνίδια, η ομαδική εργασία και οι συνομιλίες με συμμαθητές φαίνεται να συνδέονται με χαμηλότερα επίπεδα FLSA, συγκριτικά με τις απροετοίμαστες ή ατομικές δραστηριότητες και την αλληλεπίδραση με άγνωστους συνομιλητές. Η ηλικία, το κίνητρο, η εμπειρία στην εκμάθηση άλλων ξένων γλωσσών και η χρήση των Αγγλικών στην καθημερινότητα επίσης φαίνεται να επηρεάζουν τα επίπεδα Άγχους Ομιλίας στην Ξένη Γλώσσα. Τα δεδομένα της ομάδας εστίασης εμβαθύνουν στις στρεσογόνες εμπειρίες πέντε Ελλήνων εφήβων, σε σχέση με τα Αγγλικά ως ξένη γλώσσα, καθώς και τους παράγοντες που τις πυροδότησαν. Οι μαθητές αναφέρονται στις διδακτικές πρακτικές που επηρεάζουν το Άγχος Ομιλίας και περιγράφουν πώς θα μπορούσε το άγχος αυτό να εκλείψει σε ένα ιδανικό μάθημα. Τα ευρήματα εξετάζονται με γνώμονα τις παιδαγωγικές τους προεκτάσεις, αποσκοπώντας στο να καταστήσουν τους εκπαιδευτικούς ξένων γλωσσών ενήμερους για το άγχος που βιώνουν οι μαθητές τους, καθώς και τις εκπαιδευτικές πρακτικές που μπορούν να το επηρεάσουν.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Άγχος Ομιλίας στην Ξένη Γλώσσα, μοτίβο αλληλεπίδρασης, προετοιμασία, συνομιλητής, προφορικά παιχνίδια, Αγγλικά ως ξένη γλώσσα, Έλληνες μαθητές

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Abbreviations

EFL English as a Foreign Language

FLA Foreign Language Anxiety

FLSA Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Foreign Language (Speaking) Anxiety

Cognition and affect constitute two fundamental domains of learning, which are not separate from each other, but in a constant dynamic interplay, as the emotional response to the learning experience is essential for triggering cognitive processes. The way learners perceive their learning experiences directly affects the outcomes of their learning (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987), rendering affective processings equally important to cognitive ones (Brown, 1994).

One of the central affective variables in foreign language learning is foreign language anxiety (FLA). McIntyre and Gardner (1989) identified FLA as distinctive from general anxiety, suggesting that it is rather part of Communicative Anxiety. In 1992, they described foreign language anxiety as the apprehension experienced when one must use a second/foreign language in which they are not fully proficient. This type of anxiety involves negative self-perceptions, feelings of apprehension, as well as physical responses, such as increased heart rate.

Speaking in the foreign language is often reported by learners as the most anxiety provoking experience (Young, 1990; Horwitz et al., 1986). Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) is a multidimensional psychological phenomenon, experienced by a significant number of learners, when learning a foreign language (Bashori et al., 2022). This phenomenon has been shown to be a negative predictor of language achievement (Horwitz et al., 1986; Bashori et al., 2022), whereas a low-stress language environment has been found to be conducive to the acquisition of the foreign language (Krashen, 1982).

FLSA is classified as situation specific anxiety (Horwitz, 2001), due to its persistent and multifaceted nature, and not as a stable personality trait or a temporary condition (Woodrow, 2006). Thus, it is a feeling that is subject to change based on external circumstances, such as classroom practices and teacher behaviour. Individuals vary in their tendency to feel anxiety in different situations and times (Spielberger and Vagg, 1995), but FLA affects a much wider range of learners than those who are naturally prone to anxiety (Al-Saraj, 2014). Noormohamadi (2009) supports that anxiety is not an internal phenomenon generated by learners themselves, but is influenced by external factors, such as the learning environment, teaching and testing practices, interaction patterns and task requirements.

These findings, along with the debilitating effect of FLSA, highlight the need to detect anxiety inducing speaking activities and, subsequently, reform our classroom practices to the direction of reducing learner FLSA or helping learners develop coping strategies. Although the existence of FLSA has been thoroughly documented (Horwitz et al., 1986; Gannoun, 2023), studies with direct implications on how to deal with this phenomenon effectively are scarce (Bashori et al., 2022).

1.2. The Present Study

Using a survey and a focus group interview as research methods, the present research seeks to integrate broad, generalizable data from quantitative research with in-depth insights from qualitative approaches, in order to study the potential factors influencing FLSA from the learners' perspectives. The findings are intended to inform pedagogical strategies, assisting EFL educators in recognizing the extent of FLSA their learners experience and identifying classroom practices that could impact it.

Extending the existing body of research to identify specific classroom activities and practices that intensify or mitigate FLSA in the context of the Greek private language education system can provide educators with valuable insights for the creation of a stress-free learning environment. Stress-relieving activities can be regularly implemented to help learners boost their confidence and free themselves of debilitating anxiety, while the identification of anxiety-inducing activities can guide educators in providing the necessary support to the learners, when they choose to integrate them in their lessons. Findings can subsequently be utilized to improve the quality of language learning, for which learners' feelings and attitudes consist critical factors (Ghafournia, 2023).

The present study investigates the phenomenon of foreign language anxiety, but focuses solely on English language learners. Although findings could prove to be generalizable to other foreign languages, the corroboration or rejection of such a claim would require further research.

The main hypothesis of the study is that the type of speaking activity influences the level of FLSA that learners experience. This hypothesis is formulated upon the premises of previous studies, which have indicated certain factors, such as preparedness, interlocutors or audience, collaboration and games, as having the potential to affect the level of FLSA (Young, 1990; Woodrow, 2006; Noormohamadi, 2009; Yalçın and Incecay, 2014; Fatimah, 2019; Kamarulzaman et al., 2020; Zulfikar, 2022). Subsequently, the potential sources of language anxiety are examined on the basis of four axes; (un)preparedness, game-based speaking activities, interaction patterns and interlocutors.

1.3. Overview of the Study

The present study comprises six chapters. Chapter One serves as an introduction, outlining key concepts and providing an overview of the relevant literature, the significance of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research hypothesis. Chapter Two provides a conceptual framework for language anxiety in general and foreign language speaking anxiety in particular, reviewing the relevant literature. Chapter Three presents the quantitative and qualitative research design; the rationale for the selected methodology is analyzed, followed by a description of the participants, the context, the research methods and instruments used. Chapter Four presents the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative research, providing the statistical analyses of the questionnaire data and participants' responses to the focus group interview questions. An interpretation and critical discussion of the results follow in Chapter Five. Chapter Six includes the pedagogical implications arising from the study in hand, as well as its limitations and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Anxiety and Learning

Anxiety is “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 125). According to Krashen’s (1987) affective filter hypothesis, negative attitudes in learning are regarded as a filter that blocks learners’ ability to process learning content, thus affecting learning effectiveness. Anxiety contributes to the raising of that filter, making the learner unreceptive to language input and impeding the progress of language acquisition (Krashen, 1987; Horwitz et al., 1986).

According to Tobias (1986), anxiety prone individuals tend to become preoccupied with self-related thoughts about their reaction to a task rather than focusing on the task itself. This division of cognitive resources between thoughts unrelated to the task and those relevant to it, results in performance deficits among highly anxious learners. At the output stage, anxiety may block the retrieval of previously acquired information. For instance, the phenomenon of “freezing” during a test can be attributed to the impact of anxiety on the retrieval process (ibid.).

Research indicates that anxiety leads to cognitive interference (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1994). Eysenck (1979) suggested that anxiety-arousal is connected to distracting, self-related thoughts, such as excessive self-assessment and concern about potential failure and others' perceptions. Consequently, individuals experiencing anxiety divide their attention between task-related and self-related thoughts, thus, resulting in reduced cognitive efficiency.

Eysenck (1979) further theorized that anxious individuals may attempt to compensate for this interference by increasing their effort. While some studies have noted a facilitating effect of foreign language anxiety, the majority of researchers argue that FLA impairs language learning (Toth, 2010). MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) support that FLA consistently hinders language learning and production. Similarly, Horwitz (2017) argues that FLA is debilitating for language learning, rejecting the existence of any facilitating dimension.

On the other hand, Basavanthappa (2007) adopts a different approach to the effects of anxiety on learning, by considering its levels of intensity; mild, moderate, and panic. According to the researcher, mild anxiety can be beneficial, motivating learners to engage in goal-directed activities and helping them concentrate on studying for a test. At the moderate level, individuals feel nervous

and struggle to concentrate without help. At the panic level, individuals become unable to perform tasks even when given directions.

Anxiety reactions can be classified as reflecting emotionality or worry, with emotionality referring to physical or behavioural reactions, such as blushing or fidgeting, and worry referring to cognitive reactions, such as self-deprecating or irrelevant thoughts (Woodrow, 2006). The latter anxiety reaction, namely worry, seems to be the most debilitating one, as it occupies the cognitive capacity that could otherwise be devoted to learning and producing the foreign language (Tobias, 1985).

Physical manifestations of anxiety include fidgeting, playing with one's hair, clothing, or other tangible items, stuttering, stammering and displaying uneasiness (Leary, 1982). Other anxiety-induced behaviours, particular to the classroom setting, include skipping class, hiding in the last row, lack of participation, avoiding speaking in the foreign language and freezing when called to perform (Horwitz et al., 1986). Anxious learners tend to forget previously learnt material, are less likely to volunteer answers and more inclined to stay passive during classroom activities, compared to their less anxious peers, while they often experience mental blocks during speaking activities and lack confidence (Susidamaiyanti, 2018).

2.2. The Case of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

Two primary approaches have emerged in the study of anxiety within the context of foreign language learning. These are referred to as “anxiety transfer” and “the unique anxiety approach”, each reflecting different conceptualizations of FLA (Horwitz and Young, 1991; MacIntyre, 1999); The first approach assumes that anxiety in an foreign language context results from the transfer of anxiety experienced in other domains, with anxiety prone individuals being likely to experience similar anxiety when learning a foreign language. In contrast, the second approach suggests that language learning elicits a distinct form of anxiety, which is situation specific and triggered by the process of learning and using a second/foreign language. Between these contrasting perspectives, “the unique anxiety approach” has proven to be the more valid one, as it has yielded much more consistent results in relevant studies (Tóth, 2008).

Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128) define foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the

uniqueness of the language learning process”. According to Tóth (2008, p. 58), the differentiating feature of FLA is “a unique metacognitive element, which manifests itself in learners’ awareness that ‘deprived’ of their normal means of communication (i.e., the L1) they are to communicate via a language in which they do not have full competence”. Recognizing their linguistic constraints, foreign language learners might experience a sense of disparity between their authentic self and the more limited version they can express in the foreign language. Horwitz et al. (1986) suggest that this discrepancy distinguishes FLA from other academic anxieties.

According to the same study (Howitz et. al, 1986), FLA comprises communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Test anxiety emerges from a fear of failure, while fear of negative evaluation is an apprehension about others’ evaluations, for fear of negative judgement, that is not restricted to test taking situations (ibid.). Communication apprehension relates to shyness, precipitated by fear or anxiety regarding communicating with people. Oral communication anxiety, stage fright and receiver -namely listening- anxiety are all manifestations of communication apprehension (ibid.). Communication apprehension encompasses social anxiety, also greatly related to oral communication, which is anxiety that surfaces from “the prospect or presence of interpersonal evaluation in real or imagined social settings” (Leary, 1982, p. 102). Tóth (2008) suggests that FLA constitutes a unique amalgamation of various performance anxieties occurring in foreign language learning and communication.

McCroskey and colleagues (1986) proposed a framework for understanding communication apprehension, which they divided into four sub-categories. Trait-like communication apprehension is rooted in the inherent personality characteristics of speakers. Context-based communication apprehension relates to the unease individuals feel about communicating in certain contexts or environments. Audience-based communication apprehension involves the fear or anxiety associated with communicating with specific individuals or groups. Finally, situational communication apprehension refers to the psychological response elicited in speakers due to particular circumstances or situations.

Similarly, Woodrow (2006) classifies anxiety into three main categories; trait anxiety, state anxiety and situation specific anxiety. Trait anxiety refers to an individual's tendency to feel anxious across different situations. State anxiety describes the temporary experience of anxiety in specific moments or conditions, such as during exams or public speaking. Situation specific anxiety occurs in particular

contexts where anxiety traits are repeatedly triggered, such as in classrooms. FLA belongs to the latter category (Horwitz, 2001; Woodrow, 2006).

Language anxiety has been found to correlate with performance in the second or foreign language, but not in the native language (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989, 1994). Gardner and McIntyre (1994) emphasized the insidious effects of FLA on cognitive processing in the second or foreign language, as they found anxious learners to have more limited foreign language knowledge and increased difficulty in demonstrating the knowledge they do possess.

2.3. Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA)

Speaking, among the four skills, is regarded as the most stressful aspect of foreign language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1990; Sutarsyah, 2017). This could be related to the public nature of the speaking skill which places learners at a risk of exposing their linguistic deficiencies in front of others (Arnold, 2003). Friedman (1980) explains that shyness or reticence occurs when individuals have both the ability and desire to participate in a discussion but are inhibited from verbalizing their thoughts. Just like FLA in general, Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) has also been found to inhibit language learning. Several studies (Woodrow, 2006; Plantika and Adnan, 2021) have revealed a negative correlation between FLSA and oral performance.

2.4. Introduction to the Factors behind FL(S)A

Horwitz and colleagues (1986) emphasize the role of individual differences in FLSA; personality traits, past experiences, and self-esteem have been identified as significant contributors to the anxiety levels experienced by language learners. However, external factors, such as classroom practices, have also been found to significantly affect learners' FLSA (Young, 1990; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994; Woodrow, 2006). MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) argue that the classroom atmosphere, including teaching methodologies, peer interactions, and teacher-learner relationships, can either alleviate or exacerbate anxiety levels among language learners.

Young (1991) outlines six potential factors behind FLA; intrapersonal and interpersonal anxieties, learners' perceptions about language learning, instructors' perceptions about language teaching, interactions between instructor and learners, classroom procedures and language testing. Tanveer (2007) identifies a strict and formal classroom environment, presentations in class, fear of mistakes or negative evaluation, and language instructors, as some of the main causes of foreign language anxiety.

2.5. Factors Associated with the Learner

Bailey and Daley (1999) designed a study to investigate the relationship of seven variables with foreign language speaking anxiety, all of which were found to predict FLA levels; age, academic achievement, experience of visiting foreign countries, previous experience with foreign languages, expected overall grade for current language course, perceived scholastic competence, and perceived self-worth. All factors, apart from age, appeared to have a negative correlation with FLA. As far as age is concerned, older learners were found to demonstrate higher anxiety levels in comparison to young ones. Studies examining the effect of age on foreign language anxiety have produced contradictory findings; a comparative study (Karabıyık and Özkan, 2017) revealed a positive correlation between FLA and learners' age, while another similar study established no significant difference in FLA levels among the various age groups (Tosun, 2018).

In terms of gender differences, research has yielded mixed findings (Piniel and Zólyomi, 2022). Some studies have found females to display higher levels of FLSA (Çağatay, 2015) while others have found males to be more anxious (Dewaele et al., 2022). A recent meta-analysis (Piniel and Zólyomi, 2022) revealed no statistically significant gender difference in terms of foreign language anxiety.

Previous research has also produced conflicting findings regarding the association between motivation and foreign language anxiety. A study by Tóth (2007) concluded that motivation, as well as foreign language aptitude, did not show any significant correlation with foreign language anxiety. Djafri and Wimbari (2018) discovered no statistically significant correlation between FLA and motivation either. Earlier studies have generally assumed a connection between these variables: some identified a negative correlation (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1992), while others suggested a potentially positive one, where highly motivated learners experienced higher levels of anxiety (Kitano, 2001).

Fear of making mistakes dominates the thoughts of anxious language learners. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) found that more anxious learners considered avoiding making mistakes as the primary goal of using the target language, whereas learners with lower anxiety levels were more eager to speak without worrying about errors. Fear of being misunderstood can also have a considerable impact on language learners' eagerness to communicate in the foreign language (Phillips, 1992).

Anxious learners tend to focus on their failures rather than their successes in learning a foreign language, thus doubting their competence (Zulfikar, 2022). This anxiety becomes a significant obstacle to both learning and demonstrating their abilities. Fear of speaking in the foreign language often stems from the perceived threat of embarrassment or ridicule (ibid.). While emotions like joy and fear originate from present circumstances, feelings such as hope and anxiety arise from expectations about potential, yet unrealized events (Papi and Khajavy, 2023). The thoughts that generate anxiety reflect the individual's anticipation of negative outcomes (ibid.), such as mockery, poor evaluation, negative judgment or loss of face. Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009), while investigating Greek school EFL teenage learners, found that participants with FLSA regarded themselves as inadequate English speakers and were concerned that their classmates would mock or negatively judge them. Thus, low self-perception and fear of negative evaluation were identified as key factors behind FLSA.

Multilingualism has been associated with lower levels of anxiety in second language learners (Dewaele, 2007). Learners proficient in more than one foreign language frequently display lower levels of FLSA thanks to their greater exposure to diverse linguistic and cultural environments, which can make speaking in a foreign language less daunting (Thompson and Khawaja, 2016). However, only when the learner displays at least an intermediate proficiency level in the additional language has multilingualism been found to consistently relate to lower FLA levels (Thompson and Lee, 2013).

According to Oli and Ramesh (2022), learners can escape their FLSA through practicing speaking in their daily lives. Frequent use of the foreign language has been linked to decreased anxiety among learners (Jiang and Dewaele, 2020). As individuals increase their self-perceived communicative competence, they become more eager to use the foreign language in various contexts, thereby lowering their anxiety levels (ibid.). Conversely, less anxious learners may feel more confident in

their communicative abilities and thus use the foreign language more often (Gregersen and Horwitz, 2002).

For instance, EFL learners who are exposed to the English language outside the classroom by playing online games and interacting with native speakers have been found to display significantly lower levels of FLSA (Ünlü and Aydın, 2023). Participants who played online games in their everyday lives were found to be more confident and less self-conscious when speaking in the foreign language classroom, less fearful of speaking without preparation and more comfortable during interactions with native speakers (ibid.).

2.6. Factors Associated with the Teacher

As far as language educators are concerned, a good sense of humor, along with a friendly, relaxed, patient and non-authoritative attitude, have been found to contribute to the mitigation of FLSA (Young, 1990). Maintaining a relaxed attitude over error correction, by embracing them as an integral part of the learning process, can also result in reduced levels of FLSA (ibid.). However, the same study detected the need of a significant number of participants to receive corrective feedback, suggesting that the issue for the learners does not necessarily lie in error correction itself, but more importantly, in the manner of error correction.

Zulfikar (2022) proposes selective error correction as a way of treating speaking anxiety. In selective error correction, the teacher does not interrupt the learners, allowing them to complete their speech. To avoid overwhelming learners, feedback is given in manageable amounts that they can effectively process. Addressing only a few errors at a time enhances the likelihood of learners retaining these corrections in their long-term memory (Mak, 2019). MacIntyre (1999) stated that teachers who constantly correct their learners' mistakes precipitate FLSA, especially since the error correction takes place in public.

Horwitz et al. (1986) encourage teachers to establish a low-stress, friendly, and supportive learning environment, to inspire learners to adopt an active role in creating an atmosphere of group solidarity and support, to be sensitive to their fears and insecurities, and to assist them in facing those fears. They also advise using mild, non-threatening methods for error correction, providing encouragement and incorporating meaningful group work or collaborative activities into their lesson, along with relevant and engaging topics for class discussions and exercises. Finally, they stress the importance

of taking learners' preferences or learning styles into consideration and valuing their insights, ideas, and suggestions.

In a much more recent study (Marpaung and Fithriani, 2023), participants expressed the belief that they could increase their EFL speaking competence and decrease their FLSA, if provided with the necessary support from their teachers. Teacher support can include the creation of a safe environment, adequate opportunities to practice, constructive and encouraging feedback and feasible objectives. A study by Gkonou (2014) produced similar findings regarding the potential of teacher support and encouragement to boost learners' self-efficacy and lower their anxiety.

2.7. Factors Associated with the Methodology

Meaningful and frequent interactions have been found to mitigate foreign language anxiety, as they remove the fear of being mocked, embarrassed, or misunderstood (MacIntyre, 2017). Storytelling, role-plays, drama and debates have all been proposed as activities that can potentially encourage learners to speak in the language classroom (Erdiana et al., 2020). Krashen, as cited in Young (1991), supports that FLA can be optimally reduced by making the message so interesting that learners become engrossed and overlook the fact that it is to be expressed in another language. Engaging content and meaningful speaking purpose can, therefore, function as a distraction from the inhibitions related to speaking in a foreign language.

Oral presentations are regarded as one of the most anxiety-provoking activities in the EFL classroom (Alnahidh and Altalhab, 2020). Young (1991) proposes a way to help learners cope with highly stressful activities, such as presentations and role-plays, by preceding them with activities that help in building class rapport, such as team-building activities or watching an entertaining foreign movie with classmates.

2.7.1. Preparedness and Spontaneity

One controversial factor in FLSA is that of preparedness; while some research studies (Young, 1990; Mohamad and Wahid, 2009; Zulfikar, 2022) have identified unpreparedness as a potential stressor, other studies (Wörde, 2003; Yalçın and Incecay, 2014) reported spontaneity as having the potential to alleviate learners' speaking anxiety.

In a recent study by Zulfikar (2022), the majority of participants reported experiencing extreme anxiety as a result of having to speak without preparation. Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) found that learners who have undergone a thorough preparation for an activity can decrease foreign language anxiety, as they build confidence and acquire a sense of control over the material. Conversely, Yalçın's and Incecay's study (2014) underlined the great potential of spontaneous speaking activities, such as games and role-plays, in reducing FLSA. Creative drama activities have also been shown to lower the affective filter and create a non-threatening learning environment, as participants can avoid threatening their own identity by creating a new one, in the context of theatrical play (Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu, 2013).

2.7.2. Speaking Games

Games have also been reported to mitigate foreign language anxiety in general and FLSA in particular. Zhu (2012) highlighted the potential of classroom games in fostering a relaxed and amusing classroom atmosphere which can lower learners' affective filter. Maintaining a low affective filter has been recognized as one of the positive aspects of gaming (García-Carbonell et al., 2001). Games can create a nonthreatening environment, in which learners are enjoying themselves and, as a result, are more inclined to take risks and make mistakes, without being prevented by a fear of failure (Andriani and Syarif, 2021).

Reinders and Wattana (2015) carried out research to examine the impact of gameplay on EFL learners' communication skills. The findings revealed that both individual and collaborative games reduced learners' FLSA, lowering their affective barriers, and enhanced their eagerness to communicate in the target language. In the same study, participants attributed the relaxing effect of games to the alleviation of their fear of evaluation and the emphasis that games place on fluency instead of accuracy. Yalçın and Incecay (2014) stressed the soothing effect of familiar games, like Taboo, on learners' FLSA. They also found that when a time limit was part of the game's regulations, learners tended to be more engaged in spontaneous speech, rather than focusing on mistakes they might make while speaking.

Digital game-based learning was also found to have similar alleviating effects on learners' FLSA (Yang et al, 2021; Ahmed et al., 2022), while a study by Fung and Min (2016) revealed a positive effect of board game treatment on the speaking performance, motivation and confidence of participants. According to Ariza (2001), the reason why games have the potential to lower anxiety

and, consequently, increase participation, lies in the fact that the attention of players is focused on meaning rather than language; learners stop worrying about language and start using it in a spontaneous way to achieve genuine communication.

2.7.3. Interlocutors and Audience

Varying interlocutors and audience have also been found to exert a considerable impact on FLSA. Young (1990), through the implementation of a three-part questionnaire, found that performing in front of others was a key factor in igniting FLSA. However, more recent studies have shown that it is not only the existence of an audience that stimulates fear of performance, but mainly its composition; Woodrow (2006) indicated interaction with native speakers as the major stressor, with performing in front of the teacher and in front of the whole class following. Interaction with native speakers has been identified as a major stressor in other studies as well (Çağatay, 2015). Speaking with interlocutors that are more proficient in the target language, even if they are not native speakers, also appears to increase the level of FLSA (Marpaung and Fithriani, 2023). He's study (2018) indicated that interacting in the foreign language with a teacher was more stressful than speaking with classmates, as teachers are the ones who assess learners and correct their mistakes.

2.7.4. Pair/Group Work

Several studies (Fatimah, 2019; Kamarulzaman et al., 2020; Zulfikar, 2022) have illustrated the contribution of collaborative learning and groups to reducing speaking anxiety, highlighting the role that the composition of the audience and the characteristics of the interlocutors play in developing FLSA. Fatimah (2019) indicated peer support as conducive to the creation of a less stressful learning environment, while presenting evidence on the positive effect of peer collaboration and small groups on learners' confidence. Young (1990) also highlighted the potential of group or pair work in mitigating FLSA, while Liu and colleagues (2018) found interventions combining cooperative learning with digital storytelling to be effective in combating language anxiety.

Participants in a study by Yalçın and Incecay (2014) reported feeling safer in a group, as they found the thought of compensating for each other's shortcomings comforting. Similarly, Zulfikar's study (2022) revealed that working collaboratively in groups helps learners realize that their peers share

similar feelings. In this supportive environment, no individual feels solely responsible or ashamed if an answer is incorrect. Knowing that their peers are on their side, learners no longer feel negatively judged or view the situation as a competition (ibid.).

2.8. Implications

Such research findings suggest that certain types of classroom practices and environments are less anxiety provoking than others. Thus, it is indicated that the choice of speaking activities by the educator can directly affect the level of FLSA that learners experience.

As anxious learners, overwhelmed by self-consciousness, find themselves struggling to cope with language learning, especially when it comes to the speaking skill, educators are faced with two options; either helping language learners cope with the existing anxiety-inducing context or making the learning situation less stressful. Both presuppose the acknowledgement of the existence of foreign language anxiety, which becomes imperative, due to the overwhelming effect that FLA can have on language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986). The challenge posed for EFL teachers -and foreign language teachers in general- is to find ways to help learners by creating a relaxed, supportive environment that provides ample opportunities to communicate in the foreign language (Susidamaiyanti, 2018).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. The Study

The study was conducted following a mixed methods approach, by means of a survey and a focus group interview. Mixed methods research was selected to provide a richer and more complex depiction of the phenomenon under investigation by means of triangulation (Flick, 2009).

Triangulation, a research strategy that attempts to increase the number of perspectives on the phenomenon under study (Herrlitz and Sturm, 1991), has been documented to enhance the validity and generalizability of research findings (Williams, 2015).

Mixed methods studies are commonly selected in classroom research, as the intricacy of classroom phenomena is rarely adequately interpreted by single-method studies (Cicorcki and Arceusz, 2016). Classroom behaviour, as a complex phenomenon itself, is more profoundly explored through complex methods of inquiry (ibid.). Quantitative research was selected thanks to its potential to reveal patterns and allow for the generalization and replication of the findings (ibid.). However, when dealing with the attitudes and feelings of human beings, individual differences are also of importance (ibid.). For this reason, survey findings were supplemented with qualitative data, obtained through the focus group interview.

The central hypothesis of the study is that the type of speaking activity influences the level of FLSA, within the population of Greek EFL learners in private language schools. Subsequently, potential factors that can affect FLSA are explored, with a primary focus on preparedness, interaction pattern, interlocutor and speaking games, such as *Taboo*, *Never Have I Ever* or *Guess Who*, and a secondary focus on age, gender, motivation, foreign language learning experience and use of the target language in daily life. The research questions are crystallized as follows;

Main Research Question:

Does the type of speaking activity influence the level of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) among Greek EFL learners?

Secondary Research Questions:

1. What is the impact of preparedness on the level of FLSA?
2. What is the impact of speaking games on FLSA levels?
3. How do different interaction patterns affect FLSA levels?

4. What role does the interlocutor play in influencing FLSA?
5. Which demographic (age, gender) and personal factors (motivation, foreign language learning experience, use of the target language in daily life) have an impact on FLSA among Greek EFL learners?

3.2. The Context

The study focuses on learners of English as a foreign language in Greek private evening language schools. Greece belongs to the expanding circle of Kachru's (1986) classification, with English not recognized as an official language but regarded as a fundamental qualification in today's globalized community. Its official language is Modern Greek, a language that is not spoken outside Greece and Cyprus. Therefore, knowledge of a foreign language is vital for communication on an international level, with English being the first choice. However, placing more emphasis on the acquisition of certificates as a tool for employment, rather than knowledge and communication itself, is a prevalent tendency among Greek citizens and stakeholders (Dendrinou et al., 2013). Consequently, foreign language learning has turned into a highly exam-oriented process (ibid.).

Although English as a subject is taught in Greek state schools, supplementary language teaching in private tuition classes, especially evening language schools, is a widespread phenomenon in Greece (Dendrinou et al., 2013). This financially uneconomical practice reflects parents' deep-seated lack of trust towards the effectiveness of foreign language education in Greek state schools, as well as their obsession with foreign language certification. A study conducted by Dendrinou, Zouganeli and Karavas (2013) revealed that, although the hours of English lessons in Greek public schools do not suffice to reach Independent User level, the majority of Greek EFL learners display an Independent User level competence, a paradox which is explained by additional lessons in private tuition classes.

3.3. The Survey

The survey was conducted in a web environment, via Google Forms, as web-based surveys are time- and cost-effective, allowing for a large number of data to be automatically stored and instantly accessible by the researcher, at a minimum cost (Wright, 2005; Nayak and Narayan, 2019).

3.3.1. The Participants

The initial planning involved a convenience sample of 200 EFL learners from the Glossomatheia language school. However, due to low participation rates and in order to increase the diversity and, thus, the reliability of the sample, the sampling was extended to include learners from seven more private language schools. Subsequently, 201 EFL learners, between 10 and 18 years old, from eight different private language schools around Greece, participated in the survey. Five out of the eight language schools are located in Athens, the capital of Greece, while the rest are located in smaller towns; Thessaloniki, Lamia and Aliveri.

A network of English language teachers contributed to this study, by sharing the link for the online questionnaire with their learners. Consent was acquired from both participants themselves, as well as their guardians, who could ask for their children to be excluded from the survey. Participants were granted anonymity and were made aware of the fact, prior to their engagement in the survey.

3.3.2. The Questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix I) was created by the researcher, with some of the items being borrowed or adapted from Young's (1990) and Woodrow's (2006) questionnaires on speaking activities in the foreign language and their corresponding anxiety levels. The practice of adapting established questionnaires has been selected by previous researchers (Fung and Min, 2016; Kamarulzaman et al., 2020) to effectively serve the context and purposes of the new study. Despite the limitations that occurred from the fact that the designed questionnaire had not been tested in previous research, the decision was based on the need to effectively address the specific objectives of this study, namely the potential factors under investigation, as well as the more recent developments in the field of language learning methodology, such as online games. The reliability analysis of the designed questionnaire indicated excellent internal consistency, obtaining a Cronbach's alpha value of .9.

Participants were asked to self-report their perceived level of anxiety when engaging in various speaking activities, on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Very Relaxed, Moderately Relaxed, Neither Relaxed Nor Anxious and Moderately Anxious to Very Anxious. Likert point scales are typically used to measure foreign language anxiety (Woodrow, 2006). The items included in the questionnaire were selected on the basis of the reviewed literature and revolved around four axes; (un)preparedness (prepared or spontaneous role-play/storytelling), speaking games (board games and online games), interaction pattern (individual/pair/group presentations) and interlocutor (familiar teacher, classmate, unknown Greek teacher, unknown native speaker). This grouping was not

revealed in the questionnaire, to avoid guiding respondents by helping them discover the exact logic and objectives of the study, with items appearing in a randomized order for each participant.

The questionnaire concluded with some demographic (age, gender) and personal questions (motivation, foreign language learning experience, use of the target language in daily life). These questions were purposefully placed at the end of the questionnaire, in line with relevant research findings, to avoid compromising the quality of more substantive responses; Crawford, Couper, and Lamias (2001) demonstrated that surveys that began with more engaging substantive questions had higher completion rates, while De Leeuw, Hox and Dillman (2008) noted that placing demographic questions at the end of a survey can help maintain focus on the core content of the survey. Items addressing the various types of speaking activities were placed in the first part of the questionnaire, when respondents are fresh, to reduce the likelihood of fatigue affecting the reliability of responses to key survey questions.

The questionnaire was translated in the respondents' first language, namely Greek, to ensure that learners of all levels would be able to participate, without their level of proficiency in the target language affecting their understanding of the survey items and compromising the reliability of their responses. Prior to its implementation, it was pilot-tested with five Greek EFL learners, whose age ranged between 10 and 18 years old, in order to detect and amend potential ambiguities. The piloting process was meant to reveal how participants perceive the questions, by asking them to voice their thoughts, so as to ensure that the designed instrument can successfully elicit the intended data, thus increasing its validity.

3.4. The Focus Group Interview

The focus group consisted of five teenage EFL learners, two boys and three girls 14-16 years old, all of whom met the predetermined inclusion criteria of age and attendance of EFL lessons in a private language school. All participants attended the Glossomatheia language school and belonged in the same class. This choice of participants was informed by the relevant literature, which supports that underaged interviewees may feel safer and more eager to express their thoughts if they are a relatively homogeneous group, or familiar with the other group members (Williams and Katz, 2001; Adler et al., 2019).

The questions addressed to focus group members (Appendix II) included the focal points of the survey, namely the influence of preparedness, games, interaction patterns and interlocutors on FLSA, but also extended to address the impact of anxiety on learning and the elements or activities that could render an EFL lesson stress-free, according to participants' standards. Transcripts produced from the recording of the interview were subsequently coded and themes were identified (Appendix II).

The interview was conducted in English, as the participants' age, advanced level of proficiency and fluency in the English language enabled them to express themselves freely. Therefore, the limiting factor concerning participants' level of proficiency and how it could affect their understanding, which dictated the translation of the questionnaire that addressed a more varied sample, did not exist in the case of the focus group participants. With no compelling factor suggesting otherwise, the English language was preferred, in order to procure a more accurate transcription of the conversation, avoiding language mediation. However, in order to ensure that the foreign language would not function as an inhibiting factor, participants were encouraged to switch to their mother tongue at any point, in case they felt more comfortable with it.

Ethical regulations concerning focus groups with child participants (Adler et al., 2019) were consistently followed; Consent was acquired from both learners and guardians, with participation being voluntary; All interviewees were informed that they are free to quit at any time and that focus group data will be treated with absolute confidentiality.

The focus group research method was selected to enrich survey data, as focus groups are effective in capturing experiences that cannot be adequately conveyed through numbers (Berg, 1995). The uniqueness of the chosen method lies in the deliberate use of group interaction in order to produce data (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1998). Focus groups aim at fostering a comfortable atmosphere of disclosure, in which participants can openly share views, experiences and feelings on a topic, influencing and becoming influenced by each other at the same time (Krueger and Casey, 2000).

This research method is particularly appropriate for underaged participants (Adler et al., 2019), who can share their stories and perspectives in a "permissive, nonthreatening environment" (Krueger and Casey, 2000, p. 5). During a focus group interview, the researcher adopts multiple roles; moderator, listener, observer and, eventually, inductive analyst (Krueger and Casey, 2000).

Chapter 4: Results

4.1. Survey

	M
Present a project alone (speaking in English in class)	3.02
Have a discussion with a native speaker I don't know (speaking in English in class)	2.81
Have a discussion with a Greek teacher I don't know (speaking in English in class)	2.74
Role play a situation spontaneously (speaking in English in class)	2.67
Spontaneously narrate a story (speaking in English in class)	2.62
Present a project with my group (speaking in English in class)	2.42
Present a project with a partner (speaking in English in class)	2.33
Narrate a story that I have prepared (speaking in English in class)	2.31
Present a prepared role play after studying a script (speaking in English in class)	2.17
Answer questions while playing a board game (speaking in English in class)	2.11
Have a discussion with my teacher (speaking in English in class)	2.05
Answer questions while playing an online game (speaking in English in class)	1.99
Have a discussion with a classmate (speaking in English in class)	1.66

Table 1. *Activities Arranged by FLSA Mean in Descending Order*

All analyses were conducted by the use of the *Jamovi* software. In each of the analyses, all assumptions were upheld, unless stated otherwise. Two outliers were excluded, due to extreme scores in age and years of learning experience.

Based on participants' self-reporting, the three activities with the highest FLSA mean were; presenting a project alone ($M=3.02$), discussing with a native speaker they do not know ($M=2.81$) or an unfamiliar Greek teacher ($M=2.74$), as illustrated in Table 1. Contrastingly, speaking while playing board games ($M=2.11$) or online games ($M=1.99$) and discussing with one's own teacher ($M=2.05$) or a classmate ($M=1.66$) were reported to evoke the lowest levels of FLSA.

4.1.1. Preparedness and Spontaneity

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2_p
RM Factor 1	34.8	3	11.614	16.3	< .001	0.075
Residual	427.2	600	0.712			

Note. Type 3 Sums of Squares

Table 2. *Within Subjects Effects for Un-/Preparedness Items in Terms of FLSA Mean (One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA)*

Comparison							
RM Factor 1	RM Factor 1	Mean Difference	SE	df	t	p _{bonferroni}	
Spontaneous role-play	- Prepared role-play	0.4975	0.0795	200	6.256	< .001	
	- Spontaneous storytelling	0.0498	0.0872	200	0.571	1.000	
	- Prepared storytelling	0.3582	0.0876	200	4.091	< .001	
Prepared role-play	- Spontaneous storytelling	-0.4478	0.0872	200	-5.135	< .001	
	- Prepared storytelling	-0.1393	0.0795	200	-1.752	0.488	
Spontaneous storytelling	- Prepared storytelling	0.3085	0.0836	200	3.690	0.002	

Table 3. *Post Hoc Comparisons of Un-/Preparedness Items in Terms of FLSA Mean*

A one-way repeated measures ANOVA and a Bonferroni post hoc test were conducted to explore the impact of preparedness on FLSA scores. All assumptions were upheld. As shown in Table 3, the analysis revealed a statistically significant difference ($F(3,600) = 16.3, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .075$) on FLSA, with prepared speaking activities evoking lower FLSA levels than spontaneous ones.

Specifically, spontaneous role-plays were reported as more stressful than prepared ones ($M_{diff} = .5, t(200) = 6.26, p < .001$). Similar results emerged from a comparison between spontaneous and prepared storytelling, with the difference being subtler but still statistically meaningful ($M_{diff} = .3, t(200) = 3.69, p = .002$). The differences between the two types of activity, namely spontaneous role-play and spontaneous storytelling, as well as prepared role-play and prepared storytelling, were not found to be statistically significant.

4.1.2. Speaking Games

	statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference	95% Confidence Interval		Effect Size	
						Lower	Upper		
Answer questions while playing an online game (speaking in English in class)	Student's t	200	0.06	-0.124	0.0658	-0.254	0.0053	Cohen's d	-0.133
Answer questions while playing a board game (speaking in English in class)									

Table 4. Paired Samples T-Test for Speaking Games Items in Terms of FLSA Mean

	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Answer questions while playing an online game (speaking in English in class)	201	1.99	2	0.990	0.0698
Answer questions while playing a board game (speaking in English in class)	201	2.11	2	1.030	0.0727

Table 5. Descriptives for Speaking Games Items

As indicated by Table 8, a paired samples t-test showed no significant contrast between board games and online games in relation to speaking anxiety ($t(200)=-1.89, p=.06$, Cohen's $d= .13$, BCa95% CI [-0.272, 0.006]). However, both gamified activities scored relatively low in reported FLSA levels, with speaking while playing board games ($M=2.11$) and speaking while playing online games ($M=1.99$) constituting two out of the four activities with the lowest anxiety mean.

4.1.3. Interaction Pattern

	Sphericity Correction	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2_p
RM Factor 1	None	57.4	2	28.692	53.5	<.001	0.211
	Huynh-Feldt	57.4	1.88	30.512	53.5	<.001	0.211
Residual	None	214.6	400	0.537			
	Huynh-Feldt	214.6	376.14	0.571			

Note. Type 3 Sums of Squares

Table 6. *Within Subjects Effects for Interaction Pattern Items in Terms of FLSA Mean (One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA)*

Comparison							
RM Factor 1	RM Factor 1	Mean Difference	SE	df	t	$p_{\text{bonferroni}}$	
Individual	- Pairs	0.6965	0.0789	200	8.82	<.001	
	- Group	0.6020	0.0766	200	7.85	<.001	
Pairs	- Group	-0.0945	0.0625	200	-1.51	0.397	

Table 7. *Post Hoc Comparisons of Interaction Pattern Items in Terms of FLSA Mean*

The effect of an interaction pattern variation on FLSA levels was examined through a one-way repeated measures ANOVA and a Bonferroni post hoc test. All the assumptions for the one way paired ANOVA were upheld, except for the assumption of sphericity. Hence, the Huynh-Feldt correction was performed to adjust the degrees of freedom and account for this violation (Huynh-Feldt $\epsilon= 0.94$). The analysis revealed that the difference in FLSA scores when presenting a project individually and when presenting a project in pairs or groups was statistically significant ($F(1.88, 376.14)=53.5, p<.001, \text{partial } \eta^2=.211$). Presenting alone was found to be more stress-evoking than presenting in pairs ($M_{\text{diff}}=.7, t(200)=8.82, p<.001$) or in groups ($M_{\text{diff}}=.6, t(200)=7.85, p<.001$). The difference between pair and group presentations was found to be statistically insignificant.

4.1.4. Interlocutor

	Sphericity Correction	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2_p
RM Factor 1	None	184	3	61.353	82.7	<.001	0.293
	Huynh-Feldt	184	2.80	65.689	82.7	<.001	0.293
Residual	None	445	600	0.742			
	Huynh-Feldt	445	560.40	0.794			

Note. Type 3 Sums of Squares

Table 8. *Within Subjects Effects for Interlocutor Items in Terms of FLSA Mean (One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA)*

Comparison		Mean Difference	SE	df	t	$p_{\text{Bonferroni}}$
Classmate	- Familiar teacher	-0.3881	0.0687	200	-5.649	<.001
	- Unfamiliar Greek teacher	-1.0746	0.0878	200	-12.240	<.001
	- Native speaker	-1.1443	0.0953	200	-12.012	<.001
Familiar teacher	- Unfamiliar Greek teacher	-0.6866	0.0806	200	-8.517	<.001
	- Native speaker	-0.7562	0.0891	200	-8.488	<.001
Unfamiliar Greek teacher	- Native speaker	-0.0697	0.0913	200	-0.763	1.000

Table 9. *Post Hoc Comparisons of Interlocutor Items in Terms of FLSA Mean*

A one-way repeated measures ANOVA and a post hoc analysis were also performed to investigate the effect of the interlocutor on FLSA, which was found to be statistically meaningful ($F(2.80, 560.40)=82.7, p<.001$, partial $\eta^2=.29$). All assumptions for the one way ANOVA were upheld, except for that of sphericity, with the Huynh-Feldt correction being employed to adjust the degrees of freedom and account for this violation (Huynh-Feldt $\epsilon=0.93$). Speaking to a classmate was shown to be the least stressful activity, succeeded by speaking to one's own teacher with a statistically significant but relatively small difference between the two ($M_{\text{diff}}=-.39, t(200)=-5.65, p<.001$).

Speaking to an unfamiliar Greek teacher followed as more stressful, with a significant difference from the first two situations ($M_{diff} = -1.07$, $t(200) = -12.24$, $p < .001$ and $M_{diff} = -.69$, $t(200) = -8.52$, $p < .001$ respectively). Speaking to a native speaker evoked the highest FLSA scores. However, no statistically significant difference in FLSA levels occurred when comparing speaking to an unfamiliar Greek teacher to speaking to an unfamiliar native speaker ($p = 1$).

4.1.5. Age

		Mean Anxiety	How old are you?
Mean Anxiety	Pearson's r	—	—
	df	—	—
	p-value	—	—
	95% CI Upper	—	—
	95% CI Lower	—	—
	N	—	—
How old are you?	Pearson's r	0.202 **	—
	df	199	—
	p-value	0.004	—
	95% CI Upper	0.331	—
	95% CI Lower	0.065	—
	N	201	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 10. Age-FLSA Mean Correlation Matrix

A Pearson correlation analysis of the data revealed a medium to weak positive correlation between age and FLSA, as illustrated in Table 10. Learners who are older appear to be more likely to display a higher level of FLSA ($r(199) = .2$, $p = .004$, BCa95% CI [.331, .065]).

4.1.6. (Previous) Target Language Learning Experience

		Mean Anxiety	How many years have you been learning English?
Mean Anxiety	Pearson's r	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
	95% CI	—	
	Upper	—	
	95% CI	—	
	Lower	—	
	N	—	
How many years have you been learning English?	Pearson's r	0.038	—
	df	199	—
	p-value	0.595	—
	95% CI	0.175	—
	Upper	0.175	—
	95% CI	-0.101	—
	Lower	-0.101	—
	N	201	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 11. Target Language Learning Experience -FLSA Mean Correlation Matrix

According to a Pearson correlation analysis, no relationship between the years of learning experience and FLSA was established ($r(199) = .03$, $p = .6$, BCa95% CI [.175, -.101]).

4.1.7. Motivation

		Mean Anxiety	How much do you like learning English?
Mean Anxiety	Pearson's r	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
	95% CI Upper	—	
	95% CI Lower	—	
	N	—	
How much do you like learning English?	Pearson's r	-0.244 ***	—
	df	199	—
	p-value	<.001	—
	95% CI Upper	-0.110	—
	95% CI Lower	-0.370	—
	N	201	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 12. *Motivation-FLSA Mean Correlation Matrix*

In order to explore the relation between FLSA and motivation levels, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed, as can be seen in Table 12. The analysis indicated a medium negative correlation between the two. More motivated participants, who reported a higher liking for learning the target language, tended to report lower levels of FLSA ($r(199) = -.24, p < .004, BCa95\% CI [-.11, -.37]$).

4.1.8. Gender

		Statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference	95% Confidence Interval		Cohen's d	Effect Size
							Lower	Upper		
Mean Anxiety	Student's t	-1.80	196	0.073	-0.201	0.111	-0.420	0.0189		-0.268

Note. $H_a \mu_{Boy} \neq \mu_{Girl}$

Table 13. Independent Samples T-Test for Gender Effect on FLSA Mean

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Mean Anxiety	Boy	70	2.24	2.23	0.743	0.0888
	Girl	128	2.44	2.38	0.752	0.0665

Table 14. Group Descriptives for Gender

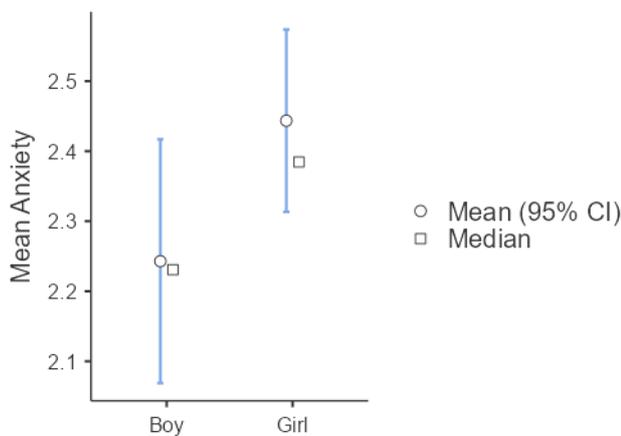


Figure 1. Gender Differences Plot

An independent samples t-test was performed to explore if male and female learners differ from each other, in terms of their foreign language speaking anxiety. Although female participants had a slightly

higher FLSA mean ($M=2.24$, $SD=.74$) than male ones ($M=2.44$, $SD=.75$), this difference was not found to be statistically significant ($t(196)=-1.8$ $p=.07$, Cohen's $d= .27$, BCa95% CI [-.56, .03]). Three participants who chose not to indicate their gender, were excluded from this analysis.

4.1.9. Other Foreign Languages Learning Experience

		Statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference	95% Confidence Interval		Cohen's d	Effect Size
							Lower	Upper		
Mean Anxiety	Student's t	2.17	199	0.031	0.231	0.106	0.0207	0.440		0.310

Table 15. Independent Samples T-Test for Other Foreign Languages Effect on FLSA Mean

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Mean Anxiety	No	83	2.51	2.54	0.723	0.0794
	Yes	118	2.28	2.23	0.756	0.0696

Table 16. Group Descriptives for Other Foreign Languages Learning Experience

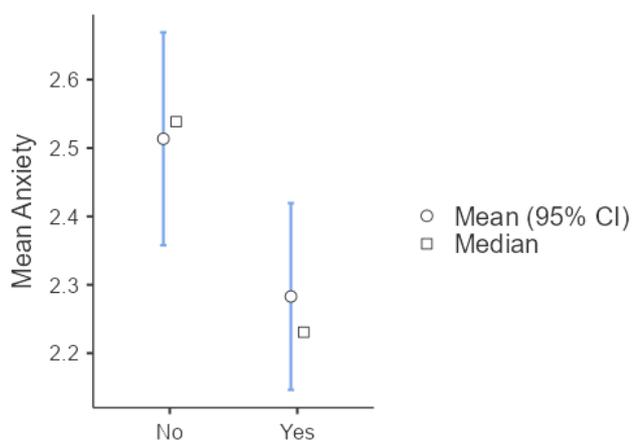


Figure 2. Other Foreign Languages Learning Experience-FLSA Mean Plot

In order to examine if learning a second foreign language had an impact on FLSA levels, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The test revealed a statistically significant difference of a small-medium size ($t(199)=2.17, p=.03$, Cohen's $d= .31$, BCa95% CI [.02, .59]) between learners of English alone ($M=2.51, SD=.72$) and learners of English and other foreign languages ($M=2.28, SD=.76$). As illustrated by Figure 2, participants who study an additional foreign language seem to experience less anxiety on average, compared to participants who only study English as a foreign language.

4.1.10. Use of the Target Language in Daily Life

		Statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference	95% Confidence Interval		Effect Size
							Lower	Upper	
Mean Anxiety	Student's t	3.15	199	0.002	0.412	0.131	0.154	0.670	Cohen's d 0.562

Table 17. Independent Samples T-Test for Use of Target Language in Daily Life Effect on FLSA Mean

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Mean Anxiety	No	39	2.71	2.62	0.632	0.101
	Yes	162	2.30	2.23	0.755	0.0593

Table 18. Group Descriptives for Use of Target Language in Daily Life

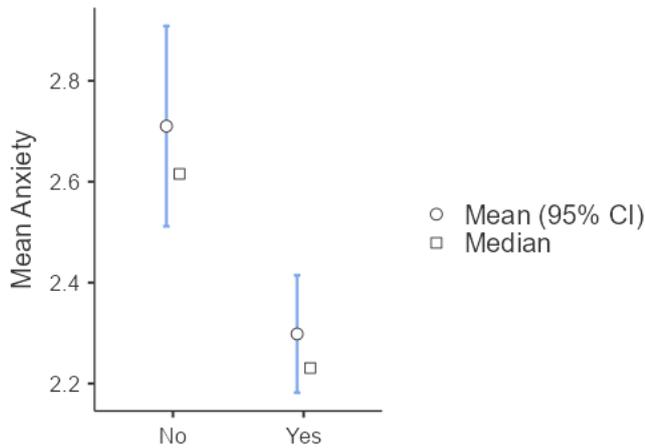


Figure 3. *Use of Target Language in Daily Life - FLSA Mean Plot*

Participants were asked to report on whether they use English in their daily lives, for reasons unrelated to the lessons. The vast majority of learners, approximating 80%, stated that they use the English language in their living environment. The results were analyzed through an independent samples t-test, as shown in Table 17, which revealed a considerable mean difference ($t(199)=3.15$, $p=.002$, Cohen's $d=.56$, BCa95% CI [.19, .93]) between participants who use English in their everyday lives ($M=2.30$, $SD=.76$) and participants who do not ($M=2.71$, $SD=.63$). The findings indicate that participants who use English on a regular basis for reasons unrelated to formal learning tend to display lower levels of foreign language speaking anxiety.

4.2. Focus Group Interview

The focus group interview revolved around the following axes; stressful or stress-free experiences, the impact of anxiety on learning, the ideal stress-free lesson and the reasons and contributing factors behind FLSA. The factors under discussion included audience and interlocutors, preparedness, interaction patterns, speaking games, the learners' age and the teacher's role.

Participants reported exams and real life encounters with speakers of other languages as the most stress-inducing situations;

My father lives in another country and speaks English there and one day someone called. And I said hello and he was speaking English and I had never faced that before. So I was like, what do I do? I didn't know what to do.

(Learner C)

When I went to London with my dad last summer, it was a real experience for me. I don't think I had ever talked to any native speaker before. So I was like, really anxious about what I was gonna say when I was speaking to someone or I was afraid of stuttering.

(Learner A)

Some learners reported speaking in their mother tongue and speaking in the foreign language as equally stressful, alluding to communication apprehension in general, while others stated that their anxiety intensifies when speaking in the foreign language. Fear of not being understood or being misunderstood by their interlocutors emerged as a recurring factor behind FLSA;

When we went to London, I was really anxious because we were going to the stores and everyone was speaking in English and I was, like, what am I saying? What if I say something wrong? Their English is so perfect. They're native speakers. It's easier for them to speak English. And I said to myself, like, what if I don't say the right words? What if I accidentally say something bad that I don't mean?

(Learner D)

On a trip abroad I had to communicate with a shop assistant. I didn't understand his English. He couldn't understand what I was telling him. And I couldn't understand what he was saying either. That made me quite stressed.

(Learner B)

Learner B reported a constant feeling of anxiety that accompanies him whenever he has to speak in public, regardless of the context. He admitted experiencing that feeling of anxiety at the very moment of the interview, emphasizing that he can never dispose of that inhibiting emotion when performing in a foreign language or school subject.

Fear of assessment and making mistakes were also mentioned as compounding factors, as illustrated in Learner C's response;

I experience it (FLSA) because I'm afraid of making mistakes. I don't want to make mistakes while others can hear me. I think that it will be very bad if I make a mistake. I am also anxious when I'm taking exams or something like that.

(Learner C)

Learner B attributed his fear of making mistakes to a negative past experience with a teacher that used to mock learners' expression errors.

A conference, during which learners had to present on stage while facing an audience, was also mentioned as a highly stressful situation. Therefore, the role of audiences and unfamiliarity with listeners on FLSA was discussed, with learners agreeing on the aggravating effect of large audiences on their speaking anxiety, while also referring to unfamiliarity with the audience as a contributing factor;

For me it depends on the audience because like if I do a presentation in my class I know how each of them will react because like I know them for three years now, so I'm not that anxious...

(Learner D)

As far as interlocutors are concerned, all learners agreed that discussing with a classmate would be the least stressful situation, followed by talking to their teacher. Speaking to a stranger, whether a Greek teacher or a native speaker, was considered significantly more stress-evoking. Although speaking with native speakers was classified by the majority of learners as the most stressful situation, some of them emphasized that unfamiliarity plays a greater role on their anxiety than their interlocutor's origin;

If I was speaking to someone I don't know, I would be very anxious. Regardless of whether they were Greek or. Because I would be afraid of making mistakes. Don't know, things wouldn't be clear in my mind. I would lag.

(Learner B)

For me, it's the fact that they know better English that counts, not the fact that they're the native speakers.

(Learner C)

The focus group members did not share opinions on the impact of native speakers as interlocutors on their speaking anxiety, with some of them stating that having a common mother tongue with their interlocutor can alleviate their FLSA, while others believed that the native speaker's point of vantage in linguistic competence would make them more understanding towards mistakes;

It makes a difference because the native speaker has a more of an accent and that makes me nervous because if I don't understand a word...

(Learner E)

I think like it's easier when you're speaking to a Greek person, someone from who's from

Greece and knows Greek too. Because, like, if you're speaking in English and then like you don't know a word you can like say it in Greek and they will understand, they won't judge you.

(Learner D)

I would be more anxious to talk with a Greek teacher that I don't know than talking with a native speaker, because the native speaker will know that you aren't from England or America so they're probably going to think that it's natural to make mistakes. If you talk with someone who is Greek and he knows better English than you do, if you make mistakes, he may be like why are you making mistakes?

(Learner C)

While discussing preferred interaction patterns, one of the participants expressed a preference for working individually when in a familiar environment that does not heighten his anxiety, while the rest found shared responsibility and shared focus of attention in group presentations to alleviate their FLSA;

I prefer doing presentations in groups, because if you make a mistake it won't matter as much as when doing a presentation alone. You won't be in the limelight.

(Learner A)

Learners were also prompted to express their preference for spontaneous or prepared role-plays. Unlike most survey participants, who rated prepared role-plays as less stressful, focus group participants found scripted role-plays to incite more anxiety, because of their demands on memory;

I think it's like a little bit easier when you have to think it on the spot because you can use your imagination on the subject and of that. But if you have, if you're in a play, you have to say like a specific thing. And if you forget and you mess that up, that's it.

(Learner D)

Learners identified stress-inducing factors in both scenarios; spontaneous role-plays require active thinking on the spot, while prepared or scripted ones require recollection. Improvisation skills were mentioned as a remedy to both situations, but learners seemed to think that spontaneous role-plays are more successful in developing such skills.

The impact of FLSA on learning was revealed to be debilitating. The majority of participants recalled numerous instances of making mistakes due to the anxiety evoked by fear of assessment or time restrictions. One of the participants described the relationship between inarticulateness and anxiety as a vicious circle that she finds herself unable to escape;

When I'm anxious I don't remember the words I want to say. And then, I stop and then it's like the people that they're all watching you and it's making you more anxious. And then I can't say the words. It's like a vicious circle. The more anxious you get, the less you can say. And the less you can say, the more anxious you get.

(Learner D)

Contrary to survey findings, that revealed FLSA to increase with age, most focus group participants reported that their anxiety declines with experience; the more experience they acquire in oral activities, such as presentations, the more confident and relaxed they tend to feel.

All learners reported games, discussions with peers and oral collaboration with classmates on group projects as the least stressful activities. When asked if they experience anxiety when playing games in class, all participants answered negatively, with Learner A characteristically stating;

I mean, it's a game. It's supposed to be fun.

(Learner A)

When describing the ideal stress-free lesson, they included games, which were described as fun and relaxing (Learner A) and learning outside the four walls, by going for a walk or exploration (Learner A). Learner D suggested having discussions on shared experiences, such as a movie that the whole class has watched. Distractions, such as going for a walk or having a snack while discussing with classmates, were proposed as an effective way of taking the focus off the speaking task itself, thus eliminating the feeling of anxiety that accompanies traditional speaking activities.

Regarding the teacher's role in reducing FLSA, Learner E stated that there is not much that educators can do. However, the rest of the participants mentioned a friendly personality and a relaxed attitude towards mistakes as helpful teacher traits. Learner C underlined the importance of the teacher making corrections only after learners have concluded their speech, instead of interrupting them.

When learners were asked if they would prefer to avoid stress-evoking speaking activities altogether or have support when engaging in them, they unanimously opted for the latter;

When you get out of your comfort you can achieve more things than by just sitting on the side and doing nothing. Experience helps you overcome your anxiety.

(Learner E)

Sometimes, if no one makes you do it, you will never do it.

(Learner A)

Some of them defined support as external encouragement, while others expressed a preference for dealing with their feelings in private (Learner D), by analyzing the reasons that lie behind their stress and trying to overcome them.

The focus group interview provided insights to individual differences, but also revealed the commonality of five different teenagers in two respects; all of them had often experienced FLSA and all of them were unwilling to let anxiety stop them from performing orally in the foreign language, but were eagerly looking for the necessary support to cope with it.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings of the present study contribute to the discourse on factors that can aggravate or alleviate FLSA. The hypothesis that the type of speaking activity can affect the level of FLSA, which is also supported by previous research findings (Young, 1990; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994; Woodrow, 2006; Noormohamadi, 2009; Yalçın and Incecay, 2014; Fatimah, 2019; Kamarulzaman et al., 2020; Zulfikar, 2022), is hereby confirmed. Extending the research to identify specific classroom activities and practices that intensify or mitigate FLSA in the context of the Greek private language education system can provide educators with valuable insights for the creation of a low-stress learning environment.

5.1. Preparedness and Spontaneity

As far as preparedness is concerned, both prepared role-plays and storytelling activities were found to invoke lower levels of FLSA than spontaneous one. These findings are in line with previous research (Young, 1990; Mohamad and Wahid, 2009; Zulfikar, 2022) that identified unpreparedness as a potential stressor. However, other studies (Wörde, 2003; Yalçın and Incecay, 2014) that indicated spontaneity as an alleviating factor in FLSA did not resonate with the findings of the present study.

The results of this study regarding the effect of creative drama activities, such as role-plays, that were found to be relaxing in previous research (Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu, 2013), were not conclusive, as there was a considerable difference in FLSA levels between prepared and spontaneous role plays. Despite the ranking of prepared role-plays as less stressful, based on survey data, focus group participants pinpointed the demands of theatrical plays or scripted role-plays on memory as equally, or even more stressful at times, than the need to improvise in spontaneous ones. The development of improvisation skills was proposed as a coping strategy for the stress induced by both kinds of role-playing activities.

5.2. Speaking Games

The only spontaneous speaking activity that scored low in FLSA levels was games. However, further research is required to investigate whether it is spontaneity in oral output or other factors, like

enjoyment or motive, that render speaking games relatively stress-free. Board games, such as *Taboo*, *Never Have I Ever* or *Guess Who*, and their equivalent online versions were both found to be relaxing as speaking activities, with the majority of participants reporting feeling relatively or even completely relaxed while playing. Focus group participants underlined the fun aspect of games as the key to alleviating their FLSA.

These findings are consistent with previous research (Zhu, 2012; Yalçın and Incecay, 2014; Fung and Min, 2016) that has underlined the potential of game-based activities to create a relaxed and amusing classroom environment, lowering the affective filter and the speaking anxiety of foreign language learners. A possible explanation for that effect is that games function as a distraction from obsessing over the accuracy of one's utterances or a potential negative evaluation (Reinders and Wattana, 2015), as players focus more on the game and the meaning they need to communicate, rather than the language that they use (Ariza, 2001). The importance of engaging in purposeful activities that can function as distractions from their fear of mistakes and evaluation was also highlighted by focus group participants.

5.3. Interaction Pattern

In terms of interaction patterns, pair or group work were revealed to be considerably less stressful than individual work. Individual oral presentations were actually shown to be the most stress-provoking of all the speaking activities included in the questionnaire, in line with previous research findings (Alnahidh and Altalhab, 2020). Working in pairs or working in a group did not appear to significantly vary in terms of their effect on FLSA. Collaborative learning and peer support have been widely documented to alleviate foreign language speaking anxiety (Young, 1990; Fatimah, 2019; Kamarulzaman et al., 2020; Zulfikar, 2022).

This tendency could be explained by the fact that sharing the responsibility and their feelings with their peers, reduces learners' competitiveness and fear of negative judgement (Zulfikar, 2022), making group members feel safer, as they can rely on their peers to cover for them in case they face difficulties in their speech (Yalçın and Incecay, 2014). Thereby, the speaking anxiety they experience in collaborative activities is considerably mitigated. These assumptions are strengthened by focus group findings, with learners reporting that, when they are involved in group presentations, they feel comforted by the fact that the responsibility and the attention of the audience are divided

among group members. In that context, they feel that their mistakes will be of less consequence than when presenting alone. However, a focus group participant also emphasized that the need for support from a partner or a group during a presentation only occurs when there is an unfamiliar audience that functions as an aggravating factor for their FLSA.

5.4. Interlocutors and Audience

The existence of an audience was found to play a significant role in FLSA, as focus group participants recalled presenting at a conference, in front of a large audience, as one of the most stressful situations they have experienced. However, they emphasized that it is not the audience in itself, but mainly its composition that affects them, as presenting in front of their classmates does not evoke the FLSA that they experience when talking in front of an unfamiliar audience. Both findings are in line with previous research (Young, 1990; Woodrow, 2006).

In terms of interlocutors, speaking with a classmate was reported to be the least stressful activity out of all the speaking activities included in the questionnaire. Speaking with one's teacher was found to be slightly more stressful, in congruence with past research findings (He, 2018), but still evoking a relatively low level of FLSA. Contrastingly, the level of FLSA escalates when discussing with unfamiliar interlocutors. All focus group members recalled real-life interactions with speakers of other languages or native speakers as the most stressful situations they have experienced.

In line with previous studies (Woodrow, 2006; Çağatay, 2015), talking to native speakers stimulated the highest FLSA levels in comparison with other interlocutors. However, unfamiliarity with the interlocutor, rather than their origin seemed to be the key factor, as the difference in FLSA levels when speaking to an unfamiliar Greek teacher or a native speaker was found to be insignificant. However, in the case of the unfamiliar Greek teacher, their profession could have also had an impact on reported FLSA, as teachers are the ones who usually assess and correct language learners (He, 2018).

The focus group interview findings in relation to the effect of native speaker interlocutors on FLSA were contradictory. Some of the learners argued that it is their interlocutor's level of proficiency in the foreign language that affects the FLSA they evoke and not their mother language. A study by Marpaung and Fithriani (2023) produced similar findings. Focus group participants even suggested that a native speaker's undeniable point of vantage in linguistic competence could increase their

understanding, consequently lowering the learner's FLSA, as a native speaker would consider mistakes on the part of a non-native one as natural. However, if a learner felt that their communicative competence is insufficient in comparison to a non-native speaker's, it could result in higher levels of FLSA, in fear of stricter judgement on the part of the interlocutor.

Nevertheless, this viewpoint was not shared by all the participants, as there were others who supported that sharing a common mother tongue with their interlocutor could help them easily bridge a potential communication gap, by resulting to their first language, thus decreasing their communication apprehension and FLSA. A native speaker's accent was also mentioned as an aspect that could inhibit comprehension while interacting with them, thus provoking the learner's anxiety.

5.5. Personal Factors

In line with older research findings (Bailey and Daley, 1999; Karabıyık and Özkan, 2017), survey data indicated a weak positive correlation between age and FLSA, with FLSA increasing as learners get older. However, focus group testimonies suggest that prior experience in a specific type of learning activity tends to diminish FLSA. Thereby, although older learners appear to be more anxious and self-conscious than younger ones, the experience one accumulates over the years can potentially contribute to managing FLSA.

Contrary to previous research data, that found either female participants (Çağatay, 2015) or male ones (Dewaele et al., 2022) to display higher level of FLSA, gender does not seem to decisively affect FLSA levels in the present study. This finding is consistent with a recent meta-analysis (Piniel and Zólyomi, 2022) that revealed no considerable gender difference in relation to foreign language anxiety.

In relation to past experience, the years of learning the target foreign language, namely English, were not found to correlate with FLSA. However, most learners with prior learning experience in other foreign language seem to experience lower levels of anxiety when speaking in English. The latter finding attests to those of previous research (Bailey and Daley, 1999; Thompson and Khawaja, 2016) and could be attributed to the fact that learners who are proficient in more than one foreign languages have a greater experience in diverse linguistic environments (Thompson and Khawaja, 2016), which has allowed them to gain more confidence in such conditions. Negative past experiences with

teachers and moments when learners felt exposed or humiliated while speaking in English were found to ignite FLSA, according to focus group participants' testimonies.

Motivation was revealed to negatively correlate with FLSA; the more participants enjoyed learning the foreign language, the less likely they were to suffer from high levels of FLSA. The opposite could also be true; learners who are not burdened with increased FLSA find more joy in the language learning process. This finding is congruent with those of Gardner and MacIntyre (1992), while it simultaneously contradicts other studies that have either discovered a positive correlation between the two (Kitano, 2001), or no correlation whatsoever (Tóth, 2007; Djafri and Wimbari, 2018). Nevertheless, it is worth clarifying that the present study focused solely on internal motivation in the sense of enjoyment of the learning procedure, while motivation is in fact a much more complex concept, encompassing a wide variety of aspects.

Finally, the use of English in daily life, for reasons unrelated to language lessons, is revealed to be a key factor in relation to FLSA. Frequent use of the foreign language outside the classroom was found to decrease the level of FLSA that learners experience during classroom activities, in congruence with findings of previous studies (Oli and Ramesh, 2022). By practicing the target language frequently, in real-life communication, learners can increase their perceived self-efficacy in terms of communicative competence and, therefore, decrease their FLSA (Jiang and Dewaele, 2020). A reverse process could also be in effect; less anxious EFL learners are more inclined to use English in their daily lives, as a result of feeling more confident (Gregersen and Horwitz, 2002). The fact that the vast majority of young EFL learners, namely 80%, use English in their everyday lives is also noteworthy. The wide use of English outside the language classroom could have implications for the corresponding levels of FLSA, in comparison to other, less widely used, foreign languages.

5.6. The Teacher's Role

Teacher support was reported as valuable in dealing with FLSA. All focus group participants expressed a willingness to continue engaging in stress-evoking activities with the necessary support, as they identified getting out of one's comfort zone as the way towards progress. What they expected from their teachers was a friendly personality and a relaxed attitude towards mistakes, as also suggested in earlier studies (Young, 1990). Contrastingly, fear of making mistakes was largely attributed to traumatizing experiences precipitated by teachers in their past.

The focus group data also suggests a preference for selective error correction, which takes place only when the learners have concluded their speech, without the teacher interrupting them. Selective error correction has also been proposed in previous research, as a way of treating FLSA (Zulfikar, 2022), as exhaustive error correction has been found to increase FLSA levels (MacIntyre, 1999).

5.7. The Fears behind FLSA

FLSA in the Greek private language education context is mainly attributed to fear of making mistakes and fear of negative evaluation. This finding adds to Gregersen's and Horwitz's study (2002), in which avoidance of mistakes is identified as the primary goal of interacting in the foreign language. One of the focus group participants vividly described the debilitating feeling that making a mistake while speaking in front of others will be highly damaging. This feeling is connected to a perceived threat of embarrassment, which has been documented as a factor behind FLSA (Zulfikar, 2022). Fear of being misunderstood has also occurred as a reason behind FLSA, both in literature (Philips, 1992) and in the current study, when focus group participants narrated their stressful interactions with speakers of other languages in their travels abroad.

Fear of assessment was also found to aggravate FLSA, with learners mentioning exams as increasingly stressful and debilitating situations, alluding to a potential test anxiety, emerging from a fear of failure (Howitz et. al, 1986). Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that, according to Woodrow (2006), the temporary feeling of anxiety in situations such as exams could fall under the category of state anxiety, which differs from the situation specific foreign language anxiety that consistently occurs in the context of foreign language learning.

5.8. The Effect of FLSA on Learning and Performance

The incapacitating effects of FLSA on language learning were stressed by the participants of the focus group interview. A great number of mistakes were attributed to the anxiety evoked by fear of assessment or time limitations. One of the learners described the relationship between speaking difficulties and FLSA as a vicious circle; anxiety prevents the retrieval of the needed vocabulary in memory. As the learner finds herself struggling to express the intended meaning in front of others, her anxiety soars, further incapacitating memory retrieval. Mental blocks have been reported in the relevant literature (Susidamaiyanti, 2018) as a repercussion of foreign language anxiety. Tobias

(1986) explains the blocking effect of anxiety on the retrieval of previously acquired information by referring to the tendency of anxious learners to divide their cognitive resources between thoughts related to the task at hand and unrelated self-judgmental thoughts about their own reaction.

5.9. Suggestions for a Low-Stress Learning Environment

In addition to teacher support and encouragement, introspection was also identified as a way of managing FLSA. Games, peer discussions and oral collaboration with classmates on group projects were proposed as activities with FLSA alleviating power. The importance of distractions, such as going for a walk outside the classroom, in eliminating FLSA, was also stressed. In line with previous research findings (Krashen, 1985, as cited in Young, 1991; Ariza, 2001), focus group data suggest that when the message is interesting enough, learners tend to focus on meaning and stop worrying about language. Shared experiences, such as a movie that all learners have watched in class, were proposed as engaging topics of discussion that can divert the learners' attention from the language and the consequent FLSA, to the message. Watching movies in the foreign language has also been previously recommended as a way of building class rapport (Young, 1991).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1. Practical Contribution

MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) argue that learners do not initially experience language anxiety when they begin learning a new language, but it develops only after their attitudes and emotions about the language learning process have solidified. This theory indicates that the issue lies more with the language learning methodology than with the learners themselves. Thus, learners' foreign language anxiety could indicate that the teaching methods used are inherently problematic. Therefore, it is crucial to help teachers recognize learner anxiety and address it effectively in the classroom.

Stress-relieving activities, such as games or peer discussions, can be regularly implemented to help learners boost their confidence and free themselves of debilitating anxiety. According to both survey and focus group findings, speaking games hold the potential to extricate learners from debilitating FLSA. As the focus group data identify fear of assessment and mistakes as underlying factors behind FLSA, educators could try to embrace mistakes as a welcome and natural part of the learning process, while also minimizing judgements in the classroom. Alternative assessment, such as games or projects, instead of constant formal testing, could contribute towards that direction. For example, a board game with speaking challenges, such as 'talk about your hobbies while walking backwards' or 'describe your favourite travel destination while dancing hip hop', could substitute traditional oral exam preparation, incorporating the needed distractions from the act of speaking itself that focus group participants mentioned as a coping mechanism for their FLSA.

Incorporating games into language instruction may also provide learners with an alternative resource they can use to practice the foreign language outside the classroom, as a pastime activity. Educators who introduce learners to the idea of using games for language learning may equip them with a tool for lifelong learning (Reinders and Wattana, 2015). Games are a potent tool for foreign language use outside the classroom, as one of their main characteristics is that learners do not tend to play just once, but repeatedly, owing to their engrossing and addictive nature (Garris et al., 2002).

As learners who use the target language outside the classroom displayed significantly lower anxiety levels than those who do not, language educators could embrace and encourage engagement in pastime activities in the target language, such as reading literature, watching movies, playing video games or communicating with learners from other countries, as an inextricable part of the learning

process. Supplementing traditional homework with such real-life experiences could provide learners with the stimuli that will encourage them to integrate the use of the foreign language in their daily lives.

At the same time, although the present study does not claim to provide any evidence that undermines the educational value of anxiety inducing activities, their identification can guide educators in providing the necessary support to their learners when choosing to integrate them in their lessons. For instance, as preparedness was shown to decrease FLSA, prepared role-plays or storytelling activities could precede spontaneous ones in order to allow learners to build confidence. Learners' inhibitions regarding their interaction with native speakers could also be addressed within the language classroom, by debunking the myth of the native speaker superiority. If classroom practices and research findings become entwined, education researchers and practitioners can foster an environment that is more conducive to foreign language learning, disentangling it from dispiriting negative feelings.

6.2. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The data of the present study were collected through participants' self-reporting. Thus, an element of subjectivity could have potentially tampered with their accuracy, in conjunction with the young age of participants. Thus, obtained data could be validated through further research, triangulated through different methods of enquiry, such as observation or physiological measurements. The sample could be further enriched, in order to be more representative of the entire population, or extended to include EFL learners that do not attend private evening language schools. Research on the field can also be extended to include more types of speaking activities. The practical contribution section of the this study could generate future action research, testing the effectiveness of the suggested classroom practices on managing FLSA.

One limitation of the chosen instrument of survey, identified in similar research (Nayak and Narayan, 2019), is that the researcher is unable to resolve any participant's doubts in real time or evaluate the participants' seriousness in completing the questionnaire. As the designed questionnaire is a novel instrument, its use in further research could attest to its validity and reliability.

Finally, although the present study revolved around the phenomenon of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, only learners of English as a foreign language participated. Different foreign languages

have been found to be associated with different levels of FLSA (Djafri and Wimbari, 2018). Thus, findings cannot claim generalizability to other foreign languages, unless substantiated by further research.

6.3. Concluding Remarks

The present studies explored Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety and its potential underlying factors, as well as subsequent implications for classroom practice. By investigating that prevalent language learning phenomenon in the context of the Greek private EFL education system, it aspires to contribute to the creation of a framework that will assist foreign language educators and policy makers in reducing FLSA. The objective in freeing foreign language learners from unnecessary FLSA is to encourage them to eagerly pursue learning experiences, instead of evading or dreading them, thereby fostering the conditions for effective language learning,

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Appendix I

Questionnaire - English Version

Speaking in English

Thank you for participating in this survey! :) It will only take 1-2 minutes.

Your views on English lessons are valuable.

Your participation is **anonymous**.

How anxious do I feel, when I ...

- 1: Very relaxed
- 2: Moderately relaxed
- 3: Neither anxious nor relaxed
- 4: Moderately anxious
- 5: Very anxious

In all the situations that follow imagine that you have to speak in **English** in class.

Have a discussion with a native speaker I don't know (speaking in English in class) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very relaxed	<input type="radio"/>	Very anxious				

Answer questions while playing an online game (speaking in English in class) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very relaxed	<input type="radio"/>	Very anxious				

Spontaneously narrate a story (speaking in English in class) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very relaxed	<input type="radio"/>	Very anxious				

Present a prepared role play after studying a script (speaking in English in class) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very relaxed	<input type="radio"/>	Very anxious				

Role play a situation spontaneously (speaking in English in class) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very relaxed	<input type="radio"/>	Very anxious				

Present a project with my group (speaking in English in class) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very relaxed	<input type="radio"/>	Very anxious				

Present a project with a partner (speaking in English in class) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very relaxed	<input type="radio"/>	Very anxious				

Answer questions while playing a board game (speaking in English in class) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very relaxed	<input type="radio"/>	Very anxious				

Present a project alone (speaking in English in class) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very relaxed	<input type="radio"/>	Very anxious				

Have a discussion with a classmate (speaking in English in class) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very relaxed	<input type="radio"/>	Very anxious				

Narrate a story that I have prepared (speaking in English in class) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very relaxed	<input type="radio"/>	Very anxious				

Have a discussion with a Greek teacher I don't know (speaking in English in class) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very relaxed	<input type="radio"/>	Very anxious				

Have a discussion with my teacher (speaking in English in class) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very relaxed	<input type="radio"/>	Very anxious				

A few things about you

How much do you like learning English? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	Very much				

Do you use English in your daily life for reasons unrelated to the lesson? *

- Yes
 No

How old are you? *

Η απάντησή σας _____

Apart from English, are you studying any other foreign language? *

- Yes
 No

You are... *

- Girl
 Boy
 Other
 Prefer not to say

How many years have you been learning English? *

Η απάντησή σας _____

Questionnaire - Greek Version

Speaking in English

Σε ευχαριστώ που συμμετέχεις σ' αυτή την έρευνα! :) Θα χρειαστούν μόνο 1 με 2 λεπτά.

Η γνώμη σου για το μάθημα των αγγλικών είναι πολύτιμη!

Η συμμετοχή σου είναι **ανώνυμη**.

Πόσο αγχωμένος/-η νιώθω όταν....

- 1: Πολύ χαλαρός/-η
- 2: Χαλαρός/-η
- 3: Ούτε χαλαρός/-η ούτε αγχωμένος/-η
- 4: Αγχωμένος/-η
- 5: Πολύ αγχωμένος/-η

Σε όλα τα σενάρια φαντάσου ότι πρέπει να **μιλήσεις αγγλικά στην τάξη σου**.

Απαντάω σε ερωτήσεις προφορικά στα αγγλικά ενώ παίζω ένα επιτραπέζιο *
παιχνίδι στην τάξη

	1	2	3	4	5	
Πολύ χαλαρός/-η	<input type="radio"/>	Πολύ αγχωμένος/-η				

Παρουσιάζω ένα project μόνος/-η μου μιλώντας αγγλικά στην τάξη *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Πολύ χαλαρός/-η	<input type="radio"/>	Πολύ αγχωμένος/-η				

Συζητάω στα αγγλικά με φυσικό ομιλητή/-τρια που βλέπω πρώτη φορά *

(φυσικός ομιλητής= τα Αγγλικά είναι η μητρική του/της γλώσσα)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Πολύ χαλαρός/-η	<input type="radio"/>	Πολύ αγχωμένος/-η				

Συζητάω με το/τη δάσκαλό/-α μου στα αγγλικά *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Πολύ χαλαρός/-η	<input type="radio"/>	Πολύ αγχωμένος/-η				

Λέω μια ιστορία που έχω προετοιμάσει μιλώντας αγγλικά στην τάξη *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Πολύ χαλαρός/-η	<input type="radio"/>	Πολύ αγχωμένος/-η				

Παρουσιάζω ένα project με έναν/μία συμμαθητή/-τρια μου μιλώντας αγγλικά *
στην τάξη

	1	2	3	4	5	
Πολύ χαλαρός/-η	<input type="radio"/>	Πολύ αγχωμένος/-η				

Απαντάω σε ερωτήσεις προφορικά στα αγγλικά ενώ παίζω ένα διαδικτυακό *
παιχνίδι στην τάξη

	1	2	3	4	5	
Πολύ χαλαρός/-η	<input type="radio"/>	Πολύ αγχωμένος/-η				

Συμμετέχω σε παιχνίδια ρόλων χωρίς προετοιμασία μιλώντας αγγλικά στην τάξη *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Πολύ χαλαρός/-η	<input type="radio"/>	Πολύ αγχωμένος/-η				

Παρουσιάζω ένα project με την ομάδα μου μιλώντας αγγλικά στην τάξη *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Πολύ χαλαρός/-η	<input type="radio"/>	Πολύ αγχωμένος/-η				

Λέω αυθόρμητα μια ιστορία μιλώντας αγγλικά στην τάξη *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Πολύ χαλαρός/-η	<input type="radio"/>	Πολύ αγχωμένος/-η				

Συζητάω στα αγγλικά με Έλληνα δάσκαλό/-α που βλέπω πρώτη φορά *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Πολύ χαλαρός/-η	<input type="radio"/>	Πολύ αγχωμένος/-η				

Συμμετέχω σε παιχνίδια ρόλων μιλώντας αγγλικά στην τάξη, αφού έχω προετοιμαστεί μελετώντας το σενάριο *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Πολύ χαλαρός/-η	<input type="radio"/>	Πολύ αγχωμένος/-η				

Συζητάω με συμμαθητή/-τρια μου στα αγγλικά *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Πολύ χαλαρός/-η	<input type="radio"/>	Πολύ αγχωμένος/-η				

Λίγα πράγματα για σένα

Πόσα χρόνια μαθαίνεις αγγλικά; *

Η απάντησή σας

Πόσο χρονών είσαι; *

Η απάντησή σας

Εκτός από αγγλικά, μαθαίνεις άλλη ξένη γλώσσα; *

Ναι

Όχι

Χρησιμοποιείς τα αγγλικά στην καθημερινότητά σου για λόγους που δε
σχετίζονται με το μάθημα; *

Ναι

Όχι

Είσαι... *

Κορίτσι

Αγόρι

Άλλο

Δεν επιθυμώ να απαντήσω

Πόσο σου αρέσει να μαθαίνεις αγγλικά; *

1

2

3

4

5

Καθόλου

Πάρα πολύ

Appendix II

Focus group interview questions and answers

<p>Stressful experiences</p> <p><u>Question:</u> Do you recall a time when you felt really stressed about talking in English?</p>	<p><i>When I was taking the B2 exam, in the speaking test I was really, really nervous. (Learner A)</i></p> <p><i>I'm anxious all the time. I don't know. It's stressful. I'm anxious whenever I'm speaking.</i></p> <p><i>At the youth conference before I went up on stage, I was really nervous and hot. I was anxious. I had a lot of anxiety. Mainly because of the crowd, the audience. (Learner B)</i></p> <p><i>My father lives in another country and speaks English there and one day someone called. And I said hello and he was speaking English and I had never faced that before. So I was like, what do I do? I didn't know what to do. (Learner C)</i></p> <p><i>When we went to London, I was really anxious because we were going to the stores and everyone was speaking in English and I was, like, what am I saying? What if I say something wrong? Their English is so perfect. They're native speakers. It's easier for them to speak English. And I said to myself, like, what if I don't say the right words? What if I accidentally say something bad that I don't mean? (Learner D)</i></p> <p><i>On a trip abroad I had to communicate with a shop assistant. I didn't understand his English. He couldn't understand what I was telling him. And I couldn't understand what he was saying either. That made me quite stressed. (Learner B)</i></p> <p><i>When I went to London with my dad last summer, it was a real experience</i></p>
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	<p><i>for me. I don't think I had had ever talked to any native speaker before. So I was like, really anxious about what I was gonna say when I was speaking to someone or I was afraid of stuttering. (Learner A)</i></p>
<p>Stress-free situations</p> <p><u>Question:</u> In which kind of situations do you not feel anxiety or feel less anxiety while speaking English? Do you recall a time when you felt really confident and relaxed about talking in English?</p>	<p><i>When I'm just talking with my classmates. I mean generally when you have to discuss something with your classmates. Something about making a story or cooperate for a project... (Learner A)</i></p> <p><i>I'm not anxious when playing games. It's a game. It's supposed to be fun. (Learner A)</i></p>
<p>The ideal stress-free lesson</p> <p><u>Question:</u> What does the ideal stress-free lesson look like for you?</p>	<p><i>Play games (all learners)</i></p> <p><i>Watch a movie and then have a whole class discussion about it. Specifically about the movie. I wouldn't like to discuss personal things but shared experiences, like a movie we have all watched. (Learner D)</i></p> <p><i>Go, go outside. Have some days that we go outside of the building like for a walk or to the park and explore. I wouldn't mind speaking then. (Learner A)</i></p> <p><i>To have a tasty snack and just talk about everything. Distractions. Not focusing on speaking itself but another task, like walking, eating or engage in a casual discussion about a common experience. (Learner D)</i></p>
<p>Age and anxiety</p> <p><u>Question:</u> When you were younger, did you use to feel less, more or equally anxious when speaking in English?</p>	<p><i>When I was younger I was really anxious, but over the years I have experienced a lot of things like presentations, so I try to be more confident and just speak. (Learner E)</i></p> <p><i>I have more experience in speaking English now, so I'm more confident than I was 3 years ago. (Learner A)</i></p>

<p>Anxiety in L1 vs L2</p> <p><u>Question:</u> Is it speaking that makes you anxious or speaking in English?</p>	<p><i>I feel equally anxious when speaking in my mother tongue. (Learner D)</i></p> <p><i>Speaking in my mother tongue is a bit less stressful. (Learner A)</i></p> <p><i>I'm anxious in both cases, but a bit less when speaking in my first language. (Learner B)</i></p>
<p>Impact of anxiety on learning</p> <p><u>Question:</u> Do you think you could learn better if there was no speaking anxiety? Does it make you refrain from certain activities?</p>	<p><i>Most of the times I make mistakes because I'm doing it fast too, because I think that I will not have time to do it. That's happening whenever I'm writing exams. (Learner A)</i></p> <p><i>When I'm anxious I don't remember the words I want to say. And then, I stop and then it's like the people that they're all watching you and it's making you more anxious. And then I can't say the words. It's like a vicious circle. The more anxious you get, the less you can say. And the less you can say, the more anxious you get. (Learner D)</i></p>
<p>Reasons behind FLSA</p> <p><u>Question:</u> Do you usually experience anxiety while speaking in English? If yes, what causes it?</p>	<p><i>I experience it because I'm afraid of making mistakes. I don't want to make mistakes while others can hear me. I think that it will be very bad if I make a mistake. I am also anxious when I'm writing exams or something like that. (Learner C)</i></p> <p><i>What if I don't say the right words? What if I like, accidentally say something bad that I don't mean? (Learner D)</i></p> <p><i>When you're sitting you don't have to do much, you just have to talk. But when you're standing you I have to combine talking and using body language. (Learner A)</i></p>
<p>Interaction pattern</p>	<p><i>Presenting in a group is less stressful.</i></p>

<p><u>Question:</u> If you have a project to present, does it make any difference to you if you do it alone, in pairs or in groups, in terms of anxiety?</p>	<p>(Learner E)</p> <p><i>If it is in front of my own class I don't have any anxiety and I mostly prefer doing it alone. (Learner B)</i></p> <p><i>I prefer doing presentations in groups, because if you make a mistake it won't matter as much as when doing a presentation alone. You won't be in the limelight. (Learner A)</i></p>
<p>Interlocutor/audience</p> <p><u>Question:</u> How would you feel about talking to a classmate or your teacher? How would you feel about talking a Greek teacher you don't know or a native speaker you don't know?</p>	<p><i>Speaking with a classmate is OK. It's fine. With the teacher that I know, it's fine too. But yeah, I have to be like a little more careful. With a teacher that I don't know, but is Greek I have to be extra careful. And with the native speaker I have to be excellent. (Learner A)</i></p> <p><i>If I was speaking to someone I don't know, I would be very anxious. Regardless of whether they were Greek or. Because I would be afraid of making mistakes. Don't know, things wouldn't be clear in my mind. I would lag. (Learner B)</i></p> <p><i>I feel nervous when there is an audience (Learner E)</i></p> <p><i>For me it depends on the audience because like if I do a presentation in my class I know how each of them will react because, like, I know them for three years now, so I'm not that anxious. (Learner D)</i></p>
<p>Native speakers</p> <p><u>Question:</u> Does talking to a native speaker make any difference?</p>	<p><i>For me, it's the fact that they know better English that counts, not the fact that they're the native speakers. If you talk with someone who is Greek and he knows better English than you do, If you make mistakes, he may be like why are you making mistakes? (Learner C)</i></p> <p><i>I think like it's easier when you're</i></p>

	<p><i>speaking to a Greek person, someone from who's from Greece and knows Greek too. Because, like, if you're speaking in English and then like you don't know a word you can like say it in Greek and they will understand, they won't judge you. (Learner D)</i></p> <p><i>It makes a difference because the native speaker has a more of an accent and that makes me nervous because if I don't understand a word... (Learner E)</i></p> <p><i>I would be more anxious to talk with a Greek teacher that I don't know than talking with a native speaker, because the native speaker will know that you aren't from England or America so they're probably going to think that it's natural to make mistakes. (Learner C)</i></p>
<p>Games</p> <p><u>Question:</u> Do you feel stressed when you answer questions orally while playing a game?</p>	<p><i>I'm not anxious when playing games. I mean, it's a game. It's supposed to be fun. (Learner A)</i></p> <p><i>It doesn't make any difference if it's a board game or an online one, they're both fun and relaxing. (Learner E)</i></p>
<p>Role-plays, scripts and preparedness</p> <p><u>Question:</u> How do you feel about role plays? Do you prefer spontaneous ones, or prepared ones in terms of anxiety? How about scripted plays?</p>	<p><i>We had done a lot of theatrical plays in primary school and in the last one I was playing a soldier and I was really afraid, being on stage in front of so many people. I was afraid that I was going to mess it all up and forget my lines. So in that case, the fact that I was prepared was worse because I had a specific thing to remember. I couldn't improvise. I was cold, not moving. (Learner B)</i></p> <p><i>It's basically the same thing because you either have to remember something correctly or think of something on the spot. (Learner A)</i></p> <p><i>I think it's like a little bit easier when you have to think it on the spot because you can use your imagination on the</i></p>

	<p><i>subject and of that. But if you're in a play, you have to say like a specific thing. And if you forget and you mess that up, that's it. (Learner D)</i></p>
<p>Support or avoidance</p> <p><u>Question:</u> Would you like to avoid all stress-evoking speaking activities? Or have support to cope?</p>	<p><i>I would prefer support to overcome my fears, not avoiding stressful activities. (Learner B)</i></p> <p><i>I wouldn't want someone to come out of the blue and try to encourage me, I would feel like they pity me. (Learner A)</i></p> <p><i>Another way to cope is to just gather your thoughts and ask yourself why you are feeling stressed, find your reasons and try to overcome them by yourself. There are some people like me; I don't want to ask for help. It's not my character. I want to do it on my own. (Learner D)</i></p> <p><i>When you get out of your comfort you can achieve more things than by just sitting on the side and doing nothing. Experience helps you overcome your anxiety. (Learner E)</i></p>
<p>Teacher's role</p> <p><u>Question:</u> What can your teacher do to help you cope with speaking anxiety?</p>	<p><i>The teacher can't do much to reduce my anxiety. (Learner E)</i></p> <p><i>Once, a teacher used to read our essays aloud and make fun of our mistakes. (Learner B)</i></p> <p><i>I want my teacher to correct me, but in a friendly, kind way. (Learner D)</i></p> <p><i>I want my teacher to correct me after I have finished, not interrupt me. (Learner C)</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes, if no one makes you do it, you will never do it. (Learner A)</i></p>

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