Anxiety-Related Emotions of University Students When Using English as a Foreign Language in Class: Comparing Health and Educational Sciences

Cristina Manchado-Nieto[*] [iD]
University of Extremadura, SPAIN

Laura V. Fielden-Burns [iD]
University of Extremadura, SPAIN

Abstract: In the realm of education, particularly in the domain of second language acquisition, understanding the intricate interplay between emotions and learning processes is a challenging endeavor. This research aims to explore the importance of studying anxiety-related emotions in the learning and teaching of English as a foreign language by conducting a study based on a quantitative methodology. To that end, a 33-item instrument was given to a total of 231 (n=231) university students who learn and use English in class in diverse degrees in the social and health sciences. The results obtained shed light on the negative emotions that students report during their English classes, such as fear, shame, nervousness, or feelings of judgement. However, not all the emotions are negative, since students also feel relaxed and interested. This study offers a new perspective on this topic since it compares different disciplines, underscoring the need to detect trends in different areas and therefore tailor pedagogy to different student profiles and degree programs.

Keywords: *Anxious emotions, discipline comparison, educational sciences, English as a foreign language, health sciences, university students.*

Introduction

The foreign language acquisition process is a complex phenomenon involving dynamic interactions between various cognitive, affective, and social factors (Horwitz et al., 1986; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Among these factors, emotions play an important role in the process of people learning and using foreign languages. In particular, anxiety, fear, or insecurity in learning and using a second language is a subject of increasing interest in educational research.

On the one hand, negative emotions can manifest in a wide variety of situations, from participating in classes to interacting with native speakers, and these can lead to adverse effects on the learning process and the consequent development of communicative skills in English as a foreign language. Linguistic and contextual anxiety are related to the fear, insecurity, shame, etc., that students may undergo when learning and using English in class (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), particularly for productive tasks. That is the reason why it is of great importance to understand and address negative emotions that appear in the language learning context.

This article aims to explore the importance of studying anxiety-related emotions in the learning and teaching of English as a foreign language, which is essential for developing more inclusive and effective educational approaches that promote active participation and academic progress, self-efficacy, optimal class conditions, and well-being for students. Additionally, this article aims to explore if there are any differences between educational social sciences students and health students in anxiety-related emotions when practicing English in class, which, as far as we know, has not been examined previously, which adds to this field of study.

Literature Review

In this section, we will review the academic literature related to plurilingualism, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and the link between learning foreign languages and anxiety-related emotions.

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[*] **Corresponding author:**
Cristina Manchado-Nieto, Facultad de Formación del Profesorado, Avenida de la Universidad, s/n, 10003, Cáceres (Cáceres), España.
✉ cmanchado@unex.es

Plurilingualism

In our contemporary, globalized society, the significance of plurilingualism has become increasingly prominent, shaping various aspects of individual and societal development (Sottani & Cossu, 2016). This perspective, which has profound implications for educational economy and social cohesion, means that language learners are no longer monolingual speakers but are more likely to be dynamic language users (Dooly, 2018; Moore de Luca, 2018). This is translated into a necessity to study foreign languages all along the academic path, which is evidenced by the Council of Europe (2018) recommendations to include plurilingualism, culture, and identity in language study programs and to raise awareness about language learning in general (Camilleri Grima, 2021).

At the core of the importance of plurilingualism lies its role in promoting cognitive flexibility and metalinguistic awareness. Researchers such as Cenoz and Gorter (2015) have highlighted the cognitive benefits of learning foreign languages, including enhanced executive functions, improved problem-solving skills, and heightened metalinguistic awareness. By engaging with multiple languages and cultures, individuals develop empathy, tolerance, and appreciation for linguistic and cultural diversity (García & Wei, 2014), which actively contributes to building inclusive and cohesive societies.

In an educational context, plurilingualism fosters inclusive and equitable learning environments. Furthermore, students may foresee a wider range of job opportunities since plurilingualism holds significant implications for economic competitiveness and social mobility in the globalized economy. Researchers such as Malokani et al. (2023) underscored the benefits of using foreign languages, including increased employability and prospects for growth and career success.

English as a Foreign Language and English for Specific Purposes

In a plurilingual world context, the English language has emerged as a lingua franca (Sottani & Cossu, 2016) and its significance cannot be overstated in contemporary society. This fact has not gone unnoticed by the Spanish Ministry of Education in terms of higher education, which has stated that, in order for its graduates to be competitive in the global labour market, Spanish universities should offer "international education in English and other foreign languages" (Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport, 2016, p. 6). Therefore, it is of paramount importance to develop linguistic skills in English to become effective interlocutors in real circumstances, which is directly related to the concept of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where the objective of communication is to replicate real-life communicative situations (Cavalheiro et al., 2021).

In contrast, ESP addresses the specific language needs of learners in professional or academic contexts, tailoring language instruction to meet the communicative demands of specific disciplines or fields. Dudley-Evans and St John (2016) define ESP as "an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (p. 3). This learner-centered approach emphasizes the integration of language and content, ensuring that language instruction is relevant and meaningful to learners' professional or academic goals.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) represent two distinct yet interconnected domains within the broader field of English language education though they are both oriented to real-life situations. In the classroom, addressing real-life communicative situations is accomplished through meaningful activities and tasks (Guerra & Bayyurt, 2019), and in the university context, these activities are guided in one way or another depending on the intentionality meant for the language and also on the students' profile.

Languages and Anxiety-Related Emotions

Despite the fact that it is not always easy to define emotions or affective factors when dealing with language learning and use, we refer to emotions and affective factors as "aspects of emotion, feeling, mood or attitude which condition behaviour" (Arnold & Brown, 1999, p. 1). That leads us to affirm that "the importance of taking affect into consideration in the field of second language acquisition cannot be denied" (Arnold, 2020, p. 19), since the affective domain may be juxtaposed to the cognitive side (Brown, 2007). Even the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) takes affective and emotional factors into account by describing different competences involved in language learning, such as the existential competence (savoir-être), that includes motivation, attitude, or personal factors, like self-confidence, self-esteem, or anxiety/fear (Council of Europe, 2018).

Krashen (1982) affirms that there is an affective filter that can act as a barrier to language acquisition by impeding learners' ability to absorb linguistic input effectively if there are heightened levels of anxiety, which has been confirmed in recent studies (Botes et al., 2020; Payant et al., 2019). Also, the affective processing theory provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding how emotions influence the acquisition and use of English as a foreign language (Arnold, 2020). According to this theory, emotions are not only subjective responses to external stimuli, but also play an active role in attention, memory, and cognitive processing. In the course of learning English, negative emotions can trigger avoidance mechanisms or cognitive impairments, thereby hindering language understanding and expression (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012b), whether in English writing performance (De Vleeschauwer, 2023) or English oral production

(Zhang, 2024). On the contrary, positive emotions, like enjoyment or curiosity, also play a crucial role in language acquisition (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012b).

Several studies have emphasized the multifaceted nature of anxiety in the context of language learning (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019), such as the study carried out by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), where they underscore the complexity of linguistic anxiety, delineating its manifestations ranging from fear and apprehension to nervousness and self-doubt. A few years later, Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018) highlighted how anxiety can negatively affect motivation, self-confidence, and willingness to engage in language learning activities (Fielden Burns & Manchado Nieto, n. d.).

As students engage in oral communication activities, they often grapple with varying degrees of apprehension and unease, which can hinder their linguistic performance and impede their overall language-learning process. Understanding the complexities of anxiety in oral production is essential for educators so they can look for pedagogical approaches aimed at alleviating students' anxieties and fostering a conducive learning environment. Contemporary studies by Fielden and Rico (2017) and Pan and Zhang (2024) have shed light on the detrimental impact of anxiety on students' motivation and engagement in oral communication activities. These researchers emphasize the reciprocal relationship between anxiety and motivation, suggesting that heightened anxiety levels can dampen students' intrinsic motivation to participate actively in oral production tasks, thereby impeding their language learning progress.

In the realm of EFL and ESP instruction, educators play a pivotal role in mediating learners' emotional experiences and fostering resilience in the face of anxiety. MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012a) advocated for the integration of affective strategies into language pedagogy, emphasizing the importance of mindfulness and self-regulation techniques in mitigating anxiety levels among learners. Consequently, it is essential for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) educators to recognize and effectively manage affective factors in order to alleviate negative emotions in students and to promote an optimal learning environment.

Therefore, by addressing students' affective needs and fostering a supportive learning environment, educators can mitigate anxiety levels and facilitate students' oral proficiency development (Reyes, 2022; Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021). However, further research is needed to explore the efficacy of specific pedagogical interventions in alleviating students' anxieties and enhancing their language learning experiences, and there is also a need to compare students from diverse degrees' to explore whether if they feel differently during their oral English performance.

Methodology

Research Questions and Objective

Given the importance of foreign language learning in today's context and its impact on the university system, the focus of this research is to investigate the anxiety-related emotions of university students in English classes. In this regard, we pose the following research questions:

RQ 1. In terms of overall anxiety about English learning, do university students feel fear, concern, nervousness, insecurity, disinterest, or confidence regarding the use of English in class as a foreign language?

RQ 2. Are there any differences in emotions regarding the use of English as a foreign language in class between students in social sciences in education and students in health sciences?

    a. At the group level (group averages in terms of averages of global anxiety).

    b. At the item level.

RQ 3. Do university students' feelings change when asked about their oral English skills, specifically in class, over the course of an entire academic semester (i.e., is there an improvement in anxiety over the course of a semester's practice?)?

We start from the idea that students who study English are motivated by multiple factors, such as a desire to adapt to the current global reality, expand their job opportunities, use it instrumentally to acquire employment or in their future jobs, have a more international profile, etc. However, there are some distinguishing features between social sciences students in education and health sciences students: while the first group might end up frequently using English in their work as future teachers in a country where bilingual schools are very present, even as a vehicular language, the second group is likely to use English as an infrequent instrumental language or as a means for informal communication. Thus, the aim of this study is to determine whether there are feelings of fear, concern, nervousness, insecurity, disinterest, or confidence related to learning English as a foreign language and, furthermore, if there are differences between groups of social sciences students in education and health sciences students.

Context and Sample

This research was conducted at a public university in Spain during the academic year 2021-2022 in obligatory English subjects in each degree. A total of 231 (n=231) undergraduate subjects voluntarily and anonymously participated in this study. The procedure for the sample selection was based on the following criteria: first, these students should have an

annual English (as a foreign language) subject during that academic year, second, there should be groups from social sciences and from health sciences. Since the field comparison was one of the main goals of this study, the sample was divided into two main groups, which in turn consist of two different group types divided into fields (Table 1): educational social sciences students, specifically in pre-school education and primary education degrees, and health sciences students, specifically in Medicine and Physical Therapy degrees.

Table 1. Study Sample

Groups and degrees	Sample
Educational social sciences	**Answers**
Pre-school education degree	87
Primary school education degree	33
Health sciences	**Answers**
Medicine degree	82
Physical Therapy degree	29
Total	231

The students who make up the sample study English as a foreign language with the intention of using their language skills to adapt to our global world, have an international profile, or broaden their job opportunities, but one of the principal differences is that the educational social sciences group might end up teaching English as a foreign language in pre-school and primary education centers, while the health sciences group studies English with the intention of possibly using it instrumentally in their future careers. In line with this, it is important to highlight that every group has a different GPA (Grade Point Average) to get enrolled at the university: pre-school education students access to their degree with 7.677 points out of 14; primary education students with 8.361 out of 14; medicine students with 13.281 out of 14; and physical therapy students with 11.990 out of 14 (Unidad Técnica de Evaluación y Calidad [UTEC] of University of Extremadura, 2024).

Research Design and Data Collection

The present study adheres to a quantitative research methodology. To this end, a pre-test-post-test study is conducted. The pre-test is carried out at the beginning of the semester, in the first 2 weeks of the class and the post-test at the end of the semester, once the class has ended, during the academic year 2021-2022. Surveys were administered by the researchers in class, and they were taken in students' native language, Spanish, and then translated. These classes were related to English in the field and called: English for Health Sciences, and English for Pre-school and Primary Education. The characteristics of this research need to be adjusted to a statistical model, and in order to align with the most appropriate model, we use tests for checking requisites.

Regarding the quality, it should be highlighted that scientific rigor of this research is achieved by adjusting the instrument to reality to ensure internal validity, by the possibility of replicating the study to ensure external validity, by the degree of replicability to ensure reliability, and by an unbiased intervention to ensure objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Instrument

In this study a Spanish version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) has been used. The FLCAS was originally elaborated by Horwitz et al. (1986), and was used to measure students' self-reported anxiety in foreign language classes. It was subsequently translated and validated by Ortega Cebreros (2003) for students whose mother tongue is Spanish and who study English as a foreign language (FL), which makes it an ideal instrument for our student population. Furthermore, we selected items that are relevant to our research objective, where the instrument issued in this study consists of a total of 33 items (Appendix 1), 22 of which are focused on determining the emotions experienced by students in English classes, and 11 focused on assessing students' level of anxiety in oral English production.

In order to know how suitable, the instrument for this study is, we have checked it with three tests: First, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient confirms the reliability of the survey with a value close to 1 (α = .852). Second, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) correlation matrix and communalities demonstrate the feasibility of the survey, as the KMO value is $p > .50$ (obtained value p = .952). Thirdly, the significance value of the Bartlett's sphericity test is .000. All of this indicates that using the survey as an instrument is appropriate for this study.

Data Analysis

According to Cubo Delgado (2019), data must adhere to 4 requisites so that the researcher can apply a certain statistical model, either parametrical or non-parametrical. In the first place, there must be an interval scale, which we do not have. The second test, known as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test, shows how data adjust to normality, where we confirm that there is not a normal distribution, since our data gave a result of .000. Then, checking the Rachas test, we also confirm that data is not randomly distributed, since the significance value is also .000. For the fourth test, Levene, we see that

there is not an equality of variances, since values are not over .05. These tests show that a non-parametric statistical model should be applied, and given that it is about related samples composed of more than two groups, we will work on the Friedman ANOVA model.

The survey, as a data collection instrument, together with the statistical Friedman ANOVA model derived from this instrument, enables the compilation of necessary elements to address our research questions and, consequently, to pursue our research objective. We analyse the obtained results in two main blocks. Firstly, 22 items were administered during the pre-test, through which we analysed the emotions experienced by students in English classes. Secondly, 11 additional items were administered during both the pre-test and post-test, corresponding to inquiries regarding the emotions experienced by students when speaking in English classes. Therefore, there are 22 items that provide insight into the overall level of anxiety experienced by the group and 11 items that indicate whether students perceive any difference in their feelings regarding their English oral skills throughout their semester of English class.

Hypothesis

Based on the research questions posed and the context in which this study is conducted, our hypotheses are the following:

1. University students experience fear, concern, nervousness, insecurity, and disinterest in using English in class as a foreign language to a greater extent than they feel confident.

2. There are no differences in emotions regarding using English as a foreign language in class between students in educational sciences and health sciences.

   a. At the group level (group averages in terms of averages of global anxiety).

   b. At the item level.

3. University students change how they feel about speaking English in class over the course of an academic semester when they are taking English courses in their field.

Results

Taking into account our research questions and the corresponding objectives set forth, we have compiled data from all survey items, although only a portion of it will be utilized to compare data between the beginning and end of the classes (pre-test-post-test), as previously explained.

To begin with, we will present the demographics of the sample. In this regard, the sample consists of a total of 231 individuals. Out of this total sample, 186 individuals identify as female, among whom 84 are studying pre-school education, 25 primary education, 59 medicine, and 18 physical therapy. Additionally, there are 45 individuals who identify as male, among whom 3 are studying pre-school education, 8 primary education, 23 medicine, and 11 physical therapy.

Pre-test Questions: Anxious Emotions in English Class at the Group Level

The 22 items (See Appendix 1) that were administered only at the beginning of the course yield interesting results regarding the emotions experienced by students towards the English subject across the four degrees where the surveys have been conducted. Given that the items are interrelated, we have grouped the results according to the emotions they inquire about, thus distinguishing 5 emotions related to anxiety or lack thereof: (a) Confidence/Relax [Items: Pre02, Pre05, Pre08, Pre22, Pre28, Pre32], (b) Fear/Worry [Items: Pre03, Pre10, Pre19, Pre25, Pre26], (c) Nervousness [Items: Pre04, Pre12, Pre21, Pre29, Pre33], (d) Insecurity/Feeling of judgement [Items: Pre07, Pre15, Pre16], and (e) Distraction/Disinterest [Items: Pre06, Pre11, Pre17]. These results are displayed in Figures 1 to 5, where students' answers are showcased on a Likert scale from 1 (I totally agree) to 5 (I totally disagree).
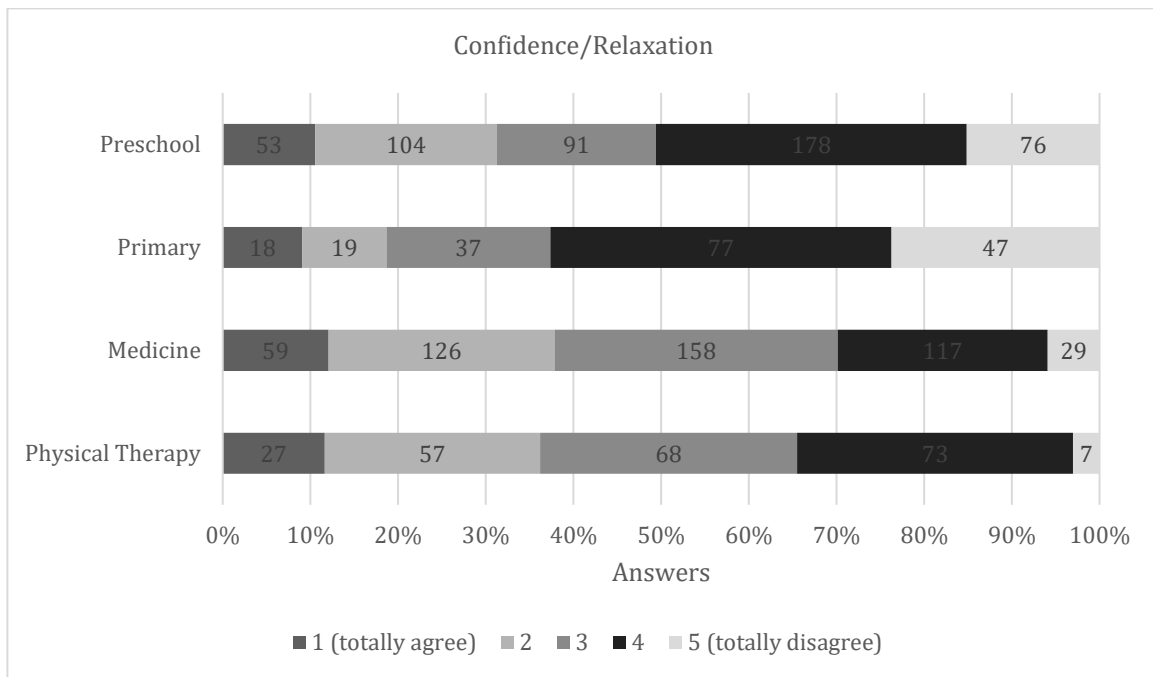
Figure 1. Results for "Confidence/Relaxation" (Pre-test-All Groups)

In Figure 1, we can discern the high percentage of responses indicating disagreement with feeling relaxed or confident in English class. This is particularly represented by the value of 4 across all groups. Therefore, while there is a significant percentage that does feel confident and relaxed, the vast majority do not feel this way. The groups that feel the least self-assured in English classes are those of pre-school education and primary education, namely, the students in social sciences for education.
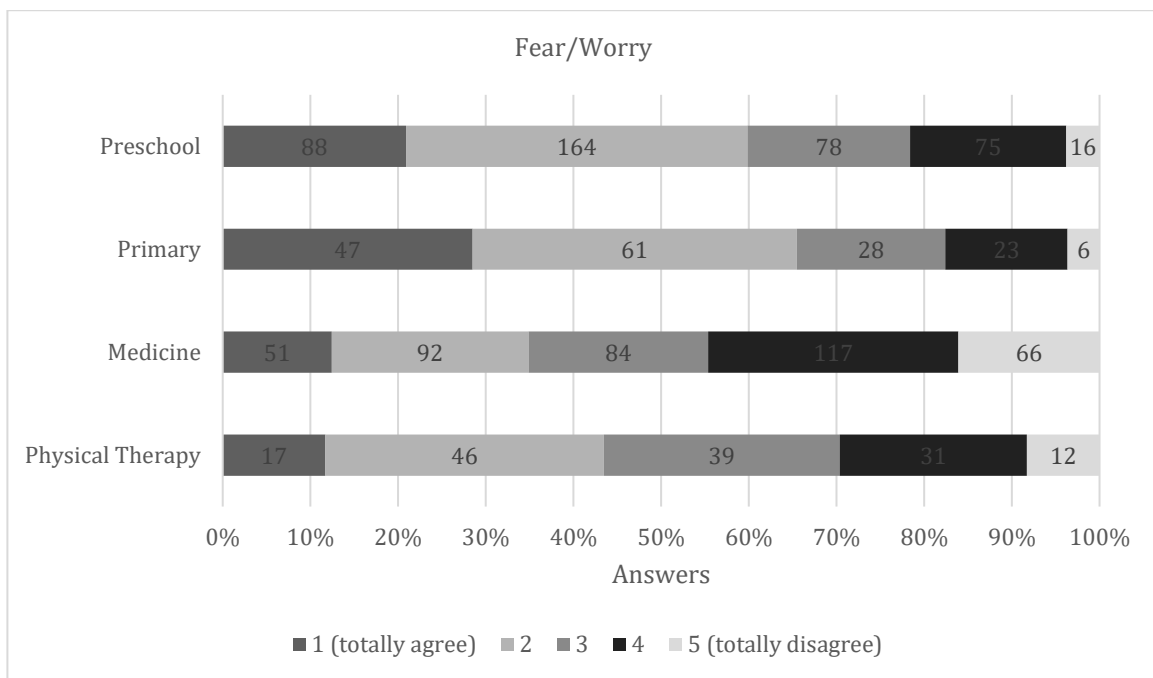

Figure 2. Results for "Fear/Worry" (Pre-test-All Groups)

In Figure 2, a fairly balanced distribution is observed among the groups of pre-school and primary education, where the bulk of responses range between values 1 and 2. That is to say, students in educational social sciences experience fear and concern in English classes. The group of health sciences predominantly marks values 2, 3, and 4, indicating that they also experience fear and concern, albeit not to the same extent. Medical students exhibit the most heterogeneity in responses, thus indicating that there are individuals who do not experience these negative emotions in English classes.
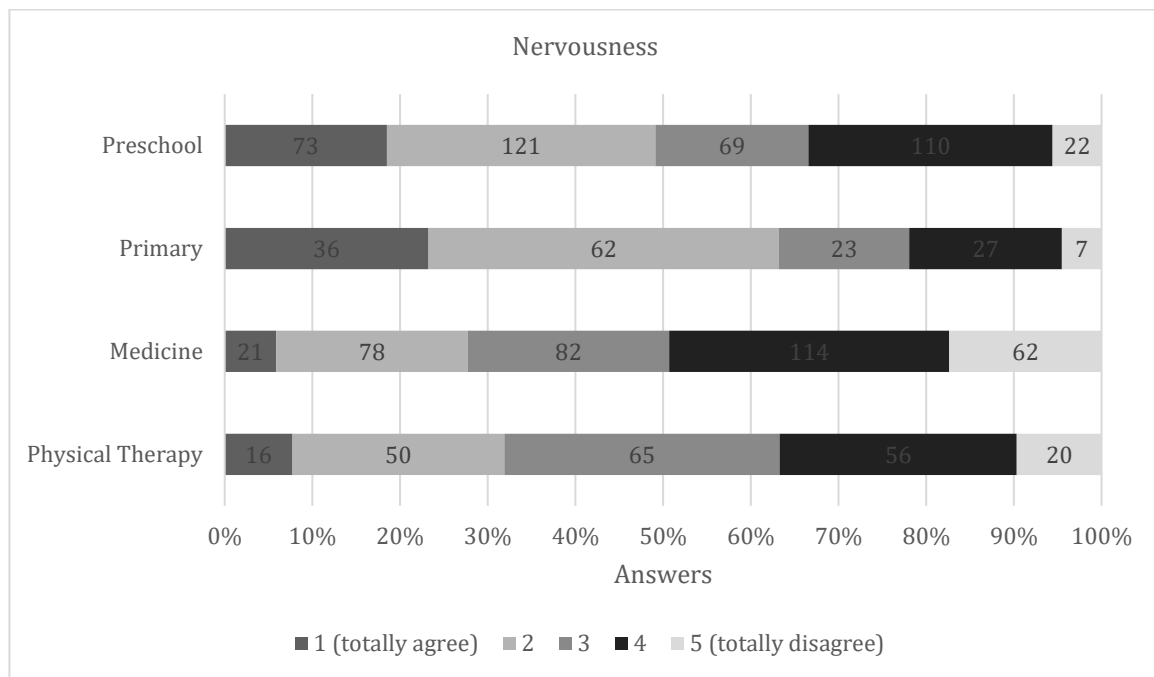
Figure 3. Results for "Nervousness" (Pre-test-All Groups)

In Figure 3, a trend very similar to the previous one (Figure 2) is observed. While students in educational social sciences exhibit a higher incidence of feeling nervous in English classes, those in health sciences represent it to a lesser extent, especially the group of medical students. Nevertheless, in any case, there is a presence of nervousness in all groups.
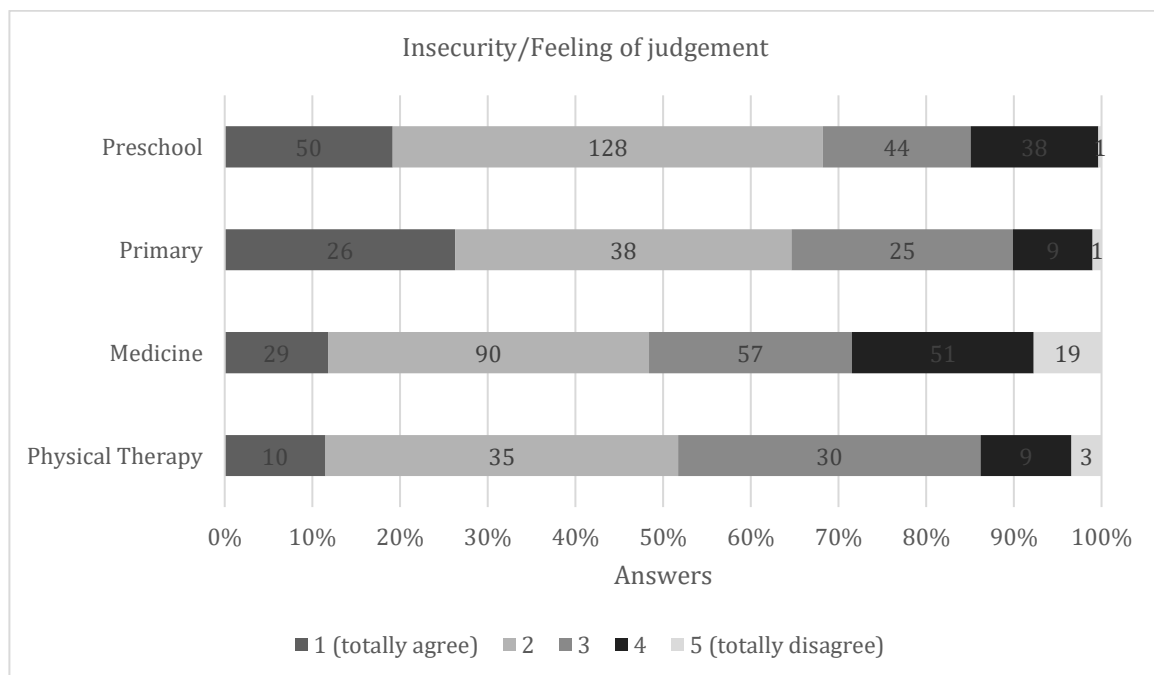
Figure 4. Results for "Insecurity/Feeling of judgement" (Pre-test-All Groups)

Regarding insecurity and feeling judged (Figure 4), there is a widespread incidence for values 2 and 3, which extend to values 1 and 4 across all groups. Once again, the pre-school education group represents the students who experience these emotions most frequently, although this time followed by the medical group. These results indicate that these are the feelings most commonly experienced by subjects across the entire sample.

Figure 5. Results for "Distraction/Disinterest" (Pre-test-All Groups)

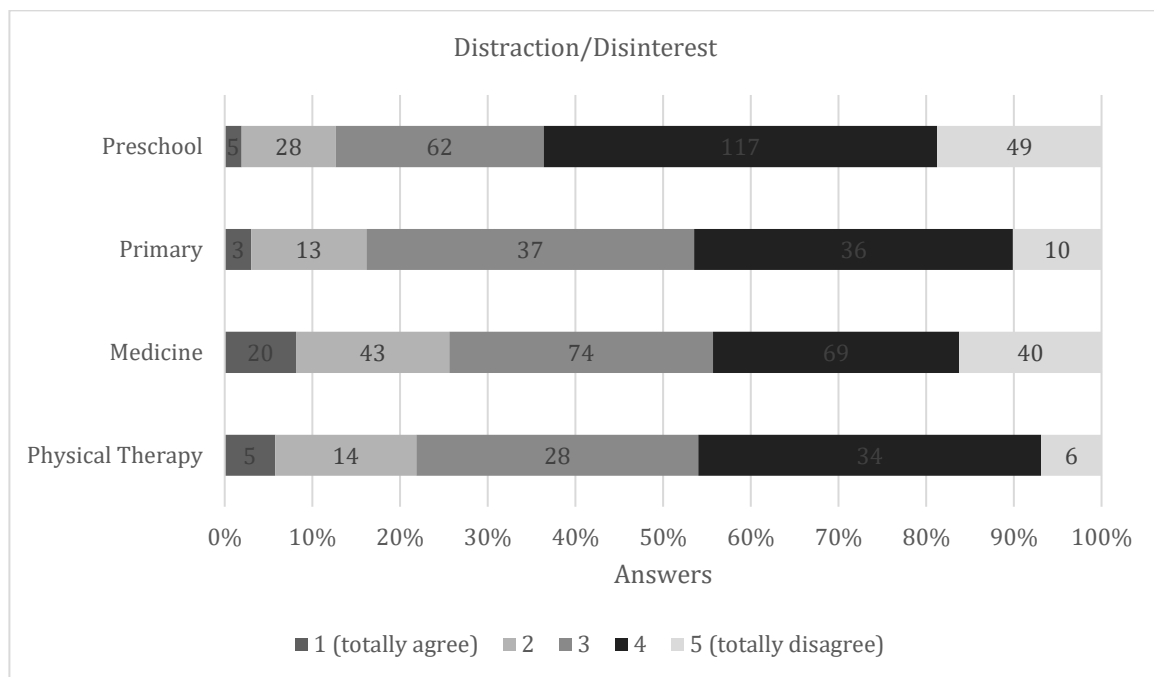With respect to interest in English classes, we perceive that the vast majority of students' report being quite interested in the subject, as values obtained primarily fall to 4, followed by 3. Additionally, in contrast to the rest of the negative feelings that the pre-school education group may have, there is a higher incidence of these emotions of attention and interest.

Pre-test Questions: Anxious Emotions in English Class at the Item Level

Now turning to the items concerning oral production in the pre and post-test phases, from the pre-test data regarding students' emotions, we observe that most students care about making mistakes when speaking English in class (Pre02). Similarly, although some students admit to getting distracted during English classes, a large portion of the sample claims to be focused in class (Pre06), and all of them are concerned about failing the English subject (Pre10). Additionally, some of them have anxiety-oriented feelings, like fear, when they know they are going to have to speak aloud, especially students in the Primary education degree (Pre03), a group that also feels dread when they do not understand what the teacher is saying in English, similar to what happens to the physical therapy group (Pre04). In fact, these same two groups, primary and physical therapy, are afraid of not understanding what the teacher says in English, pointing to a certain anxiety concerning their listening skills; meanwhile, students in medicine feel less afraid of not understanding what is being said in English (Pre04), which may indicate higher confidence in their listening skills. However, many students are afraid that the teacher is paying attention to all the mistakes they make when speaking, mainly the Primary group, followed by pre-school education and physical therapy (Pre19), and the vast majority of all groups are greatly concerned about not understanding the corrections the teacher makes to their English in class (Pre15).

We can also identify some differences between students in educational social sciences and students in health sciences. Among these differences, we highlight that the group of education students feels tense during English exams, while the group of health science students generally feels more relaxed (Pre08). Additionally, the group of educational social sciences claims to often feel like not attending classes, a sentiment not expressed as strongly by the group of health sciences (Pre17). This difference is also evident when they feel that the class is progressing faster than they can keep up with (Pre25) or when they feel more nervous in the English class than in any other class (Pre26), which occurs in the group of educational social sciences but not as much in the group of health sciences. This difference becomes particularly visible, seeing that they affirm feeling nervous when they do not understand every single word the teacher says in English, whereas the group of educational and social sciences clearly experiences feelings of anxiety in class, contrasting with the relative anxiety felt by students in health sciences.

With regards to the individual speaking of each student in English class, we can observe that students in pre-school education, primary education, and medicine become more nervous when the teacher asks them questions they have not previously prepared for, while students in physical therapy seem to be more hesitant in this aspect (Pre33). In line with this, the group of students that feels more pressure if they are not well-prepared for classes is the pre-school education group (Pre22), although all groups consider themselves under pressure in these cases, with the physical therapy group showing the least pressure (Pre16). This same trend is also observed when they affirm that they worry about their

English classes even if they prepare for them beforehand (Pre16), a highly enlightening datum regarding the tension or anxiety provoked by such subjects.

In addition, we observe a remarkably consistent tendency across all degrees of the sample to believe that their peers are better than they are in English oral skills (Pre07). Likewise, we highlight that only a small portion of the sample feels relaxed when attending English class, while the rest of the individuals concur that they do not feel relaxed (Pre28). Such may be the level of anxiety experienced by a significant portion of the studied population that they even claim to forget everything they know due to nerves, a fact particularly prominent in the pre-school education, primary education, and physical therapy groups, although the medicine group does not fall far behind (Pre12).

In the most optimistic aspects of their feelings towards English subjects, the four groups exhibit similar trends in that they would not mind taking more subjects in English, a feature particularly highlighted in the pre-school education group (Pre05). Similarly, the majority of students value English classes, as they understand that students care about English subjects (Pre11), and some of them believe they would feel comfortable speaking English if they conversed with native English speakers, although not necessarily, as there is quite a disparity in this data (Pre32). Lastly, the data refute any correlation between studying and failing, despite the anxiety students may express, as all groups agree that the more they study, the fewer mistakes they make. This datum shows some disagreement in the primary education and physical therapy groups, where a small portion considers that, despite studying, they make mistakes (Pre21).

Pre-test-Post-test Questions: Anxiety in English Oral Skills

In the 11 items posed both at the beginning of the course in the pre-test and at the end of the course in the post-test we can discern differences among students from the degrees in the sample, as well as whether there was any evolution in their perception of their oral skills in English. Before presenting these results, we ensured that, indeed there were statistical differences among the groups and subsequently analyzed the obtained data. The Friedman ANOVA test yields an asymptotic significance value of .000, indicating rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0), which posits that the groups are equal, and acceptance of the working hypothesis or alternative hypothesis (H_1), suggesting differences among the groups. This is the first evidence that differences exist in the level of anxiety when speaking English in class based on the group to which one belongs (pre-school education, primary education, medicine, or physical therapy). The data have been collected from students' responses using the Likert scale ranging from 1 (I totally agree) to 5 (I totally disagree), which are shown below.

Table 3. Pre-test-Post-test Statistics for Pre-school Education Degree

| Group Educational Social Sciences	Item	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
	Pre01	87	2.33	1.096
	Post01(01)	87	2.52	1.109
	Pre09	87	2.06	1.106
	Post02(09)	87	2.43	1.148
	Pre13	87	2.52	1.209
	Post03(13)	87	2.76	1.141
	Pre14	87	3.62	0.979
	Post04(14)	87	3.36	1.120
	Pre18	87	3.59	1.106
	Post05(18)	87	3.51	1.066
Pre-school education degree	Pre20	87	2.28	1.096
	Post06(20)	87	2.61	1.114
	Pre23	87	2.45	1.149
	Post07(23)	87	2.61	1.103
	Pre24	87	2.59	1.196
	Post08(24)	87	3.02	1.045
	Pre27	87	2.38	1.037
	Post09(27)	87	2.53	0.975
	Pre30	87	2.87	1.149
	Post10(30)	87	2.94	1.038
	Pre31	87	3.10	1.142
	Post11(31)	87	3.46	1.119
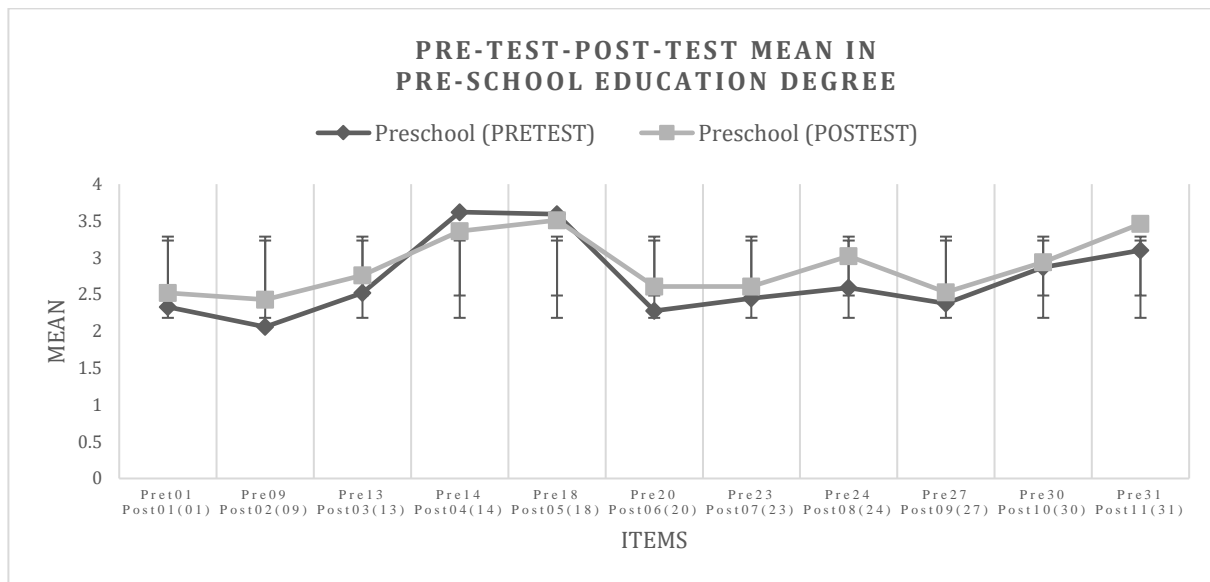
Figure 6. Pre-test-Post-test Mean in Pre-school Education Degree

In Table 3, the corresponding values for the mean and standard deviation for the 11 pre-test and post-test items are shown. Means are depicted in Figure 6 in order to offer a more visual picture. Data collected from students in the Pre-school education degree indicate that all values have slightly increased in the post-test compared to the pre-test, except for two cases. Hence, we can assert that, on one hand, students in this group feel more embarrassed to voluntarily respond in English class at the end of the course than at the beginning [Pre13 and Post03(13)]. On the other hand, some of these values that have increased, perhaps because of the experience students have gained throughout the course, include responses indicating that they feel more confident [Pre18 and Post05(18)] and less panicked when speaking in English at the end of the course compared to the beginning [Pre09 and Post02(09)], that they feel less embarrassment in voluntarily responding [Pre13 and Post03(13)], that their heart rate accelerates less when asked to participate [Pre20 and Post06(20)], that they worry less about what others think of them when speaking English in front of their peers [Pre24 and Post08(24)], or that the fear of being laughed at by other students when speaking English is reduced [Pre31 and Post11(31)]. Additionally, they consider that they would be less nervous if they were to converse with a native English speaker [Pre14 and Post04(14)].

Table 4. Pre-test-Post-test Statistics for Primary Education Degree

| Group Educational Social Sciences	Item	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
	Pre01	33	1.94	1.059
	Post01(01)	33	2.24	1.173
	Pre09	33	2.03	1.132
	Post02(09)	33	2.45	1.394
	Pre13	33	2.55	1.348
	Post03(13)	33	2.67	1.267
	Pre14	33	4.00	0.968
	Post04(14)	33	3.76	1.206
	Pre18	33	3.97	1.075
	Post05(18)	33	3.39	1.171
Primary education degree	Pre20	33	2.30	1.015
	Post06(20)	33	2.52	1.064
	Pre23	33	2.15	0.870
	Post07(23)	33	2.18	1.185
	Pre24	33	2.27	1.039
	Post08(24)	33	2.70	0.951
	Pre27	33	2.09	0.980
	Post09(27)	33	2.06	0.827
	Pre30	33	2.24	1.032
	Post10(30)	33	2.52	1.093
	Pre31	33	2.70	1.357
	Post11(31)	33	3.03	1.212
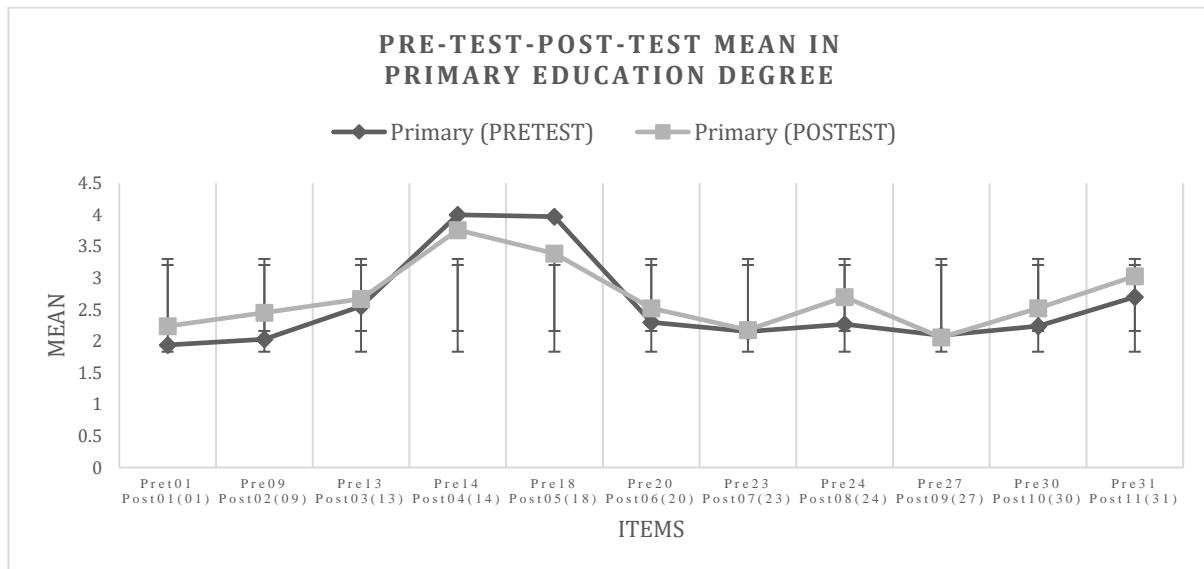
Figure 7. Pre-test-Post-test Mean in Primary Education Degree

In Table 4, the corresponding values for the mean and standard deviation for the 11 pre-test and post-test items are displayed. Also, means are depicted in Figure 7 in order to offer a more visual picture. Similar to the pre-school education group, data collected from students in the Primary education degree indicate an improvement in the overall sentiment of the students, both in terms of values that have increased statistically speaking.

Thus, we can state that there has been a significant difference in the confidence gained by the students throughout the course [Pre18 and Post05(18)]. These students also feel less panicked when speaking in English in class without prior preparation [Pre09 and Post02(09)], they are less concerned about what others think of them when speaking in English [Pre08 and Post08(24)], they become less nervous [Pre27 and Post09(27)], and they feel less fear of other students laughing at them when speaking in English [Pre31 and Post11(31)]. From these results, we infer that both degrees that constitute the educational social sciences group consider that the corresponding in-class activities throughout the course have been beneficial in reducing their levels of anxiety, nervousness, embarrassment, fear, or feelings of judgment.

Table 5. Pre-test-Post-test Statistics for Medicine Degree

| Group Health Sciences	Item	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
	Pre01	82	2.88	1.280
	Post01(01)	82	2.98	1.257
	Pre09	82	2.96	1.242
	Post02(09)	82	3.13	1.284
	Pre13	82	2.95	1.196
	Post03(13)	82	3.00	1.227
	Pre14	82	2.76	1.171
	Post04(14)	82	2.80	1.211
	Pre18	82	2.90	1.118
	Post05(18)	82	2.96	1.127
Medicine	Pre20	82	2.79	1.141
	Post06(20)	82	2.87	1.141
	Pre23	82	2.70	1.108
	Post07(23)	82	2.71	1.170
	Pre24	82	3.01	1.191
	Post08(24)	82	3.28	1.189
	Pre27	82	3.11	1.100
	Post09(27)	82	2.80	1.094
	Pre30	82	3.65	0.921
	Post10(30)	82	3.63	1.000
	Pre31	82	3.63	1.212
	Post11(31)	82	3.88	1.148
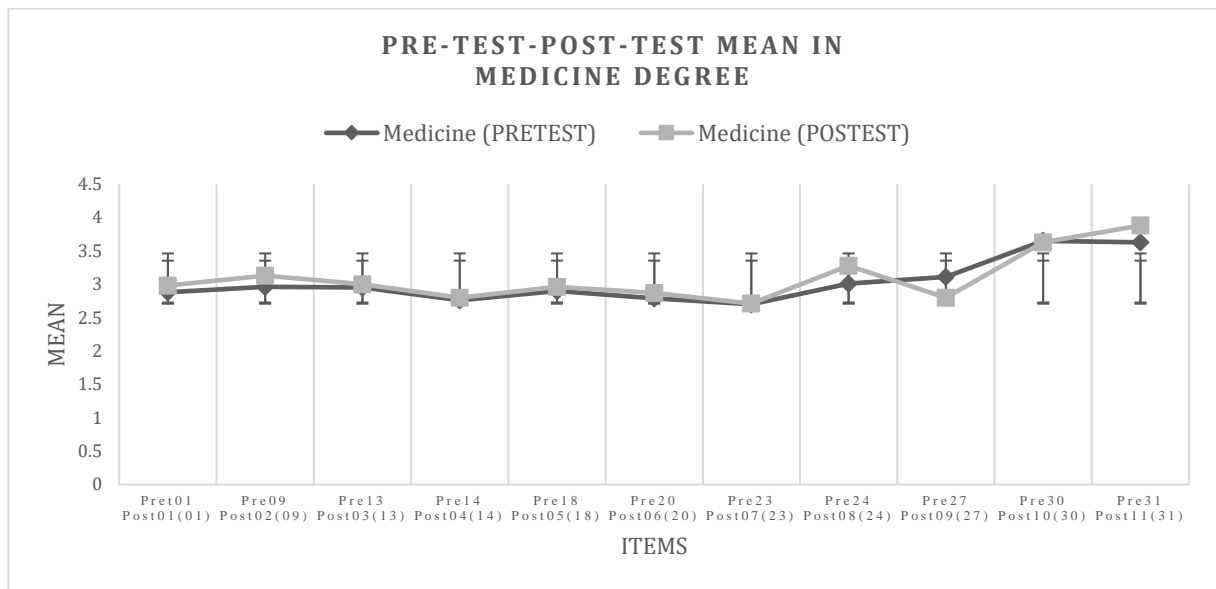
Figure 8. Pre-test-Post-test Mean in Medicine Degree

In Table 5, the values corresponding to the mean and standard deviation for the 11 pre-test and post-test items are displayed. Also, means are depicted in Figure 8 in order to offer a more visual picture. Data collected from students in the Medicine degree highlight that this group exhibits the most equidistant values, as only four values show some noteworthy changes. medicine students feel slightly less panicked when they have to speak in English in class without prior preparation after completing the course [Pre09 and Post02(09)], they are somewhat less concerned about what others think of them when speaking in English [Pre24 and Post08(24)], and they feel less fear of other students laughing at them when speaking in English in class [Pre30 and Post10(30)].

However, this group becomes considerably more nervous and confused by the end of the course than at the beginning [Pre27 and Post09(27)]. Likewise, a slight change is perceived in the value indicating that they feel somewhat more overwhelmed by the number of rules they have to learn to be able to speak English [Pre30 and Post10(30)].

Table 6. Pre-test-Post-test Statistics for Physical Therapy Degree

| Group Health Sciences	Item	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
	Pre01	29	2.45	1.088
	Post01(01)	29	2.48	1.056
	Pre09	29	2.62	1.237
	Post02(09)	29	2.62	1.083
	Pre13	29	2.48	1.271
	Post03(13)	29	2.59	1.240
	Pre14	29	3.17	1.167
	Post04(14)	29	3.41	1.240
	Pre18	29	3.28	0.996
	Post05(18)	29	3.52	0.911
Physical Therapy	Pre20	29	2.62	1.015
	Post06(20)	29	2.59	1.119
	Pre23	29	2.72	0.841
	Post07(23)	29	2.72	1.066
	Pre24	29	2.83	1.136
	Post08(24)	29	3.07	0.961
	Pre27	29	2.72	0.922
	Post09(27)	29	2.83	1.256
	Pre30	29	3.10	1.113
	Post10(30)	29	3.34	1.078
	Pre31	29	2.76	1.215
	Post11(31)	29	3.62	1.147
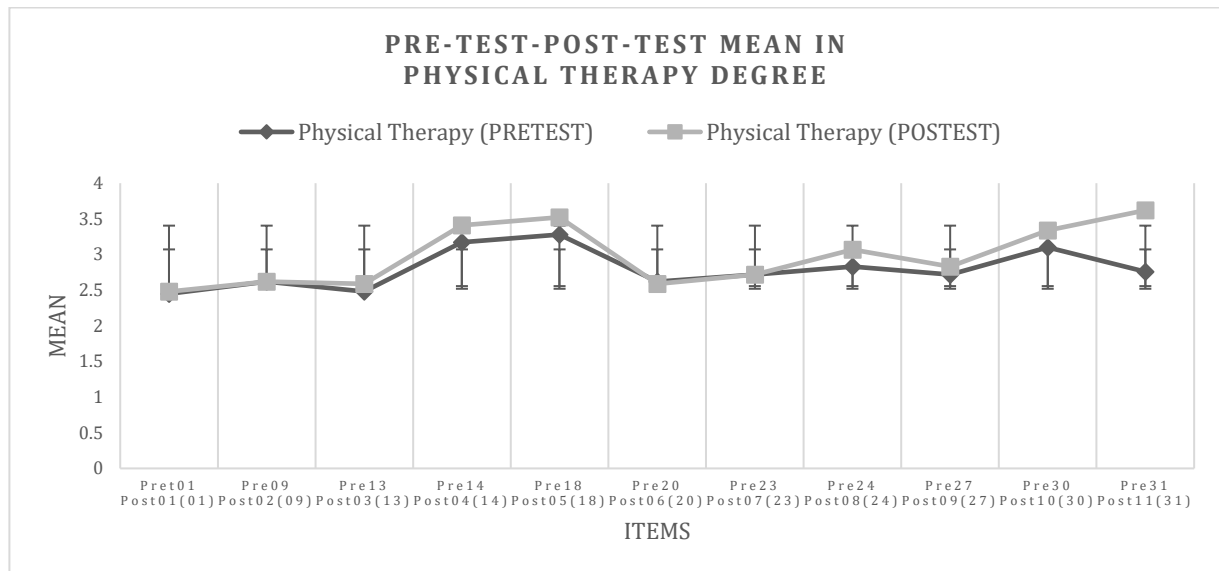
Figure 9. Pre-test-Post-test Mean in Physical Therapy Degree

In Table 6, the values corresponding to the mean and standard deviation for the 11 pre-test and post-test items are displayed. Also, means are depicted in Figure 9 in order to offer a more visual picture. On this occasion, it is interesting to note that students report feeling their pulse increase, a physiological response to nervousness, when they are about to speak up in English class at the end of the course compared to the beginning [Pre20 and Post06(20)]. This is a value that contrasts with the rest of the data.

Conversely, other values indicate that they would be less influenced by whether or not they speak with a native English speaker [Pre14 and Post04(14)], that their confidence to speak in English class has increased as the course progressed [Pre18 and Post05(18)], that they become less nervous [Pre27 and Post09(27)], they feel less overwhelmed in learning the rules to speak English [Pre30 and Post10(30)], but most notably, and with a particularly noticeable difference, that they have significantly reduced their fear of other students laughing at them when speaking in English [Pre31 and Post11(31)]. The rest of the values remain very similar in the post-test compared to the pre-test.

From the results of these last two groups, we infer that students in the health sciences degree believe that performing the corresponding in-class activities throughout the course has been beneficial in reducing their levels of worry, nervousness, fear, or judgment. However, conversely, there has been a worsening of values regarding nervousness, confusion, and feeling overwhelmed in medicine students, and palpitations when asked to speak up in English class in physical therapy students. Comparing the four groups' general means for the pre-test and post-test results, we observe an interesting overall picture where all groups have decreased their levels of anxious emotions from the beginning to the end of the academic semester with regard to using English in class (Figure 10).
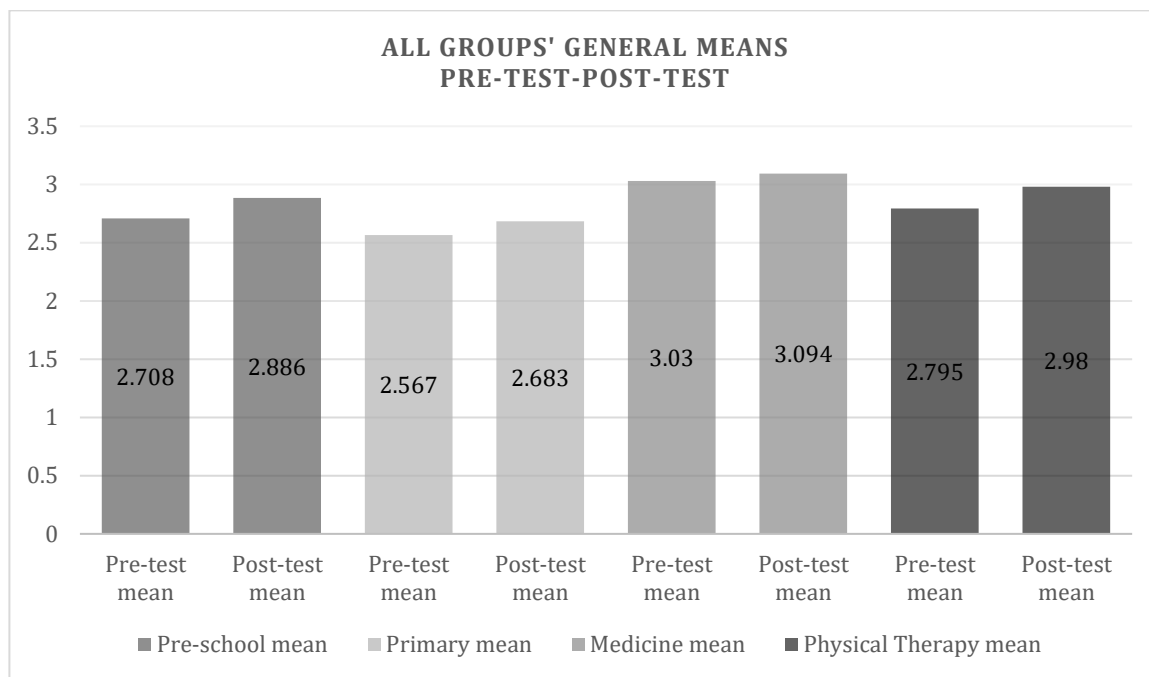
Figure 10. All Groups' Means in Pre-test and Post-test

Given the results, we can accept the first and the third hypotheses, as university students feel more fear, concern, insecurity, and disinterest than confidence during English classes, although it is also true that they perceive an improvement after having completed tasks in class throughout an academic class in English for their fields. However, we refute the second hypothesis, as there are indeed differences between the degrees of the sample corresponding to educational social sciences and those belonging to health sciences.

Discussion

This study aims to investigate the anxiety-related emotions of university students in English classes, both in general terms and specifically regarding oral production. According to the results obtained, we can affirm that it is indeed essential to take into account affective and emotional factors in language classes, in this particular case, in English classes, a fact that is consistent with the assertions of Arnold (2020). This is because the cognitive aspect can be compromised depending on whether the human aspects of students are considered or not, from personal values to social interactions, as asserted by Brown (2007).

Related to this idea, we highlight what the authors MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012b) indicate, who conclude that negative emotions linked to anxiety can hinder optimal cognitive development, as well as impede comprehension and expression. This fact aligns with the results of this study, where we observe that fear or worry may be interfering with students' well-being in class and, consequently, their English learning and use. This is especially evident in the results related to oral production, compared in the second part of our study, where feelings of embarrassment, insecurity, and feeling of being judged in class when they have to speak in English are distinguished, which echoes conclusions by the recent study of Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018), Fielden Burns and Manchado Nieto (2024), and Zhang (2024).

Other statements that align with the results of our study are those made by Botes et al. (2020), Krashen (1982), and Payant et al. (2019), who stated that there is an affective filter that acts as a barrier to language acquisition. In this sense, anxiety in English classes can manifest in various ways, such as nervousness or lack of self-confidence, as concluded by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) and Oteir and Al-Otaibi (2019) in their respective studies. Hence, in addition to teaching itself, it is necessary to acknowledge the interplay of mood and emotions of students in order to adapt pedagogy and classroom teaching strategies to tasks that might trigger negative responses, such as writing performance (De Vleeschauwer, 2023) or oral production tasks (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012b).

Thus, anxiety, and the negative emotions derived from it, can affect students' motivation to learn English, conclusions reached by authors such as Pan and Zhang (2023). However, our results show that students may feel insecure or fearful, but at the same time, they may also be willing to extend the hours of English classes and report feeling, at times, relaxed and confident. Therefore, it is not only necessary to consider the mixed matrix of emotions that may interact in positive tension, together as these can impact students' willingness to engage in activities, as affirmed by MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012a).

Therefore, to respond to our research questions, we can say that university students do feel fear, concern, nervousness, insecurity, disinterest, or confidence regarding the use of English in class as a foreign language, and they also change their

self-reported anxiety for oral skills in English from the beginning of the semester to the end of it. Finally, we detect differences between social science students in educational degrees and health science students. The second group reports feeling more relaxed than the first group, perhaps because their entering GPA is higher, which may point to these students having higher English standards, which implies lower anxiety levels. Also, perhaps these students show less anxiety because the instrumental nature of their future English language use on the job is less determined, while education students may assume their near futures include English use more readily, given the prominence of bilingual programs in Spanish public schools. In line with these ideas, we also note that the second group's results in oral production anxiety vary much less in the course of an academic semester than the first group, which shows that there may be many external factors affecting the students' emotional evolution regarding their oral English production in class, such as the starting language level, the intentionality of the language use once they finish their degree, the faculty pedagogical methods, the frequency of class attendance, and the social context and culture.

Conclusion

According to this study, we draw several conclusions. In the first place, affective and emotional factors in language classes can contribute to the success of the students not only in English classes but also in the future internationalization of the university and in future job opportunities. In this regard, we underscore the opportunities that future graduates with various university degrees may have both nationally and internationally.

As evidence of the future prospects that this path may hold is the inclusion of these parameters (personal attitudes or emotional factors) in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL), where the various elements comprising existential competence are taken into account, such as motivation, attitude, or personal factors, like self-confidence, self-esteem, or anxiety/fear. Educators should consider these parameters to elaborate their own pedagogical lessons, since it could be the differential factor for their students' successful performance in EFL classes.

Moreover, we consider that it is necessary to distinguish the intentionality with which a language is learned, as this can influence how a student approaches an English course. From the data of this study, we can identify that there are some differences between students in educational social sciences, who will likely use the English language to teach some of their classes, and students in health sciences, who will primarily use English on the job less frequently. These circumstances may affect students' beliefs about the importance of their English studies, which may, in turn, interfere at an emotional level as well.

Expanding opportunities in the future as well as having a European reference regarding emotional features could surely have an impact on educational systems. That is why results emerging from this sort of studies should be taken into account by the university community in order to bear in mind the intentionality of learning English, to adjust to pedagogical approaches to different contexts (students and degree), and to elaborate activities based on real-life communicative situations and meaningful activities and tasks.

Recommendations

For future similar studies, we recommend investigating students enrolled in diverse degrees from different disciplines, such as the arts, and we also recommend establishing statistical correlations between the variables coming from the instrument and other variables related to the topic, such as intentionality or motivation. In pedagogical terms, we recommend, on one hand, to use a natural didactic approach that involves real-life communicative situations to avoid making continuous corrections, and to elaborate scaffolded lessons, so that those students with anxiety-related emotions in the EFL class can lessen those negative feelings during the whole academic year and strengthen their confidence little by little. On the other hand, we recommend to use certain tools, such as FlipGrid, that help alleviating their fear to speak in public and shorten the social pressure.

Limitations

In future studies, we would include the entire survey in the post test, to aid in total comparability. Additionally, it is a limitation to not have at our disposal parallel variables, such as students' intentionality of learning or using the language or the motivational levels of the students in general (including, for example, instrumental motivation). These limitations could be addressed in future research to strengthen the quality of the study. Finally, a more thorough study of the didactic particularities of each class might shed more light on their differences in terms of activities, methodologies, etc.

Ethics Statements

The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest for the authors.

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Authorship Contribution Statement

Manchado: Data analysis, statistical analysis, writing, editing. Fielden: Conceptualization, design, data acquisition, reviewing.

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Appendix

Table A1. Instrument

Code pre-test	Code post-test	Items	Type
Pre01	Post01(01)	*Nunca me siento muy seguro de mí mismo cuando hablo en la clase de inglés* [I never feel confident when I speak in English in class]	Likert
Pre02	-	*No me preocupa el cometer errores en la clase de inglés* [I don't mind making mistakes in English in class]	Likert
Pre03	-	*Tiemblo cuando que me van a llamar en la clase de inglés* [I tremble when I am about to be called on in English class]	Likert
Pre04	-	*Me da miedo cuando no comprendo lo que el profesor está diciendo en inglés* [I'm scared when I don't understand what the professor is saying in English]	Likert
Pre05	-	*No me importaría en absoluto recibir más clases de inglés* [I wouldn't mind at all having more lessons in English]	Likert
Pre06	-	*Durante la clase de inglés, me doy cuenta de que pienso en cosas que no tienen nada que ver con la clase* [During English class, I realize that I think of things that have nothing to do with the class]	Likert
Pre07	-	*Continuamente pienso que a mis compañeros se les da mejor el inglés que a mí* [I constantly think that my fellow classmates are better in English than me]	Likert
Pre08	-	*Normalmente estoy relajado durante los exámenes en la clase de inglés* [I normally feel relaxed during the English exams]	Likert
Pre09	Post02(09)	*Me entra pánico cuando tengo que hablar en la clase de inglés sin haberme preparado antes* [I feel panicked when I have to speak in English class without prior preparation]	Likert
Pre10	-	*Me preocupan las consecuencias de suspender la asignatura de inglés* [I am concerned about the consequences of failing English]	Likert
Pre11	-	*No comprendo por qué razón alguna gente se preocupa tanto por las clases de inglés* [I don't understand why some people care that much about English classes]	Likert
Pre12	-	*En la clase de inglés puedo ponerme tan nervioso que llegue a olvidar las cosas que sé.* [In English class I can get so nervous that I end up forgetting everything I know]	Likert
Pre13	Post03(13)	*Me da vergüenza contestar de modo voluntario en la clase de inglés* [I am ashamed of voluntarily answering questions in English]	Likert
Pre14	Post04(14)	*No me pondría nervioso hablando el inglés con hablantes nativos* [I would not be nervous if I spoke English to English native speakers]	Likert
Pre15	-	*Me inquieto cuando no comprendo lo que el profesor está corrigiendo* [It unsettles me when I don't understand what the professor is correcting]	Likert
Pre16	-	*Me preocupo por la clase de inglés incluso si estoy bien preparado para la misma* [I worry about English class even if I am prepared for it]	Likert
Pre17	-	*A menudo me apetece no asistir a la clase de inglés* [I often don't feel like attending English class]	Likert
Pre18	Post05(18)	*Me siento seguro de mí mismo cuando hablo en la clase de inglés* [I feel confident when I speak in English class]	Likert
Pre19	-	*Me produce temor que el profesor de inglés esté pendiente de corregir cada error que cometo.* [I feel scared of my English professor watching out for every mistake that I commit]	Likert

Table A1. Continued

Code pre-test	Code post-test	Items	Type
Pre20	Post06(20)	*Se me acelera el corazón cuando mi intervención va a ser solicitada en la clase de inglés* [My heart races when I am going to be called on to speak in English in class]	Likert
Pre21	-	*Cuanto más estudio para un examen de inglés, más me confundo* [The more I study for an English exam, the more I get confused]	Likert
Pre22	-	*No siento la presión de tener que prepararme muy bien para la clase de inglés* [I don't feel pressured to be well-prepared for my English class]	Likert
Pre23	Post07(23)	*Siempre tengo la sensación de que los demás alumnos hablan el inglés mejor que yo* [I always feel that my classmates speak English better than me]	Likert
Pre24	Post08(24)	*Me preocupo mucho de lo que los demás piensan de mí cuando hablo el inglés enfrente de otros estudiantes* [I really worry about what other students think about me when I speak English in front of them]	Likert
Pre25	-	*La clase de inglés va tan deprisa que me preocupa quedarme atrás* [English class goes so fast that I worry I will fall behind]	Likert
Pre26	-	*Me siento más tenso y nervioso en la clase de inglés que en las otras clases* [In English class I feel more tense and nervous than in other classes]	Likert
Pre27	Post09(27)	*Me pongo nervioso y me confundo cuando hablo en la clase de inglés* [I get nervous and confused when I have to talk in English class]	Likert
Pre28	-	*Mientras voy a la clase de inglés me siento muy seguro y relajado* [I feel confident and relaxed when I go to English class]	Likert
Pre29	-	*Me pongo nervioso cuando no entiendo cada una de las palabras que dice el profesor* [I feel nervous when I don't understand every single word that the professor says]	Likert
Pre30	Post10(30)	*Me siento agobiado por el número de reglas que tienes que aprender para poder hablar el inglés* [I feel overwhelmed about the number of rules one needs to learn to be able to speak English]	Likert
Pre31	Post11(31)	*Temo que los otros alumnos se rían de mí cuando hablo el inglés* [I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I speak English]	Likert
Pre32	-	*Probablemente me sentiría cómodo entre hablantes nativos del inglés* [I would probably feel comfortable speaking to native English speakers]	Likert
Pre33	-	*Me pongo nervioso cuando el profesor de inglés me hace preguntas que no he preparado de antemano* [I get nervous when my English professor asks me questions that I haven't prepared beforehand]	Likert