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Grado en Estudios Ingleses

TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

THE IMPACT OF ANXIETY ON ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE LEARNING

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2020-2021



## ABSTRACT

Contrary to popular belief, anxiety is a key factor in foreign language learning which hinders its correct acquisition to a great extent and makes the learning process itself much more complicated. Alongside with anxiety, Emotional Intelligence (EI) also plays an important role in this field, as it manages humans' emotions and having a low EI would likewise impair the correct development of language skills. The main purpose of this paper is to cast light on this issue, which has been considered a mystery to date given the scarcity of research done on it to know which areas of expertise in English are the most affected. Apart from considering theories by prestigious authorities, an own work survey is also carried out to have a better insight into this issue. The potential solutions to this problem will be given by Cognitive Psychology in speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills.

**KEYWORDS:** anxiety disorder, foreign language anxiety, English language skills, emotional intelligence, cognitive psychology

## RESUMEN

Al contrario de lo que se suele pensar, la ansiedad es un factor clave en el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera que imposibilita su correcta adquisición en gran medida y hace en sí el proceso de aprendizaje mucho más complicado. Además de la ansiedad, la Inteligencia Emocional (IE) también juega un papel importante en este campo ya que gestiona las emociones de los humanos por lo que una baja IE imposibilitaría la correcta adquisición de competencias en una lengua. El objetivo principal de este trabajo es arrojar luz sobre este problema que ha sido hasta la fecha un misterio dada la escasez de investigaciones que se han hecho para saber cuáles son las competencias más afectadas en inglés. Además de tener en cuenta las opiniones de autoridades prestigiosas, se llevará a cabo una encuesta de elaboración propia para tener una mejor perspectiva de este asunto. Las posibles soluciones a este problema vendrán de la mano de la Psicología Cognitiva en las competencias orales, escritas, auditivas y lectoras.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** trastorno de ansiedad, ansiedad en el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera, competencias lingüísticas en inglés, inteligencia emocional, psicología cognitiva



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## **1. Introduction**

Learning a language can be a really difficult task to accomplish given the various aspects and skills that a person has to acquire and, contrary to popular belief, it is not always directly dependent on the learner's Intelligence Quotient, as experts have proved over time. For this very same reason and roughly speaking, educators and parents have commonly attributed bad academic performance at school to either a lack of interest on the part of the student or they were simply regarded as incompetent in this area. However, there are many other external factors which are crucial to master a language like English such as psychological or affective issues, anxiety or Emotional Intelligence which could hinder the skill development of a potential learner even when their intelligence works at full capacity. Therefore, this paper will examine this issue in depth through many authorities in this field in order to cast light on a still mysterious matter whose functioning and effects are to a great extent unknown. Finding potential solutions to this problem is necessary for anxiety sufferers to acquire language skills correctly in the different areas of expertise, which are speaking, writing, listening, and reading respectively.

## **2. Conceptual approach**

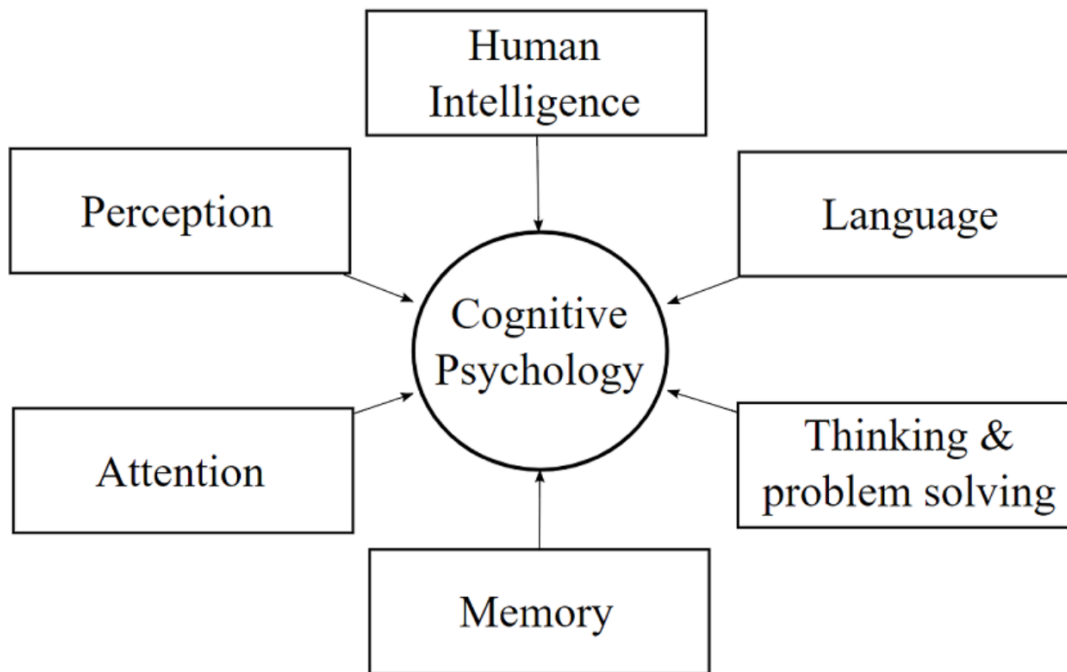
This section will focus on several definitions given by different authors and associations to better understand the nature of anxiety as well as how psychology can help people to overcome certain mental disorders such as anxiety. It is also important to bear in mind the perceptions of some psychologists to have a global overview of this issue with a view to solving this mental disorder.

### **2.1. Definition of psychology**

The scientific study of the mind and how it influences behaviour. (Oxford Dictionary)

## 2.2. Definition of cognitive psychology

Cognitive psychology is the scientific study of the mind as an information processor. Cognitive psychologists try to build up cognitive models of the information processing that goes on inside people's minds, including perception, attention, language, memory, thinking, and consciousness. (Simply Psychology)



Sovann, M. (2019, 4 Jun). *How Cognitive Psychology Can Improve Blog Content* [Mind Map]. Return On Now. <https://returnonnow.com/2019/06/how-cognitive-psychology-can-improve-blog-content/>

## 2.3. Definition of anxiety

According to the American Psychiatric Association, anxiety is a normal reaction to stress and can be beneficial in some situations. It can alert us to dangers and help us prepare and pay attention. Anxiety disorders differ from normal feelings of nervousness or anxiousness

and involve excessive fear or anxiety. Anxiety disorders are the most common of mental disorders and affect nearly 30 percent of adults at some point in their lives. But anxiety disorders are treatable, and a number of effective treatments are available. Treatment helps most people lead normal productive lives. (American Psychiatric Association)

#### **2.4. Definition of language learning process**

Language Learning: A Shared Responsibility. All students can be successful learners. Responsibility for language learning is shared by students, parents, teachers, and the community. Students require ongoing opportunities to use language in its many forms. Opportunities to learn language occur first at home and are extended as children move into the larger community. Schools provide environments where students continue to develop language knowledge, skills, and strategies to achieve personal, social, and academic goals. (Manitoba Education)

#### **2.5. Definition of Emotional Intelligence**

According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), "Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth."

### **3. Aim of this paper and methodology**

This section will be devoted to explaining the main goal that wants to be achieved with this piece of work in relation to anxiety issues solving as well as the different methodologies followed to carry this study out, always abiding by authorities in psychology and education.



## **Aim of this paper**

The aim of this paper can be divided into generic and specific purposes, given the different targets which want to be presented and achieved.

First of all, and as for the generic aim of this paper, it will be based on the presentation of the more theoretical aspects of language learning anxiety as it is one of the big unknown issues nowadays, given its lack of study and dedication. It is crucial for educators and students to become acquainted with this topic before moving onto more hands-on work.

The second aim of this paper can well be referred to as the more practical focus of it. The main purpose here will be to provide potential anxiety sufferers with essential tools to better deal with anxiety and anxiousness in relation to language learning anxiety. To accomplish this goal, the branch of psychology that this study will make use of is Cognitive Psychology, given the fact that it has proved to be successful in solving or, at least, in alleviating anxiety symptoms through the modification of erroneous conduct or thinking.

## **Methodology**

To develop this paper and given the fact that it is linked to anxiety issues in relation to English language learning, the latest scientific and linguistic findings and evidence will be considered, always abiding by expert opinion and the investigations which have been carried out in this area of expertise.

The main focus of this paper are students and how anxiety affects them when learning English as a second language. Therefore, to support this research, it will be necessary to analyse the findings of experts in this matter, such as psychologists and educationalists. They are, broadly speaking, the most faithful source as they not only can offer a feasible solution to this problem but also know the student's needs first-hand. It is likewise true that teachers themselves can experiment anxiety, but the focus of this paper will be students.

Furthermore, the most important theories in relation to anxiety will be compared to give the reader a wider view of this issue, which will also come in useful when moving onto more hands-on knowledge. Another approach of this paper will be Emotional Intelligence as an ability different from anxiety, which will be considered as well given its relevance in language learning.

Moreover, a survey will be carried out in order to corroborate the above-mentioned theories by different authorities. The survey will be mainly based on the four fields of expertise in English, this is, speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills to get to know better where students with anxiety fail the most. Fifty students will participate in this survey, men, and women in equal shares whose ages will range from 25-30 years old to make sure they have already had contact with English for a long time. What's more, the survey will also include graphs of different types to better illustrate the percentage of students having a certain problem in a specific area of expertise to find the appropriate solutions to improve their condition.

Lastly, this paper will also analyse the language learning process from the perspective of Cognitive Psychology, which has proved to be able to help many people to overcome their fears and mental disorders by modifying their way of thinking and mistakenly apprehended conducts. Cognitive Psychology offers a wide range of useful tools to mitigate the effects of anxiety or low emotional intelligence to keep them at bay. Therefore, a section with potential solutions to these problems will be included as well for English learners to resort to.

#### **4. Emotional intelligence and its repercussions on language learning according to Goleman, Gardner, Mayer and Salovey**

Many people used to wonder whether there is a real link between Emotional Intelligence and language learning, and as experts such as Márquez, Martin and Brackett (2006) have

proved, the answer is a resounding yes. According to Daniel Goleman (1995) there are five key factors which Emotional Quotient (EQ) consists of: self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, social skills, and motivation. All these aspects play an important role in language learning, given the fact that otherwise learners would not be able to develop their skills correctly and they could be overcome with negative feelings derived from their apprehended emotions. Depending on the nature of the above-mentioned emotions, people can associate certain activities with passion, joy, fear, repulsion and so on.

The human brain has undergone an incredibly huge change since our primitive ancestors came to life for the very first time. At the beginning, human beings just had at their disposal the brainstem, whose only function is to guarantee the person's survival against external dangers; the brainstem cannot control thinking or learning at all. Nonetheless, over time the brain slowly enhanced its functions and nerve cells to develop into a more complex organ, causing the limbic system, which hosts emotions, to appear and develop as well. The limbic system brought about essential changes in our brains, as it meant the arrival of two indispensable tools: the capacity of learning and memory that make it possible for humans to learn languages and communicate with others. This was an absolute revolutionary advance in human history. Without this emotional development and the neocortex, languages would not exist since they provided human beings with cognition and the capacity of reasoning.

It is also important to mention that the actual relation between anxiety disorders and emotional intelligence consists of the inability of people with low EQ to manage anxiety properly. It has been commonly thought that it was anxiety that caused people to have a low EQ, but it actually works the other way round. It can well be said that they feed one another back and they both impede the correct functioning of language learning. In the same way, emotional intelligence is connected with the management of a person's affective life.

Contrary to popular belief, the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) is not the only skill a learner needs to be able to acquire in a language to master all the competences it requires. Emotional Intelligence is also crucial to learn a language and is completely unrelated to IQ, being EQ rather associated with anxiety issues.

As experts have proved over time, emotional intelligence is not only a key factor to have in the working world but also to perform any task which requires certain degree of skill to solve daily problems, including the learning process of a language, in this case, English.

It is closely related to anxiety disorders due to the fact that it causes the sufferer to be insecure and with low self-esteem and for that very same reason, it is essential to explain its functioning and the way it affects language learning in its various competences, being it one of the many factors which might hinder the learning process, thus making it more difficult and slower.

Emotional intelligence is directly related to the way people deal with problems, whether they are difficult or simple, and that's why those who have higher emotional intelligence are more likely to be successful in the different areas of expertise in a language. Academic achievement is more influenced by EQ rather than by IQ, given that it increases the chances of a learner of managing their stress levels and anxiousness better, as well as controlling their changes in mood to some extent, thus not letting them interfere in their language skills.

Having said this, learners with higher EQ will be, in general terms, more comfortable when expressing themselves, and this is of great importance to be understood when trying to convey the appropriate message in a foreign language. Moreover, they are more capable of expressing their feelings openly and this way, they can feel better with themselves. This also allows them to have fewer negative feelings such as fear, embarrassment, or guilt among others, which are so often in anxiety disorders. When learning a language, avoiding having these problems is key to communicating with others and to express oneself correctly

either in an oral way or in writing format. Last but not least, learners with higher EQ will have more motivation which, apart from boosting their self-confidence, will also make them see failures in a more positive way and not as the end or as irreparable.

On the other hand, learners with less EQ or deeply influenced by anxiety will be less willing to learn a language or their capability will at least be reduced. This group of people is more likely to incriminate themselves and refuse to take responsibility for their acts, which makes them be, in a way, less mature. This is a problem which can clearly impede the process of learning a language since they will not listen to others nor to themselves. In addition to this, they do not usually trust themselves, which makes them be insecure and defensive and is really important when learning a language to gain confidence in oneself and to be able convey a message in the right way. The acceptance of possible mistakes and being willing to improve one's skills in a language are crucial factors to learn to be a good listener.

So far, it should be clear that not only the Intelligence Quotient or memory matter when a person is to learn a language. Schools and ordinary people have commonly thought that learning English was just about memorizing grammar and studying hard, but it actually takes much more than that, and Emotional Intelligence plays an important role as well.

Even though having high EQ is not compulsory to be successful in a language, it will make the process much easier for learners. The best possible solution might be to seek to solve anxiety itself, but that will be dealt with later on. However, taking language learning as a process of transformation instead of as memorizing grammar and sounds will be probably be much more motivating. In general terms, learning a language makes a person develop new skills as well as their inner world, making them able to communicate with more people and having a much wider range of vocabulary to do so, which at the same time also helps in the development of the brain.

## 5. The influence of anxiety disorder on the language learning process

### 5.1. Theoretical frame

Nowadays, learning languages is considered to be one of the main factors which trigger anxiety, being it even more stressful than the rest of subjects, as Fernando D. Rubio Alcalá states in *La Ansiedad en el Aprendizaje de Idiomas*. It might be due to the fact that achieving success in a language is a slow and gradual process, and, therefore, learners will never derive benefits from them immediately. Learning a language requires perseverance and effort on the part of the student for it to produce results.

The current pace of life makes students suffer from anxiety owing to the constant and fast changes that society has to undergo. Rojas (1989:18) describes this situation as follows: *“Hemos pasado de los conflictos a la era de la ansiedad y la depresión. Se han ido entronizando la apatía, la dejadez y una especie de neutralidad asfixiante”*. This metaphor that Rojas presents here illustrates perfectly how in this era, society has another war to win: the one against stress and anxiety issues. It is also important to highlight the fact that language learners are also deeply influenced by technology nowadays, since they communicate with others through computers, smartphones, etc. and paradoxically, the more they use it, the more isolated they are. This is so because real communication among people has lost its relevance and the use of technological devices only makes us feel lonelier.

Another anxiety trigger among language learners is the increasing competitiveness at schools instead of collaboration. These days students struggle to get the highest score in the class without considering that working alongside with their classmates is much worthier and satisfying. The general atmosphere at schools makes this issue worsen, as technology keeps advancing and teachers demand that their students study harder and harder. This can be a double-edged sword in fact because students will not only try to compete against their own classmates, but they will also be more likely to become selfish, thus not being able to develop their social skills correctly, as well as the above-mentioned emotional intelligence.

Teachers also have to experience this stress because of the quick changes they have to adapt to. They must be as effective as possible at the lowest cost and this makes them work under a great deal of pressure.

According to Maley (1999), globalization is especially important in the English language since it is the means by which everyone communicates on the internet and the main scientific language as well. Moreover, the fast changes in the technological world directly affect teachers who used to guide themselves through books and now have to adapt to a never-ending changing technology. This may cause them to feel outdated and insecure and it is clearly one of the anxiety triggers. It is also crucial to mention that if teachers suffer from anxiety given this situation, they will not be able to teach students correctly and, consequently, English learners will be likely to suffer from it as well.

### **5.1.1 Affective factors in anxiety**

Earlier on in this paper, there was a detailed explanation of the relation between emotional intelligence and anxiety and how they feed each other back, being a low EQ a potential factor in the increase of the chances of suffering from anxiety disorders.

To study how anxiety works when learning English, it is also important to pay attention to the affective factor, since it also causes anxiety and hinders the process of learning English. This is not a newly discovered relation at all, since back in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the philosopher Saint Augustin already explained how important the affective factor is. To illustrate this, he explained his aversion to learning Greek as a child. Given the fact that he disliked it, he says that the key to succeeding in learning a foreign language is to be moved by curiosity and interest, two affective factors, instead of being guided by fear of teachers or by academic pressure. Later research, such as that of Bless & Fiedler (2006), shows that affect, commonly thought to be completely unrelated to English learning, is actually closely

associated with cognition and memory, as well as with the way people think. To learn a language, a person cannot do without these aptitudes.

In the same way, the different affective variables are crucial when learning English because they are directly linked to emotions and to the motivation of the students. Without them, experts have proved that the brain does not work properly and consequently, students will have a higher predisposition to academic failure in English learning. Scovel (1978:140) describes it as: *“It is not a simple unitary construct, but a cluster of affective states influenced by factors which are intrinsic and extrinsic to the foreign language learner”*. According to this, the climate of tension at schools because of the anxiety caused makes teachers and students be often confronted and, for this reason, the affective factor, very important to learn English properly, disappears.

### **5.1.2 Anxiety disorder – when it is not related to academic factors**

To better understand what anxiety itself is, this is, when it is separate from other external factors, it is important to provide an explanation of its pure nature.

At the beginning of this paper, a definition of anxiety was already given by The American Psychiatric Association and now a more in-depth analysis of its functioning will be developed. According to Spielberg (1983:27) *“Anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system”*. As it can be deduced from this statement, anxiety lacks an objective background, and it depends on the person’s perception and degree of self-awareness. Moreover, as Davies (1986) states, anxiety causes vagueness, which means that the sufferer’s statements will lack objectivity, as anxiety itself is uncertain as well.

Besides, it is necessary to distinguish between fear and anxiety, which have commonly been considered to be the same, but they operate on different stages indeed. Whereas fear is



a more specific feeling and is objective because it reacts to actual external dangers (Rojas, 1989), anxiety lacks a real object, and it is subjective, vague, and unspecific (May 1977:205). The main underlying problem of this issue is the fact that a person can combat fear, as it is something specific and real, but anxiety sufferers cannot overcome their disorder in an easy way, given its inaccurate nature. That's why, more often than not, anxiety lingers over time.

Although the causes of this condition have commonly been unknown, there are some factors which will predispose people to suffer it. According to MedlinePlus, the possible causes might be related to genetics, stress factors, brain biological or chemical aspects or even the environment a person lives in. Physical symptoms could also trigger anxiety, such as dizziness, shortage of breath, palpitations, etc. Furthermore, other external factors like drug intake or affective issues could cause it too. Although this website states that there are no real differences between sexes, Clark and Beck, the main authorities in Cognitive Psychology, claim there is a higher incidence of anxiety on women. Inconclusive as these results are, Craske (2003) alleges that it could be due to the fact that they are more vulnerable because of negative affectivity, differences in their social roles in which they are forced to be more dependent than men or because they tend to be less assertive than men, since they try to control every challenge.

### **5.1.3 Anxiety symptoms**

As it could not be otherwise, a list of the most common anxiety symptoms will be provided, according to their type. Recognizing them is crucial to understand how anxiety disorders affect learning English. According to Rojas (1989) there are five different types of anxiety symptoms: physical, psychological, behavioural, intellectual, and assertive. Only the most relevant to the English learning process will be mentioned, given that they are a hindrance.

Noteworthy physical symptoms that will not allow the person to concentrate and that in some cases might be a medical emergency:

- Tachycardia and palpitations
- Breathing difficulty
- Blood vessel constriction
- Excessive sweating
- General trembling
- Blood-pressure increase
- Blurred vision

As it is obvious, an English student who has to sit an exam, do an oral presentation, etc. and is suffering from any of these symptoms will have great difficulty in carrying it out.

As for the psychological symptoms, they consist of almost a countless list but only those that affect more directly to English learning will be included, (Rubio, 1995:26):

- Concern and/or worry
- Distress
- Sensation of threat
- Insecurity
- Vagueness
- Fear of losing control
- Weakness

All these psychological symptoms, which are very common to anxiety disorders, make it almost impossible for the ones who suffer from it to accomplish the tasks they have to do. For that very same reason, later on in the paper the possible solutions to this problem will be tackled from the point of view of cognitive psychology.

With regard to the behavioural symptoms, it can be seen in a person's gestures and conduct (Rubio 1995:26; Rojas, 1989:82):

- Astonishment
- Attempt to stop body trembling
- Changes in tone
- Difficulty in acting
- Constant alertness

All these aspects make the person be even more nervous since they are aware of their symptoms and feel unable to solve them. It is likewise very common to fear that other people realize these strange behavioural patterns.

Observing cognitive symptoms is also crucial to find a solution to anxiety. The most common ones are (Rubio, 1995:27):

- Negative expectations
- Incorrect interpretations of reality
- Distorted thinking
- Memory problems
- Inefficiency
- Generalizations, exaggerations, and absolutist thinking
- Unfounded suspects

The general idea of these symptoms is that the learner will have a negative predisposition to carry their tasks out and this will result in lack of motivation. If their thinking is also distorted and accompanied by memory problems, the language learning process will be seriously affected.

Last but not least, among all the advantages that learning English has, the development of one's social skills is one of them. However, anxiety also affects assertiveness, this is, the capability of a person to express themselves correctly with the appropriate words. The most common assertive symptoms are (Rojas, 1989:89; Rubio, 1995:28):

- Inability to start a conversation
- Difficulty in discussing certain topics
- Having a mental blank when having to answer or to ask a question
- In general terms, difficulty in talking in front of other people or to lead a conversation

From these symptoms, the main deduction could be that it affects especially the speaking skills of a learner.

#### **5.1.4 Academic anxiety**

So far, it should already be clear that anxiety affects a learner somehow and especially in a negative way. However, according to Spence (1960), who belongs to the Iowa Theory, anxiety can actually have a positive influence on the learning process, since he holds that it is an inherited ability that energizes mind and body. Needless to say, this is an isolated supportive theory in comparison to all the experts who defend the fact that anxiety will always be an obstacle in the learning process. To contrast this allegation, Mandler and Sarason (1952), belonging to Yale Theory, claim that it is not something that can be inherited, but rather a skill which a person can acquire as they age. To explain this, they state that once a person has apprehended this skill, they will react differently to external stimuli and, therefore, they will gradually develop a series of techniques which allow them to handle difficult situations better. In accordance with Yale Theory, there are two types of apprehended responses to external stimuli: the irrelevant ones, which will hinder the learning process given that they cause fear, helplessness, evasiveness, etc. and relevant responses which make the learning process easier.

### **5.1.5 Iowa Theory and the difficulty of the task**

Moreover, Iowa Theory presents a third aspect which also influences learning: the difficulty of the task. Thus Spence (1960) holds that anxiety makes doing simple tasks easier whereas in hard tasks it will have interferences in the answers. Taking into account that mastering a language is a rather hard and gradual process without immediate results, anxiety will affect negatively those who suffer from it, making learning a language even more difficult.

Eysenck (1979) associates anxiety with the effort that a learner makes to achieve their goal. His general conclusion is that anxiety will never be positive for a learner since it causes interferences in the process of memory and understanding. However, he states that the greater the effort the learner makes, the better the results will be. He also points that there will always be difficulties in this process as worries and negative thoughts will always be present.

### **5.1.6 A cognitive approach to academic learning**

Given the fact that this paper will opt for cognitive psychology as the possible means by which anxiety can be overcome, all the different cognitive focuses have to be considered. One of these referents is Weiner (1979), who studies the potential relation between anxiety itself, the difficulty of the task and the past experiences of the learner as a crucial factor in the learning process. His findings show that people who have anxiety issues are more efficient when their start is successful. On the other hand, if they failed to begin in a positive way, the completion of the rest of tasks will gradually get worse. Tobias (1979, 1980, 1986), in the same line of Weiner, also points that anxiety influences the learning process from a cognitive perspective. It affects reception, processing, and production of the message. Having said this, according to Tobias, anxiety makes it difficult for the learner to understand the message, to process it, as anxiety makes the process of elaborating an answer longer and eventually to produce a correct answer. This is caused by the fact that

anxiety has a negative influence on memory, attention, and language itself, making the quality of the messages produced worse.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1994b:284) share the same thoughts with Tobias. In one of their studies, they show how anxiety negatively affects the realization of language-related activities from a cognitive point of view:

- Time to recognize words
- Short-term memorizing of words
- Grammar rules memorizing
- Skill to translate texts into a foreign language
- Time to complete a vocabulary exam
- Long-term memorizing of vocabulary
- Ability to acquire foreign pronunciation
- Speaking fluency

As it can be seen in the above scheme, anxiety affects all the different fields of expertise in a language. Memory is one of the most fiercely affected by it, making it difficult to retain important data both in long and short term. As it was commented on earlier in this paper, the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) is not the only important aspect to become skilful in a language, but also other external factors play their role. Among other aptitudes, learners have to develop their emotional intelligence to reinforce self-control, self-motivation, and perseverance. Without these abilities, language learners will have a worse academic performance as they will not be able to achieve their full intellectual potential.

### **5.1.7 Language learning anxiety**

As it was mentioned earlier on, language learning anxiety is still a mystery, given that it lacks enough research to prove all the effects it can have. Since the central issue in this paper is how anxiety affects school environment and performance, in this section the focus

will be all the areas of expertise it has repercussions on. Moreover, it will be seen how there are different types of anxiety when it comes to the academic world as well as the factors or potential effects it all could trigger in the end.

The first aspect to bear in mind is the fact that both students and teachers equally are, generally speaking, ignorant of how or why anxiety affects language learning. On the one hand, students who suffer from this disorder will undergo difficulties in the knowledge acquisition because, more often than not, language learning causes the person great stress, and it is usually seen as a threat. On the other hand, teachers will be more likely to be frustrated as they cannot achieve their goals with their students, since anxiety makes them to have a bad academic performance. In short, anxiety will affect not only the different areas of expertise in a language but also all the participants involved in its acquisition.

To better illustrate this, Crookall and Oxford (1991:43) describe language learning anxiety in their book *Dealing with Anxiety* as “It is a form of serious personal discomfort, and most people simply fail to perform at their best under such constraints”. The main conclusion which could be drawn from this description is that many people, when learning a foreign language, feel under great pressure, and it is even compared to a “constraint”.

It is equally important to bear in mind the fact that language learning anxiety can be studied separately as an individual type of anxiety disorder or as derived from generalized anxiety. Some authors might consider them to be linked in a way or another but most of the experts agree that it is an isolated type of anxiety itself. Horwitz and Young (1991), for their part, state that both theories can be combined as generalized anxiety can affect academic performance and language learning anxiety can make generalized anxiety worsen, so they basically feed each other back and they are not opposite.

Horwitz (1986) in *Preliminary Evidence for the Reliability and Validity of a Foreign Language Anxiety Scale* explains that foreign language anxiety mainly derives from three basic conceptions:

- Communication apprehension
- Test anxiety
- Fear of negative evaluation (also called atychiphobia)

This division is also shared by other prestigious authorities in this issue such as MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) in *Anxiety and Second Language Learning: Toward a Theoretical Clarification*.

Taking all this into account, it is to be assumed that language anxiety will affect all the different skills in a language, namely speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills. Knowing how every area is hindered will be crucial for its later diagnosis and tackling of the problem from an educational and/or psychological approach.

#### **5.1.8 Language anxiety and speaking skills**

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994:12). In earlier years, speaking tests and the skills expected to be acquired from it used to be overlooked. However, nowadays both in an academic environment and in the working world being able to speak fluently to either do business or to pass an exam have grown stronger and, therefore, methods to assess proper speaking skills acquisition are more demanding. This might be due to the technological advancements and the growing demands of globalization. Given the nature of the speaking tests, students tend to become more nervous than in others assessing, for example, their writing capacities, where the atmosphere is often more relaxed. Having said this, speaking skills acquisition and performance can be considered one of the hardest skills to obtain, since anxiety has a harmful effect on language learners while speaking, because their self-confidence will be inferior to others, as well as their self-esteem and willingness to participate in a class out loud.



As Dolly Jesusita Young (1990) states in *An Investigation of Students' Perspectives on Anxiety and Speaking*, students who suffer from anxiety will be more likely to adopt an attitude of avoidance towards the type of tests done to assess someone's speaking skills. This will happen mainly because of two reasons: the student's shyness, triggered by anxiety, will make them try to avoid speaking in public at all costs and also, more physical-related symptoms such as sweating, rapid heartbeat or shaking. This will result in the student having problems to understand the teacher's instructions and in them losing their concentration eventually. Moreover, language anxiety will make the state of worry and nervousness worse and, needless to say, this will affect the overall student's speaking performance because of their fear of expressing their ideas in a foreign language. This fear is usually founded by the fact that they could make a mistake or lose control in front of people and it is terrifying for them. That's why avoidance is so important and typical in students with language anxiety.

Another key factor to bear in mind when dealing with anxiety issues and speaking skills acquisition is the fact that, in some more extreme cases, students will stop attending classes where these practices take place, and therefore, they will be more likely to fail the subject or, even worse, they will drop out sooner, leaving the academic world and their studies. These individuals tend to have passive attitude in class and therefore their communication skills do not develop as other students'. This does not only affect the academic environment but also the way in which they learn to communicate in the real world and later on at work. Failure to be able to be a team player might mean their inability to keep a job due to the fact that they could be considered less competent or socially unattractive.

As it was mentioned at the beginning of this paper, emotional intelligence also plays a crucial role in acquiring speaking skills correctly. This can be seen, as it could not be otherwise, in Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence*. To express his ideas on this issue, he resorted to other authors' perspectives on the matter such as Salovey's or Mayer's, who have also been mentioned before in relation to emotional intelligence. Since they proved that emotions impact directly language learning, it also has repercussions on students'

behaviour and ultimately on their memory to retain information and to express it orally. In the tests they conducted, students with a higher EI were more able to regulate their emotions and consequently, to keep concentrated on their speech, thus avoiding anxiety-triggering situations. This is also applicable to students with the same Intelligence Quotient, and that is why performance is ultimately more affected by anxiety or emotional facts than by the innate learner's capacity. The most viable solution to prevent speaking failure from happening would, therefore, be to teach people with Emotional Intelligence issues strategies to keep negative emotions at bay. Effects of low Emotional Intelligence extend to other more social areas which are also linked to academic achievement, such as taking up drugs, having more difficulties to socialize or having anxiety or depression as a consequence of these factors.

All in all, for all these reasons, teaching children how to communicate with others correctly is crucial to avoid more complicated conditions. If children are taught to express their emotions in the right way, they will be more likely to adapt to the social norm better and to score better at speaking tests. Even though there is, unfortunately, not enough evidence or research on this matter, it has been proved that students with higher EI have more self-motivation, they can control their negative emotions better and, in the end, they can develop social abilities in a better way. Having all these traits would help them avoid shyness, anxiousness or shaking in speaking tests since they would have been able to acquire speaking skills in the right way.

### **5.1.9 Language anxiety and writing skills**

Are someone's writing skills also affected by anxiety? As in any other area of expertise in a language, students' writing skills are also negatively affected by language anxiety. Neal A. Raisman (1982) in his book *I just Can't Do English: Writing Anxiety in the Classroom*, explains that even though this task might seem less aggressive, since students have more time to carry it out at their disposal and therefore to choose every word carefully, still generates a great deal of anxiety on many students. This is due to the fact that many people

find writing especially complicated in comparison to speaking, where words are produced more automatically.

Regardless of the degree in which writing can be affected by this disorder, it is crucial to focus on writing skills, as writing might be the most important skill that a learner has to acquire, since most of the assignments are presented in a written format, rather than having to present them orally. That's why writing is so important, because it may be the most faithful indicator that a student is successful in a certain subject. In 1986, Horwitz noticed that students who suffered from anxiety tended to write shorter compositions than students without any condition. What is more, they wrote texts of a poorer quality and they were proved unable to express their ideas in a clear way.

One of the factors which contribute to this failure to acquire writing skills properly is the fact that learners with anxiety tend to experience writing apprehension. This means that they will try to avoid situations where they must write a text of any kind out of their irrational fear of being assessed. This is what experts call hypersensitivity to being assessed. This is all explained in a study that Keziban Teksan carried out in 2012, where he stated that people with anxiety had less self-esteem, and this prevented them from having control over themselves and their ideas. Moreover, Teksan also noted gender differences, seeing that female writers were more inclined to experience writing apprehension, as they were more responsible and conscientious and, therefore, their fear of making any mistakes was stronger.

Emotional Intelligence, as usual, also plays an important role in learners' writing skills. When a student has to write a composition, an assignment, or a text of any kind from scratch, they can suffer what is known as "black page syndrome", this is the inability to know how to start or tackle a certain task you are presented. This happens to people with anxiety, but it is also related to Emotional Intelligence. The reason is very simple but key to understanding the disorder and to knowing how to solve it. If a person with anxiety becomes nervous before a given situation but has high Emotional Intelligence, they will

know how to control their negative emotions and feelings, and consequently, they will be able to continue with their task. On the contrary, if apart from suffering from anxiety they also have a low EI, they will find themselves unable to solve it anyhow. The main factor might be motivation, which is one of the components of Emotional Intelligence, according to Daniel Goleman. Therefore, motivation can be of the utmost importance when writing, both intrinsically and extrinsically. Here, the extrinsic motivation would be given by the student being academically successful, since if they get good marks, they will pass all the subjects. The intrinsic factor would be related to personal growth, as in self-satisfaction. This will encourage the person to write more and adequately.

This matter leads readers to bear in mind that teaching a student how to master all the competences in a language is as important as teaching them how to keep anxiety under control or teaching them how to develop their Emotional Intelligence. Failure to keep anxiety and emotions at bay will ultimately negatively affect learners' students, either being unable to write or producing poor texts. It is also important to note that research on this specific area of knowledge is scarce, and therefore experts still have a long way ahead of investigating.

#### **5.1.10 Language anxiety and listening skills**

Following on the same line of analysis and covering all the different areas of expertise in a language, students with anxiety will also have their listening capacity reduced by it, if not totally impeded in some cases. Apart from the complexities that acquiring listening skills in a language involves, including discerning phonological aspects, learning grammar, distinguishing accents and so on, anxiety will make this process barely possible even if the learner masters all these areas. Although everyone might feel uneasy when listening to an English audio when being examined or when they are being given instructions, anxiety will pose a big obstacle for all sufferers to overcome. As Hasan (2000) states, listening itself is not the same as listening comprehension, because in order to acquire the necessary listening

skills, a learner needs listening comprehension to prove that the speech is being understood and correctly interpreted.

There are some generally accepted issues which are commonly present in every anxious person when acquiring listening skills. One of the most common is digressed thinking or, in other words, internal stimuli which cause the listener to be distracted. Among other reasons, this could be triggered by being too concentrated on one's own thoughts, often of a negative nature, and therefore being unable to listen to what is being said. Needless to say, this issue clearly impairs communication with other individuals as well, so becoming skilful in this area can be quite challenging. Strange though it might seem, affective side of human beings can also interfere with learners' listening comprehension, as motivation and self-esteem take part in it. When these traits do not work properly, chances are that the learner will experience anxiety which will ultimately lead to failure to understand the message being conveyed. To better illustrate this, Krashen (1982) explains in his Affective Filter Theory that anxiety actually works as a kind of filter that impedes language learning by preventing language signals, in this case orally transmitted, from reaching the areas of the brain which are in charge of processing the information. Bearing his investigation in mind, it can be concluded that anxiety has both negative emotional and physical consequences, that, in the best of the cases, will just hinder the learning process.

Considering that this is an issue with little research done on it, as Kimura (2012) holds, there are some authorities who cast some light on it for people to better understand its functioning.

Vogely (1999) in his book *Addressing Listening Comprehension Anxiety* explains that listening skills are one of the most harshly affected by anxiety when learning a language because of several factors, including discourse velocity, pronunciation, voice quality, etc. It could be said that he attributes listening anxiety to rather external stimuli. However, his conclusions have solid grounds, since if students have a low listening comprehension level, their anxiety will be increased.

Closely related to Vogely's ideas are those of Kim (2000). In the study that she conducted, called *Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS)*, found that people with this disorder underwent great anxiousness, tension and even irritability while learning how to acquire listening skills in English. This study is particularly relevant because the outcome helped experts to become more familiar with these questions. She learned that the higher the level of proficiency of a learner, the lesser the anxiety will be. Even though higher levels are, most assuredly, more complicated to pass, learners are supposed to have acquired all the necessary tools to work with, and therefore levels of self-confidence increase, which will also boost anxiety sufferers' motivation to go on.

As usual, the most common symptoms of anxiety, whether they are physical or emotional, also affect negatively someone's listening skills. Bekleyen (2009) noticed that it was the physical symptoms that most negatively affected students in the end because it caused them to practice avoidance. If the subjects tried to avoid the uptake of these skills, they would never acquire them.

As for Gardner (1987) in *Second Language Attrition: The Role of Motivation and Use* states that listening anxiety will directly reduce the student's motivation and it will consequently predispose them to have a negative attitude towards learning a language, being more prone to quit it. This is due to the fact that when developing listening skills, the learner has to deal with spontaneous data, which if compared to other skills such as the writing ones where the student would have more time to prepare the materials and to control the time, it could be clearly considered a potential anxiety trigger. Joiner (1986) on his part, holds the opinion that lack of self-confidence and fear of failure will be the most likely factors to hinder the success of acquiring listening skills properly.

Some of the potential solutions to improve this condition might devolve upon teachers, as they are, after all, the persons in charge of their education and of their language acquisition. Since students with anxiety tend to be easily overwhelmed by too much information, one of the means by which teachers could help them is by guiding them through the texts that the

students will have to listen to, thus focusing on one single aspect at a time, as Ommagio (1993) explained in his study on developing listening skills. This would mitigate the effects of the debilitating anxiety, which is basically the inability of understanding what is being said due to an interference with the individual's concentration. Another plausible solution could be to provide students with visual material to help them understand the content of the audio or real-time conversation in a foreign language. This visual theory was supported by Nisbet and Ross (1980) among others. Other solutions pay more attention to the affective side of the student, like for example trying to encourage students with anxiety issues to gain more motivation, knowing that their self-esteem will be low. However, it is also a difficult task for teachers to carry this out as students with anxiety are usually reluctant to admit their weaknesses, and in this case their inability to understand an oral speech, so teachers will not be able to offer guidance.

#### **5.1.11 Language anxiety and reading skills**

Finally, reading skills are also affected by anxiety. Taking into account that reading requires the person to stay focused on the text to be able to understand it, it will be difficult for people with anxiety to avoid losing their concentration.

However, concentration is not the only issue. First of all, there is a distinction between reading fluency and reading comprehension, as they are differently affected by anxiety. Markham and Darke (1991) pointed that anxiety mainly affects verbal aspects, which means that reading comprehension was the most affected. The reason is that it depends heavily on memory, which is also impaired by anxiety. Sellers (2000) also noticed that learners with anxiety were not able to remember as much content as healthy learners when having their reading comprehension evaluated in a foreign language. This is due to the fact that concentration of students with anxiety tended to wander often, interrupted by intrusive thoughts of diverse natures. As for reading fluency, it is more related to the degree of skills that learners themselves are able to acquire because it is considered a more automatic

process than reading comprehension whose need for memory is notorious. McLeod and Donnellan (1993) also support the idea that reading fluency being an automatic skill does not hinge so much on memory and therefore the negative impact on the reading skill will be less relevant.

Another important matter is that of reading self-concept, which is basically the way readers see themselves as a reader. Astounding though it might sound, Chapman and Tunmer (1995) state that it is closely related to the person's self-motivation and anxiety negatively affects the final reading performance. It was proved, therefore, that children with a higher reading self-concept performed better since their verbal ability was better as well.

Regarding the more affective side and Emotional Intelligence (EI), since students with anxiety will be more likely to have less EI, their reading abilities will be affected too. When a student has to read out loud in class, for example, they will feel very nervous that the teacher might judge them negatively or out of fear of their classmates ridiculing them. Here, again, avoidance appears as a mechanism of defence to prevent others from making the state of anxiousness rise. As Hinton (2008) found, it is actually a biological effect that occurs when the amygdale is activated as it detects an external threat and feels fear and by which cognitive responses become slower. This triggers the so-called avoidance because it is interpreted as a threat and it is very common in anxiety disorders.

As it has been seen, all the fields of expertise in English are negatively affected by anxiety. To find out which of them is the most affected, a survey will be carried out in this paper in an attempt to cast more light on this scarcely studied issue.

## **6. Language learning anxiety survey**

All theoretical aspects should have a more practical counterpart which proves why and how these theories are meant to have repercussions on society. For this very reason, a survey on how anxiety affects English learners was carried out, to give shape to all the above-



mentioned experts' theories. The survey is based on 14 questions which tackle all the issues which have been dealt with in this paper: anxiety effects on English learning in the different areas of expertise, anxiety symptoms, techniques against anxiety, repercussions of Emotional Intelligence, etc. The survey was completed by 50 English learners, women, and men in equal shares, for it to be significant. These English students' age ranges from 25 to 30 years old, since this study is mainly aimed at mentally mature people who can already know and manage their anxiety state. All the participants have studied English for many years and still do it. The reason for this choice is because for this survey, it is necessary to analyse people who still have to deal with anxiety in English learning, instead of those who have already overcome it.

### **6.1. Purpose of the survey**

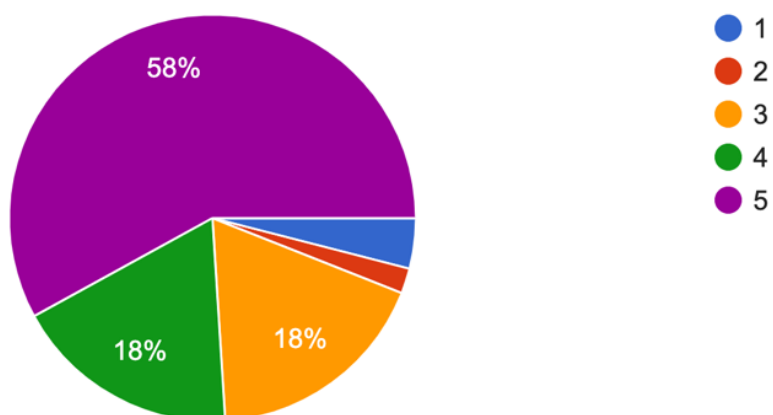
The main purpose of this survey is to cast light on English learning anxiety in order to improve students' lives. To do so, all the different theories by the most representative authorities in psychology and linguistics are examined. The questions are arranged in a way that all these theories can be corroborated. Furthermore, another purpose of the survey is to draw conclusions about what techniques and psychological branch is the best to solve this problem. To come to final conclusions, an analysis of the results is necessary.

### **6.2. Analysis of the outcome**

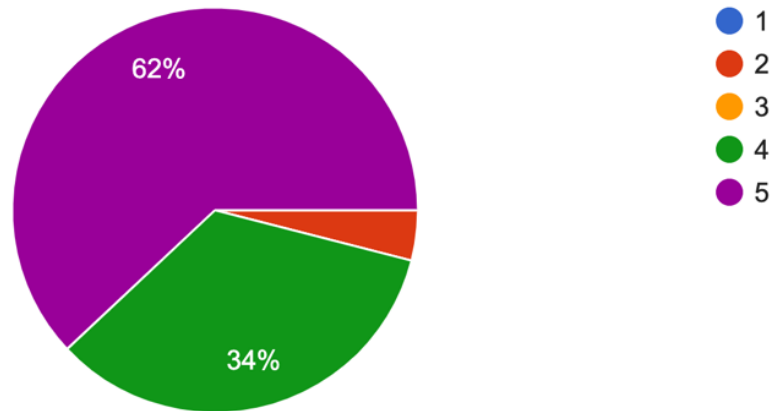
As it was said before, to prove the significance and harmful implications of anxiety on English learners, a survey was carried out among 50 participants, 25 women and 25 men between 25 and 30 years old. In this survey, those questions which are based on choosing a number from 1 to 5 focus on people's criteria according to whether they consider an issue to be of more or less relevance. These are the meanings of the figures according to the level of anxiety:

- 1- Insignificant
- 2- Low
- 3- Average
- 4- High
- 5- Extreme

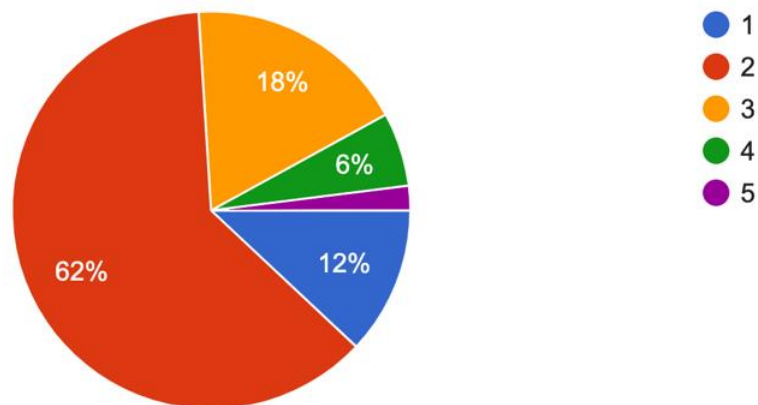
*Pie Chart 1 To what extent do you think anxiety affects English learning? (1 being not at all and 5 to a great extent)*



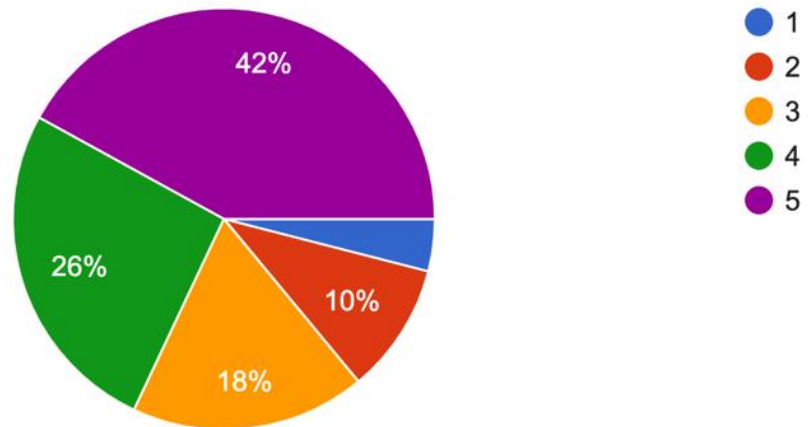
*Pie Chart 2 From 1 to 5, assess the degree to which you think your speaking skills are affected by anxiety (1 being not at all and 5 being to a great extent)*



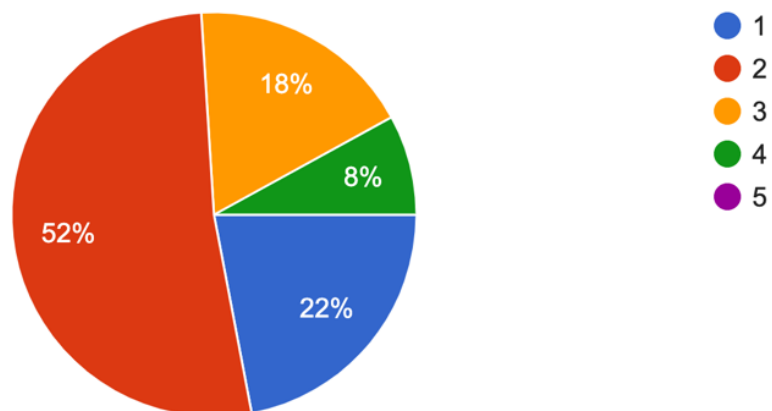
*Pie Chart 3 From 1 to 5, assess the degree to which you think your writing skills are affected by anxiety (1 being not at all and 5 being to a great extent)*



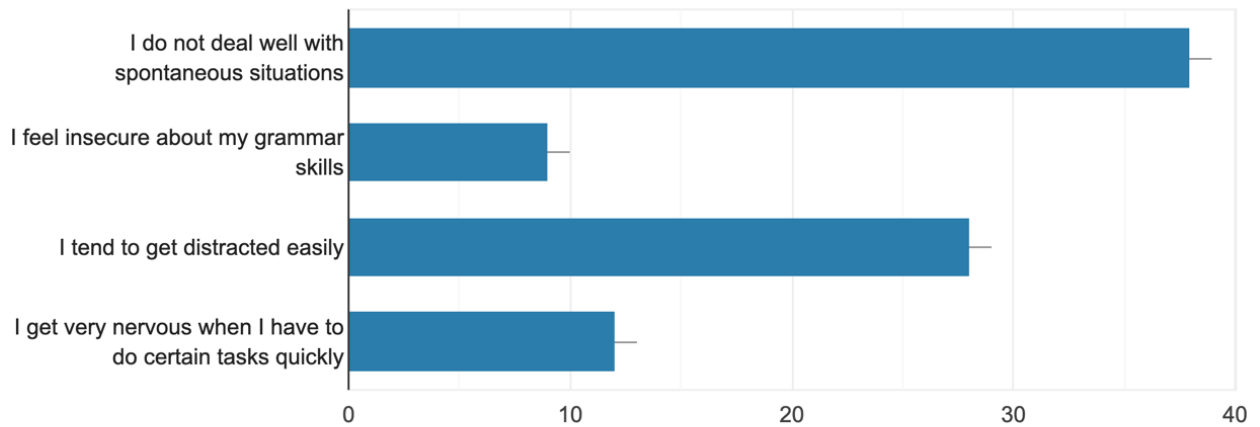
***Pie Chart 4 From 1 to 5, assess the degree to which you think your listening skills are affected by anxiety (1 being not at all and 5 being to a great extent)***



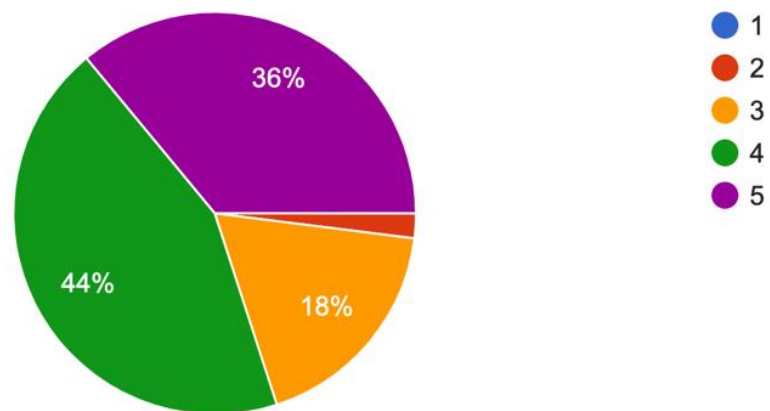
***Pie Chart 5 From 1 to 5, assess the degree to which you think your reading skills are affected by anxiety (1 being not at all and 5 being to a great extent)***



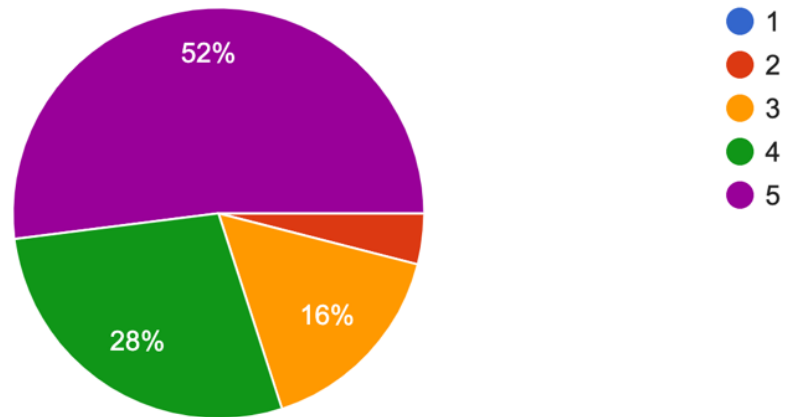
**Bar Chart 1** Which of the following reasons would you say causes the complications?



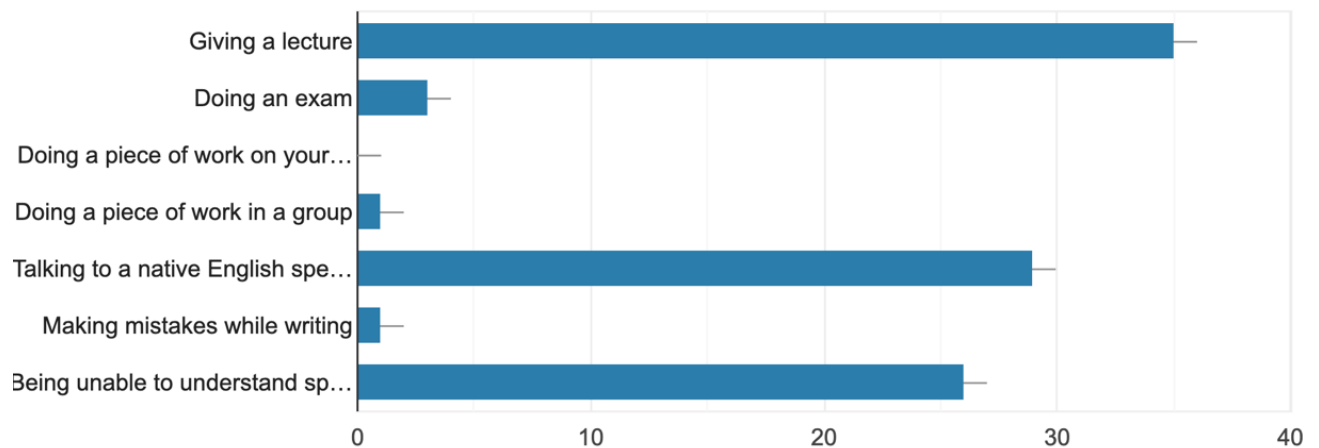
**Pie Chart 6** From 1 to 5, assess how much you think Cognitive Psychology can contribute to anxiety reduction (1 being not at all and 5 being to a great extent)



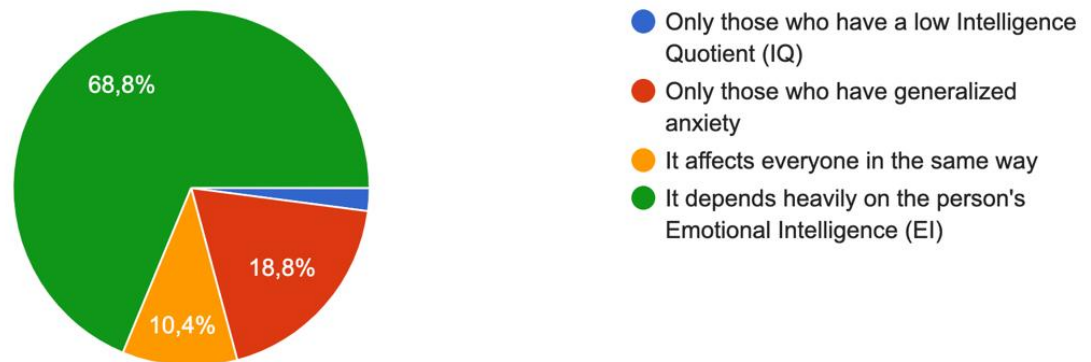
***Pie Chart 7 Emotional Intelligence (EI) is in charge of managing our emotions and has commonly been linked to maturity in humans. To what extent do you think having a low EI would negatively affect your English-skill acquisition? (1 being not at all and 5 being to a great extent)***



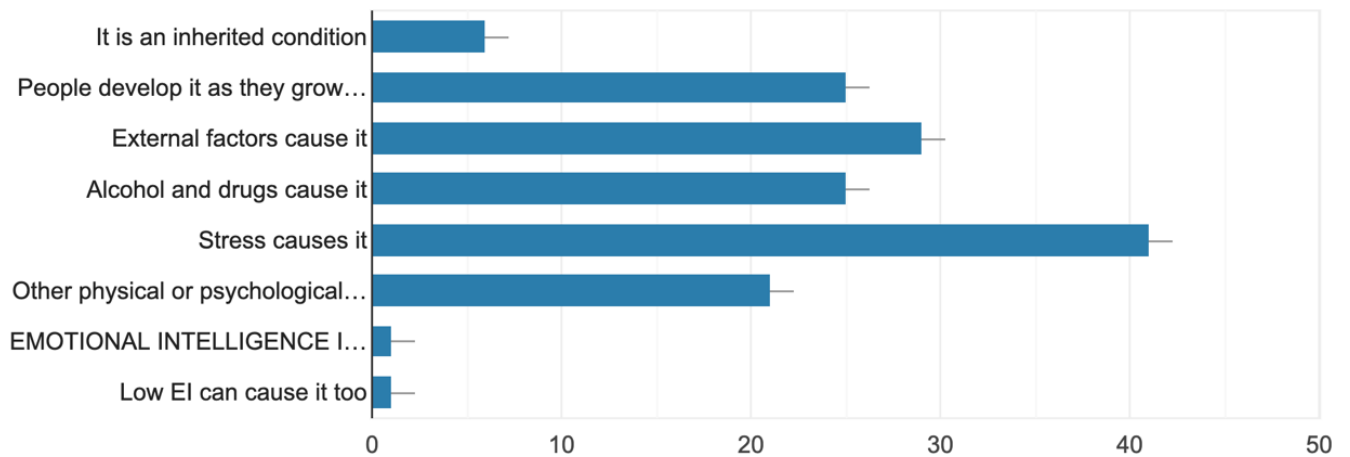
***Bar chart 2 Which of these activities cause you the most anxiety? Choose two.***



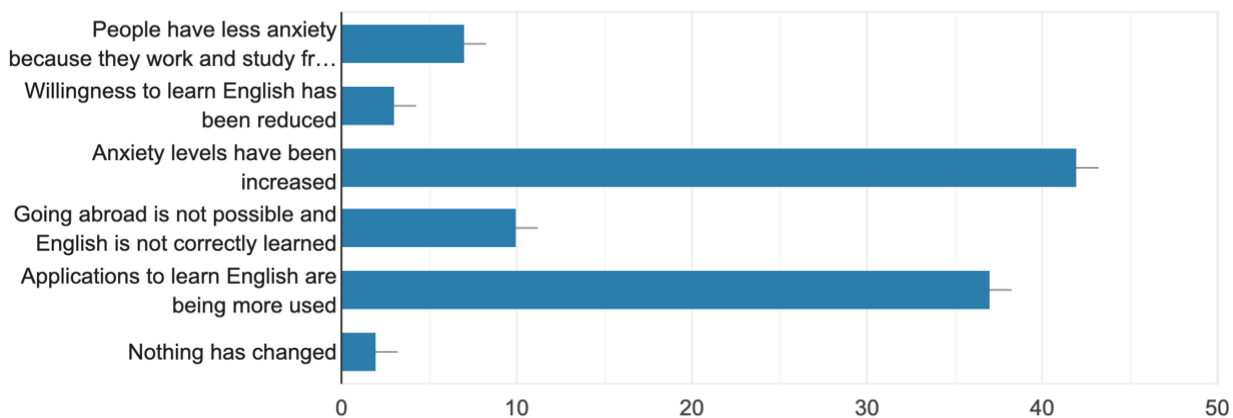
**Pie Chart 8** Do you think anxiety affects academic performance in English?



**Bar chart 3** There are many theories regarding the causes of anxiety. Which of these statements are true for you?



**Bar chart 4** *How has the Coronavirus pandemic changed English learning nowadays?*



Source: Own work

Most students (58%) agree that anxiety affects English learning to a great extent. As for the speaking skills, the vast majority of people (62%) agree that anxiety affects their speaking skills in an extreme way or with high intensity. Regarding the writing skills, 62% of the students consider that it only causes them low anxiety levels because they have more time for its preparation, and it is not a spontaneous situation. Looking at the listening skills, it can be deduced that English learners also consider it a strong source of anxiety, as most of them chose the highest score, alongside with the speaking section. When it comes to the reading skills, people generally accept that their anxiousness is not high at all, since 52% of the students said it just causes low anxiety levels. With regard to the possible causes of this anxiety, 76% of the students attribute it to their inability to deal with spontaneous situations well, which is related to their speaking skills. Another 56% of them put it down to getting easily distracted, a very common trait in people with anxiety when developing their listening skills. The possible symptoms were analysed too, and the vast majority admit having sweating, breathing difficulties, losing their concentration, or having a transitory loss of memory. In an attempt to reduce anxiety, the survey opted for Cognitive Psychology



and queried participants about its possible efficiency. Most of them agree that it can be very beneficial to solve it. As it has been analysed throughout this paper, Emotional intelligence takes an important role in English learning, and almost all the participants are aware of its repercussions on English learning and on anxiety management. Furthermore, concerning the potential relaxation techniques, most people pointed that breathing techniques or counting up to a certain number could work for them, but unfortunately many of them did not know any techniques. It is also important to mention that closely related to the previous finds, people attribute their highest anxiety states to either giving a lecture (speaking skills) or their inability to understand spoken English (listening skills). To prove this more in depth, there is a graph which shows the direct relation between EI and academic performance in English, which people seem to be aware of. Although it is true that the causes of anxiety are still certainly unknown and diverse, most students agree that stress is the most likely to cause anxiety in people as they grow up, closely followed by other external factors or even drugs. Last but not least, there is a section devoted to the coronavirus pandemic and how it has affected our society. Most English learners admit that anxiety levels have been increased as a consequence of the pandemic. Furthermore, the fact that people cannot travel abroad seems to have affected their English skill acquisition too, as they consider it relevant for correct English acquisition, so the use of applications to learn English has increased. All in all, roughly speaking, the results of the survey met the expectations that one could have from all the theories by different authorities presented before.

## **7. Solutions to anxiety: Cognitive Psychology**

Since this paper is researching educational matters, focused in this case on language skills, and psychological issues, more specifically anxiety, there should be a solution that ideally tackles both areas to reconcile them. Although it is true that anxiety is still a big mystery, there are some techniques which can be applied in the classroom for students to reduce their symptoms and, consequently, acquire English skills properly.

As it was studied both in the theoretical frame and in the survey, either physical or psychological symptoms can lead to an increase in anxiety levels, and therefore, the potential techniques to reduce it should be centred around both. Relaxation techniques have been proved to be effective against anxiety-triggering situations, in which a person's heart starts to beat faster and this causes a stronger distress in the person. The most well-known ones, as most people stated in the survey, are breathing techniques. When practiced correctly, they lower heart rate and, therefore, the heart can distribute oxygen and blood to all parts of the human body more evenly. Ultimately, this technique will let the person relax and have a better predisposition to concentrate on the task they were previously doing. However, it is also true that these techniques, regardless of their effectiveness, are not directly associated with language learning.

To reinforce this idea, McCoy (1979) in his book *Means to Overcome the Anxieties of Second Language Learners* explains that it is highly complicated to extrapolate cognitive techniques to the educational environment due to their difficult applicability to students. Nonetheless, there are several techniques that could be useful for their academic performance.

One of them is the so-called systematic desensitization, which consists in a change in someone's behavioural pattern and was established by Wolpe in 1950. This could be used by students because it is based on trying to mentally reproduce an anxiety-triggering event until the student comes to terms with it. They also have to expose themselves to this situation gradually until they feel more comfortable about it in order not to fall into avoidance. The final objective is to replace it by more appealing feelings once the person realises that it was a wrongly learned behaviour and that nothing negative will happen to them. This could be carried out by students learning a language whose strongest fear might be to give a presentation or to have to do an exam in English. They could repeat this technique until they come to the realisation that this task poses no threat to them.

The second technique is called guided participation, whose term was coined by Rogoff (1990). This is a technique based on the students taking part in different activities with the help of teachers to gain more and more experience. The key idea is for students to be led through the whole process but always being allowed to have hands-on participation to acquire new knowledge, so the teacher will stop helping them gradually until they feel self-confident. This technique is mainly aimed at boosting students' motivation and self-confidence so that they can learn language skills properly without fear of failing or making mistakes.

The third technique was introduced by the fathers of Cognitive Psychology, David A. Clark, and Aaron T. Beck in their book *Cognitive Therapy of Anxiety Disorders*. Despite the fact that it is a technique that should be monitored by an expert therapist, teachers could also try to apply it in the classroom to substitute students' misapprehended conduct for a healthier approach. This technique is called cognitive restructuring and according to Burns & Beck (1978); Dobson & Dozois (2010); Hollon & Dimidjian (2009), it is defined as follows: "It refers to a structured, collaborative therapeutic approach in which distressed individuals are taught how to identify, evaluate, and modify the faulty thoughts, evaluations and beliefs that are considered responsible for their psychological disturbance". In this therapy, students are taught to modify distortions such as emotional reasoning, splitting, magnification, etc. If teachers tried to carry this technique out in class, especially among those students with higher anxiety levels, they could prevent many students from academic failure, as sometimes their wrongly learned behaviours make them think in a way that actually disqualifies them from acquiring language skills correctly or from even accomplishing their most basic tasks.

The objective would be for students to first identify their main fear or "automatic thought" which is based on a negative aspect of themselves or the world which surrounds them and think of the worst event that could happen. Speaking in English in front of many people could be taken as an example for this. The second step would be to carry out a Socratic dialogue, which centres on the idea of questioning oneself about the credibility of that negative thought, for example: what is the likelihood you making a fool of yourself in front

of all these people? Would it be that serious? In a third instance, teachers could try to practice paradoxical intention with their students, by which if the teacher forbids a student to speak in class whereas it is actually what causes them anxiety, it will generate a paradoxical effect on the student's understanding which will be more likely to them want to speak in the end. The fourth step would be to do role playing, which basically consists in simulating an anxiety-triggering situation between a student and a teacher which will increase the former's empathy and control over their emotions once it has been practiced. The next technique, although it can cause great anxiety on the student at first, is very useful. It is based on asking a student what would happen if they did what causes them the most anxiety. By placing themselves in the worst of the scenarios, they will get to see nothing is as serious as they used to imagine. Lastly, the student would have to judge his negative thoughts from an objective point of view, without letting their emotions interfere. This would make them realise it is an absurd thought in the end, given the lack of scientific or logical support.

Finally, since most students in the survey considered the speaking skills the most complicated to acquire, a brief section will be devoted to that issue with a view to solving it. Students usually see these types of tests as threatening because of the spontaneity of the questions and because of one's own oral skills. When it comes speaking publicly, most people might become nervous since making a mistake could ridicule them or everyone could notice their anxiousness. However, there are certain easy activities which can be carried out in-class to overcome this fear. One of the techniques was given by Little and Sanders (1989), who said that by creating a kind of community of students inside the class, students would feel much more comfortable. This is so because they could practice through conversational exchange to practice their oral skills, by doing tasks such as an interview, a survey, role playing, or by telling witty stories. This would boost their self-confidence and the bonds of friendship within the group, which are also crucial to improve emotional intelligence. Moreover, by doing these tasks instead of individual work, they would become team players, which means not only one of them has to take the responsibility, but they all

work as a group. These activities pose a noticeable decrease in students' anxiety levels, which at the same time boost their oral skills, emotional intelligence, and motivation.

## **8. Conclusion**

Anxiety has a significant impact on the English learning process since it hinders its correct acquisition. Unlike people have commonly thought, the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) is not the only aspect affecting students' academic performance and that is why, not everything should revolve around it. Instead, paying closer attention to psychological factors and their repercussions would be wiser to find potential solutions to acquire the necessary skills in the English language.

Throughout this paper, it can be seen through theories by different authorities how affective factors and a low Emotional Intelligence also affect English learning in a negative way, as they influence memory, cognition, and concentration among others. That is why, bearing in mind the physical or psychological symptoms is also relevant to find the appropriate techniques to deal with anxiety. However, as McCoy (1979) states, it is a really complicated task to extrapolate these psychological techniques to the educational environment given the diversity of problems and personalities, whereby a unique solution cannot be applied to all students, even though Cognitive Psychology offers quite useful explanations.

The own work survey fulfilled the expectations, as most students agreed that acquiring speaking skills is the hardest task for them, closely followed by the listening ones, just as it had been predicted in the theoretical frame where expert opinions are displayed. However, one of the main limitations is the sample size, as only a reduced number of students can be examined and because having access to students with anxiety only was not possible. Moreover, there is not a great deal of research done on the topic itself, which made the documentation process somewhat complex.

Precisely because of this scarcity of research, this is a relevant paper aimed at boosting the investigation into this issue and to cast light on how anxiety really affects language learning. Providing students with the necessary tools to overcome this disorder and feel comfortable while learning English is ultimately the main objective of this project. Will people keep thinking the IQ is what makes a student be doomed to failure?

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