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**Research article**

# Fear and Discomfort When Speaking English: A Case Study at a Private Institution in Riobamba, Ecuador

## Temor e incomodidad al hablar inglés: un estudio de caso en una institución privada de Riobamba, Ecuador

Paola Fernanda Valverde Sánchez
pfvs.uesm@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2938-1500
*Universidad Nacional de Chimborazo, Riobamba, Ecuador*

Blanca Narcisa Fuertes López
bfuertes@unach.edu.ec
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0342-3311
*Universidad Nacional de Chimborazo, Riobamba, Ecuador*

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Speaking English in front of others often causes discomfort due to fear of making mistakes and receiving negative evaluations. **Objective:** To explore oral participation experiences among ninth-grade students, situations that cause discomfort, and perceived support. **Methodology:** A qualitative case study design was adopted involving seven students aged 12 to 14 from a private institution in Riobamba, Ecuador. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, documented using written notes without audio recordings, and classroom observations. **Results:** The findings were associated with greater discomfort when speaking individually in front of the group, uncertainty about pronunciation and vocabulary, and concerns about classmates' possible reactions. Preparation, peer practice, and respectful feedback emerged as supportive factors, while experiences varied across students and tasks. **Conclusion:** The results describe context-specific perceptions and do not estimate prevalence rates or demonstrate the effectiveness of interventions.

## Resumen

**Introducción:** Hablar inglés frente a otros suele producir incomodidad por temor a equivocarse y a la evaluación negativa. **Objetivo:** Explorar experiencias de participación oral en estudiantes de noveno año, situaciones de malestar y apoyos percibidos. **Metodología:** Se adoptó un diseño de caso cualitativo

con siete estudiantes de 12 a 14 años de una institución privada de Riobamba, Ecuador. Los datos se recogen mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas, registradas por medio de notas escritas sin grabación, y mediante observaciones en el aula. **Resultados:** Los hallazgos se asocian con una mayor incomodidad al hablar individualmente ante el grupo, con dudas de pronunciación y vocabulario y con las posibles reacciones de los compañeros; la preparación, la práctica entre pares y la retroalimentación respetuosa aparecen como apoyos, y las experiencias varían entre estudiantes y tareas. **Conclusión:** Los resultados describen percepciones contextuales y no estiman prevalencias ni demuestran la eficacia de intervenciones.

## Introduction

Speaking English in front of classmates turns the classroom into a setting in which every contribution becomes observable. Errors cease to be a private matter and come to be interpreted as indicators of competence or deficiency before a familiar audience. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), foreign language anxiety manifests in three interconnected dimensions: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and concern about academic performance. The third dimension is particularly salient in contexts where grading and the gaze of the group overlap. Grades turn performance into public evidence of learning. Understanding how this discomfort is configured requires attention to the specific conditions of each classroom, rather than solely to stable individual traits.

Contemporary research conceptualizes language anxiety as a situated phenomenon rather than a fixed personality trait. Gregersen (2020) argues that learners' emotions fluctuate over short time scales and that this variability has significant pedagogical implications. The same student may participate actively in a pair task and become withdrawn minutes later when required to give an individual presentation. The same individual performs differently depending on the task format. Recognizing this fluctuation helps avoid two common errors: attributing silence to stable linguistic incapacity or assuming that discomfort affects all group members equally. Available evidence calls for examining the interaction among the task, the audience, and the speaker's level of preparation.

Fear of negative evaluation occupies a central place in explanations of oral participation. Mak (2011) found that fear of making mistakes and concern about others' judgments are among the most frequent components of anxiety associated with speaking in class. Oral production exposes a competence that is still developing and offers few

opportunities to correct the impression created. A speaking turn allows no drafting, editing, or subsequent revision. This exposure explains why a student may master a structure in a written exercise yet still avoid using it in front of the group. It should be emphasized that anticipated judgment does not require confirmation to produce effects, since the expectation of ridicule operates regardless of whether it actually occurs.

Linguistic insecurity constitutes a second source of discomfort that should be distinguished from social fear. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) proposed that anxiety interferes with second-language learning processes and that its effect cannot be reduced to a superficial affective reaction. During spontaneous production, speakers must retrieve vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical structures in real time, with no opportunity for revision. Uncertainty about the correct form may interrupt the flow of discourse and generate a pause that speakers themselves interpret as a sign of incompetence. The pause then becomes an object of social interpretation. Therefore, distinguishing between available competence and observable performance is essential to avoid confusing an access problem with a lack of knowledge.

Studies involving adolescents make it possible to situate the problem at a particular stage of development. Criado and Mengual (2017) analyzed anxiety and oral expression in Spanish secondary education and demonstrated the influence of affective factors on foreign-language learning during this stage. Adolescence heightens sensitivity to the gaze of the group and makes public error more costly. Peer status acquires considerable importance at this stage. Moreover, the compulsory nature of the subject reduces the possibility of avoiding feared situations, as students do not choose to leave the class. The combination of evaluative pressure and sustained exposure creates a context that warrants specific attention and cannot be fully explained through categories developed for adult university students.

In Latin America, the available evidence derives primarily from psychometric studies. Quispe-Sanca et al. (2024) validated a Spanish version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale with Peruvian secondary school students and reported a positive association between anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Questionnaires provide valuable information on the magnitude and structure of the construct, although they do not capture how students interpret specific situations. Measurement and interpretation address different questions. A high score indicates the presence of discomfort, but it does not explain which circumstances trigger it or what resources are mobilized by those who experience it. The complementarity between measurement and qualitative description thus emerges as a methodological necessity rather than a theoretical preference.

Ecuador has a documented history of this problem across different educational levels. Such is the case of Coutinho dos Santos et al. (2020), who examined the emotions that

hinder oral participation in English among students aged 11 to 18 in Los Ríos province and showed that fear of making mistakes and being judged ranked among the most frequent responses. Their work provides a solid descriptive basis and confirms that the phenomenon is not limited to university contexts. However, its design prioritizes the identification of emotions through structured instruments and does not examine in depth the situations that trigger them. A list of emotions does not constitute an explanation of how they operate. What remains to be understood is how these emotions are articulated with the everyday practices of a specific classroom.

Other Ecuadorian studies shift attention toward contextual conditions. Castro-Vaca and Argudo-Garzon (2024) explored the relationship between classroom climate and levels of anxiety when speaking English among tenth-grade students, whereas Alvarez et al. (2024) analyzed teachers' perspectives and identified anxiety and low self-confidence as factors that constrain willingness to speak. Both studies agree that the classroom matters, although they differ in terms of informants, instruments, and scope. By contrast, students' voices are mediated through scales or teachers' interpretations. Both filter experience before transforming it into data. Therefore, recovering students' voices in detail is a necessary step toward designing responses tailored to the situations that students themselves identify as difficult.

The reviewed literature reveals abundant research based on measurement and comparatively few rich descriptions of what occurs within a single classroom. Designs using questionnaires, scales, or interventions enable comparisons across groups and the estimation of effects, but they rarely capture the specific sequence through which discomfort emerges, intensifies, or subsides. Nor do they usually distinguish between what students report and what observers record. The distinction between these two sources is crucial when the object of study is an emotion. This issue becomes particularly relevant in contexts in which teachers investigate their own groups, as the two sources may diverge. A case study makes it possible to examine these differences without claiming generalizability, provided that its limitations and methodological decisions are made explicit.

Therefore, the rationale for this study lies in the need to understand, from the perspective of those who speak, how discomfort is configured in a ninth-grade classroom and which conditions moderate it. The question guiding the inquiry is how students describe their discomfort when speaking English in front of their peers, which situations intensify it, and which forms of support they consider useful. The relevance of the study is supported by the scarcity of research that recovers this perspective in the Ecuadorian context. The overall objective is to explore these experiences of oral participation in a private institution in Riobamba, with attention to the social and linguistic factors that participants associate with greater tension. The response is constructed from situated accounts rather than prevalence estimates.

## Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative case study design aimed at understanding discomfort when speaking English within its usual instructional context. The case consisted of a single ninth-grade class at a private institution in Riobamba, Chimborazo province, during the third term of the 2025–2026 academic year. The institution combined Cambridge-oriented materials with the national curriculum, thereby situating oral practice within a framework of preparation for international examinations. The unit of analysis was the group rather than the isolated individual, since situations of exposure are defined through interaction with peers and the teacher. The classroom gives meaning to judgment. The purpose was to interpret situated meanings rather than estimate prevalence or establish causal relationships.

The class comprised twelve students, seven of whom participated as focal cases coded S1 to S7. Selection was purposive and considered group membership, parental consent, student assent, willingness to collaborate, regular attendance, and the relevance of their oral experiences. Table 1 summarizes the aggregated characteristics of the group. The overall class level was approximately A2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), without individual assessment. Sample adequacy was assessed through information power in accordance with Malterud et al. (2016), and thematic saturation was not invoked. Two eligible students could not be followed due to frequent absences, and three others were not selected for reasons that were not documented.

**Table 1.** *Characteristics of the focal participants (aggregated data).*

| Characteristic | Focal participants (n = 7) |
|---|---|
| Sex | 2 males, 5 females |
| Age | 12 years, 2; 13 years, 4; 14 years, 1 |
| Overall English proficiency level | Approximately A2 (CEFR); individual levels not assessed |
| Context | Private institution; Cambridge instructional materials; class of 12 students |

*Note.* Prepared by the authors based on interview records and field notes.

Data were obtained from individual semi-structured interviews and classroom observations recorded by the teacher-researcher. The seven interviews were conducted in Spanish, lasted between fifteen and twenty-five minutes, and followed the same guide of seven open-ended questions. This guide was designed prior to fieldwork and addressed speaking in front of the group, errors and peer judgment, interruptions in English classes, coping responses, and desired support. The question concerning interruptions explicitly referred to weekly periods and breaks in the school calendar; therefore, responses were interpreted as prompted perceptions. The interviews were not audio-recorded, and responses were documented by hand during each meeting.

Fieldwork spanned five weeks between May and June 2026 and included eighteen in-person observation sessions of approximately forty minutes each. Using a structured

protocol, the teacher recorded hesitation, brief responses, switching to Spanish, reduced voice volume, variations in gaze, repetitive movements, laughter, avoidance, and requests for help. Notes were taken at times when she was not addressing the group. Observations were conducted continuously during regular sessions, in parallel with the interviews. The exact chronological order between each session and each interview was not recorded; therefore, both sources were analyzed jointly rather than as successive verification of the same episode. Temporal concurrence was not strictly controlled.

Thematic analysis was predominantly deductive and organized into four predefined categories (fear of negative evaluation, linguistic insecurity, classroom and task conditions, and coping and perceived support). Braun and Clarke (2021) caution that reflexive thematic analysis requires explicit articulation of analytical decisions rather than merely applying a procedure. Byrne (2022) provides a detailed example of this sequence applied to interview data. Accounts were reviewed to identify recurrent and divergent patterns and were subsequently compared in a participant-by-category matrix. The findings are descriptive rather than diagnostic or causal. The matrix retained the reference to each case. A single researcher conducted the analysis; therefore, no inter-coder agreement statistic was calculated.

The teacher-researcher's dual role facilitated access to everyday interactions and, at the same time, influenced responses and interpretation. Reflexive caution was applied to question formulation and note-taking in order to distinguish between what was reported and what was observed. Before the interviews, the teacher spoke informally with the group about her master's studies and the purpose of the article, clarifying that socially desirable responses were not expected. Such a warning does not eliminate the risk of social desirability bias, although it makes it explicit. Direct quotations were retained in Spanish as recorded, and the remaining responses were translated by the researcher when appropriate.

Legal guardians signed informed consent forms, and all approached individuals agreed to participate. Students provided verbal assent. The protocol established that participation was voluntary and that refusing to participate or expressing discomfort would not affect grades or the relationship with the teacher. Interviews were conducted individually and privately, and participants could skip questions or discontinue the meeting at any time. Confidentiality was protected through coding. In the event of signs of acute distress, the design provided for a transition to less exposed formats and referral to the Department of Student Counseling, with notification to families. No referrals were necessary. The institution authorized the study, and the work was conducted with academic approval from UNACH, without review by an independent ethics committee.

## Results

Fear of judgment emerged in all seven cases, although with distinct nuances. Participants expressed favorable attitudes toward English while also describing greater discomfort when required to speak individually before the entire group. S1 compared this situation to feeling that everyone's gaze was focused on him, and S2 used the terms nervousness and anxiety and mentioned the risk of making a bad impression in front of the class. S3, S4, S6, and S7 reported similar concerns about being judged, ridiculed, or perceived unfavorably after making an error. Enjoyment of the language did not fully protect against the tension associated with taking a public turn. Positive appraisal of the subject and situated discomfort coexisted in the accounts without apparent contradiction.

Anticipated reactions from peers shaped this fear. S1 imagined mockery during recess, although he acknowledged that it did not always occur. S2 feared that those who spoke better would think that she knew nothing, and S4 associated making an error with a lack of preparation. S6 described the feeling of being watched through a vivid image, and her account condensed the link between others' gaze and doubts about her own competence. Anticipation of others' comments operated as a prior script for participation. Fear was sustained by minimal cues, such as a smile or a gesture. S1's words illustrate how this expectation is activated before any participation and regardless of the actual outcome of the class: "I do like English class, teacher; honestly, I think it is cool, but I feel somewhat nervous when you ask me to speak in front of everyone. I feel as if everyone were looking only at me." (S1)

Public correction elicited divergent reactions. S1, S2, S4, and S6 reported embarrassment when the teacher corrected an error in front of the group; S3 described tension, and S7 reported discomfort when making another pronunciation mistake. By contrast, S5 interpreted correction as a natural part of learning and maintained that it did not cause embarrassment because the purpose of the class was to learn. This difference precludes treating corrective feedback as a homogeneous stimulus. The timing, audience, and manner of correction appeared to matter more than its presence or absence. The same teacher intervention allowed for opposing interpretations depending on the recipient. Observation was consistent with these accounts, as visible reactions ranged from blushing to defensive laughter.

Pronunciation emerged among the most recurrent concerns. Unfamiliar or complex words frequently led to hesitation or interrupted reading, and S4, S5, S6, and S7 linked these difficulties to insecurity and the inability to continue. S7 described how a difficult term affected the pronunciation of subsequent words, while S6 reported difficulty resuming speech after a public correction. The accounts did not merely describe limited vocabulary, but rather the effect of encountering an obstacle while classmates were watching. The technical difficulty became a social episode when the group remained

attentive to each intervention. Observation recorded prolonged pauses in S4 and S6 and brief responses that coincided with these moments.

When faced with difficulty, students displayed both avoidance and coping responses. Silence, one-word answers, low volume, simulated writing, and requests for help from a classmate appeared recurrently. S3 described a specific strategy and added a detail that observation confirmed across several sessions, as the student leaned over the notebook and avoided eye contact when the teacher sought volunteers. Field notes also documented long pauses, low volume, repetitive movements, and laughter. S1's blushing after a correction and the defensive laughter of S2 and S5 were treated only as contextual indicators, as they reflect the teacher-researcher's interpretation of visible behaviors and do not allow internal states to be confirmed.

Peer support constituted another frequent response. S4, S5, and S7 discreetly sought support from nearby classmates when they were uncertain about pronunciation or wished to reduce individual exposure, which was consistent with observations across several sessions. This behavior allows for opposing interpretations (dependency or emerging autonomy), and the distinction is important because it guides pedagogical interpretation. The accounts suggested the latter interpretation, since help was requested in order to continue the task rather than to abandon it. Distinguishing between dependency and autonomy requires observing the complete sequence of the task. This resource functioned as a regulator of discomfort and as support for participation, although its effectiveness was not measured. Assistance circulated in low voices and rarely entered the public record of the class.

Comfort varied according to activity design. Most participants felt more at ease in pair work, small-group tasks, silent reading, and activities conducted from their seats. S5 found games and competitions less intimidating than extended individual reading. S6 represented the exception, preferring low-volume reading and individual work and rejecting both reading aloud and conversation with classmates. Prior preparation, vocabulary review, practice with a classmate, and pronunciation guides emerged as favorable conditions. Reducing the audience appeared sufficient to make the task manageable. Thus, these preferences describe perceptions rather than demonstrated effects of the strategies mentioned.

Continuity across classes also emerged in the accounts, as all seven participants stated that interruptions between sessions made it difficult to resume oral tasks, and S5 summarized this with an image of losing the thread. None attributed this difficulty to a lack of study. The researcher considers that this convergence should be interpreted cautiously, because the corresponding question explicitly introduced the topic and may have guided the responses. The finding provides information about the perception of continuity rather than measured changes in fluency. The association between interruptions and loss of ease belongs to the realm of reported experience.

Nevertheless, the unanimous recurrence suggests that the school calendar forms part of the emotional context of the classroom and not merely of its administrative organization.

The set of narratives made it possible to organize the information into four analytical categories while preserving the traceability of each case. Table 2 presents these categories, the interview questions supporting them, and the interpretive cautions corresponding to each. Internal contrasts are particularly relevant, as S5 considered correction useful, whereas others associated it with embarrassment, and S6 preferred individual work over peer interaction. Fear of negative evaluation and linguistic insecurity were linked in the narratives without being conflated, as the former concerned the social interpretation of error and the latter the production of words. The matrix made it possible to preserve this distinction without forcing a single category.

**Table 2.** *Analytical Categories, Interview Questions, and Interpretive Cautions.*

| Category | Questions and evidence | Interpretive caution |
|---|---|---|
| Fear of negative evaluation | P3 and P4, anticipated peer reactions and experience of correction. | The questions directly examine judgment; distinguish between anticipated and actual experiences. |
| Linguistic insecurity | P1 and P3, pronunciation, word retrieval, and reading aloud. | Isolated behavior does not allow the inference of clinical anxiety. |
| Classroom and task conditions | P1, P2, and P5, whole-group work versus pair work. | P5 mentions weekly periods and breaks; do not infer causality. |
| Coping and perceived support | P6 and P7, silence, brief responses, peer support, rehearsal, and feedback. | Perceived usefulness does not demonstrate the effectiveness of an intervention. |

*Note.* Prepared by the authors based on interview records and field notes.

The participant-by-category matrix presented in Table 3 shows convergences and divergences across the seven cases. The main convergence was discomfort with individual exposure, whereas the most visible divergence was the appraisal of correction. The matrix combined interview narratives with classroom observations, and its cells constitute thematic syntheses rather than diagnoses.

Recent studies on speaking anxiety describe similar concerns among adolescents (Findikli & Buyukkarci, 2023; Jurikova, 2026); whereas systematic reviews emphasize social evaluation and classroom support as recurring dimensions (Widyawati & Al Hakim, 2026). Convergence across cases does not justify treating them as equivalent. Furthermore, observable behavior is not equivalent to a standardized measure of anxiety, according to Gao (2022).

**Table 3.** *Participant-by-Category Matrix of Interview Narratives and Classroom Observations.*

| Case | Fear of Negative Evaluation | Linguistic Insecurity | Task Conditions | Coping Strategies and Perceived Support |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| S1 | Feels observed when speaking; anticipates teasing during recess; blushes when corrected publicly (obs.). | Hesitates over long or infrequent words. | Prefers small groups and silent reading; tense during individual reading. | Gives brief responses, speaks softly, or remains silent; requests pronunciation review before reading. |
| S2 | Fears appearing ignorant in front of those who speak better; responds by laughing (obs.). | Is unsure about the pronunciation of some words. | Enjoys conversation; feels uncomfortable when called on alone. | Switches to Spanish or remains silent (obs.); requests review or pair practice. |
| S3 | Fears others' judgment; after making an error, perceived looks and comments. | Becomes tense when encountering unfamiliar words. | Comfortable when seated; tense when standing before the group. | Remains silent or pretends to write (obs.); suggests auditory support. |
| S4 | Public correction embarrasses her; anticipates comments about insufficient studying (obs.). | Difficult words make her nervous. | Calm during pair reading; nervous when reading alone. | Whispers to ask for help (obs.); suggests timed group reading. |
| S5 | Is concerned about teasing during recess; is indifferent to correction. | Laughs nervously; has difficulty with long words. | Comfortable in games and competitions; uncomfortable during extended reading. | Consults a classmate (obs.); suggests brief pronunciation games. |
| S6 | Feels observed and fears being judged as incapable; correction causes her to freeze. | Freezes and does not finish the paragraph. | Rejects reading aloud and conversation with peers. | Remains silent (obs.); suggests a written pronunciation guide. |
| S7 | Is concerned about classmates' smiles and gestures; feels uncomfortable when repeating an error. | Is insecure about her accent; hesitates after a difficult word. | Comfortable with reading aloud and group work. | Speaks slowly and softly or asks a peer to respond (obs.); suggests an initial review. |

*Note.* Prepared by the authors based on interview records and field notes. obs. = behavior recorded during classroom observation.

## Discussion

The convergence between participants' accounts and the model proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986) supports the argument that fear of negative evaluation is not an ancillary

component of the construct, but rather an axis that structures the experience of speaking in another language. The social dimension of the model explains why discomfort intensifies when the task requires an identifiable audience rather than when language use remains private. This interpretation shifts the question from the level of competence to the conditions of exposure, because if discomfort depends on the audience rather than on linguistic proficiency, competence ceases to be the central explanatory variable. The distinction between these two domains has implications for teaching; that is, if fear precedes error, intervention cannot be limited to correcting production but must address the framework through which the student interprets their performance. In this regard, the study's theoretical contribution lies in showing that anticipated evaluation operates as an interpretive framework for error rather than as an emotional reaction that follows it.

The ambivalent appraisal of correction calls for a reconsideration of widespread assumptions in language teaching. Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) recommend reducing unnecessary threat without relinquishing communication, and the accounts collected support this orientation by showing that correction does not produce uniform effects. The relevant discussion is not whether to correct or not, but rather the conditions under which correction becomes intelligible as support to the recipient. Timing, tone, and audience modify the meaning that students attribute to feedback. Correction is interpreted, not merely received. The same pedagogical act may confirm perceived incompetence or enable the revision of an error, depending on the context in which it occurs.

The linguistic insecurity described by the participants finds partial support in studies on processing. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991b) linked anxiety to cognitive functioning in the first and second languages, and this relationship helps interpret the interruptions observed during spontaneous production. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991a) further demonstrated the value of students' own accounts for accessing classroom anxiety. The study does not allow determination of the specific process that produced each pause, although it does confirm that students interpret hesitation as evidence of incapacity. The causal attribution made by the speaker themself carries greater weight than the accuracy of their pronunciation. Thus, this interpretation, rather than an objective deficit, appears to fuel the cycle of discomfort.

The variability observed across tasks and among students supports the dynamic conception of anxiety. Gregersen et al. (2014) documented short-term fluctuations in learner anxiety through idiodynamic studies, and Gregersen (2020) developed the implications of such variability for teaching. The case examined reproduces this logic in a specific classroom, where the same individual was participatory in pairs and reluctant in front of the group. The contribution lies in situating this fluctuation within a specific institutional context and showing that the audience functions as an organizing variable.

The stability suggested by scales reflects an average rather than a constant experience. Explanations that treat anxiety as a stable trait lose explanatory power in accounting for these differences.

The study also provides a methodological reflection on how anxiety is understood. Botes et al. (2022) linked anxiety and enjoyment to self-perceived proficiency, and Yu (2024) traced the development of this line of research in a leading journal. Both studies confirm the consolidation of a field that privileges measurement. Measurement enhances comparability but loses context. A thick description of a classroom does not replace such measurements; however, it does reveal the situated mechanisms that scales summarize as scores. Qualitative description provides the sequence and meaning that scores do not retain. Combining both traditions would make it possible to explain why two students with similar scores differ in how they cope with oral exposure.

The pedagogical implications are oriented toward the design of participation rather than the correction of the individual. Toyama and Yamazaki (2021) reviewed classroom interventions and identified variable effects across studies, which calls for caution regarding promises of quick solutions. The accounts collected point to specific conditions (prior preparation, peer practice, and the gradual reduction of exposure). None of these conditions was tested as an intervention; thus, their value lies in their plausibility and in the support expressed by those who experienced them. Available evidence does not allow the assertion that the same technique will work in all groups and contexts. Teaching may adopt these conditions as working hypotheses subject to revision rather than as prescriptions.

In this regard, the limitations of the study condition the scope of these claims. The small focal sample and purposive selection preclude generalizing the findings to the entire Ecuadorian secondary-school student population. The absence of recordings restricts the analysis of interaction and excludes prosodic and conversational elements. The question concerning interruptions introduced the topic, and the responses should be interpreted as elicited perceptions. The teacher-researcher's dual role may have affected what students chose to say and how their behaviors were interpreted. The small group size and contextual homogeneity limit the variation observed in the accounts. Likewise, the absence of approval from an independent ethics committee must also be considered when assessing the procedure.

Overall, the findings suggest that discomfort when speaking English in this group is better understood as a relational phenomenon than as an individual deficit. Peers' gaze, uncertainty regarding linguistic form, and task design converge in identifiable situations. This interpretation opens a research agenda that could combine longitudinal monitoring, comparisons across institutions, and triangulation with validated measures. It also suggests that teacher education should include the analysis of exposure conditions as a core component rather than as a peripheral issue. Comparison with

other contexts would make it possible to distinguish what is specific to this group from what is shared across the region. The study provides a descriptive basis for these questions rather than a definitive answer.

## Conclusions

Discomfort with speaking English in this ninth-grade group is organized around individual exposure before the whole class, anticipation of peers' judgment, and uncertainty about pronunciation and vocabulary. Students maintain a favorable appraisal of the subject while simultaneously experiencing tension in specific situations. This coexistence indicates that discomfort does not equate to rejection of the language or lack of motivation. The experience is also not uniform, as public correction elicits embarrassment in most participants but is perceived as useful by one of them. Tension is activated in identifiable situations. The patterns described pertain to this group and do not allow for estimating their frequency in other contexts.

Coping responses tend to reduce exposure through silence, speaking softly, brief responses, and seeking help. Peer work, prior preparation, pronunciation and vocabulary review, and respectful feedback emerge as more manageable conditions. Such conditions reflect perceptions rather than demonstrated effects, as the study did not evaluate interventions. Observed pauses, gaze avoidance, and laughter function as contextual indicators rather than diagnostic evidence. The identified conditions describe what is more tolerable rather than what reduces anxiety. Stated preferences do not constitute evidence of effectiveness in this group. The interpretation remains within the limits imposed by manual recording and the absence of audio recording.

For English language teaching, the case suggests combining communicative challenge with preparation, gradual support, and feedback that distinguishes the error from the person. The findings are limited by a single class, seven selected students, written records, and the dual role of the teacher-researcher. Statistical generalization is not appropriate for this design. Transferability requires comparing contexts using explicit and documented criteria. Future research could adopt longitudinal follow-up, multisite samples, or mixed-methods designs that integrate narratives with validated measures of anxiety and systematic observation. The adopted design does not allow the observed changes to be attributed to a single cause. Comparison between public and private institutions would also make it possible to examine the influence of institutional conditions on the configuration of discomfort.

## About

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