Systematic Work with Speaking Skills and Motivation in Second Language Classes

May Olaug Horverak
Birkenes Learning Centre, Norway

Gerd Martina Langeland
Lillesand Upper Secondary School, Norway

Agnete Løvik
Kvadraturen Upper Secondary School, Norway

Sigrunn Askland
Arendal Upper Secondary School, Norway

Paweł Scheffler
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland

Aleksandra Wach
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland

Abstract

Learning a foreign language is more difficult for some students than others, and particularly speaking out loud in class may be a challenge. The aim of this study is to investigate the potential of a systematic approach to facilitate mastery, motivation and a supportive language learning environment, to limit foreign language anxiety. An intervention was carried out in different language learning contexts, including English classes in Norway and Poland and Spanish classes in Norway. The research material collected consists of student logs, student evaluations and self-reported data from a validated questionnaire on foreign language anxiety. The findings show that many students reported becoming more motivated and comfortable in class and that the method helped them work with strategies to overcome problems. Self-reported questionnaire data suggest that in two of three contexts, the foreign language anxiety level of the students decreased significantly during the intervention period. It may be difficult to generalise based on the findings presented here as the sample from each context is limited, the data is self-reported, the intervention period was limited and there is no control group. To strengthen the study's findings, triangulation of multiple data sources was used. To conclude, the five-step method presented in this study may be a useful strategy to facilitate developing motivation and creating a supportive learning environment in the language classroom. However, more longitudinal and extensive studies are needed to investigate the potential of the approach presented here further.

Keywords: learning strategies, foreign language anxiety, mastery, motivation, second language learning

Speaking is an essential communicative skill and thus a crucial element of L2 education. However, learners' inhibitions and negative emotions associated with speaking in the classroom, referred to as speaking anxiety (King & Smith, 2017), are a serious obstacle to effective L2 learning. In Krashen's language acquisition theory (1982), the role of the affective filter is emphasized – if a language learner feels anxious, learning will not progress. A pilot study from the project reported on here confirmed this anxiousness concerning speaking in class also in a Norwegian context (Horverak, Aanensen, Olsbu, Päplow, & Langeland, 2020), where one may assume that the level of proficiency is rather high (Education First, 2012). Many students were concerned about not speaking fluently or sounding sufficiently "English". Recognizing this problem in the context of teaching second or foreign languages in different contexts, a five-step method for learning languages was implemented, which included a series of discussion sessions aimed at creating a feeling of mastery and motivation.

The essence of the five-step method applied in this study is that the students identify what is important to them and what hinders them from speaking in a foreign language, and the class discusses possible solutions to obstacles. In this way, the students learn to take responsibility themselves for their own learning and development, and they also support each other to overcome the fear of speaking in a foreign language. Creating a pleasant and supportive environment is described as a basic motivational condition in relation to language learning, as well as promoting group cohesiveness through interaction and sharing, and developing a personal relationship with students (Dörnyei, 2001). This is at the centre of the five-step approach applied in the current study, which focuses on how students can develop strategies to overcome anxiety and improve their speaking skills in a foreign language.

The aim of this article is to investigate whether the five-step method applied may be a useful strategy to facilitate a) developing language learning strategies and motivation, b) creating a supportive learning environment in the language classroom and c) decreasing language anxiety. The method has been implemented in different language classes in upper secondary schools in Norway and Poland. The study investigates how working with the five-step method in class, both through discussions and individual reflections, influence the students' development in terms of feeling motivated, comfortable and in control in the language learning classroom, as well as possible changes in their language anxiety level. In the following, the language learning contexts included in this study are described and literature on foreign language anxiety is explored. Second, methodology and findings are described and discussed. The findings include student reflections on possible obstacles and strategies to apply when learning to speak a second language, as well as effects on foreign language anxiety. Finally, recommendations and conclusions are presented.

Language Learning Contexts

In both Norway and in Poland, English is taught from year 1 throughout the end of lower secondary school. In Poland, English has the status of being a foreign language, whereas in Norway, English has for some years had a special status as it is defined a second language in the curriculum (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2006). Still, it is not really an official language in Norway. Hence, it has a status somewhere in-between a second and a foreign language (Graddol, 1997; Rindal, 2012). In Norway, students choose to either attend vocational studies or general studies in upper secondary school, and one year of learning English is obligatory, after 10 years of English in primary and lower secondary school. Even though these are different types of study programmes with different aims, the English subject has the same curricula and exam in both contexts (Norwegian Directorate for Education and

Training, 2020). In Poland, the students also choose between vocational and general studies, and both learn English. There are higher requirements in general studies, and this context is quite like English classes in Norwegian upper secondary schools (Scheffler, Horverak, & Dominska., 2018). Only general studies students from Poland are included in this study, whereas both vocational and general studies students from Norway are included.

In addition to learning English, it is obligatory for students in Norway who want to complete general studies to learn a second foreign language, normally Spanish, German or French. It is voluntary to study a second foreign language in lower secondary school, but obligatory in general studies in upper secondary school. Spanish is the most popular language choice with 37% of students electing to study Spanish, 24% choosing to study German, and, 13% opting to study French (The Foreign Language Centre, 2021), but many students give up before they reach upper secondary school (Carrai, 2014). As all students attending general studies in upper secondary school must learn a foreign language in addition to English, many end up attending foreign language classes with low motivation, and they may not make the efforts necessary to learn a foreign language.

Research on Foreign Language Anxiety

There is much research on anxiety in relation to second language acquisition. This is also an important aspect in the current study. The notion of language anxiety includes both mental and physical symptoms:

> The feelings associated with language anxiety […] include tension, nervousness, worry, dread, upset, and similar terms. The physical dimension also is present – the heart races, the body sweats, the hands tremble, and there is a sinking feeling in the stomach. (MacIntyre and Gregersen, 2012, p. 195)

Anxiety is considered a major obstacle to overcome in learning to speak another language and being anxious may cause the student to avoid speaking and conveying difficult or personal messages in the target language, even though they may be talkative otherwise (Horwitz et al., 1986). An established understanding of the concept is found in Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Anxiety – scale (FLA-scale), which combines three various anxieties: Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation. Communication apprehension means a type of shyness or fear of talking to people. Test anxiety means that there is a fear of failure. Fear of negative evaluation concerns having expectations that others will give negative evaluations of one's performance. Other studies have questioned the construct proposed in the FLA-scale, as there is insufficient evidence to conclude that language anxiety is a unitary construct (Horwitz, 2017). This was not really Horwitz' concern either when developing the scale. Rather, she was concerned with having teachers acknowledge the importance of offering a less anxiety-inducing environment: "We don't need to thoroughly identify the components of Language Anxiety or understand the interactions among them before we can help anxious learners" (2017, p. 38).

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) can be related to the different basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Most often, FLA is tied with speaking, as this generally involves public evaluation, and it is the primary communication form in a classroom (King & Smith, 2017). Anxiety is also provoked in the case of learners at more advanced levels (Ewald, 2007; Horwitz, 1996; Tóth, 2011), and some students even report that the feeling of anxiety increases at the more advanced levels compared with earlier stages in their language learning. Feelings

of anxiety are related to perceptions of learning environments as challenging, perceived pressure to do well, fear of not meeting high expectations, doubts about one's own competence and concern about classmates' proficiency (Ewald, 2007; Tóth, 2011; Tóth, 2017). A study on the role of L1-use in the language classroom comparing a Norwegian and a Polish context shows results that confirm this tendency, that more proficient learners may be more anxious than students in contexts where less proficiency is expected (Scheffler et al., 2016). Surprisingly, Norwegian students, who are expected to be generally quite proficient in English (Education First, 2012), were more anxious about using the target language only in language classes compared with Polish students. This could be related to the fact that English has a status closer to a second language in Norway (Graddol, 1997; Rindal, 2012). Having problems mastering English proficiently could be quite embarrassing, adding stress to the language learning context.

Research on foreign language anxiety has also focused on giving evidence for correlations between language anxiety and test scores, and a negative correlation between anxiety and oral performance has been documented (Cheng et al., 1999; Hewitt & Stephenson, 2011; MacIntyre, 2017; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Phillips, 1992; Woodrow, 2006; Young, 1986). To what extent language anxiety influences performance may be influenced by the degree of anxiety. As pointed out by Şimşek and Dörnyei (2017), there are different types of foreign language anxiety. They list three main categories, a) anxiety as a personality trait, b) anxiety as a context-dependent construct, and c) anxiety as integrated in the life story. Depending on what type of reason lies behind the foreign language anxiety, different treatments may be needed. According to Oxford (2017), one solution to the problem of being an anxious language learner is to reclaim agency, meaning that learners understand their feelings and use these to guide their thinking and take action to control their own learning. Agency is a central concept in the five-step method applied in the current study, as this method is about reclaiming agency through identifying success factors and obstacles and taking steps to make a change in one's own situation (Langeland & Horverak, 2021).

Method

This study utilized a mixed method approach (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), combining qualitative and quantitative data on the student level. The central research question of the investigation was:

> How can a systematic approach to working with mastery and motivation contribute to creating a supportive language learning environment that limits foreign language anxiety?

An intervention was carried out over a period of 4-6 weeks, and the students filled in the Foreign Language Anxiety scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) before and after the intervention. An evaluation form with open and closed questions was also used after the intervention period. In addition, the students' reflections from logbooks were included in the qualitative data. All the collected data was anonymous.

Intervention

The intervention (see figure 1) included 3 to 4 sessions where students identified the following:

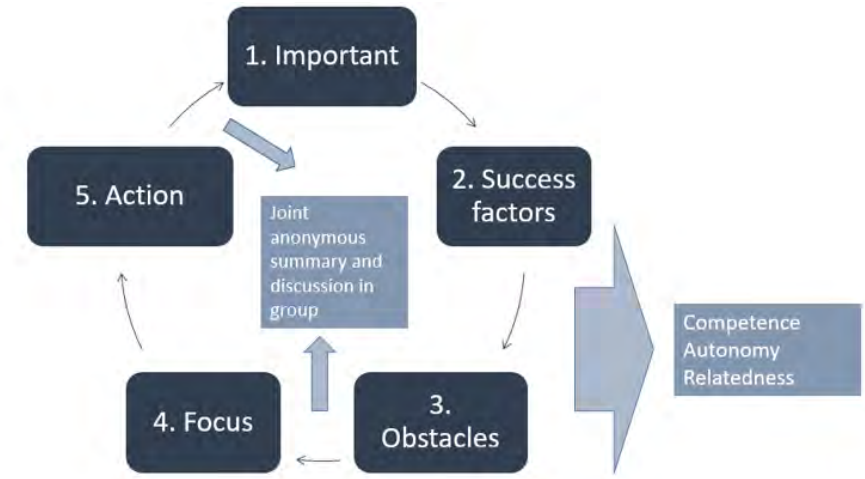
1) What is important to me when learning to speak English/Spanish?

2) What do I already master?
3) What hinders me from speaking English/Spanish?
4) What do I need to focus on?
5) What specifically will I do to keep this focus?

The intervention was carried out in L1 in Spanish classes, and in L2 in English classes, with translation to L1 when necessary.

In the first session, the students discussed questions 1-3, and then wrote anonymous individual answers to questions in logbooks that the teacher collected at the end of each session. The students chose a confidential code to identify their logbooks. At the start of the second session, the teacher summed up the anonymous reflections in class. Following this, the students discussed what they could do about possible obstacles to succeed at becoming better speakers of English or Spanish and gave examples to each other about how they could work to improve their speaking skills. The session ended with the students writing individual answers in their logbooks and the teacher collecting their reflections. In the following sessions, the students answered questions 4 and 5 repeatedly, and discussed further how they could improve their strategies.

Figure 1
The Five-Step Method (Horverak & Aanensen, 2019)



Data Collection and Analyses

The Foreign Language Anxiety scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) that was used in this study consists of 33 items with 5-point Likert scales from 1 to 5 (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree). The scale includes three related performance anxieties; communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Examples of items included in the scale are “I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class”, “I don’t worry about making mistakes in language class”, I tremble when I know that I’m going to be called on in language class” and “It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language”. In the analysis, tests of statistical significance were performed on the entire scale to determine whether there were any significant differences between pre- and post-intervention scores in three language learning contexts: Norwegian students learning English, Norwegian students learning Spanish and Polish students learning English.

In addition to filling in the FLA-scale, self-reported data on how the students perceived the method was collected. They reported on whether the method helped them find out what was essential in learning to speak English or Spanish, the extent to which the method motivated them, what they focused on, how closely they followed their plan, whether, and how, they became better at working with what is difficult, whether they felt more comfortable in class and whether they liked using the method. The items included in the questionnaire and results are presented in bar charts. The qualitative material in this study also comprised reflections from the students' logbooks, which had been thematically analysed inductively, meaning that the themes emerged from the material (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Sample

The participants were students from vocational and general studies in Norway and general studies in Poland. The Polish students were teenagers, and the Norwegian students were either teenagers or adult immigrants who studied English or Spanish at the upper secondary level (table 1). There was a total of 156 participants in the study, and data was collected from three different institutions.

The sample for each context was limited, and there was no control group, but qualitative research does not always require a large group of participants (Creswell, 2013, p. 157; Cohen et al., 2011, p. 162). The variety of the settings contributed to a complex, detailed understanding of the issue, central in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013, p. 48), which supported the validity of the study.

Table 1
Participants

Studies	Language	Year	Age	Students in class	Partici-pants
Vocational (Health and Care)**	English	1	Adults	15	15
Vocational (Restaurant and Food Processing)*	English	1	Adults	11	7
Vocational (Paramedics)	English	2	17-18	14	14
Vocational (Children and youth)*	English	2	17-18	17	11
Vocational (Restaurant and Food Processing)**	English	2	Adults	7	6
General studies	English	1	16-17	30	29
General studies*	Spanish	2	17-18	22	22
General studies	Spanish	1	15-16	25	23
General studies, Poland	English	1	15-16	32	29
Total number of students				173	156

Note: * The classes did not complete evaluations and/or FLA scales due to corona restrictions ** Adult immigrant classes, FLA-scale not filled in due to challenges with Norwegian.

As for English, there were five vocational studies classes, three of which were adult immigrant classes from Health and Care studies, year 1 and Restaurant and Food Processing, year 1 and 2. The Restaurant and Food Processing class was the same class over two years, and most of the students were the same. The other vocational classes consisted of students who specialised

in children and youth or were studying to become paramedics (year 2). There were also two first year general studies classes, one from Norway and one from Poland. The participants who studied Spanish were first- and second-year general studies students in Norway.

Findings

A thematic analysis is presented revealing what factors students considered to be crucial when learning to speak a foreign language and what they perceived to be their success factors and obstacles. In addition, the analysis presents what the students chose to focus on and types of strategies applied. The data from the English-classes and the Spanish-classes are presented separately. The students' evaluations answered the questions on whether the students felt that they had become more motivated and better at finding strategies, and whether they felt more comfortable in class. Finally, the results from the FLA-scale reveal how the intervention influenced the students' level of language anxiety.

Thematic Analysis of Students' Reflections in English

There are various themes present in the material from the student reflections, and the themes differ somewhat in the Norwegian (NO) and the Polish (PL) context (table 2). Similar items in the material were identified and grouped as themes, and these were chosen as they represented answers to questions concerning what students found important, what they considered they already mastered that could help them to learn speaking the foreign language, and what prevented them. In the Norwegian sample, many students mentioned that it is essential to practice or get the opportunity to speak in class (27), and this was only mentioned by three from the Polish sample. Some students reported that pronunciation is of significance (NO: 16, PL: 12), and fluency was also mentioned in the Polish data (6). Vocabulary was mentioned as crucial in both samples (NO 13, PL: 22) to succeed with speaking English. Understanding or listening to English was also mentioned by many Norwegian students (26), but only three Polish students. Grammar (NO: 11, PL: 19) and reading (NO: 7) were also fundamental aspects that were highlighted. Some Norwegian students also reflected on the importance of watching films or series (9) to improve their skills. In the vocational groups, the fact that English is a world language (9) was mentioned. In the Polish data, confidence was a prominent theme (18), and openness (9). Overcoming anxiety was also mentioned by four students.

Table 2
Themes in Student Reflections on Priorities, Success Factors, and Obstacles in Speaking in L2

Theme	Important		Success factors		Obstacles	
	NO	PL	NO	PL	NO	PL
Speaking/Practice	27	3	27	3	9	-
Pronunciation	16	12	3	4	8	3
Fluency	-	6	-	9	-	3
Listening/understanding/communication	26	3	26	2	2	2
Vocabulary	13	22	7	18	7	9
Grammar	11	19	7	17	18	9
Reading	7	-	20	-	1	-
Writing	-	-	9	-	2	-
Watching TV/films	9	-	30	6	-	-
Use social media/the internet	-	-	13	-	-	-
English as a world language	9	-	-	-	-	-
Ideas/content	-	1	-	5	-	3
Confidence	-	18	3	8	6	13
Anxiety (overcoming)	-	4	-	1	37	21
Openness	-	9	-	1	-	-
Mixing languages	-	-	-	-	3	-

Note: NO= Norwegian, n = 94; PL = Poland, n = 32.

When it comes to success factors, many Norwegian students reported that they are good at speaking English (27), without specifying what they meant by this, and they understand what others say (26). In the Polish sample, only three mentioned being good at speaking and two that they understand English well. Many of the Norwegian students reported that the fact that they watch TV or films (30) is a success factor as it helps them become better in English. Six Polish students reported the same and using the internet or social media was mentioned by several Norwegian students (13). Reading (20) was also mentioned several times by Norwegian students, and some also reported that they are good at writing English (9). Only a few Norwegian students mentioned vocabulary (7) grammar (7) and pronunciation (3) as success factors. In comparison, many Polish students listed vocabulary (18) and grammar (17) as success factors. Pronunciation was mentioned by four Polish students, and nine mentioned fluency in the English language as a success factor. Being confident was mentioned by only three Norwegian students, but by eight Polish students. Finding ideas or content was mentioned as a success factor by five Polish students.

Concerning obstacles, anxiety was clearly the dominant factor (NO: 37, PL: 21), and some also mentioned a lack of confidence (NO: 6, PL: 13), which is related to having anxiety to speak. Examples of the anxiety reported by some of the Norwegian students follow:

> *It is scary in front of the whole class, some laugh/tease, even though it is just for fun, it makes me uncertain. Being afraid of pronouncing words in the wrong way, or using the wrong words.*

> *I want to talk English, but I don't dare because I have a Norwegian accent, many grammar mistakes, and little vocabulary*.
>
> *I often start to studder if I am to speak or read in English.*
>
> *I am afraid to sound very Norwegian-English when pronouncing words*.
>
> *Afraid to say something wrong. Afraid that people will laugh out at me*.
>
> *Personally, it is knowing everyone hears my voice in the room, and my voice is the only voice in the room. Everyone listens to me and me only. It makes me nervous*.

Another, somewhat more serious reflection, also revealed low self-esteem in general:

> *I have managed to pull myself down and my parents have been a great help with that, telling me every day I won't succeed and I'm a failure, that there was a big chance that I had to repeat 10th grade because I'm so bad at everything.*

Another obstacle reported by many was grammar (NO: 18, PL: 9). Some Norwegian students mentioned that they did not get enough speaking practice (9). Other students struggled with pronunciation (NO: 8, PL: 3), or had insufficient vocabulary (NO: 7, PL: 9). The obstacles identified mainly referred to general difficulties, but also the challenge associated with having to learn two Germanic languages (Norwegian and English) at the same time was mentioned by some of the adult learners from the Norwegian context (3). In the Polish sample, some students mentioned problems with finding ideas (3) and achieving fluency (3) as obstacles.

Table 3
Students' Action Plans

Theme	Focus		Planned action 1	
	NO	PL	NO	PL
Speaking practice	14	-	40	15
Pronunciation	4	3	7	4
Speaking fluency	-	9	-	5
Listening	6	-	10	-
Vocabulary	22	18	13	12
Grammar	-	3	-	2
Reading	9	-	18	4
Writing	10	-	11	4
Watch TV/films	10	-	12	19
Use internet resources/apps	-	-	-	13
Recording	-	-	3	-
Thinking in English	-	-	-	10
Doing exercises	-	-	-	7
Overcome anxiety	4	7	-	3

Confidence	10	7	8	5

Note: NO= Norwegian, n = 94; PL = Poland, n = 32.

The students emphasized their desire to focus on skills that are vital to speech development in English. Many students reported that they wanted to focus on increasing their vocabulary (NO: 22, PL: 18) and practice speaking was mentioned by several Norwegian students (14). Other Norwegian students said that they would focus on writing (10), reading (9), watching films or series (10), listen to English in general (6), and improving their pronunciation (4). The Polish students also reported that they wanted to focus on pronunciation (3) and fluency (9). Quite a few students planned to focus on strengthening their confidence (NO: 10, PL: 7) and overcoming their anxiety (NO: 4, PL: 7).

Many students had plans to practice speaking (NO: 40, PL: 15), for example through gaming, communication via social media, practicing tongue twisters, speaking in safe surroundings, raising hands, and speaking in class. Others report that they will read (NO: 18, PL: 4), write (NO: 11, PL: 4), listen to English (NO: 10) and watch TV or films (NO: 12, PL: 19). Some wanted to work with strategies to improve their vocabulary (NO: 13, PL: 12) and some wished to practice how to pronounce words (NO: 7, PL: 4). Five Polish students mentioned practice speaking fluency and three Norwegian students mentioned specifically that they planned to record themselves speaking English to find out what they need to improve. Some of the students chose to try to be more confident (NO: 8, PL: 5), and one of the Norwegian students suggested "*I can also speak English with people I trust, friends and family, then I can become more confident*". In the Polish sample, 13 mentioned using internet resources or apps, ten reported that they wanted to try to think in English, seven reported that they would do exercises and three were going to work with overcoming anxiety.

After the second session, the students were to improve their action plans and make them more explicit. A Norwegian student with the action plan "*Finding more English words*" from the first session improved the plan to "*Learn at least 5 words every week. Making quizlet to the new words every week*". Another Norwegian student wrote "*Listen to podcasts in English*" in the first plan, and "*Listen to an English podcast episode every week, if there are some difficult words I don't know from before, I write them down in a book I have at home, and what they mean*". A final example shows that a Norwegian student improved the plan from "*Talking out loud to myself […] recording myself when talking*" to "*Narrating what I am doing every day after school [….] read some pages of a book out loud for myself every day and record it*". The revised plans reflected both growth in language, through more advanced vocabulary and sentences, and in organization, as they specified how they would organize their work with improving their speaking skills.

Thematic Analysis of Student Reflections in Spanish

In Spanish classes, the most important focus areas chosen to improve oral skills were to achieve good grades (5), work more with the subject (7), pay attention in class (3), find motivation (3), focus on oral skills (6) and improve vocabulary (3). As for success factors, meaning personality traits or skills that could potentially help the students improve their Spanish, the following are mentioned:

> *I have a good pronunciation.* (3)
>
> *I have a high ability to cram vocabulary.*

I have a good memory. (3)

I am able to compare Spanish and English" (4)

My vocabulary is good. (3)

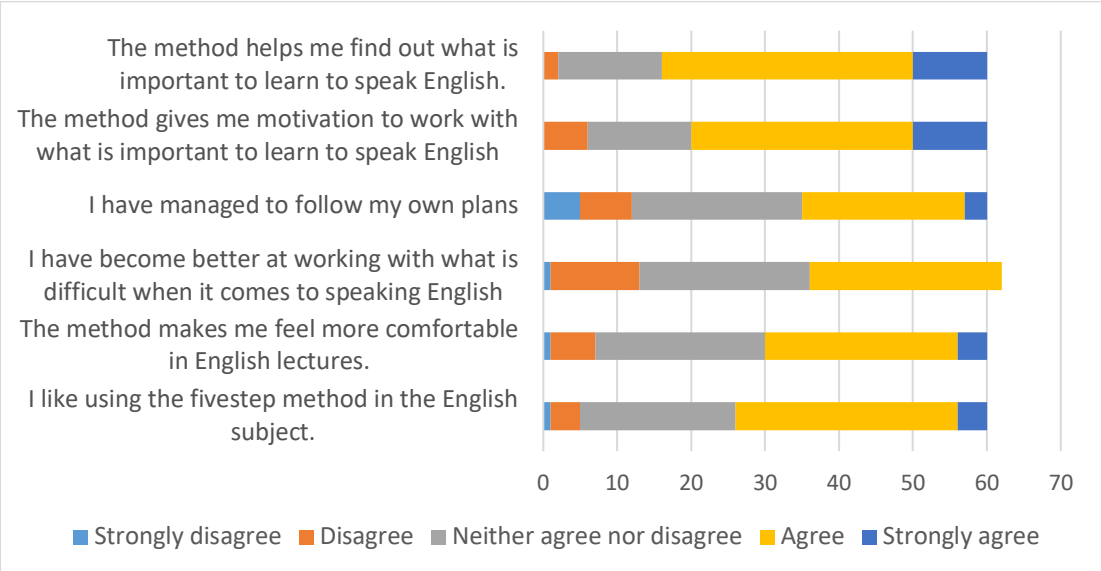
I have an extrovert personality. (3).

Concerning the obstacles encountered by the students when learning Spanish and which prevented them from speaking the language, the students mentioned poor grammar skills (20), struggles to comprehend the target language (3), lack of vocabulary (14) and lack of motivation (3). Regarding grammar, the ability to conjugate verbs and having command of grammatical rules were explicitly mentioned as needs. To improve their Spanish skills, the students wanted to focus on learning grammatical rules (22), improve vocabulary (16), speak more Spanish (7), be more "active" in class (3), watch films and other visual media (3), and achieve good grades (3). The strategies the students chose were to complete more homework (11) watch films, series, and other media (15), listen to music, podcasts and other audio media (7), work with grammar (7), speak more Spanish (6), read more Spanish (4) and write more Spanish (3).

Evaluations of the Approach in English Classes

The evaluations from English classes in Norway showed that many of the students appreciated the approach, and felt it was useful and motivating to apply the five-step method (figure 2). Of 60 students, 44 reported that they agree or strongly agree that the method assisted them in identifying significant aspects of English to be learned and 40 agree that the method has given them motivation.

Figure 2
English in Norwegian Upper Secondary School Classes, n = 60



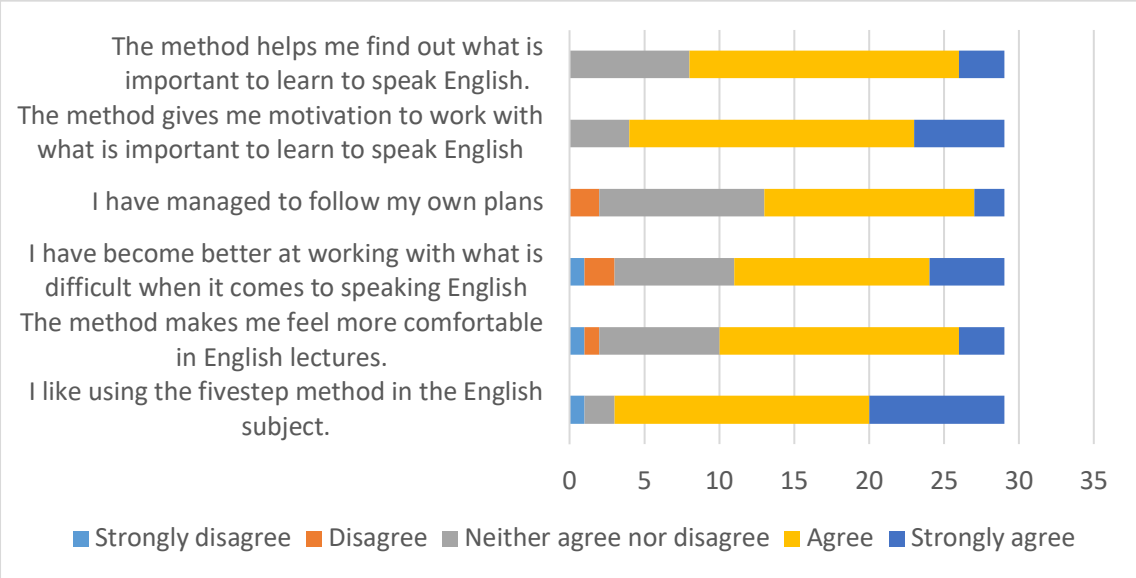
Twenty-five students reported having followed their own plans, and 26 have become better at working with what is difficult. In terms of learning environment, 30 students report that the method makes them more comfortable in English lectures, and 34 like using the five-step

method. Many students were uncertain concerning how they felt about the method, and only a few disagreed that the method is useful and motivating. The students also report having improved strategies to deal with language learning:

> "*I have understood what my obstacles are and found the «solution» to this problem.*
>
> *As I made a concrete plan on how to work with the language it is easier to actually do it.*
>
> *I have increased my English vocabulary, which makes it easier to speak English*.

The evaluation data from the Polish learners are also indicative of a positive attitude to the method.

Figure 3
English in a Polish Upper Secondary School Class, n = 29



The majority of the students either agreed or strongly agreed that the method is beneficial, which can perhaps be seen most clearly in the case of the last statement: 17 students agreed and 9 students strongly agreed that they liked using the five-step method in their English classes. Apart from this general statement, most specific issues were also seen as positively affected by the method. In particular, the students appreciated the impact of the method on their motivation to work on what is crucial to speak English, something 25 students agreed on, and 21 students agreed that the method helped them find out what is fundamental to the development of spoken English. Also, 16 students reported that they had been able to implement their plans, which often involved working on English vocabulary and overcoming the fear of speaking and making mistakes, as in the following comments:

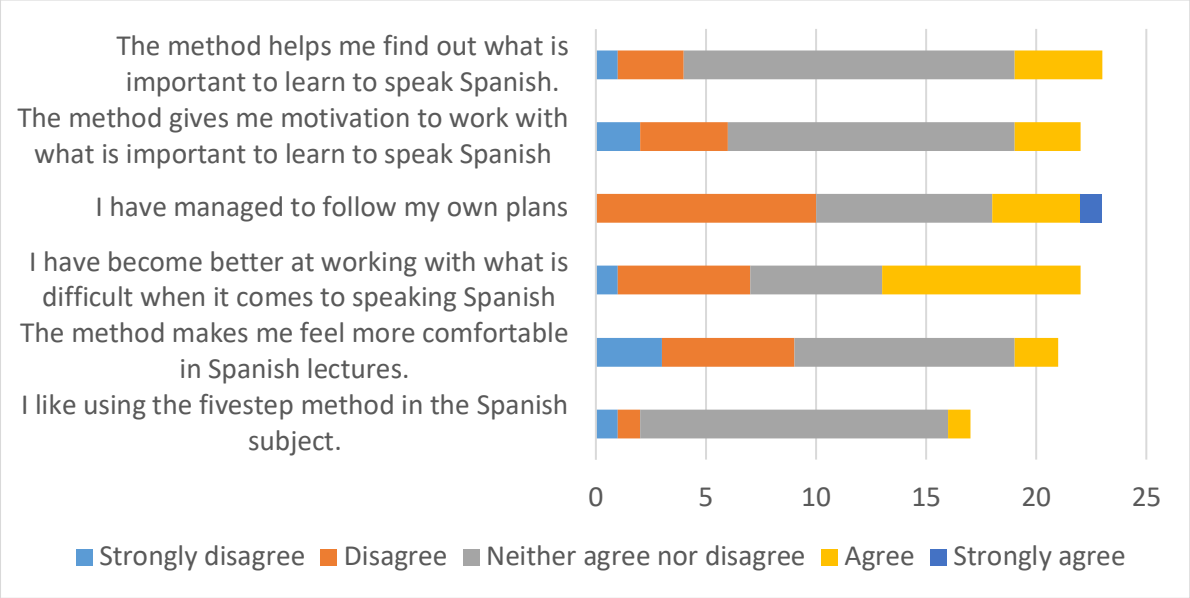
> *I worked on my fear of making mistakes, and on feeling shame at not being able to speak fluently.*
>
> *I tried not to think too much about correctness, about grammar*.

No students in the material, neither the Norwegian nor the Polish, reported specifically on how they worked with their fear of speaking and making mistakes.

Evaluations of the Approach in Spanish Classes

The results of the evaluation showed that the Norwegian students learning Spanish did not find the approach particularly valuable as a tool to improve their Spanish skills. Only four students agreed that the method helped them figure out what is important to learn to be able to speak Spanish, and only three students said that the method gave them motivation (figure 4).

Figure 4
Spanish in a Norwegian Upper Secondary School Class, n = 17-22.



Note: Year 2 students did not compete the evaluation due to COVID-19 restrictions.

On the other hand, the students openly admitted that they had not been able to follow their own plans to a great extent. There was no information about why they did not manage this. Only five students agreed that they had followed their plans. However, nine students agreed that they had become better at working with what is difficult. One of the students ended the evaluation with a positive reflection:

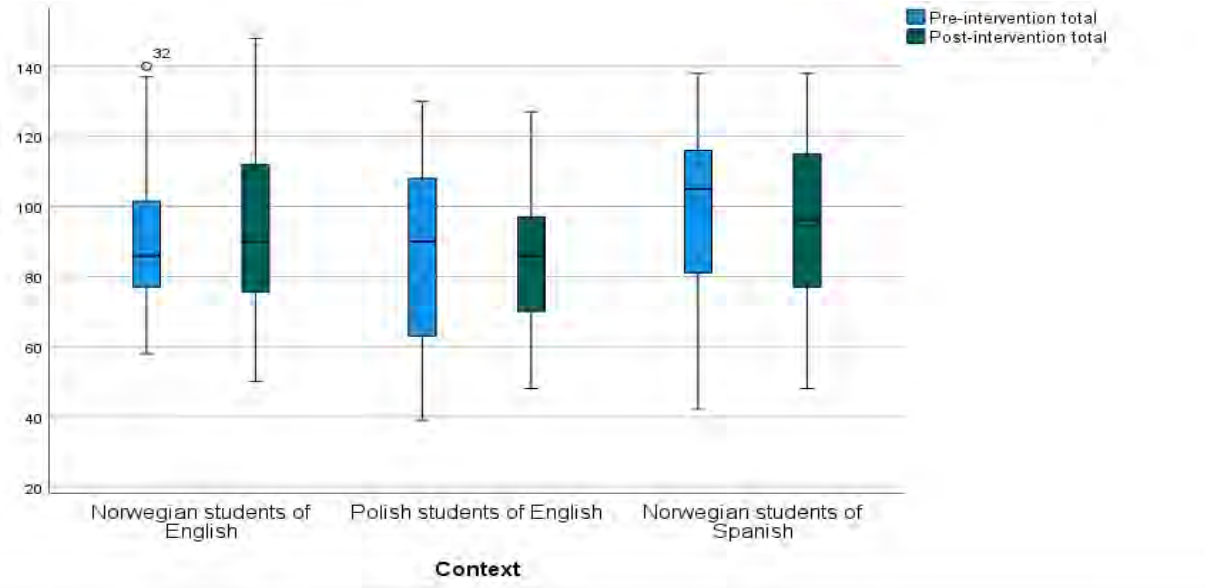
> *What motivates me is the joy that I feel. It gives me an extreme feeling of accomplishment. I would also very much like to use languages in my future studies. Right now, learning languages is my biggest and most fun hobby. I want to learn languages all my life, because when you know languages, you see things in new and different ways.*

Foreign Language Anxiety

The levels of foreign language anxiety as measured by the FLA questionnaire before and after the intervention are presented in Figure 5 below. Not all students who attended the sessions were present for both administrations of the questionnaire, and therefore, the plots are based on the following samples: the Norwegian Spanish learners: 18; The Norwegian English

learners: 31; The Polish English learners: 28. The minimum possible total score is 33, and the maximum is 165.

Figure 5
Distribution of Total Scores in the FLA Questionnaire



A Wilcoxon signed-rank test was performed on the pre- and post-intervention scores in each of the contexts to check for significant differences. The test revealed statistically significant differences in the Polish-English ($Z = 83.5$, $p = .011$) and the Norwegian-Spanish context ($Z = 27.5$, $p = .02$). No statistically significant difference was found for the Norwegian-English group ($Z = 277$, $p = .36$).

Discussion

In general, the results show that many students in English classes appreciated the five-step method applied in this study, and it helped them develop language learning strategies and motivation, as well as a greater degree of comfort in class. The method appears to have facilitated a supportive learning environment for several students. The FLA questionnaire indicates a significant decrease in the level of language anxiety for two of the three examined contexts. There was a significant change in the context of learning English in Poland and Spanish in Norway, but not in the context of learning English in Norway. Perhaps the difference in the two English learning contexts is related to the fact that English teaching and requirements are somewhat different in Norway compared with Poland (Scheffler et al., 2018).

Previous research shows that lower levels of anxiety are associated with increased levels of teacher support and enhanced student involvement in learning (Palacios, 1998, Horwitz, 2017). Applying the five-step method as presented in this study involves teacher support and student engagement, and this may be the reason why students report positively on the experience and effect of the intervention. Learners with language anxiety often feel a lack of agency. Yet, taking control of their own language learning process and applying a range of learning strategies may assist them in improving their feeling of agency, meaning their capacity to affect outcomes (Oxford, 2017).

One may wonder why there is such anxiety about speaking a foreign language in class. One hypothesis is that self and language are closely tied, and a threat to one of these is a threat to the other (Cohen & Norst, 1989). The student reflections showed that quite a few students felt anxious about speaking in class, which may be expressions of context-dependent anxiety (Şimşek & Dörnyei, 2017). Creating an open and safe atmosphere, as suggested by Dörnyei (2001), may be a solution to support these students in overcoming their fears about speaking out loud in class, and this is what the five-step method is about.

The student reflections also revealed that there was language anxiety in all contexts where English was taught. This was not a problem particularly for weaker students, all types of students seemed to be nervous about speaking out loud, or "*Not sounding like an Englishman*". This confirms previous findings from research, that anxiety is also a problem for learners at more advanced levels (Ewald, 2007; Horwitz, 1996; Tóth, 2011). The learners of Spanish classes in Norway, a language learning context where less proficiency is expected compared to that of English classes, are not as anxious as the learners in Norwegian English classes. This substantiates the idea that anxiety increases at the more advanced levels (Ewald, 2007; Tóth, 2011). A person may also have different anxiety profiles in different languages (Dewaele, 2002). Even though a student is anxious about speaking English, the same anxiety is perhaps not present in, for example, Spanish classes.

Recommendations

The five-step method presented in this study seems to have potential to create a supportive learning atmosphere in language classes and to support students in learning a foreign language. Some psychological aspects may appear, like high levels of anxiety. These should be delegated to other professionals than to a teacher.

As this study has clear limitations, more extensive and longitudinal studies are needed to explore the potential of the five-step method further. As much language anxiety research has focused on defining the construct and finding correlations between anxiety and outcome (Horwitz, 2017), there is a need for more research focused on how to help anxious learners. To quote Horwitz, there are some logical steps to reduce anxiety: "talk with our students, listen to their stories, share our own difficulties, let them have more control over their learning and give them opportunities for genuine communication in a safe environment" (2017, p. 44). These steps are integrated in the five-step method presented in this study.

Conclusions

This study shows that applying the five-step method presented here may support some students in developing language learning strategies and motivation, as well as contributing to a supportive learning environment. Considering the results, visibility of collective challenges may lead to individual and collective efforts, which again may contribute to general safety and relief of anxiety. However, there are limitations with this study. To strengthen reliability, multiple data sources were used in the analyses. Despite limitations, the analyses and reflections presented here may elicit some aspects concerning working with speaking skills and motivation in language classes that are interesting for stakeholders, such as teachers or teacher training educators.

Acknowledgements

This project has been supported by the Norwegian Directorate of Health and the Agder county through the programme Healthpromoting Kindergartens and Schools (HBS Agder).

References

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Carrai, D. (2014). *Fremmedspråk på ungdomstrinnet: en analyse av motivasjon og andre faktorer involvert i elevenes fagvalg og tilfredshet med faget [Foreign language learning in lower secondary school: an analysis of motivation and other factors involved in students' choice of subject and satisfaction with the subject]*. (Doctoral dissertation, the University of Oslo).

Cheng, Y, Jorwitz, E. K. & Schallert, D. L. (1999). Language anxiety: Differentiating writing and speaking components. *Language Learning, 49,* 417–446. https://doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.00095

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Cohen, Y. & Norst, M. J. (1989). Fear, dependence and loss of self-esteem: Affective barriers in second language learning among adults*. RELC Journal 20*, 61–77. https://doi.org/10.1177/003368828902000206

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Dewaele, J.-M. (2002). Psychological and sociodemographic correlates of communicative anxiety in L2 and L3 production. *International Journal of Bilingualism 6*(1), 23–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/13670069020060010201

Dörnyei, Z, (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom.* Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667343

Education First. (2012). *EF English Proficiency Index* (EF EPI) (3rd ed.). http://www.ef.no/epi/

Ewald, J. D. (2007). Foreign language learning anxiety in upper-level classes: Involving students as researchers. *Foreign Language Annals, 40*(1), 122–142. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2007.tb02857.x

The Foreign Language Centre. (2021). *Fagvalgstatistikk [Subject Choice Statistics].* https://www.hiof.no/fss/sprakvalg/fagvalgstatistikk/index.html#Valg%20av%20FS%20US

Graddol, D. (1997). *The future of English.* The British Council.

Hewitt, E. & Stephenson, J. (2011). Foreign language anxiety and oral exam performance: A replication of Phillips's MLJ study. *The Modern Language Journal, 96*(2), 170–189. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2011.01174.x

Horverak, M. O. & Aanensen, M. (2019). Decreased motivation and increased mental illness among young people – a need for teaching life mastery skills in school. The 7th European Conference on Education, Independence & Interdependence, official conference proceedings, pp. 239–251. https://papers.iafor.org/submission52464/

Horverak, M. O., Aanensen, M., Olsbu, I., Päplow, T. M. & Langeland, G. M. (2020). Systematic motivation work in the language classroom – an action research study from southern Norway. *Nordic Journal of Modern Language Methodology, 8*(1), 55–80. https://doi.org/10.46364/njmlm.v8i1.484

Horwitz, E., Horwitz, M. & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal 70*(2), 125–132. https://doi.org/327317

Horwitz, E. K. (2017). On the misreading of Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) and the need to balance anxiety research and the experiences of anxious language learners. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications* (pp. 31-50). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783097722-004

Horwitz, E. K. (1996). Even teachers get the blues: Recognizing and alleviating non-native teachers' feelings of foreign language anxiety. *Foreign Language Annals, 29,* 365–372. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1996.tb01248.x

King, J. & Smith, L. (2017). Social anxiety and silence in Japan's tertiary foreign language classrooms. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications* (pp. 91–109). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783097722-007

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition.* Pergamon Press.

Langeland, G. M. & Horverak, M. O. (2021*). Hvordan legge til rette for mestring, medvirkning og motivasjon [How to facilitate for mastery, participation and motivation].* Cappelen Damm Akademisk.

MacIntyre, P. D. (2017). An overview of language anxiety research and trends in its development. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications* (pp. 11–30). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783097722-003

MacIntyre, P. D. & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language Learning, 41*, 85–117. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1994.tb01103.x

MacIntyre, P. D. & Gregersen, T. (2012). Emotions that facilitate language learning: The positive broadening power of the imagination. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 2*(2), 193–213. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2012.2.2.4

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. (2020). *Læreplan i engelsk [English subject curriculum]* (ENG01-04). https://www.udir.no/lk20/eng01-04?lang=nob

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. (2006). *Læreplanverket for Kunnskapsløftet midlertidig utgave [The subject curriculum for the knowledge promotion temporary edition].* http://www.udir.no/upload/larerplaner/Fastsatte_lareplaner_for_Kunnskapsloeftet/Kunnskapsloftet_midlertidig_utgave_2006_tekstdel.pdf

Oxford, R. L. (2017). Anxious language learners can change their minds: Ideas and strategies from traditional psychology and positive psychology. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications* (pp. 177–197). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783097722-011

Palacios, L. M. (1998). *Foreign language anxiety and classroom environment: A study of Spanish university students.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Texas at Austin).

Phillips, E. M. (1992). The effects of language anxiety on students' oral test performance and attitudes. *The Modern Language Journal, 76*, 14–26. https://doi.org/329894

Rindal, U. (2012). *Meaning in English, L2 attitudes, choices and pronunciation in Norway*. (Doctoral dissertation, the University of Oslo).

Scheffler, P., Horverak, M.O. & Dominska, A. (2018). English Instruction in Polish and Norwegian Secondary Schools: Convergent Goals, Divergent Means. In M. Pawlak & A. Mystkowska-Wiertelak (Eds.), *Challenges of Second and Foreign Language Education in a Globalised World: Studies in Honor of Krystyna Droździał-Szelest* (pp. 131–149). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66975-5_9

Scheffler, P., Horverak, M.O., Krzebietke, W. & Askland S. (2016). Language backgrounds and learners' attitudes to own-language use. *ELT Journal Advance Access, 71*(2), 197–217. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccw058

Şimşek, E. & Dörnyei, Z. (2017). Anxiety and L2 Self-Images: The 'anxious self'. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications* (pp. 51-69). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783097722-005

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research: integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioral sciences*. SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483348858.n9

Tóth, Zs. (2017). Exploring the relationship between anxiety and advanced hungarian EFL learners' communication experiences in the target language: A study of high vs low-anxious learners. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications* (pp. 156–174). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783097722-010

Tóth, Zs. (2011). Foreign language anxiety and advanced EFL learners: An interview study. *Working Papers in Language Pedagogy, 5*, 39–57.

Woodrow, L. (2006). Anxiety and speaking English as a second language. *RELC 37*(3), 308–328. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688206071315

Young, D. J. (1986). The relationship between anxiety and foreign language oral proficiency ratings. *Foreign Language Annals, 19*, 439–445. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1986.tb01032.x

Corresponding author: May Olaug Horverak
Email: may.olaug.horverak@birkenes.kommune.no