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The influence of emotional factors on the development of speaking skills in children

La influencia de los factores emocionales en el desarrollo de las habilidades de expresión oral en niños

A influência dos fatores emocionais no desenvolvimento das habilidades de expressão oral em crianças

Lic. Gema Lisseth Vélez Vargas [1]*, https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7560-1323
Dr. C. Miguel Macías Loor [2], https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5958-3541

[1] Unidad Educativa "Pueblo Nuevo" y maestranda de la ULEAM, Ecuador

[2] Universidad Técnica de Manabí, Ecuador

*Corresponding author. email gemaj1405@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Oral expression in the English language implies the coordination of linguistic, cognitive, and emotional capacities; therefore, anxiety, worries about committing errors, motivation, and confidence, among other things, might play a role in students' expression. Aim: To study emotional factors manifesting in the process of development of oral speaking skills in young English learners in ordinary classroom interaction in Ecuador, Chone. Materials and Methods: A study of qualitative-descriptive cross-sectional design was conducted in a private institution in Ecuador, Chone involving 37 students at Grade 7 and 3 teachers of English selected by means of convenience sampling. Data collection techniques employed were classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, with data analysis performed in thematic categories employing data source triangulation. Results: Feelings of nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and communication insecurity were correlated with hesitation, short answers, silence, and avoidance of individual speech tasks. Pair and group activities, interactive methods, games, visuals, and constructive feedback contribute to increased ability to communicate and spontaneous speaking. The findings corroborate prior research on language anxiety, willingness to communicate, and pleasure in language acquisition, indicating that speaking ability differs based on the context's pressure and safety perceived by participants. Deliberations: Growing oral speaking skills in young students relates to emotional climate ratings made during the teaching process, so it might be reasonable to develop progressive speaking experiences that facilitate learning mistakes and minimize stress and increase self-esteem.

Keywords: foreign language anxiety; speaking skills; self-confidence; willingness to communicate; young learners.

RESUMEN

Introducción: La expresión oral en inglés exige coordinar recursos lingüísticos, cognitivos y socioemocionales, por lo que la ansiedad, el miedo al error, la motivación y la autoconfianza pueden modificar la disposición de los estudiantes a participar. Objetivo: analizar cómo se manifiestan los factores emocionales y cómo se asocian con el desarrollo de las habilidades de expresión oral en jóvenes estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) durante la interacción habitual en el aula en Chone, Ecuador. Materiales y Métodos: Se desarrolló un estudio cualitativo, descriptivo y transversal en una institución educativa privada de Chone, Ecuador, con 37 estudiantes de séptimo grado y tres docentes de inglés seleccionados mediante muestreo por conveniencia. La información se obtuvo mediante observaciones de aula y entrevistas semiestructuradas; los datos se organizaron en categorías temáticas y se contrastaron mediante triangulación entre fuentes. Resultados: El nerviosismo, el miedo a cometer errores y la inseguridad comunicativa se asociaron con vacilaciones, respuestas breves, silencio y evitación de tareas orales individuales. En contraste, el trabajo

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en parejas y grupos, las actividades interactivas, los juegos, el apoyo visual y la retroalimentación respetuosa estuvieron acompañados de una mayor disposición a comunicarse y de respuestas más espontáneas. Los patrones observados coinciden con la literatura sobre ansiedad lingüística, disposición a comunicarse y disfrute en el aprendizaje de lenguas, y sugieren que la participación oral varía según el grado de presión comunicativa y seguridad percibida en cada actividad. Conclusiones: El desarrollo de la expresión oral en jóvenes aprendices de inglés se relaciona estrechamente con las condiciones emocionales construidas en la interacción de aula; por ello, conviene diseñar experiencias comunicativas progresivas que normalicen el error, reduzcan la exposición innecesaria y fortalezcan la confianza para hablar.
Palabras clave: ansiedad lingüística; habilidades orales; autoconfianza; voluntad de comunicarse; jóvenes aprendices.

RESUMO

Introdução: A expressão oral em inglês exige a coordenação de recursos linguísticos, cognitivos e socioemocionais; por isso, a ansiedade, o medo de errar, a motivação e a autoconfiança podem alterar a disposição dos estudantes para participar. Objetivo: analisar como os fatores emocionais se manifestam e como se associam ao desenvolvimento das habilidades de expressão oral em jovens estudantes de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL) durante a interação habitual em sala de aula em Chone, Equador. Materiais e Métodos: Realizou-se um estudo qualitativo, descritivo e transversal em uma instituição de ensino privada de Chone, Equador, com 37 alunos do sétimo ano e três professores de inglês, selecionados por meio de amostragem por conveniência. As informações foram obtidas mediante observações em sala de aula e entrevistas semiestruturadas; os dados foram organizados em categorias temáticas e confrontados por meio da triangulação de fontes. Resultados: O nervosismo, o medo de cometer erros e a insegurança comunicativa associaram-se a hesitações, respostas breves, silêncio e à evitação de tarefas orais individuais. Em contrapartida, o trabalho em duplas e grupos, as atividades interativas, os jogos, o suporte visual e o feedback respeitoso foram acompanhados de uma maior disposição para se comunicar e de respostas mais espontâneas. Os padrões observados coincidem com a literatura sobre ansiedade linguística, disposição para se comunicar e prazer na aprendizagem de línguas, sugerindo que a participação oral varia conforme o grau de pressão comunicativa e a segurança percebida em cada atividade. Conclusões: O desenvolvimento da expressão oral em jovens aprendizes de inglês está estreitamente relacionado às condições emocionais construídas na interação em sala de aula; portanto, convém elaborar experiências comunicativas progressivas que normalizem o erro, reduzam a exposição desnecessária e fortaleçam a confiança para falar.
Palavras-chave: ansiedade em língua estrangeira; habilidades de fala; autoconfiança; disposição para comunicar-se; jovens aprendizes.

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Introduction

Speaking is among the most discernible means of foreign language acquisition as it makes it possible for the learners to apply the knowledge about language in real time in the presence of others. Unlike receptive language activities, speaking interaction makes oral performance visible to teachers and classmates. Young learners have to remember words, generate grammar, pay attention to pronunciation, read the speakers, and distribute speech turns while taking into consideration the social context of speaking activities. This means that problems with oral speech cannot be attributed only to insufficient knowledge of vocabulary or grammar. Emotional reactions are likely to have an impact on the learner's choice to make use of the language they already have, to postpone answering, to make the message shorter, or to avoid speaking (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre et al, 1998; Zuniga & Simard, 2022). The link between emotions and language learning has become a central topic in the field of second language acquisition. Early studies on emotions were largely centered on anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) presented foreign language classroom anxiety as a context-specific phenomenon that includes anxieties concerning communication, fear of negative evaluation, and worries at exams. The results of later researches have shown that foreign language anxiety results in a decrease in learner's performance regardless of the type of skills or tasks performed in class; however, the extent of anxiety and its manifestation differ depending on the learner, skill, task, and classroom context.

According to a meta-analysis, there is an overall negative relationship between foreign language anxiety and performance, whereas more skill-specific studies showed that speaking is the skill most influenced by anxiety due to its combination of public assessment and time constraints (Zhang, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2023; Zuniga & Simard, 2022). Speaking anxiety becomes an issue of pedagogical concern when apprehension is reflected in actual classroom behavior. In a study of speaking-in-class anxiety, Mak (2011) identified fear of negative evaluation, unprepared public speaking, correction during performance, and insufficient response time as

important anxiety-provoking conditions. More recent research likewise shows that anxiety can interfere with the allocation of attention during L2 speech and increase discourse-level self-repair, suggesting that anxious speakers may struggle to access and organize language efficiently under communicative pressure (Zuniga & Simard, 2022). Evidence from neurocognitive research also supports the view that foreign language speaking anxiety has behavioral and somatic correlates rather than being merely a subjective classroom complaint (Kelsen & Liang, 2024).

The problem is especially relevant for children and early adolescents because the affective conditions surrounding foreign language use are still developing. Research with primary-school learners remains smaller than the literature on university populations, yet available evidence shows that anxiety is already present at young ages. Yim (2014), in a path analysis with Korean primary-school EFL learners, found that self-perceived English proficiency played a central role in explaining anxiety. The significance of this finding lies in the notion that a child's response is influenced by their beliefs about their own skills. Thus, a student with expectations of failure or embarrassment entering an oral task may feel less secure about using the language than a student with positive expectations.

Recent studies of very young learners provide a more multi-angled perspective. For instance, Aramaki's (2024) studies conducted in Japan on the repetition of collaborative oral tasks in elementary school EFL classes demonstrate that task organization may be seen as an anxiety-management tool. Similarly, Buckingham and Alpaslan (2017) prove that additional speaking practice impacts the learners' willingness to communicate and fluency. Such studies are important for practical purposes because they do not only explore anxiety as a personal deficiency but also investigate how task design affects learners' confidence to communicate.

This situational interpretation links language learning anxiety to WTC. According to MacIntyre et al. (1998), the second language WTC is the individual's comfort level for taking part in discussion with a certain interlocutor at a certain moment in time. The so-called model is very important for explaining the reasons behind linguistic competence not leading to any communication practices. The learner may possess sufficient knowledge of English to respond but may choose to do nothing in case of low situational confidence. The research of WTC in the classroom has proven that numerous aspects, including topic, interlocutor, task, environment, teacher's actions, competence level, anxiety level, and motivation can influence WTC at a specific moment (Zuniga & Simard, 2022; Feng et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2026). WTC can be extremely important in the educational context. Thus, the student may be totally willing to collaborate with a peer but will choose not to speak in front of the whole class. The same student will use more words when playing a game than in a formal presentation even though both tasks require the use of the same vocabulary. The longitudinal research conducted on young learners of EFL reinforces the significance of WTC as a relevant developmental concept. Feng et al. (2025), who examined seventh-grade students over a period of three semesters, managed to establish a positive connection between WTC and language attitudes. Their research design is different from the qualitative one used for this research but reinforces the idea that WTC is not merely about language ability; it is linked to attitudes, emotions and the students' changing relationship with English.

Teacher and classroom climate represent one of the situational factors influencing WTC. Recent studies indicate that classroom environment, emotions and perceived language competence function together to determine the level of WTC and participation (Zuniga and Simard, 2022; Feng et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2026). When students view speaking activities as a public performance, mistakes can be interpreted as social risks. On the contrary, when the same language activity involves pair work, games, project work, or guided practice, the students can feel less afraid of making mistakes. The education significance is not about removing difficulty; it is about managing the style so that students can speak on their own without being anxious. Research conducted among learners in the upper-secondary school shows that the classroom atmosphere, emotions and the extent of readiness for communication are tightly connected. According to the research done by Khajavy et al. (2018), who examined 1,528 students from 65 classrooms, the positive classroom environment correlates with higher levels of enjoyment and willingness to communicate whereas anxiety is negatively connected with the willingness to communicate within the classroom. According to the findings of the study of Peng and Woodrow (2010), the confidence level in communications, motivation of the students, students' beliefs, and the environment of the classroom facilitate the willingness to communicate among the students. Finally, Dewaele (2019) determined foreign language anxiety as the major negative predictor of willingness-to-communicate among EFL students while enjoyment together with the frequency of teacher' use of the target language served as the positive predictors. Overall, these findings lend weight to the ecological framework in

which classroom participation emerges from an interplay of learner emotions, perceived competence, teacher behavior, and immediate social environment.

A second important trend in affective research is the movement away from focusing exclusively on negative feelings to positive psychology and positive experiences in foreign language learning. According to Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), enjoyment and anxiety are not two opposite ends of one continuum, as learners can experience both simultaneously in a class session. It has been established in subsequent studies that foreign language enjoyment is connected with teacher and student variables, classroom interactions, attitude toward the language being studied and the amount of language practiced in class (Dewaele et al., 2018). Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018) have revealed that enjoyment contributes to language performance independently of anxiety. Consequently, the important pedagogical question changes from the simplistic "How to reduce anxiety?" to a more detailed "Which classroom conditions promote positive learning context while the teacher is managing inevitable difficulties?"

The combination of enjoyment and anxiety gives insight into the mechanisms behind the success of interactive speaking tasks irrespective of their participants' anxieties. There can always be a certain level of anxiety present in authentic speaking practices, but the presence of feelings such as interest and encouragement, perception of the speaker's competence, and an understanding that the speech task can be successfully accomplished is of utmost importance. Dewaele et al. (2022) note that changes in the learning environment also influence patterns of enjoyment and anxiety and that social interaction is one of the key components of the students' experience. More recently, Tsang and Davis (2024) have studied EFL students of grade 5 and discovered that games and videos belonged to the most enjoyable activities. The findings obtained are very important for the current research as the participants of Ecuadorian students demonstrated the same level of enthusiasm when involved in interactive games.

The conduct of the educator plays an essential role in creating the emotional atmosphere of the speaking process. Emotional safety means not avoiding corrections as to the meaning of how and when corrections are made and how given feedback is understood by learners. Recent emotional studies show that teacher behavior, support, and classroom environment influence the feelings of learners and readiness for oral participation in a class (Dewaele et al., 2022; Wu, 2024). Dewaele et al. (2018) showed that teacher-related factors are linked more to enjoyment than anxiety which means educators hold a key to ensuring positive emotional experience. Recent studies demonstrate that teacher characteristics and perceived support lead to learners' enjoyment and anxiety levels and willingness to communicate (Wu, 2024; Zhang et al., 2026).

In young learners, feedback probably interacts with self-confidence in terms of the development of judgment concerning their own communicative competence. Repeated experiences of successful participation led to increasing the belief that speaking is easy while repeated failures decrease risks and make learners give shorter answers or drop speaking. Yim's (2014) results about self-evaluated quality of performance coincide with this assumption, as do newer pieces of research that describe perceived communicative competence being the cause of WTC. Thus, the main problem in pedagogy is not whether learners make mistakes—mistakes happen all the time in the process of learning—but whether classroom communication allows them to remain active even if they make mistakes.

Collaborative communication is especially important in this context since it changes the emotional and linguistic landscape of communication. Pair tasks or small group tasks divide speaking turns, provide opportunities for practicing speech, and minimize attention focused on one particular learner. Aramaki (2024) suggests that repeated collaborative tasks let the students get rid of anxiety caused by EFL learning, while Buckingham and Alpaslan (2017) found that learners, who have structured opportunities to practice speaking, become very good at it as well as good at WTC. There are studies conducted in other populations of EFL which show that collaborative and/or scaffolded speaking environments improve communicative confidence and reduce anxiety (Zarrinabadi & Alipour, 2020; Fathi et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2025).

Visual and multimodal assistance may work in the same way. Pictures, flashcards, gestures, and other contextual signals can help ease retrieval demands and provide learners with a clear beginning for their utterances. Studies devoted to multimodal classrooms have shown the relevance of pedagogical multimodality to WTC and perceived classroom atmosphere, which means that communication relies not only on spoken language but also on visual and interpersonal resources (Peng, 2019). In the current situation, the use of visual assistance has been related to a rise in confidence during vocabulary- based oral responses, implying that

scaffolding can indirectly help reach some level of emotional comfort because it makes speaking easier.

Despite the growth of affective research, three gaps remain relevant. First, much of the evidence comes from adult or university EFL contexts, even though anxiety and WTC are already consequential in primary and lower-secondary education (Yim, 2014; Buckingham & Alpaslan, 2017; Aramaki, 2024; Feng et al., 2025). Second, many studies rely primarily on self-report scales; classroom observations can contribute complementary evidence about how affect is manifested behaviorally during actual speaking activities. Third, Latin American school contexts remain underrepresented in the international literature on foreign language emotions, which limits understanding of how broader theoretical constructs are expressed in specific institutional and sociocultural settings.

Recent Ecuadorian evidence strengthens the relevance of this problem in basic education. Vélez Muñoz et al. (2026), in a study published in Maestro y Sociedad with 180 eighth-, ninth-, and tenth-grade students and five English teachers, identified low stable motivation, limited peer-to-peer use of English, restricted classroom participation, and fear or uncertainty during oral and pronunciation-related activities. The authors also emphasized the interplay of affective, cognitive, and methodological conditions and recommended greater oral practice, participatory strategies, and emotionally supportive classroom interaction. Though this research did investigate wider elements of difficulty rather than the emotion of speaking with its main focus to support the importance of exploring how different factors – motivation, anxiety, confidence, teaching methods and possibilities of being active – are connected with learners' real practices with English, its form of research in Ecuador represents an important regional context for the current research.

The problem that emerged from the institution being studied had to do with some grade seven students who could successfully give answers in English but remained passive when confronted with speaking tasks. Teachers noticed the increase in students' involvement when the tasks involved working together with others, were delivered in some form of game or visual format, or were followed by feedback. These observations pointed to a need to examine emotional factors as part of speaking development rather than treating low participation solely as a linguistic deficit.

Accordingly, the present study analyzes how emotional factors are manifested in and associated with the development of speaking skills among young EFL learners during ordinary classroom interaction in Chone, Ecuador. The study focuses on anxiety, fear of error, motivation, self-confidence, collaborative interaction, and emotional classroom climate, while avoiding causal claims that cannot be supported by a qualitative cross-sectional design. The objective of the article is to analyze the relationship between emotional factors and speaking participation in young learners of English as a foreign language.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A qualitative approach with descriptive scope and a cross-sectional design was used. The design was appropriate because the study sought to interpret emotional manifestations and participation patterns as they occurred in the natural classroom rather than to manipulate an intervention or quantify causal effects. The unit of interest was the relationship between emotional conditions and observable speaking behavior during communicative English activities. Consequently, the study emphasized meanings, recurring patterns, and convergence across qualitative sources.

The research was conducted in a private educational institution in Chone, Ecuador. The accessible student population comprised 135 learners. A non-probability convenience sample of 37 seventh-grade students participated in the classroom observations, together with three English teachers who were directly involved in the relevant instructional context. Convenience sampling was used because selection depended on accessibility and direct participation in the phenomenon under study. The sample is therefore contextual and should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all seventh-grade EFL learners in Ecuador.

Two complementary data-collection techniques were employed: classroom observation and semi-structured teacher interviews. Classroom observation was used to document emotional and behavioral manifestations during speaking activities, including hesitation, silence, response length, avoidance, eye contact, willingness to volunteer, interaction with peers, reactions to correction, and changes in participation across task formats. The interviews were used to explore teachers' perceptions of anxiety, motivation, self-confidence, fear of mistakes, peer judgment, classroom climate, and the strategies they considered helpful for oral participation.

An observation sheet and semi-structured interview guide were used for the research. With respect to

the research's aim, anxiety/communicative insecurity, motivation/engagement, self-confidence, and oral participation represented four key points of focus on the observation sheet. As for the interview guide, it addressed topics such as circumstances characterizing students' willingness or unwillingness to speak, emotional barriers, attitudes toward errors and corrections, and impacts of such factors as pair work, group work, games, and teacher support on their learning process.

Before being utilized, the two instruments were reviewed by three professionals specializing in English teaching and research methodology. The experts took a close look at wording, applicability, clarity, and structure and suggested corrections.

There was no quantitative index stated for the original research, making the expert review a qualitative validation method without claiming a number for the validity index.

To improve the clarity of the students' evidence, the dimensions used in the original study were summarized for reporting in an analytical specification (Table 1). The specification comprises the four dimensions used in the research (anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and oral contribution) and relates them to observable behaviors described in the student record sheets.

Table 1. Analytical specification for the classroom observation instrument

Dimension	Observable indicators	Evidence recorded	Interpretive focus
Anxiety / communicative insecurity	Anxiety encountering speech; delay; hesitation; avoidance to make eye contact; silence/avoidance	Occurrence in oral tasks in addition to the short field-note example	Whether communicative pressure is present while limited participation occurs
Self-confidence	Reassurance needed; ability to initiate independently; ability to keep going after making mistake; willingness to volunteer	Observed level of support needed and behavioral response after feedback	Degree of communicative security and autonomy during speaking
Motivation / engagement	Focus on the task; motivation; ability to volunteer; persistence; responsiveness to games or activities	Visible engagement and changes across task formats	Whether engaging tasks co-occur with increased attempts to use English
Oral participation / interaction	Length of response; number of attempts; participation in pairs/groups; contribution to the overall class; spontaneous comments	Comparative observation across individual, pair/group, and supported tasks	How interaction format and emotional comfort relate to speaking behavior

Source: The authors' organization of data according to the characteristics and manifestations from the original observation process.

The received information were analyzed through qualitative content analysis. First, observation notes and teacher responses were read repeatedly to identify recurrent statements and behaviors. Second, meaning units were coded according to the emotional condition described and the speaking behavior with which it co-occurred. Third, related codes were grouped into broader analytic categories: (a) anxiety and communicative insecurity, (b) fear of mistakes and peer evaluation, (c) motivation and engagement, (d) self-confidence and support seeking, (e) collaborative interaction, and (f) emotional classroom climate. Finally, interview and observation evidence was compared to identify convergent, complementary, or divergent patterns.

Triangulation was used at the source level. A pattern was treated as especially meaningful when teachers reported it and similar behavior was documented in classroom observation. In another instance, teachers' reports indicating lesser involvement during the oral presentations were juxtaposed with note-taking about hesitance, brief responses, and evasiveness. Similarly, the reports of group pair work being helpful in reducing stress correlated with the increasing tendencies for participation in collaborative tasks. In this case, since the data collected did not have frequency counts for every code, findings were analyzed qualitatively.

Ethical principles such as confidentiality, voluntary participation, and institutional permission were taken into account. Prior approval was obtained from the educational institution. Given that participants are minors, it is necessary to specify whether parents have provided informed consent on behalf of their children and indicate if students were informed about this research theme. The relevant information is only needed if ethical procedures are included in the original report.

RESULTS

The nature of the working profile reveals a distinct difference between obstructing and enabling circumstances. The popular inhibiting attributes are the fear to make a mistake (64.9%), the uncertainty

(62.2%), as well as the anxiety about one's performance (59.5%). On the contrary, the widespread facilitating attributes are participation in games and interactive activities (78.4%), regular participation after receiving positive feedback (75.7%), as well as the growing participation in pair/group activities (73.0%). Such figures serve as a form of descriptive evidence that can supplement the qualitative research results but would not lead to the transformation of the current research into the quantitative one.

Table 2. Distribution of emotional and speaking behaviors (n = 37)

Observed indicator	n	%	Working interpretation
Fear of making mistakes	24	64.9	One of the most common hindering emotions.
Nervousness before individual speaking	22	59.5	Individual exposure led to visible pressure.
Hesitation before/during speaking	23	62.2	Hesitation frequently accompanied oral production.
Very short oral responses	21	56.8	Restricted response length was common in speaking tasks.
Silence or avoidance of participation	12	32.4	A smaller but relevant subgroup avoided oral participation.
Dependence on teacher prompts	20	54.1	Many learners required reassurance or direct support.
Increased participation in pair/group work	27	73.0	Collaborative formats were associated with stronger participation.
More spontaneous responses in pair/group work	23	62.2	Peer interaction appeared to facilitate spontaneous speech.
Higher engagement during games/interactive tasks	29	78.4	Interactive tasks showed the strongest engagement pattern.
Continued participation after positive feedback	28	75.7	Supportive feedback was followed by sustained participation.
Greater confidence with visual support	25	67.6	Visual prompts appeared to facilitate oral response.
Voluntary participation without direct prompting	17	45.9	Independent volunteering remained comparatively limited.

Source: Authors' elaboration from classroom observations and semi-structured teacher interviews.

The analysis produced a coherent set of qualitative patterns showing that oral participation varied with the emotional and interactional conditions surrounding speaking tasks. Interview and observation data converged most strongly around five themes: anxiety during individual exposure, fear of mistakes and peer judgment, increased engagement in interactive activities, greater participation in collaborative formats, and the role of supportive feedback and classroom climate. The findings are presented as contextual associations rather than causal effects.

Table 3. Working triangulation of student observations and teacher interview patterns

Category	Student-observation evidence	Teacher-interview pattern	Interpretation
Anxiety / fear of mistakes	24/37 fear-of-error; 23/37 hesitation	All three working teacher accounts describe fear of mistakes, insecurity, or public exposure.	Convergent pattern of communicative pressure during individual speaking.
Self-confidence	20/37 prompt-dependent; 17/37 volunteered independently	Teachers connect confidence with volunteering, longer answers, and willingness to take risks.	Confidence appears variable across task formats and support conditions.
Collaborative interaction	27/37 increased participation; 23/37 more spontaneous responses	Teachers describe shy learners as more active in pair/group work.	Shared communicative responsibility appears to reduce perceived exposure.
Positive feedback / support	28/37 continued after positive feedback; 25/37 benefited from visual support	Teachers emphasize encouragement, respectful correction, and visual scaffolding.	Supportive classroom conditions appear to sustain communicative engagement.

Source: Authors' elaboration from classroom observations and semi-structured teacher interviews.

Student evidence in this study derives from classroom observation rather than from a student questionnaire. Accordingly, the results below report observable manifestations and contrasts across task conditions instead of presenting response percentages that were not collected. The coding matrix for every student (S01 to S37) has been created to help calculate frequencies and percentages only after comparison and verification of observation sheets. This ensures the qualitative design is preserved and allows for the creation of a straightforward way to count descriptive indicatives.

Anxiety and communicative insecurity in the course of individual exposure

Teachers have frequently said that individual speaking can cause insecurity in some learners. One teacher noted that "There are students who do not want to answer orally since they are afraid of making mistakes in front of others," while another said that "Some children remain silent when asked to speak individually." These words suggest that the public consequences of errors seem to be more important than the lingual difficulty.

Observations in class supported the teachers' opinions. During an individual oral task, some boys did not dare to maintain eye contact, delayed their answers, or provided a very limited verbal response even when they needed more words. In some cases, the boy seemed to know some language needed to make a response; however, he silenced himself when he was addressed directly.

Anxiety regarding errors, evaluation by friends, and limited risk-taking in speaking activities

Teachers said that some students would not take the risk of volunteering to speak in front of others because they were worried about what other students would think. This fear was seen in other areas too, such as vocabulary limitation, reliance on design prompts, and unwillingness to elaborate the answer given. Instead of communicating a message, students seemed to be more concerned about trying to avoid making a mistake.

The tendency is towards a limited oral risk because students stressed by evaluation would choose safer and shorter forms. The evidence is indirect in that we cannot assess the degree of anxiety, but we find agreement between the statements made during the interviews and the evidence of hesitation.

Motivation and participation in games and interactive activities

In the teachers' opinion, they were happier to take part in an activity when speaking was presented within a game or a kind of light interactive activity. According to him, such tasks set up a very relaxed atmosphere and made students concentrate on completing the task rather than on the mistake prevention procedures. The students were more active and eager to make a short statement when the activity was in a fun format or interactive one.

Observation data supported this view. When comparing the typical individual assignments with interactive activities, one can note that the latter ones encouraged much more volunteering and quicker reactions of students as well as more attempts to use English on their own.

Confidence, responses to mistakes, and continuity after mistakes

Self-assurance could be seen in the level of self-sufficiency displayed by learners in engaging in communication. According to teachers, some students required help in the form of encouragement or motivation before they could start talking. The observations showed that positive feedback and correction were followed by active speaking, while those learners who were worried about saying something wrong preferred to stop or shorten their turns.

This suggests that positive feedback is not something to be considered pure praise, but rather as some social help that prevents the receivers from dropping out after having failed in the response. The significant indicator here is continuity, which shows that the students feel less inclined to withdraw if the correction does not lead to be punished publicly for committing the error.

Cooperation in communication and diminished pressure in communication

According to the data, pair and group work produced the sharpest contrasts in behavior of students in this study. Teachers mentioned that students who they regarded as timid or insecure were less likely to participate in individual activities performed in front of the whole class but did become more engaged in the process while working in pairs or groups. Teachers noted that in collaborative activities students were able to communicate freely with each other and give support to one another.

The observations also showed similar results. Some students, whose individual answers were rather short, were able to talk a lot in pairs and behave more confidently. However, it is impossible to determine the size of the change since the original tool did not have the systematic frequency counts. Nevertheless, the results are consistent and demonstrate the importance of peer interaction in enhancing the process of oral participation.

Positive emotions in the classroom and visual aid

It was noted and described that the general atmosphere in the classroom is respectful. The teachers state that the students demonstrate more confidence in their communication when they perceive support and encouragement. On the contrary, they believe that constant criticism or correction would make them feel insecure. Thus, the classroom environment acts as a background factor that influences how the students understand particular speaking episodes.

Various visuals, such as flashcards and pictures, are also connected with relieving the burden of speaking in terms of vocabulary. These resources provided concrete cues from which students could construct an answer

and appeared to reduce uncertainty about what to say. Visual support did not eliminate hesitation, but it was frequently present when students responded with greater confidence.

Table 4. Triangulated emotional conditions and speaking behaviors identified in the study

Analytic category	Interview evidence	Observation evidence	Interpretive relationship
Anxiety / individual exposure	Teachers reported silence and avoidance when learners had to speak individually.	Hesitation, eye-contact avoidance, brief responses, delayed initiation.	Higher perceived exposure co-occurred with restricted participation.
Fear of mistakes / peer judgment	Teachers associated errors with fear of classmates' reactions.	Students limited answers, relied on prompts, or stopped speaking.	Fear of negative evaluation was linked to reduced oral risk-taking.
Games / interactive tasks	Teachers described greater enthusiasm and willingness to participate.	More volunteering and spontaneous attempts were observed.	Engaging task formats co-occurred with higher oral engagement.
Pair and group work	Teachers reported improved participation among shy/insecure learners.	Participation increased compared with individual whole-class tasks.	Collaborative formats appeared to reduce communicative pressure.
Positive feedback / respectful correction	Teachers emphasized encouragement and confidence building.	Students often continued participating after supportive correction.	Feedback style was associated with maintenance of communicative confidence.
Visual support	Teachers used contextual supports during oral activities.	Flashcards/pictures accompanied more confident vocabulary responses.	Scaffolding appeared to reduce uncertainty in initiating speech.

Source: Authors' elaboration from classroom observations and semi-structured teacher interviews.

The table makes visible the student-derived component of the dataset by separating what teachers reported from what was actually documented in learners' classroom behavior. This is important because the observation evidence (hesitation, response length, avoidance, volunteering, participation in pairs/groups and continuity after feedback) is the direct empirical contribution of 37 students participated in the research.

In essence, the integrated pattern can be interpreted as a movement between communicative pressure and emotional comfort. The constraining situation was related to the limited speaking behavior while in the supportive pedagogical situation the level of participation was much higher.

Figure 1 demonstrates this interpretation without providing frequencies or causal relationship no information used in the research was collected.

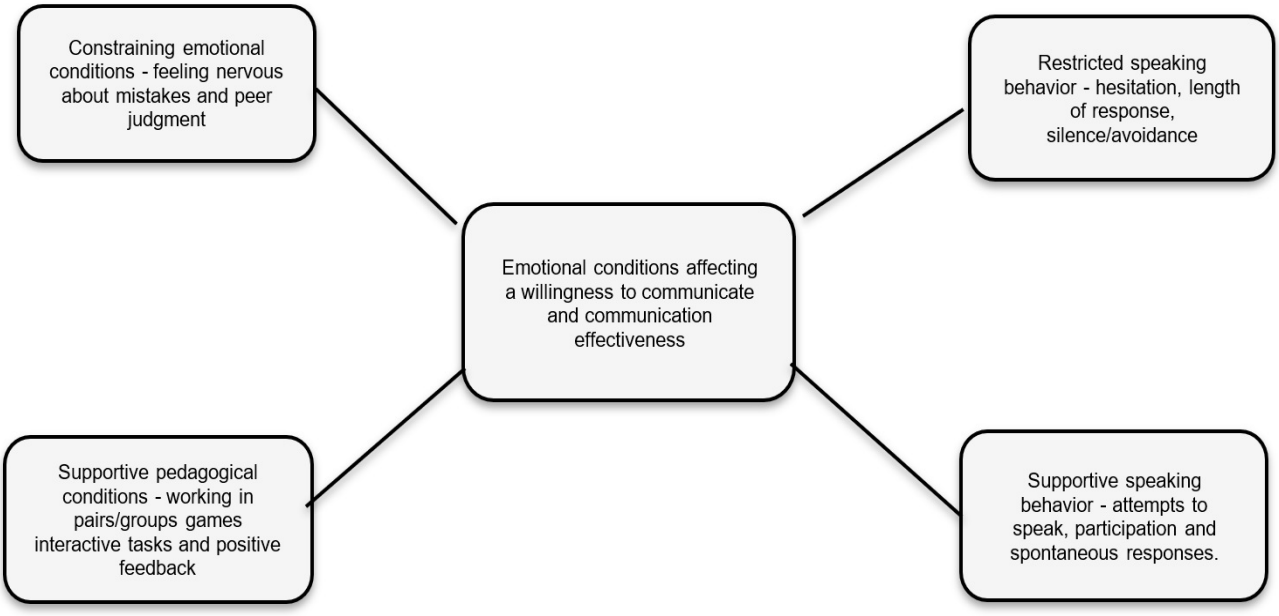


Figure 1. Qualitative relationship between emotional conditions and speaking participation.

Source: Author's analysis based on triangulated interview and observation data.

DISCUSSION

The study findings suggest that emotional conditions affect the extent of the young learners' participation in speaking activities. Some restrictions emerged when learners needed to speak in front of classmates. In these instances, teachers reported that students experience fear of making mistakes, while observations revealed the presence of hesitation, short answers, and avoidance. This observation is in line with the classical

concept of language anxiety in foreign language classes as communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation are the main components of this anxiety. This finding also corresponds to the finding by Mak (2011) about the importance of making a presentation to the class and being corrected during speaking for speech anxiety. Moreover, recent studies demonstrate that decreased evaluative pressure helps to reduce the level of anxiety in speaking or to increase readiness to speak (Elov et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024).

The current evidence is particularly relevant because the participants were young learners rather than university students. Yim (2014) demonstrated that anxiety is already meaningful among primary-school EFL learners and that self-perceived proficiency occupies an important position in the anxiety process. The Ecuadorian observations suggest a compatible mechanism: several students appeared capable of responding but restricted their oral behavior when they perceived the speaking event as socially risky. Thus, limited participation should not automatically be interpreted as lack of knowledge. In some cases, it may reflect the learner's appraisal of competence and the anticipated interpersonal consequences of error.

The negative association observed between anxiety-related behavior and oral participation also accords with broader quantitative evidence, while the present design provides a different type of support. Teimouri et al. (2019), in a meta-analysis of 97 reports and 19,933 learners, found an overall negative relationship between second-language anxiety and achievement. At the school-age level, MacIntyre et al. (2002) showed that WTC, perceived communicative competence, anxiety, motivation, and frequency of L2 communication are already meaningfully differentiated among junior-high learners. These studies do not permit the present qualitative observations to be interpreted as effect sizes or causal relationships, but they reinforce the plausibility of the behavioral pattern found here: when perceived competence is low and evaluative pressure is high, learners may possess relevant linguistic knowledge yet make less use of it in actual communication (MacIntyre et al., 2002; Teimouri et al., 2019).

The role of fear of mistakes also corresponds with research showing that anxiety can disrupt the real-time processes required for L2 speech. Zuniga and Simard (2022) found that increased anxiety was linked to discourse-level self-repairs and difficulties that emerge before words are fully formulated. These findings provide insight into why sometimes students witness reluctance or cut back on their messages even though they have the vocabulary. Oral production requires the ability to pay attention quickly, and the nervousness may increase one's self-observation at the moment communication needs to be prioritized.

At the same time, however, the findings should not be interpreted as evidencing deficiency of anxious students. Participation is contingent upon a task. Students who may be hesitant to talk in front of the whole class often become quite active in pair or group work. Such variability is consistent with the WTC theory, which states that communication willingness depends on situational confidence and current conditions in the classroom (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Zuniga & Simard, 2022; Feng et al., 2025). A student is not simply willing or unwilling to speak.

The variation in situational characteristics is in line with the modern upgrade of the WTC model. MacIntyre (2020) is of the view that WTC is to be treated as a dynamic concept that is subject to variations due to the interaction of affect, perceived competence, context, and communicative competition in WTC. Khajavy et al. (2018) also succeeded in proving the role of situations in class in forming WTC and enjoyment, whereas Dewaele and Pavelescu (2021) proved through multiple-case study that enjoyment and anxiety can exhibit some complex and unique patterns of WTC. Quite recently, Lin et al. (2025) established the negative relationship between foreign language anxiousness and WTC and showed that academic buoyancy could explain part of this relationship.

The importance of WTC is confirmed by new longitudinal studies on young learners of EFL. One of them is Feng et al. (2025), who demonstrated a positive relationship between language attitudes and WTC over time among seventh graders. Although their research did not cover the type of classroom research presented here, it still supports finding that communication behavior is linked to affective orientation towards language learning in students as a whole. For these subjects, willingness could be observed as a behavior change manifested in attempts of students to produce more speech when low communicative pressure and high task support was present.

Collaborative interaction was one of the most consistent supportive conditions. Pair and group work reduced the visibility of individual performance and allowed learners to share responsibility for communication. Aramaki (2024), studying elementary EFL learners, likewise found value in collaborative oral task repetition as an anxiety-reduction strategy. Buckingham and Alpaslan (2017) showed that additional structured speaking practice

could improve both speaking outcomes and young learners' WTC. Together with the present observations, these studies suggest that collaboration can function simultaneously as a linguistic practice opportunity and an emotional scaffold.

This interpretation does not imply that all group work automatically produces learning or emotional safety. Poorly structured collaboration can allow some learners to remain passive. The useful feature in the present study was the reduction of communicative pressure combined with an increased opportunity to attempt short turns. From a pedagogical perspective, it is conceivable to employ pair work as a transitional phase connecting teacher-centered intervention and individual public performance. Students may rehearse their ideas with a classmate to reiterate them in a group and later perform individually (similarly to achieving their own aims). As a result, the session maintains a type of challenge without causing shock.

The observed motivating pattern in games and other interactive activities supports the findings of research on young learners (Tsang & Davis, 2024). In particular, the students of the fifth grade indicate games and videos as enjoyable activities worthwhile in terms of having fun, learning, communicating, and implementing English in practice. A similar finding was obtained in this research, where games and dynamics of interaction caused interest and motivation to speak. This correlation indicates that enjoyment is not for fun only, as it seems to create a totally appropriate environment for speaking the target language.

Research in positive psychology explains this pattern. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) found that enjoyment and anxiety operate as independent emotions that can coexist. Afterward, Dewaele et al. (2018) established that enjoyment has a strong relationship with teacher and classroom variables, whereas Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018) indicated that enjoyment and performance are positively related to each other. Thus, the learners observed in Ecuador did not necessarily have to eliminate anxiety altogether in order to produce speech. Enjoying and supportive environment may have made them ready to speak despite having a small amount of anxiety.

The difference between eliminating negative feelings and generating positive emotions is important pedagogically. If the focus is only on avoiding anxiety, students may be taught much simpler tasks or tasks without communicative value. More importantly, it is better to strive for creating a manageable difficulty in a supportive environment. Fun games, cooperative tasks, and pictures can keep a linguistic target while making the task more predictable, socially distributed, and enjoyable.

The teacher feedback came out again as yet another instrument for influencing the relationship between students' emotional climate and their speaking behavior. In the course of observations, a corrective feedback applied with respect was usually followed by a sustained involvement, whilst inevitability of criticism led to withdrawal in teacher reports. The wider literature on emotions indicates that certain teachers' behaviors and emotional climates associated with speaking can strengthen or diminish anxiousness and influence students' readiness to continue following an error (Dewaele et al., 2022; Wu, 2024).

It should be noted that feedback may be especially important for younger learners as it helps form their perspectives of communicative competences. However, this does not mean, of course, that correction should be replaced by the constant praise. In the process of speaking, it is necessary to provide the student with the information about the content, vocabulary, grammar, and interaction. Thus, communications should follow a communicative continuum between fluency-oriented communications and corrective feedback. The current findings support this differentiation because, rather than praise, the key factor was the students' capability of putting their ideas together after receiving the help they needed.

Visual input provides an additional level of assistance. Flashcards and images yielded positive results in terms of students' confidence during the vocabulary-oriented communication. This is consistent with the findings of earlier research confirming that communication in the classroom is multimodal and that various factors—visual multimedia, tone, environment, etc.—influence learner's willingness to communicate (Peng, 2019). For example, in the case of very young learners of English as a foreign language, a visual cue lessens the burden of deciding what to say and helps them concentrate on producing the words they need to say in the process.

The results emphasize the necessity to distinguish between the emotional state and personality characteristics. Some of the students who were considered shy by their teachers behaved differently once they took on a new task. Dynamic models of WTC and emotion in the classroom are more appropriate because it is seen from the dialogue between specific learner characteristics and situational qualities. New findings about young EFL learners show that emotions and attitudes must be explored in terms of classroom activities rather than regarded as fixed features of leaning (Tsang & Davis, 2024; Feng et al., 2025).

The second important aspect of this study is related to qualitative triangulation. Many of the existing studies on learner emotions are based on questionnaires, which include general assessments of anxiety, interest, WTC, and other characteristics. Even though such studies can be useful, they do not allow investigating how emotions manifest in particular moments. The present study addresses this gap, connecting the teacher perceptions with classroom observation and revealing the concrete behavioral manifestations in the form of hesitations, silence, brief replies, dependency on manipulations, etc.

The data still have to be interpreted carefully. The authors have not used validated measures of either anxiety or willingness to communicate (WTC). Also, they have failed to evaluate students' speaking via an analytic rubric and to track learners' progress over time. Thus, nothing can be said if highly anxious students did, in fact, have lower levels of language proficiency or if collaborative approaches helped them to develop their speaking ability. The authors may thus only conclude that some emotional and pedagogical factors are associated with either restricted or expanded patterns of speaking in the classroom studied.

The role of context is also very important. The majority of literature cited in this article has focused on Asian, European, or university EFL contexts. The fact that similar tendencies have been established in Ecuador implies that the phenomena under investigation are cross-cultural. However, the way in which they manifest themselves could depend on cultural beliefs related to correction, authority, peer evaluation, and English proficiency. Thus, further research conducted in Ecuador should not assume that models found abroad can be universally applicable in Ecuador but must rely on data collected from different institutions and areas. The literature on emotional safety is concerned not simply with the trait of particular people, but with characteristics of communication settings, as is evident from the qualitative studies of emotional language use environments (Dryden et al., 2021) or the most recent reviews of emotional wellbeing in EFL context (Mierzwa-Kamińska, 2025).

The current results add to the latest Ecuadorian educational evidence since Vélez Muñoz et al. (2026) indicate that many primary education students hardly ever use English with each other, while teachers note the presence of fear, lack of enthusiasm, and silence when students do not know how to react to questions. This connection is significant, since despite different sample populations and analytical focus areas, the studies produced similar findings: while Vélez Muñoz et al. engaged with cognitive and motivational obstacles affecting senior learners, the present research analyzed the impact of emotions on the seventh formers' speaking. Nonetheless, they imply that inadequate oral participation of students in Ecuadorian EFL classrooms can be seen as the result of various emotional, motivational, pedagogic, and communicative variables instead of being attributed to grammar or vocabulary learning problems.

In terms of implementation practice, these findings support the model of gradual transition in teaching spoken language. First of all, teachers should pay attention to low exposure to speaking through visual prompts or pair work, with further developments to discussing ideas in small groups and speaking publicly after the students formulate their necessary messages. Additionally, error correction approaches should vary depending on the objective of the task. For example, in case of fluency-oriented activity students are supposed to use communication first of all, whereas subsequent activities should put more focus on correctness.

The results also indicate that the emotional climate is a part of speaking pedagogy and not just a pastoral concern. An emotionally safe environment in the classroom does not eliminate the need to pursue academic goals, whereas it does provide a favorable environment in which students would want to do that. The notion that students become engaged with academic requirements when they realize that language learners make errors and that they are provided with meaningful feedback and with opportunities to communicate with their peers proves to be consistent with the theory suggesting that in a supportive environment EFL learners are more likely to experience less speaking anxiety and increased willingness to speak (Aramaki, 2024; Fathi et al., 2024; Hedayati et al., 2026; Zhang et al., 2026). The theory is also confirmed by the recent intervention study showing the impact of cooperative speaking structures on language anxiety (Hedayati et al., 2026).

In conclusion, the present study provides a few avenues for additional research. Longitudinal classroom observation may be able to clarify whether those students who become more willing to participate are also those who eventually improve in their fluency, complexity, accuracy, or pronunciation. Mixed-method research can involve age-appropriate affective scales, oral performance tasks, and stimulated-recall interviews. Intervention studies may compare the effectiveness of different sequences of individual, paired, and group speaking activities and simultaneously study both emotional and language outcomes. Such studies allow for making stronger claims about the role of emotional support in the development of speaking skills.

CONCLUSIONS

It was concluded that the success or failure of EFL learners is determined by emotional factors that affect learners' performance during the class interaction. Factors such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, belief that peers will judge them, and the feelings of being incompetent in speaking prevented them from participating in the communication process, expressing ideas briefly, staying silent, being dependent on the teacher's prompts, and avoiding speaking tasks.

The research also discovered that positive teaching methods allow learners to participate in the communication process more actively; group and pair work, games, interactive tasks, visual support, positive reinforcement, and acceptable corrections help learners gain confidence in their speaking performances.

The research indicates that it is also necessary to consider error as part of language learning. Instructors need to ensure that there are enough possibilities for giving corrective feedback, but should refrain from employing methods that unduly increase students' exposure to errors.

However, it is necessary to acknowledge some limitations in deriving these conclusions. The study relied on a convenience sample, was carried out in one private educational institution and did not involve direct interviews with the students, standardized affective measures or any analytic assessment of speaking performance.

As a result, the results are specific for a situation and do not show the cause and effect links. In future research, more schools, following students through time, getting opinion of students and using mixed methods would be essential to measure anxiety, enjoyment, WTC (willingness to communicate), and oral production.

Despite the limitations of this paper, its findings provide evidence of Ecuadorian context to international literature that has been dominated by research on older people. The key point that follows from here is the importance of emotional and pedagogical structure of speaking tasks: when speaking tasks are demanding, through providing support, interaction, and respectful dealing with errors young learners show higher readiness to employ the English they are acquiring.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Declaration of responsibility of authorship

We, the authors of the aforementioned manuscript, DECLARE that we have directly contributed to its intellectual content, as well as to the genesis and analysis of its data; therefore, we are able to take public responsibility for it and accept that their names appear on the list of authors in the order indicated. Furthermore, we have complied with the ethical requirements of the aforementioned publication, having consulted the Declaration of Ethics and Publication Malpractice.

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