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Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety and Self-Esteem:
the relation between the Two Psychological Aspects explained through
A Survey among University Students

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Introduction

The present work arises from the desire to investigate two important psychological aspects involved in the process of foreign language learning, namely self-esteem and Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety. When the argument regards the learning of a foreign language it is in fact important to consider not only the technical aspect related to the rules to be learned but also the emotional element of the students.

The paper is divided into five chapters. The first chapter will focus on anxiety, an emotion that everyone has experienced at least once in their life, but which can assume different characteristics from person to person. The first part of the chapter will analyse anxiety in its general characteristics, its facets, and its neurobiological sources, while the second part will deal with a specific type of anxiety that affects many students who are studying one or more foreign languages, namely the so-called Foreign Language Anxiety and in particular the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, or the anxiety of expressing oneself orally in a language that is not one's mother tongue, with particular attention to the causes, the physical and psychological manifestations and the effects.

The topic of the second chapter will be self-esteem, a personality trait that involves the self-concept of individuals and which can influence many aspects of people's lives. After an analysis of its main characteristics and its components, it will be explained how self-esteem changes during the different stages of an individual's life and then the dissertation will focus on self-esteem in the school context. By examining various studies conducted in the past, the present paper will show how self-esteem is a factor that has an important role when human beings are studying a foreign language, especially when oral communication is involved.

The third chapter will present the exploratory study conducted thanks to the participation of 108 students of "Languages and Cultures" Department at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice which answered two questionnaires, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLSAS). The two instruments were used in order to achieve the three objectives of the study.

The first objective was to analyse the perception students have of themselves as persons in order to establish whether they have a good level of self-esteem or not. The second objective aimed at investigating whether oral activities in the foreign language cause anxiety in learners studying one or more foreign languages at university, i.e., if they suffer from Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety.

Finally, the third objective was to investigate the nature of the relationship between self-esteem of students and their Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety. At the beginning of the chapter there will be a description of the participants, the method and the instruments that were used to conduct the exploratory study.

The data collected will be shown and analysed in the fourth chapter, while they will be discussed in the fifth and last chapter underlining the most relevant findings for the purposes of the present work. The chapter will end with some final conclusions.

CHAPTER I: ANXIETY

Anxiety is a normal emotion that has been experienced by almost all human beings at least once in their life. People often confuse it with fear, but the large number of studies and research conducted within different domains of Psychology have revealed that anxiety is actually a different, multi-faceted phenomenon that can affect several areas of the existence of an individual. The first part of this chapter will briefly analyse the main characteristics of anxiety and its different classifications from a psychological and neurobiological point of view. In the second part the chapter will focus on a specific type of anxiety called Foreign Language Anxiety, on its causes and its effects on language learning process.

1.1 *What is anxiety?*

Anxiety is undoubtedly one of the most studied phenomena in the vast field of Psychology and its history is very long. As explained by the American neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux in his book “*Ansia*” (2016)¹, in Ancient Greek the root “*angh*” referred to a physical sensation of tension, constriction or discomfort. From the Greek root derives the Latin word “*anxietas*” and from this in turn the English “*anxiety*” or the Italian “*ansia*”. In the first half of the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud was the first to study anxious behaviour as a pathological phenomenon and to examine its causes and its physiological and psychological manifestations. On the one hand Freud considered anxiety as a normal and sometimes useful element, on the other hand he believed it to be the origin of many mental disorders of human beings. The work of the Austrian psychoanalyst has led to a change in the way anxiety is seen nowadays. Many years later, Horwitz et al. (1986) defined anxiety as “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (p.125). One of the main contributions of Sigmund Freud has been the distinction between fear and anxiety. Although they have several elements in common as the fact that both can arise from external stimuli, the main difference between the two phenomena is that fear is an emotion that occurs when a human being faces a real, identifiable and tangible danger, while anxiety is more a state of anticipation and preparation for danger, even if the source of threat is not identifiable (LeDoux, 2016). In the latter case, the person can see any situation as threatening and can anticipate in his or her mind negative events that could happen without concrete signs of danger in the present because anxiety can also be caused by thoughts or memories that distress

¹ Original title: “*Anxious. Using the Brain to Understand and Treat Fear and Anxiety*” (LeDoux, 2015)

individuals. Indeed, the threat “is something more internal, it is more a mental expectation than a fact and it can even be a mere imagined possibility that is unlikely to occur” (LeDoux, 2016, p.29)². For this reason, anxiety often leads individuals to have an exaggerated reaction to the actual threat (Zeidner & Matthews, 2011); the reaction can be both objective with motor and physiological manifestations, or a subjective-cognitive one. The first type of reaction includes symptoms as muscle tension, easy fatigability, hands sweating, faster breathing and palpitations (Fava et al., 1998), while the cognitive-subjective dimension “reflects symptoms that are associated more directly with thought processes” (Ree et al., 2008, p.314) such as restlessness, irritability, worry, fear, difficulty in concentrating or memory lapses.

According to Peter Lang, a researcher cited by LeDoux in his book (2016), emotions like anxiety can be measured by using three categories referring to individuals’ responses that are objectively quantifiable. Specifically, the concept of *linguistic behaviour* means what people say about their condition, *behavioural acts* include avoidance and escape while *physiological reactions* are those already mentioned a few lines above. With his model, Lang has influenced therapy whose purpose should be to lead significant and persistent changes in all three categories of behaviour. Furthermore, since that moment anxiety has begun to be studied by researchers in objective terms by using often first-person reports. Psychology also makes a clear distinction within the broad concept of anxiety between normal and pathological anxiety. The two concepts differ according to the frequency, intensity or duration with which they occur in the life of an individual. Normal anxiety is milder in intensity and frequency than pathological anxiety and assumes a positive function for human beings because it motivates them to adapt to situations of danger or threat, to face them and to improve as individuals. In people who are pathologically anxious, however, anxiety is not a stimulus but an obstacle because it causes an exaggerated reaction to situations that are seen as threatening, and besides, anxiety is no longer sporadic but it appears constantly (González Martínez, 1993). In this case, psychologists define anxiety as maladaptive as it impedes the normal course of daily life; when this happens, we have an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders can have several pathological manifestations as constant and irrational worries, sudden panic attacks that lead the person suffering from them to avoid certain places, situations or objects for fear that other episodes will occur. Furthermore, individuals with pathological anxiety fear being judged,

² “(...) è qualcosa di più interno, è più un’aspettativa mentale che un fatto e può anche essere una mera possibilità immaginata che ha scarse probabilità di verificarsi” (LeDoux, 2016, p.29). The translation of the quote into English is mine.

embarrassed or humiliated by others and therefore they manifest avoidance of social situations. Other symptoms are the obsessive repetition of certain actions but also nightmares or even emotional paralysis due to a trauma that occurred in the recent or distant past (LeDoux, 2016). Anxiety is a subjective phenomenon that changes from individual to individual. As we will see in the next section, some people are more prone to anxiety than others and because of this characteristic the situations that cause them stress are more numerous than in less anxious people. At the same time, a given circumstance can appear very threatening and stressful for an individual while it can leave another person cold. The type of reaction to a stimulus varies according both to the genetic factor as well as to the personal history of the person, with the experiences occurred in his or her life (González Martínez, 1993). In the words of LeDoux: “Nature and culture collaborate in shaping who we are, and this collaboration occurs in the brain of each of us³” (LeDoux, 2016, p.22).

1.2 Trait and state anxiety

The difference between normal and pathological anxiety is not the only distinction made by psychologists. Cattell and Scheier were the first to introduce the concepts of trait and state anxiety in 1961 and in the following years Charles Spielberger, an American clinical psychologist, was the scholar who developed more than all the other colleagues the study of these two different types of anxiety. According to Spielberger, trait anxiety “refers to relatively stable, individual differences in anxiety proneness” (Spielberger, 1972, p.7), whereas state anxiety refers to a transitory and subjective reaction to a situation that causes a certain degree of stress in the individual with the consequent increase in the activity of the autonomic nervous system. Spielberger, along with other colleagues, created an instrument to measure trait and state anxiety: the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). His theory was that anxiety as a personality trait would be a predictor of the frequency and intensity with which individuals experience state anxiety. Spielberger explained that individuals who show higher scores as regards trait anxiety have a predisposition to see threats and dangers in many situations and therefore, they suffer from greater stress than those who have lower scores (1972). Other scholars who follow this theory claim that trait anxiety exposes individuals to the risk of suffering from anxiety disorders. It should be briefly mentioned that not all authors share the

³ “Natura e cultura collaborano nel plasmare chi siamo, e questa collaborazione avviene nel cervello di ognuno di noi” (LeDoux, 2016, p.22). The translation of the quote into English is mine.

idea of considering trait anxiety a proneness to suffer from state anxiety. On the contrary, some psychologists believe that the two concepts are “separate multidimensional constructs” (Saviola et al., 2020).

1.3 Neurobiological sources of anxiety

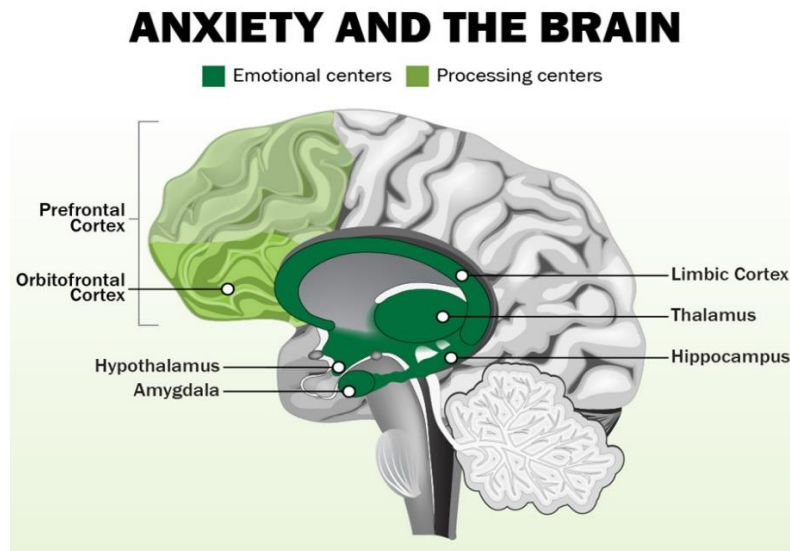
From a neurobiological point of view, differences in the functioning of some components of the human brain may explain why some individuals have more severe anxiety symptoms than others. The phenomenon can be explained by studying the brain mechanisms that have the fundamental task of processing threats and controlling defence responses. The circuits responsible for these functions are in the amygdala, the ventral striatum, the hippocampus, the PAG (Periaqueductal Gray) and various areas of the prefrontal cortex (LeDoux, 2016). Furthermore, the several areas of human brain contain neurotransmitters called monoamines, namely serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine that can facilitate or attenuate emotions like fear or anxiety (Forster et al., 2012). An alteration in the volume of the limbic regions has been detected in subjects who are predisposed to anxiety. In particular, the cortex of these people is so thick that it causes a hyperactivity of the amygdala, which seems to play a prominent role in the anxiety process. As the professor and researcher Gina Forster reported in her essay (2012), when individuals with this characteristic face stimuli perceived negatively as threatening or dangerous, the reactivity of the amygdala is greater than that of other individuals, so it can be said that there is a positive correlation between it and trait anxiety. Grupe and Nitschke (2013), cited by LeDoux (2016), identified six fundamental brain processes that appear altered in anxiety disorders. Specifically, anxious people present:

- 1) *a greater attention to threats* with a proneness to consider even harmless stimuli as a danger. Hyperactivity of the amygdala leads people to overreact to threats with defensive behaviours such as avoidance or freezing, the activation of the autonomic nervous system and the release of stress hormones such as adrenaline or cortisol.
- 2) *Reduced ability to discriminate between threat and security*. Anxious people find it difficult to distinguish between dangerous and safe situations due to an altered functioning of the hippocampus that prevents them from analysing the context correctly; furthermore, there is a malfunction of the prefrontal cortex which fails to regulate the amygdala and to change the interpretation of situations perceived as threatening once the evidence shows that they no longer represent a danger.

- 3) *Excessively avoidant behaviour* as a defensive attitude to not having to face dangerous situations. When this habit becomes too frequent, as in the case of anxiety disorders, human brain loses the ability to recognize changes and how dangerous or not the circumstances still are. Individuals no longer know how to distinguish what is safe and therefore they live in constant waiting for the feared threat to occur and when this does not happen, they believe it was avoidance that prevented it. In this way avoidant behaviour is strengthened more and more. One of the most important tasks of psychologists is precisely to break this vicious circle that compromises people's quality of life.
- 4) *Overestimation of the probability of threats and their consequences* means that people suffering from anxiety excessively expect negative events to occur or to have serious consequences. For this reason, they experience a higher level of preventive stress than other individuals, even if their worry is not justified by concrete facts.
- 5) *Exaggerated reactivity to the uncertainty of the threat*. When faced with situations in which the occurrence of a perceived danger or the exact moment in which the danger will end is not predictable with certainty, anxious people have a disproportionate reaction (for example panic attacks) because they have difficulty tolerating uncertainty. In this case some parts of human brain are involved such as the amygdala, the hippocampus and the hypothalamus.
- 6) *Maladaptive behavioural and cognitive control while facing a threat*. This particular alteration does not have a clear origin and in the field of neuroscience several theories have been hypothesized. Each theory focuses on different areas of human brain, some of which have already been mentioned above; namely the amygdala, the hippocampus, the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) and the BNST⁴. The latter is the component of the brain that works the most when threats are uncertain, that is, they are possible but may also never occur. When individuals face new or uncertain situations, their minds begin to make predictions or to prepare to face events that may occur in the future. In these circumstances the BNST receives strong inputs from the prefrontal cortex, the hippocampus and the amygdala and contributes with the latter to the control of human behaviour.

⁴ Bed Nucleus of the Stria Terminalis.

Table 1 – *Image of the areas of the human brain responsible for the anxiety process (Eifrig, 2021)*



1.4 Situational anxiety

As already mentioned, the frequency and intensity with which anxiety states manifest themselves are not the same for all human beings. Moreover, in each individual anxiety does not always appear the same in all circumstances. On the contrary, the same individual experiences different levels of anxiety depending on the situation he or she is facing. In order to explain this phenomenon, psychologists identified another type of anxiety which they called in different ways; Peter MacIntyre and Robert Gardner (1994) called it “situational anxiety”, Spielberger (1972) “situation-specific anxiety” while Horwitz et al. (1986) defined it “specific anxiety”. In contrast with the so-called “general anxiety”, which occurs in a large number of different circumstances in persons who have a general tendency to become anxious, situational anxiety is experienced only in specific contexts. In light of his research on anxiety, Spielberger stated that in order to predict the predisposition of individuals to suffer from state anxiety in a particular situation, it is not sufficiently effective to use measures concerning general trait anxiety. Instead, it is much more useful to resort to more reliable situation-specific anxiety measures (Spielberger, 1972).

A field in which many examples of situational anxiety can be found is the field of school. As observed by Phillips (1991), there are some behaviours that can help identify students suffering from anxiety. These learners are unwilling to actively participate in class, they prefer to “sit in

the back of the room, attempt to hide in their seats, neglect to turn in homework, never volunteer and, when called upon, respond in a barely audible whisper, if at all” (Phillips, 1991, p.1). Students can experience two different types of anxiety that have opposite effects on learning. Oxford (1999), quoted by G. Subasi (2010), explained that there is a positive anxiety that she defines “*facilitating anxiety*” because it encourages learners to assume some behaviours that can help the learning process such as listening or reading very carefully the instructions of the assigned tasks. The opposite type of anxiety has negative effects on students as it inhibits them from taking certain initiatives, such as voluntarily participating in activities that would lead to an exposure in front of the class; for this reason, it is called “*debilitating anxiety*”. Looking at the world of school, it would be more correct to speak of situational “anxieties” rather than “anxiety”. In fact, there are several situations at school that can cause specific anxieties in learners. As explained by Horwitz et al. (1986), students may feel anxious when they have to demonstrate their knowledge through a written test or an oral exam (test anxiety) but anxiety can sometimes be related to a specific school subject and depending on this it takes different names such as “mathematics (or math) anxiety” or “science anxiety”. Numerous studies have revealed that one of the school activities that causes most anxiety is the learning of a foreign language. The remainder of the chapter will analyse this type of situational anxiety called “Foreign Language Anxiety”, often abbreviated with the acronym FLA.

1.5 Foreign Language Anxiety

As explained by Horwitz (2001), since the mid-1960s researchers have supposed that second and foreign language learning could sometimes be hindered by anxiety. However, it was only in 1986 that Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope introduced the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety distinguishing it from other situation-specific anxieties. They recognized that FLA has some unique characteristics; in fact, it arises from the “inherent inauthenticity associated with foreign language communicative abilities” (p. 114). Unlike what happens with one’s mother tongue, communicating in a foreign language means adopting unfamiliar linguistic and socio-cultural standards as well as complex and non-spontaneous mental operations (Horwitz et al., 1986). According to Hewitt and Stephenson (2012), Foreign Language Anxiety is a “situation-specific anxiety [that] students experience in the classroom which is characterized by self-centred thoughts, feelings of in-adequacy, fear of failure, and emotional reactions in the language classroom” (p.171). At first, researchers began to analyse the phenomenon of language anxiety

within the context of Second Language (often abbreviated as L2⁵), but the studies soon extended to the field of Foreign Language Acquisition as well. Some manifestations of FLA are common to other situational anxieties thus including palpitations, faster breathing and sweat as regards physiological symptoms, while symptoms concerning the cognitive dimension are fear, worry, reduced ability to concentrate and to memorize concepts and avoidance behaviour (Horwitz et al., 1986). In addition to these general manifestations, there are other symptoms that can be considered specific expressions of Foreign Language Anxiety. Students who suffer from it have often difficulties recognizing essential elements such as the structures or the sounds of a written text or an oral speech in the language they are studying. As a result, it becomes more difficult for them to understand the meaning of what they are reading or listening to.

In light of these considerations, researchers state that Foreign Language Anxiety has a negative effect on the language learning process and on the performance of the students. For example, although they are prepared, learners may perform poorly on a test or an exam and the teacher may therefore erroneously think that they have not done enough effort. In order to explain this phenomenon, it could be useful to mention a famous theory known as the Affective Filter Hypothesis.

1.5.1 The Affective Filter Hypothesis

The intuition that some psychological factors could undermine the learning process of a foreign language was first developed by Heidi Dulay and Marina Burt in the Seventies of the last century and led to the Affective Filter Hypothesis. A few years later, it was the American linguist Stephen Krashen who perfected the Affective Filter Hypothesis and made it one of the cornerstones in the study of Foreign Language Acquisition. The concept at the base of this theory claims that there are some obstacles that hinder the complete absorption of the linguistic input and its transformation into intake⁶. Krashen identified three affective factors that particularly influence the learning process of a foreign (or second) language. They are: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety.

⁵ Second Language (also known as L2) has specific characteristics for which the field of Linguistics differentiates it from First Language (L1) and Foreign Language (FL). Unlike L1, Second Language is not the native language of an individual but neither is it a foreign language studied in one's own country (FL). L2 is the language learned in the country whose inhabitants speak it as native speakers.

⁶ The term "input" refers to the exposure to the foreign language that is offered to students. "Intake" is the part of the input that learners are able to process, understand and acquire.

- *Motivation* is an essential element as it determines how much effort (time and energy) students invest in order to achieve their goals. Highly motivated students will be interested in studying the foreign language and this will influence their behaviour as regards different aspects of language learning; in particular, the frequency with which they will make use of the language learning strategies, the amount of input they will convert into intake, the linguistic proficiency they will manage to reach and its maintenance over the years even beyond school or university (Ni, 2012).
- *Self-confidence* is a concept that refers to the learners' trust in their ability to successfully complete a task. When a student is self-confident, he or she is more inclined to take risks, for example by voluntarily intervening in class or by undertaking new activities that allow him or her to improve foreign language skills. Furthermore, these students will not be discouraged by failures but will try again until they have achieved their goals.
- Students suffering from *anxiety* can not fully express their potential or their linguistic knowledge because they are blocked by the fear of making mistakes with a consequent bad impression in front of the teacher and classmates. Language anxiety leads students to avoid many situations such as group works or other cooperative activities that would be very useful for the foreign language learning process. For this reason, it is considered one of the most important obstacles for language learners both inside and outside the school environment (Ni, 2012). An important concept is that of "group membership": when the student "does not consider himself or herself to be a potential member of the group that speaks the language" (Krashen, 2013, p.4), the affective filter is high and the learning process is mined.

In conclusion, according to the Affective Filter Hypothesis, the optimal conditions for a successful acquisition of a foreign language are a high motivation, a high level of self-confidence and a low level of anxiety. In fact, students with these characteristics have fewer filters and therefore are able to fully absorb the input that is offered to them by teachers or the class environment, to acquire it and transform it into intake. To facilitate this process, teachers must be aware of the existence of the affective filters and their importance. In this way, they will have the instruments to create the conditions to offer learners an atmosphere in which

emotional obstacles are reduced as much as possible. By doing so, learning a foreign language will become a less stressful, more engaging and interesting experience with positive implications for the effectiveness of foreign language teaching.

1.5.2 Sources of Foreign Language Anxiety

Researchers who have dealt with language anxiety have also tried to investigate the underlying causes of the phenomenon. Young (1991) made an important contribution to this academic field. According to his study, language anxiety arises from six potential sources which are related to the individual and to different components of the academic world. They are the following:

1. Personal and interpersonal anxieties
2. Learner beliefs about language learning
3. Instructor beliefs about language teaching
4. Instructor-learner interactions
5. Classroom procedures
6. Language testing

The first point includes concepts such as self-esteem, which we will analyse in the next chapter, and competitiveness. Bailey (1983), cited in Young (1991), stated that language anxiety can arise from competitiveness when a comparison occurs between students and other people or when there is a discrepancy between reality and the self-image learners had imagined.

Learner beliefs about language learning can lead to language anxiety when students' expectations are unrealistic and are therefore disappointed. For example, some foreign language learners believe that the most important thing is to have perfect pronunciation; others prioritize grammatical correctness. Translation is considered by some students to be the main aspect of the learning of a foreign language, others would like to achieve a perfect fluency a few years after starting to study a new language. When this does not happen, learners experience frustration and may become anxious about foreign language learning.

As regards the third point, Young stated that some teachers have a *foreign language teaching belief* which can be dangerous as it can lead to developing language anxiety in students. According to the tradition, language teaching takes place through the so-called "frontal lesson" in which most of the time it is the teacher who speaks while the students just listen. In this type of teaching one of the most important tasks of the language teacher is to

correct any mistake made by students “like a drill sergeant” (Young, 1991, p.428). The atmosphere in the classroom is therefore stressful for students, with the negative consequences already described.

According to Young, language anxiety related to *instructor-learner interactions* arises mainly from the frequency and the way in which language teachers correct the mistakes made by their students. In fact, a too severe or too frequent manner of underlining errors can cause an excessive fear of making mistakes in front of the teacher or the classmates and this could be a first step that will lead to Foreign Language Anxiety.

From numerous studies, it emerges that among the several *classroom procedures* that are normally offered in a foreign language course or lesson, the ones that cause the most anxiety are the activities involving an oral exposure of the students in the target language. This topic will be explored extensively later in this chapter.

Language testing can be a cause of Foreign Language Anxiety in some circumstances. It can occur when the test asks questions about different material than that explained in class by the language teacher thus causing confusion and frustration in the learner. Foreign Language Anxiety can depend also to the format of the test; usually, test items which represent a novelty for the students are experienced with more anxiety than items or tasks which are familiar to them. Furthermore, tests whose instructions are clearly explained cause less apprehension than ambiguous tasks. Finally, a very important aspect is the coherence between the language teacher’s approach and the type of tests it gives to students. Quoting Young’s words: “If an instructor has a communicative approach to language teaching but then gives primarily grammar tests, this likely leads students not only to complain, but also to experience frustration and anxiety” (Young, 1991, p.429).

The possible sources of language anxiety identified by Young seem to confirm what was stated by Horwitz et al. some years earlier. In 1986 the researchers wrote an article in which a new theory was introduced according to which Foreign Language Anxiety consists of three components which are interrelated and belong to the bigger concept of “performance anxiety”. The three dimensions are: *communication apprehension*, *test anxiety* and *fear of negative evaluation*.

1. *Communication apprehension* is “a type of shyness characterized by fear or anxiety about communicating with people” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p.127). This construct includes within it different types of anxiety that negatively affect the learning of a foreign language.

Specifically, “*oral communication anxiety*” can occur when the student shows fear of speaking during group or pair works. People suffering from “*stage fright*” have difficulty speaking in public. In the case of school or university, the public is represented by teachers or classmates and the fact of having to use a foreign language is an additional factor of anxiety as it is more difficult to control than the mother tongue. Furthermore, the fear of not being able to make themselves understood or of appearing ridiculous in the eyes of the people in the class explains why foreign language is one of the school subjects which scare students the most. “*Receiver anxiety*” is instead the difficulty “in listening to or learning a spoken message” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p.127). A few years earlier, Leary (1982) had introduced another type of anxiety that incorporates the concepts explained by Horwitz et al. Indeed, communication apprehension, stage fright and oral (or speech) anxiety are also typical symptoms of a psychological phenomenon called “*social anxiety*”. According to Leary, human beings experience social anxiety when they have to speak or perform in front of other people, with “the prospect or presence of interpersonal evaluation in real or imagined social settings” (p.102). Since foreign language lessons often involve situations in which the student has to perform in front of the class in order to receive an assessment by the teacher, social anxiety can be an obstacle that aggravates language anxiety. To confirm this theory, it can be observed that the behaviours associated with social anxiety which Leary divides into three categories are very similar to those already mentioned as regards Foreign Language Anxiety: *arousal-mediated responses* include physiological, motor and psychological symptoms due to activation of the sympathetic nervous system with people that “squirm in their seats, fidget, play with their hair, clothes or other objects, stutter and stammer as they talk, and generally appear jittery and nervous” (Leary, 1982, p.110). *Disaffiliative behaviour* is another manifestation of social anxiety in which individuals try to avoid social interactions as much as possible; they prefer to remain silent or to speak little rather than take the initiative and participate or even start a conversation. *Image-protection behaviour* refers to actions as “smiling and nodding frequently, seldom interrupting others, giving frequent communicative feedback such as uh-huh” (Young, 1991, p.429). As the name of this third category suggests, individuals adopt these attitudes in order to preserve a positive image of themselves for other people.

2. We have already seen how language tests can cause anxiety in students; this specific type of anxiety is called “*test anxiety*”. Test anxiety sometimes adds to oral communication anxiety when language learners have to take an oral test.

3. “*Fear of negative evaluation*” was described by Watson & Friend (1969) and then cited in Horwitz et al. (1986) as “apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively” (p.128). This third type of performance anxiety is often linked to test anxiety but can also be a contributing cause of communication apprehension.

Until now we have seen that Foreign Language Anxiety is a complex phenomenon which includes within it different facets involving many aspects of the teaching and the learning of a foreign language and, as we will see, also of the students' personality. Extensive field research has revealed that the activities causing the greatest amount of anxiety in foreign language students are two: listening and speaking. In this paper, we will focus on anxiety deriving from oral exposure which is called Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA).

1.6 Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

A large number of researchers who have studied the phenomenon of language anxiety agree that speaking is the activity that causes the greatest amount of stress in learners. According to Phillips, cited in Hewitt & Stephenson (2012), “oral activities are associated with higher levels of anxiety” (p. 172). This specific aspect of foreign language learning has been the object of many studies, one of which was conducted by Kitano (2001) among 212 students of Japanese language courses at two state universities in the United States. Kitano identified two main sources of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, namely *fear of negative evaluation as a personality trait* and *self-perception of speaking ability* in the target language. Learners who have a predisposition to fear of being judged negatively by others seem to suffer more from speaking anxiety in class; in fact, speaking in a foreign language in front of peers and teachers and the risk of making mistakes, particularly errors of pronunciation, is a source of embarrassment and stress for them. Furthermore, in foreign language courses it is common for students to compare their ability in the target language with that of their peers or of the teacher. Another research conducted by Price (1991) revealed that speaking is the first skill in which the comparison between students of a foreign language and their peers or teachers occurs. One explanation may be the fact that speaking the foreign language correctly is considered by many students the main skill to learn. Students interviewed by Price (1991) declared that they felt embarrassed because they realized they did not have a pronunciation equal to that of native speakers. Kitano confirmed this finding with his study several years later. In fact, his sample of students reported that they experienced a higher level of Foreign Language Anxiety when the

comparison with their peers, teachers or native speakers revealed that their speaking skill was more deficient (Kitano, 2001). Research have also found a negative relationship between anxiety and oral performance, i.e., speaking skills appear poorer in learners with a higher level of Foreign Language Anxiety (Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012).

Over the last thirty years, foreign language courses have undergone an important change: it has been given increasing priority no longer to language considered simply as a set of grammatical rules to be learned by heart, but to the so-called “functional language”, i.e., the language individuals may need in everyday life. Nowadays, language lessons are proficiency-oriented, and teachers present the target language in a real and authentic context and this type of work requires interaction and dialogue. The communicative aspect has therefore assumed centrality and speaking activities have found more space than what happened in the past and for many students this has resulted in an aggravation of language anxiety. Phillips (1991) explained this phenomenon in simple and clear words: “Memorization, pattern drills and extensive grammatical explanations give way more and more to functional language use and communicative activities, language in context (...). More practice in speaking, intended to facilitate oral competence, can also engender anxiety, which in turn reduces any enjoyment associated with the language learning experience.” (p.1)

The next chapter will be focused on a construct which has a strong relationship with Foreign Language Anxiety and Speaking Anxiety: the self-concept. In particular, it will be analysed the concept of self-esteem.

CHAPTER II: SELF-ESTEEM

In the previous chapter, we have seen how learning a foreign language is a process that involves many factors, some of a cognitive nature and others belonging to the psychological and emotional sphere of the individual. One of the elements that are most involved is the so-called *self-concept*, a construct that comprises several facets. This chapter will focus in particular on one of these facets, namely self-esteem, and it will be described how self-esteem relates to Foreign Language Anxiety, especially as regards Speaking Anxiety.

2.1 The concept of self-esteem

The concept of self-esteem began to arouse increasing interest in the 1960s, especially in the field of social psychology (Rosenberg et al., 1995). Mandokhail et al. (2017) summarized the definitions given to this construct by the pioneers of the topic.

Rosenberg (1965) believed self-esteem to be the “sum of the individual’s thoughts and feelings with respect to own self as an object” (Mandokhail et al., 2017, p. 211). Coopersmith (1967) described it as “the evaluation an individual makes and habitually maintains with reference to one’s own self, which he may express by an attitude of approval or disapproval eventually determining the extent of his belief about self-capabilities, a sense of being significant, successful and worthy” (*Ivi*, p.210). According to a third researcher, Nathaniel Branden (1969), self-esteem refers to “the tendency in human personality to experience oneself as being praiseworthy and competent in coping with basic life challenges” (*Ibidem*). There is not a definition of a few lines that can actually be exhaustive in defining such a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. In fact, self-esteem is a personality trait which concerns the perception that an individual has of him or herself, but the variables that can occur are numerous.

First of all, the levels of self-esteem can vary from person to person. People who show a high level of self-esteem evaluate themselves in a positive, favourable way, while individuals with low self-esteem judge themselves negatively. Different consequences arise from different levels of self-esteem.

During the 1970s, a large number of research were conducted with the aim of identifying the effects that self-esteem could have on human beings. At that time, it was even thought that every aspect of an individual’s life could be caused by self-esteem. The enthusiasm was so much that in 1986 California established the so-called Task Force on Self-Esteem and Personal

and Social Responsibility; the reason that led to the birth of this institution was the belief that increasing self-esteem in people would solve many problems that plagued American society such as drug addiction, crime, school dropout, teen pregnancy, and pollution. Thanks to the resolution of these problems, the State would have an economic return as it was thought that individuals with high self-esteem would earn more money than those with low self-esteem and consequently would pay more taxes (Baumeister et al., 2003).

As reported by Fernando Rubio (2007), many studies confirm that self-esteem has important repercussions on the behaviour of human beings. For example, people with low self-esteem feel that they are inadequate and worthless; this poor conception of oneself can lead to negative consequences such as greater probability of suffering from anxiety but also serious illnesses such as depression, mental disorders or even suicide.

According to the main researchers of the topic, self-esteem consists of six main elements:

1. Competence
2. Worthiness
3. Cognition
4. Affect
5. Stability
6. Openness

1. We will see that the concept of *competence* related to self-esteem has been and continues to be the subject of numerous studies, especially as regards the field of school and in particular academic performance.

2. *Worthiness* refers to the judgment an individual makes of him or herself. Scholars believe that it develops already in the first years of life and that the attitude of parents towards their children plays a fundamental role.

3. *Cognition* is another important element because the neocortex, which is involved in thinking, allows individuals to exercise self-evaluation and to judge their degree of competence and worthiness.

4. The construct of self-esteem involves not only the cognitive dimension but also the dimension of *affect*, i.e., the emotions which, as explained in the previous chapter, are regulated by the limbic system.

5. & 6. Researchers have often investigated whether self-esteem is a phenomenon characterized by *stability* or *openness* over time. Does it change throughout the life of an individual or does it remain constant from childhood to old age? The next section will examine this topic.

2.2 Self-esteem across the lifespan

Over the years, many researchers have tried to understand if self-esteem is a phenomenon that remains stable over time or if it undergoes some changes during the existence of a human being. Nowadays, scholars agree that self-esteem does not remain the same but varies throughout the different periods of our life, with increases or decreases in its level.

- During the first years of their life, children appear to have a high level of self-esteem; the reason could be the fact that their self-image is “unrealistically positive” (Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005, p.159). As the child grows, his or her cognitive ability develops, and new factors come into play such as external feedback and social comparison. It is above all the entrance to elementary school to mark this change, since children begin to receive evaluations not only from their parents but also from teachers and classmates. Self-esteem therefore becomes the result of a combination of elements such as attractiveness, social skills, and academic competence. Since it is almost impossible for the child at this stage of life to receive only positive feedback, self-esteem begins to lower if compared to that of the first years of life.
- Adolescence is a notoriously complicated age due to many reasons. People at this age are more sensitive to the judgment of others, especially that of their peers, and the self-image is influenced by many insecurities related, for example, to the body, to school problems which become increasingly demanding and to the first thoughts about one’s future. All this leads to a further lowering of self-esteem, which is particularly unstable during adolescence.
- According to many researchers, a gradual increase in self-esteem occurs in adulthood when individuals achieve satisfying goals in the field of work or family that enhance a feeling of worthiness and improve self-image. Robins & Trzesniewski also claim that “many lifespan theorists have suggested that midlife is characterized by peaks in

achievement, mastery, and control over self and environment” (p.159). Additionally, human beings generally acquire greater emotional stability and maturity at this age.

- The changes that occur in old age such as retirement, the decay of physical functions and the loss of important people such as a spouse or friends, again lead to a lowering of self-esteem.

Self-esteem is therefore determined by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include the psychological and biological elements while external factors come from the social environment. All these elements are not separate concepts but, on the contrary, they influence each other, and all together affect the self-esteem of individuals.

To conclude this section, it might be useful to quote the words of Fernando Rubio (2007): “Basically, self-esteem is a psychological and social phenomenon in which an individual evaluates his/her competence and own self according to some values, which may result in different emotional states, and which becomes developmentally stable but is still open to variation depending on personal circumstances” (p.5). In this quote, it appears another concept which is very important when the discussion regards self-esteem, namely *competence*. The evaluation of one’s competence can have a strong impact on self-esteem and the sectors in which competence plays a primary role are the workplace and school. The next section will deal with the relevance that school has for self-esteem and vice versa.

2.3 Self-esteem in the school context

In analysing the fluctuations of self-esteem during the lifespan of an individual, it has been underlined the fundamental role of school. In fact, the school environment includes many elements that can exert a certain influence on the self-esteem of learners. The two main factors that are typically present at school and have an impact on self-esteem are the evaluation of one’s own competence and the comparison with peers.

Most of the research on self-esteem conducted in the school context has focused on the relationship between self-esteem and academic performance. As reported by Baumeister et al. (2003), the results of many studies have revealed that the two constructs are positively correlated but researchers have different opinions on the nature of this relationship. Some of them believe that students with high self-esteem perform better than those with low self-esteem for a variety of reasons. First of all, high self-esteem allows students to aim for higher goals and to tackle even the most difficult and challenging tasks in order to achieve them.

Furthermore, these learners have a predisposition to persist without becoming discouraged if they fail, while low self-esteem favours the onset of negative attitudes such as a sense of inability and worthlessness. According to these researchers, the school should therefore encourage and promote the self-esteem of learners to obtain better academic outcomes from them. Other studies have instead come to the conclusion that there is a causal relationship between self-esteem and academic performance, but this relationship goes in the opposite direction; self-esteem is in fact not the cause but the result of positive outcomes at school. According to a third group of authors, however, there would be a very small correlation between self-esteem and academic outcomes.

Bachman and O'Malley (1977), as reported by Baumeister et al. (2003), were the first to conduct a sophisticated study on the effects of self-esteem and their work led to the conclusion that the correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement was actually caused by the presence of underlying common elements such as previous academic performances, the IQ of the students and their family background. Also, Rubin et al. (1977) interpreted this weak correlation as due to "common underlying factors such as ability and background" (p.503). A few years later, Maruyama et al. (1981) confirmed the results of these studies and identified IQ and social class as common causal factors. Rosenberg (1965), Coopersmith (1967) and Clark (1994) agreed on the importance of family, especially parents, for a positive development of self-esteem. Their studies found that children with indifferent or often absent parents had lower self-esteem than their peers who grew up with loving and respectful parents. Quoting Fernando Rubio (2007): "Parental warmth, expectations, respect, consistency and birth order are other factors affecting the development of self-esteem" (p.6).

Among the factors that have been associated with self-esteem in the school context there is also the subject students have to learn. Foreign language is recognized as the subject that most of all involves this aspect of individuals' personality. Guiora (1983), cited in Horwitz et al. (1986), defined language learning as "a profoundly unsettling psychological proposition" (p.125) and considered it to be a danger to the self-concept of students.

2.3.1 Foreign language and self-esteem

In the first chapter it has been explained how the study of a foreign language is one of the school activities that cause more anxiety in students, so much so that it constitutes a specific type of anxiety that takes the name of Foreign Language Anxiety. Many researchers think that one of

the reasons behind this phenomenon is the fact that the acquisition of a foreign language is a process that involves the self-concept. The main factor that distinguishes learning a foreign language from studying other subjects is the strong connection between expressing oneself in a language that the individual masters with less proficiency and self-image (Arnaiz-Castro & Guillén, 2013). According to Horwitz et al. (1991): “Probably no other field of study implicates self-concept and self-expression to the degree that language study does” (p.31). Oh (1990), cited in Hewitt & Stephenson (2012), defined Foreign Language Anxiety as a “situation-specific anxiety [that] students experience in the classroom which is characterized by self-centred thoughts (...)” (p.171). The lower knowledge of the foreign language if compared to one's mother tongue makes authentic communication more complicated, and this has consequences both as regards language anxiety and as regards self-esteem.

Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that “the language learner's self-esteem is vulnerable to the awareness that the range of communicative choices and authenticity is restricted. The importance of the disparity between the "true" self as known to the language learner and the more limited self as can be presented at any given moment in the foreign language would seem to distinguish foreign language anxiety from other academic anxieties” (p. 128).

Self-esteem has been associated by numerous other researchers with Foreign Language Anxiety. For example, a low level of self-esteem is considered by some authors a possible cause of language anxiety (Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012). Students with low self-esteem have indeed a perception of themselves as persons with less abilities than their classmates, they feel insecure and show a constant fear of making mistakes. These characteristics lead students who are learning a foreign language to adopt counterproductive behaviours such as the avoidance of opportunities that may be important for the development of competence in the target language. The phenomenon occurs mainly in situations where oral expression in the foreign language is involved such as conversations, debates, presentations, or discussions (Mandokhail et al., 2017), and it is the demonstration that self-esteem comes into play especially when students have to face oral communication, as it happens for anxiety. The concept was emphasized also by Philips (1991) who explained that “one’s self-image is closely related to the ability to express oneself through language and is vulnerable to assaults by teachers and classmates and to self-perceived failure” (p.2). Learners with lower self-esteem are more likely to experience frustration and anxiety in the face of inevitable failures during the process of learning a foreign language and they will find their communication skills less effective than those of their peers

even when this perception does not find feedback from teachers (Foss & Reitzel, 1991).

In the first chapter, the six sources of Foreign Language Anxiety identified by Young (1991) has been examined; it has been explained that at the top of the list there are the “*personal and interpersonal anxieties*” and among these Young cited low self-esteem as the first source of anxiety. He reported the thought of the linguist Stephen Krashen who argued that the degree of self-esteem and linguistic anxiety are two phenomena closely linked to each other: “(...) This is what causes anxiety in a lot of people. People with low self-esteem worry about what their peers think; they are concerned with pleasing others (...)” (Young, 1991, p.427).

Another aspect of the school context that some researchers such as Burnett (1998) and Morrison & Thomas (1975) correlate with self-esteem is participation in the classroom. Their works found that students with different levels of self-esteem show different behaviours. Learners with high self-esteem are more willing to interact with peers and teachers, for example by voluntarily intervening by raising their hand, expressing their thoughts, and asking questions. Conversely, students with low self-esteem tend to be quieter and to sit at the back of the classroom. The relationship between self-esteem and classroom participation is not one-sided but instead seems to be reciprocal; self-esteem can be increased by greater participation in the classroom and vice versa. Furthermore, students with higher self-esteem develop more communication skills.

When the discourse concerns the school context it is important not to confuse self-esteem with another concept that in many respects has similar characteristics, namely self-efficacy. As we will see in the next section, self-efficacy has also been the subject of numerous studies that have investigated its impact on students' academic performance.

2.4 Self-efficacy and self-esteem: similarities and differences

The leading expert on self-efficacy has been the psychologist Albert Bandura (1977, 1982, 1997). Cited by Lane et al. (2004), he defined self-efficacy as “the levels of confidence individuals have in their ability to execute certain courses of action, or achieve specific outcomes” (p. 247). The major difference with self-esteem is that the latter concerns the perception that an individual has of his or her own worth as a person in a global sense, while self-efficacy is domain specific. This means that while self-esteem is a personality trait that affects many aspects of human life, self-efficacy refers to specific tasks, abilities, or subjects. The academic world is the context in which self-efficacy has been most studied and analysed. Research conducted found that students develop confidence in their abilities on the basis of

their actual performances, with successes that increase self-efficacy and failures that instead lower it. Another element that affects self-efficacy is the observation of peers' performances; if classmates are successful in a given task, the other students are encouraged to try because they believe they can succeed as well. If peers fail, self-efficacy will suffer the opposite consequence. Physical symptoms like trembling, sweating or palpitations may be a third factor affecting self-efficacy. Their presence can in fact be interpreted as a signal indicating the inability of the learner to tackle a certain activity (Schunk, 2012).

Like self-esteem, self-efficacy can affect the learning process. According to Baldura (1997), learners with low self-efficacy in a specific ability are less likely to take initiative in starting activities involving it. For example, students who do not have confidence in their speaking skill will avoid engaging in tasks as conversations or debates. Furthermore, students with a high self-efficacy show higher levels of effort and persistence when they face difficult tasks or when obstacles and failures arise. In addition to a greater degree of effort, self-efficacy also appears to lead to a better quality of the effort in tackling a task, that is, "deeper cognitive processing and general cognitive engagement" (Schunk, 2012, p.148), with a positive effect on academic achievement. Bandura (1982) explained also that perceived self-efficacy leads to better academic outcomes because "people who judge themselves ineffective in coping with environmental demands tend to generate high emotional arousal, become excessively preoccupied with personal deficiencies, and cognize potential difficulties as more formidable than they really are. Such self-referent concerns undermine effective use of the competencies people possess" (pp. 25-26).

There are some factors that can affect a student's level of self-efficacy; some of them are of an internal nature to the individual, while others are external. Internal factors include physical conditions, preparation, and the learner's knowledge of the task, while the external elements are mainly related to the characteristics of the task to be performed such as its complexity and length, and the social environment. As regards the latter factor, self-efficacy referred to the school context is influenced by the same actors already seen for self-esteem, i.e., parents, classmates, and teachers. More specifically, as reported by Schunk (2012), "parents' academic aspirations for their children affected both children's academic achievements and their self-efficacy" (p.149). We have also seen that the observation of peers is important and acts as a source of motivation and confidence in one's abilities.

Finally, self-efficacy is a requirement that not only learners but also teachers should

have. Several studies, including the one conducted by Ashton and Webb (1986), showed that also teachers should own an adequate level of self-efficacy in order to facilitate the learning process of their students. A low level of self-efficacy, in fact, leads teachers to adopt certain behaviours that could have a negative effect on students' motivation and achievement. If teachers do not believe enough in their ability to guide pupils in the learning process, they may not have the courage to propose activities that go beyond their self-perceived capabilities and they may invest less effort in the research of materials or in the explanation of concepts in a clear way for students, and finally they show less persistence in helping learners that are facing difficulties. Conversely, teachers with a higher level of self-efficacy are more likely to engage students in challenging activities, they expend more effort in their job and facilitate academic achievement by persevering in helping students who experience difficulties, and they try to understand learners' needs and ideas. In this way, they are able to create a more relaxed classroom environment in which students will suffer less from anxiety and will acquire a more effective and lasting competence. The knowledge of the factors that influence self-efficacy is a fundamental prerequisite to plan initiatives that could help students to develop their self-efficacy and consequently to obtain better performances.

Although self-efficacy and self-esteem have some characteristics in common, they should not be confused with each other as they are two different constructs. As we have seen, self-efficacy refers to the perceived ability to carry out specific tasks or actions while self-esteem concerns the value that individuals perceive to have as persons and the extent to which they like themselves. Self-esteem is not related to specific tasks or skills, but includes within it a multiplicity of factors, both personal and external, that affect different aspects of human life. As explained by Lane (2004): "Self-efficacy questions are concerned with capabilities to execute specific tasks or actions, the outcomes of which may or may not have any bearing on self-esteem" (p. 249). Self-efficacy that derives from success in tasks to which the individual attributes primary importance for his or her life and in which he or she has invested a great amount of self-worth, can have an impact on self-esteem. Conversely, if self-efficacy refers to tasks that occupy a secondary place for the person, the correlation with self-esteem does not seem to exist.

For example, for a learner who studies a foreign language and wants to become an interpreter, a positive outcome in a listening task will have a greater impact on his or her self-esteem than a good performance in a writing exercise.

Table 2 - A brief summary of the difference between self-efficacy and self-esteem (Thomas & Johnson)

The Difference Between Self-Efficacy & Self-Esteem

Often used interchangeably as though they represent the same phenomenon, when in fact they refer to entirely different things.

- ↳ **Self-Efficacy:** concerned with judgments of personal capabilities
↳ Example: "I'm going to make this free-throw shot."
- ↳ **Self-Esteem:** concerned with judgment of self-worth
↳ Example: "I'm a terrible person."

"There is no fixed relationship between beliefs about one's capabilities and whether one likes or dislikes oneself." (Bandura, *Self-Efficacy*)

In order to avoid confusing self-esteem with self-efficacy, it might be helpful to use a distinction made by Rosenberg et al. (1995) between two different types of self-esteem, namely *global self-esteem* and *specific self-esteem*. The characteristics and differences between these two constructs will be analysed in the next section.

2.5 Global and specific self-esteem

So far, we have described self-esteem as a multifaceted construct as it involves many aspects that together lead to the perception that individuals have of themselves and of their own worth. Rosenberg et al. (1995) gave this concept the name of "*global self-esteem*" which was defined as "the individual's positive or negative attitude toward the self as a totality" (p. 141). Global self-esteem has been the subject of most of the studies on the topic. According to some researchers, however, global self-esteem was not sufficient to explain some phenomena encountered for example in the school context. Students with little confidence in their academic abilities and with poor performances were often implicitly categorized as individuals with low self-esteem. Actually, it has already been explained that from various studies it has emerged that there is not always a correlation between academic results and level of self-esteem. As an explanation for this phenomenon, the existence of a second type of self-esteem has been hypothesized, namely the so-called *specific self-esteem*. The concept of specific self-esteem has many similarities with that of self-efficacy. In the field of our interest, that is the academic

context, specific self-esteem concerns the perception that an individual has of his or her competence in a given subject or activity. Furthermore, as well as self-efficacy, specific self-esteem is a predictor of students' performances. In fact, "specific self-esteem is more relevant to behaviour, whereas global self-esteem is most relevant to psychological well-being" (Rosenberg et al., p. 144). A reason could be the fact that while global self-esteem is characterized by a more affective dimension, specific self-esteem involves the cognitive dimension, which includes judgment and evaluation. Global self-esteem is composed of various factors that lead to self-respect and self-acceptance and competence is only one of them. Specific self-esteem can have an influence on global self-esteem when the particular field that is involved has a central role for the individual. On the other hand, if that field has a peripheral place in his or her life, specific self-esteem does not appear to have a significant impact on the feeling of self-worth.

A type of specific self-esteem is the so-called *academic self-esteem*, the level of which appears to have an effect on school marks. Students' confidence in their skills as regards foreign language or some aspects of that language (for example the oral competence or the grammatical one) can be considered a type of specific self-esteem that can have an influence on linguistic performances but also on global self-esteem if the study of the foreign language plays a relevant role in the life of the learner.

While specific self-esteem would have a direct effect on behaviour and outcomes, several studies have shown that global self-esteem has a strong association with psychological well-being. It has emerged for example that people with a low level of global self-esteem suffer more from some diseases such as depression and this phenomenon can occur at any stage of life, from childhood to adulthood. Furthermore, a central finding for the present work is the existence of an inverse association between global self-esteem and anxiety. In fact, individuals with a lower level of global self-esteem are more likely to suffer from anxiety with all the symptoms that have already been described in the previous chapter.

The data collected by Rosenberg et al. during their research demonstrated that "more specific forms of self-esteem, such as academic self-esteem or self-assessment of intelligence, tend to have greater effects on more global forms of self-esteem than more global forms of self-esteem have on more specific ones" (p.153). Specific self-esteem, as mentioned above, can influence global self-esteem depending on the amount of value that the individual attributes to that particular facet. As regards the school context, specific academic self-esteem has a relevant

effect on global self-esteem if the subject, the skill, or the performance is of significant importance in the life of the learner and in his or her psychologic world. In conclusion, it can be stated that specific self-esteem is more reliable if we want to predict the performance of a student, while global self-esteem is a better predictor as regards the psychological conditions of learners.

Since the main purpose of the present dissertation is not to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and the outcomes of students but to analyse the association between self-esteem and a phenomenon of a psychological nature such as Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, it has been preferred to take into consideration self-esteem in its broader meaning, i.e., the one that Rosenberg et al. would call *global self-esteem*. In order to achieve this aim, an exploratory study has been conducted among a sample of foreign language students and it will be presented and discussed in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III: THE EXPLORATORY STUDY

After having examined the phenomena of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety and self-esteem from a theoretical point of view in the previous chapters, the following chapters will investigate these constructs and analyse the relationship between them through an exploratory study conducted among a group of university students.

In the next sections the objectives of the exploratory study will be presented, as well as the research questions, the participants, the method and the instruments used.

3.1 Objectives

In light of what has been examined in the previous literature, this exploratory study has been realized starting from the need to pursue three main objectives:

1. Collect students' perceptions of their own value, abilities and satisfaction in order to investigate their level of self-esteem
2. Analyse Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety of learners who are studying one or more foreign languages at university in order to determine whether oral activities cause particular anxiety in them
3. Investigate the relationship between learners' self-esteem and their Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

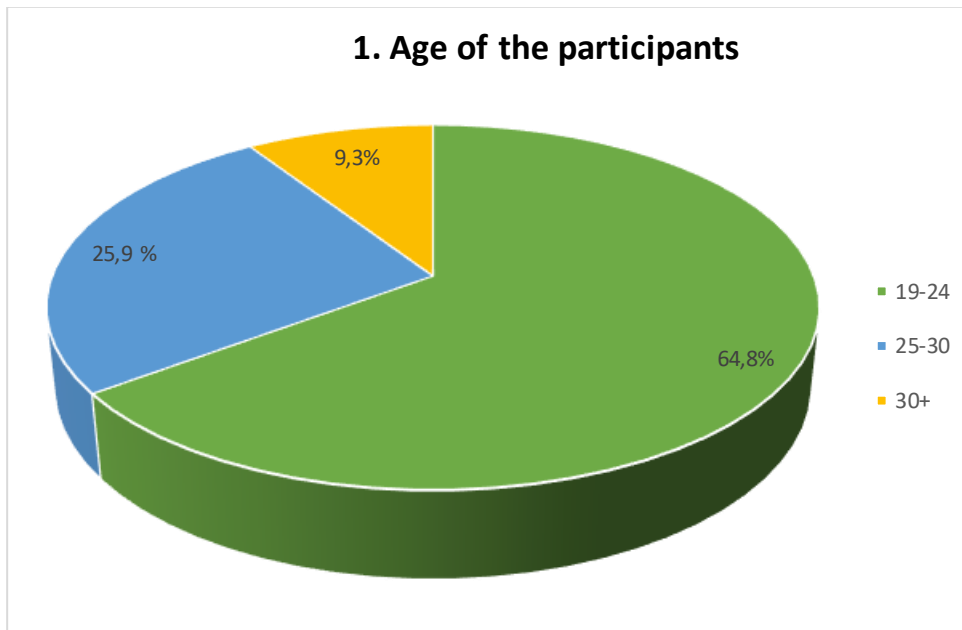
3.2 Research questions

From reading the studies conducted in the past by numerous authors, some questions have arisen that aim to pursue the objectives of the exploratory study listed above. They focus the interest on the emotional and psychological aspect of the foreign language learning process, which is not of secondary importance but, on the contrary, must be taken into great consideration by teachers.

1. Question One: Do university students of foreign languages perceive themselves in a positive or negative way?
2. Question Two: Do students experience anxiety when they have to tackle an oral activity in the foreign language they are studying?
3. Question Three: What is the nature of the relationship between students' self-esteem and their Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety?

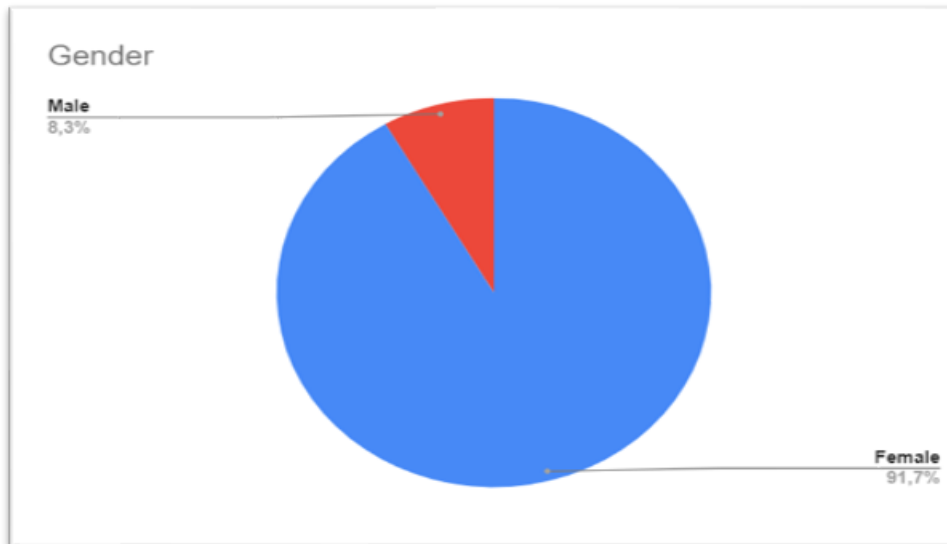
3.3 Participants

It was possible to conduct and complete this exploratory study thanks to the participation of 108 students of “Languages and Cultures” Department at the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice. The criterion of convenience guided the choice of the university and the learners, which belong to the population of learners who are studying one or more foreign languages at Ca’ Foscari, regardless of the degree course, the year they are attending, or the language studied. As can be seen in the pie graph below, most of the students of the sample are aged between 19 and 24 years (64.8%), 25.9% are between 25 and 30 years old while a minority (9.3%) is over 30 years old.



As regards the gender, almost all of the sample is made up of women (91.7%), while only 8.3% are men. This is probably due to the fact that the majority of language students at Ca’ Foscari are female, and the sample confirms it.

Question 2: “Indicate your gender”



The third question asked the students what their mother tongue is. The results are the following: 102 out of 108 learners declared that they are native Italian speakers, 1 person has Albanian as her mother tongue, 1 person Portuguese, 1 Russian, 1 Croatian, 1 Spanish and one girl is bilingual Italian-Croatian.

The fourth personal information on the sample that it was decided to collect as it could have a possible relevance for the exploratory study is the degree course attended by learners at the time of filling in the questionnaire. From the answers it emerges that:

- almost half of the sample (52 students) are attending a master’s degree course
- 38 learners are attending a bachelor’s degree course
- 3 persons have already earned the bachelor’s degree
- 1 girl is doing a PhD
- 4 students have already earned the master’s degree in “*Scienze del Linguaggio*”
- 2 students are attending a Master’s program (one of them specified that her Master is in translation)
- 1 person is currently working
- 1 student is acquiring the “24 CFU” for teaching
- 1 participant is attending a private Italian language course

- 4 persons have already graduated but they did not specify whether they refer to a bachelor's or master's degree
- 1 participant generically referred to herself as an ex-student

Finally, before the 31 questions of the FLSAS, it was added a question that wanted to collect data on the foreign languages studied by the participants. Although in the instructions given to the students to correctly complete the questionnaire it was specified to focus on only one foreign language even if the languages they are studying are more than one, there were five people who mentioned more than a language, specifically:

- Arabic and French,
- English and Swedish,
- English and Spanish,
- English, German and Spanish
- English and sign language

It is therefore not possible to know which specific language they thought in answering, but we can suppose that the feelings they expressed as regards speaking activities occur with all the languages they mentioned. The languages studied by the other participants are:

1. English (35 learners)
2. German (18 learners)
3. Russian (14 learners)
4. French (11 learners)
5. Spanish (10 learners)
6. Chinese (2 learners)
7. Swedish (2 learners)
8. Polish (1 learner)
9. Japanese (1 learner)
10. Sign language (2 learners)
11. Anglo-American (1 learner)
12. New Greek (1 learner)
13. Czech (1 learner)
14. Italian (1 learner)

It is also necessary to specify that the student who is attending the PhD wrote that she is not currently studying a particular language, but she indicated English as a foreign language as it is the one she is mainly using. Furthermore, a student who has already graduated chose the German language because after studying it at university it is now used by her at work.

3.4 Method and Instruments

In order to conduct the exploratory study two questionnaires were used, the format of which implies a quantitative analysis of the data. The two instruments that were used to achieve the objectives of the exploratory study are the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the FLSAS:

1. The first instrument is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The scale was first developed in 1965 by the sociologist Morris Rosenberg and it has since become the most widely used self-report instrument for measuring the self-esteem of individuals. It consists of 10 items regarding the so-called *global self-esteem*; some items investigate the positive feelings people have about themselves, while others evaluate the negative feelings. The answers of the original questionnaire have the format of a Likert scale with 4 points ranging from “*strongly agree*” (1) to “*strongly disagree*” (4) (Rosenberg, 1965). Before administering the questionnaire to the students, it was decided to modify the direction of the scale by making it go from 1 (“*strongly disagree*”) to 4 (“*strongly agree*”), while point 2 means “*disagree*” and point 3 “*agree*”.

The motivation behind this choice was the consideration that this arrangement would have created less confusion among learners, as it is usually more automatic to associate negative answers with lower values and affirmative answers with higher values. Items 6, 9, 10, 12, 13 are reversed in valence. The scale ranges from a minimum of 10 to a maximum of 40. Scores between 20 and 34 are within normal range, scores below 20 suggest low self-esteem, while scores above 35 indicate high self-esteem. Furthermore, four questions were added at the beginning of the questionnaire aimed at obtaining some potentially relevant personal information about the participants. The first question asked students to indicate which age group they belong to. The answers implied a multiple choice with three options: 1) *19-24*; 2) *25-30*; 3) *30+*. In the second question, participants had to indicate their gender between three options: 1) *male*; 2) *female*; 3) *I'd rather not answer*. The third question required a short answer text and it was asked to indicate students' mother tongue. Finally, the fourth question wanted to

know the degree course attended by the respondents between bachelor's degree course, master's degree course or other.

2. The second instrument is called FLSAS (Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale), and it is a version of the FLCAS which was modified by Hasan Sağlamel and Mustafa Naci Kayaoğlu, two professors of the Turkish Karadeniz Technical University. In 2013, they published the results of a study they had conducted among 565 learners of a Turkish state university in order to analyse “the role of creative drama in reducing language anxiety in speaking classes” (Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu, 2013, p. 377). On that occasion they realized a variation of the FLCAS in order to focus the instrument on speaking activity.

The original FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) was developed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope in 1986, it has been used in many studies and still continues to be one of the most used instruments to measure the level of Foreign Language Anxiety of students. The original questionnaire consists of 33 items that investigate three components of FLA, namely communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. The answers have the format of a Likert scale ranging from point 1 (“*completely agree*”) to point 5 (“*completely disagree*”).

As stated by its authors, in the FLSAS “the wording was shifted from language class to speaking class” (Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu, 2013, p. 383) and for this reason it has been chosen as instrument for the present research, as it is more suitable for the purpose of investigating Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety among university students.

As for the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and for the same reason, also for this questionnaire it was decided to change the direction of the scale from “*completely disagree*” (1) to “*completely agree*” (5), passing through “*disagree*” (2), “*neutral*” (3) and “*agree*” (4). Questions 2, 5, 10, 13, 17, 20, 26 and 30 reversed in valence. The scale ranges from a minimum of 31 to a maximum of 173. Scores below 100 suggest a low level of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, while scores above 100 indicate a high level of FLSA.

Furthermore, it must be specified that before being administered to the students, both questionnaires were translated from English into Italian, as it was not sure that all participants had sufficient knowledge of the language to fully understand the items. The two questionnaires were created with Google Moduli and were administered to the students by uploading them as a single file in two Facebook groups reserved respectively for students

of the bachelor's degree course in "*Lingue, Civiltà e Scienze del Linguaggio*" and of the master's degree course in "*Scienze del Linguaggio*". A brief presentation of the project was uploaded together with the questionnaires, as well as the instructions for completing them and the privacy policies. Participants then answered online, their answers were collected between April and May 2022 in a completely anonymous way and the resulting data of each question were shown by Google Moduli both individually and collectively in the form of a graph.

3.5 Previous research

The relationship between self-esteem and Foreign Language Anxiety is a topic that has been little investigated, especially as regards Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety. Most of the research, in fact, concerns the relationship between self-esteem and the academic outcomes of students, but there are two authors who have tried to understand whether self-esteem and FLA are related as phenomena.

Indeed, Pezhman Zare and Mohammad Javad Riasati (2012) conducted a study among “a total of 108 language learners enrolled for Teaching English as a Foreign Language in two universities in Shiraz, Iran” (p.219). Students were asked to answer two self-report questionnaires, namely the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the FLCAS, with the aim of investigating the relationship between Foreign Language Anxiety, self-esteem and academic level. From the results it emerged that the correlation between Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety and self-esteem of students was -0.74 with a correlation coefficient having a significance at the level of 0.01. This means that the two constructs showed a strong negative correlation, i.e., while self-esteem increased, language anxiety diminished. The two authors explained this finding by stating that learners with a high level of self-esteem are more able to overcome the failures and the difficulties that occur during the process of foreign language learning and also because they have more confidence in their abilities.

It must be underlined that the research dealt with the topic of self-esteem and Foreign Language Anxiety in a broader sense, while our exploratory study investigated a specific facet of Foreign Language, namely Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety. The next chapters will show and discuss the results of the study.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter will present and analyse the data collected through the two questionnaires. Based on the three objectives of the exploratory study already described in section 3.1, the findings concerning the self-esteem of students will be shown first, then the results of the questionnaire on Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety will be analysed.

4.1 Results regarding students' self-esteem

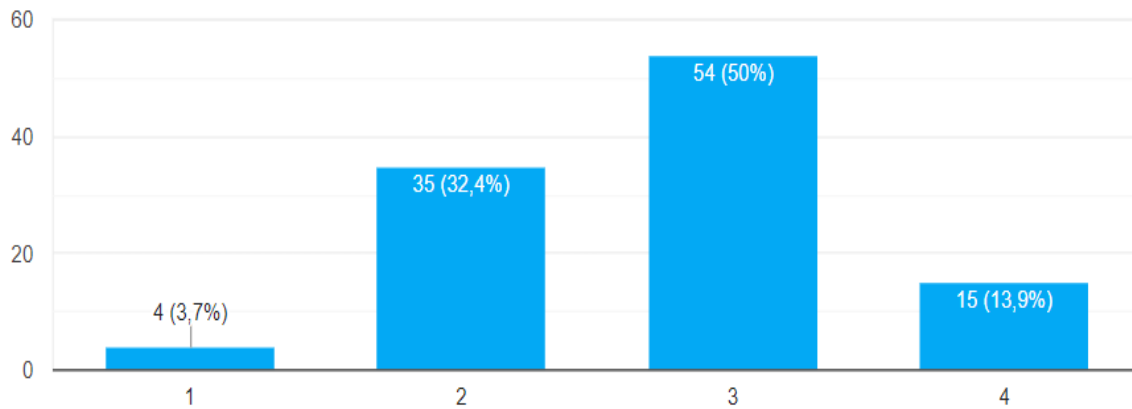
As the first four questions concerning students' personal data have already been analysed in section 3.3, we will now consider the 10 questions that constitute the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and which concern students' perception of themselves.

4.1.2 Question 5

This question wanted to investigate how satisfied students are with themselves. As can be seen in the graph below, exactly half of the participants (54 people) seem to have a good level of satisfaction (point 3), while 32.4% chose point 2. Furthermore, 13.9% of the sample declared that they strongly agree with the statement: "*On the whole, I am satisfied with myself*", while only 3.7%, i.e., 4 people, strongly disagree. It is interesting to underline that among the nine male students who participated in the questionnaire, four of them gave the answer 4, i.e., they have an excellent level of satisfaction. On the other hand, of the four people who are less satisfied with themselves, three have common characteristics, that is, they are between 19 and 24 years old, are female, have Italian as mother tongue and are attending the bachelor's degree course. Only one student is between 25 and 30 years old, she is a female and an Italian native speaker, and she is attending the master's degree course.

Question 5: “*On the whole, I am satisfied with myself*”

108 responses

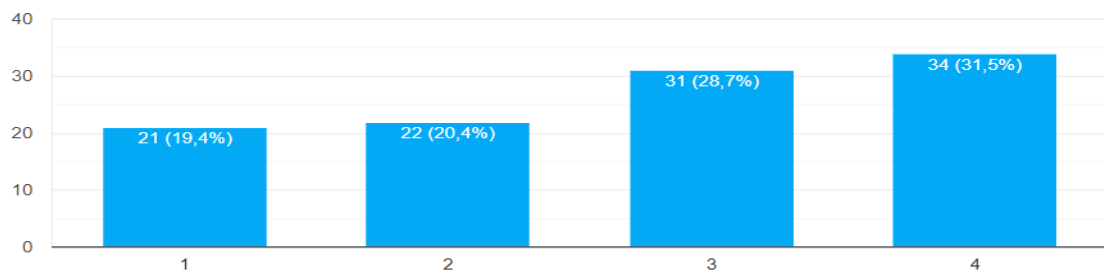


4.1.2 Question 6

The focus of the sixth question is the perception students have of their abilities. The statement in fact says: “*At times I think I am no good at all*”. This feeling seems to be experienced by most of the students, as 31.5% of them answered that they totally agree and 28.7% answered “*agree*” (point 3). Adding the two percentages, therefore, it appears that for 60.2% of the sample this is a felt problem, while 39.8% of the learners seem to suffer less from this phenomenon. It is important to underline that the sentence starts with “*at times*”; this means that the lack of confidence in one's own abilities can be for many students a feeling that occurs occasionally and not a stable characteristic of their personality.

Question 6: “*At times I think I am no good at all*”

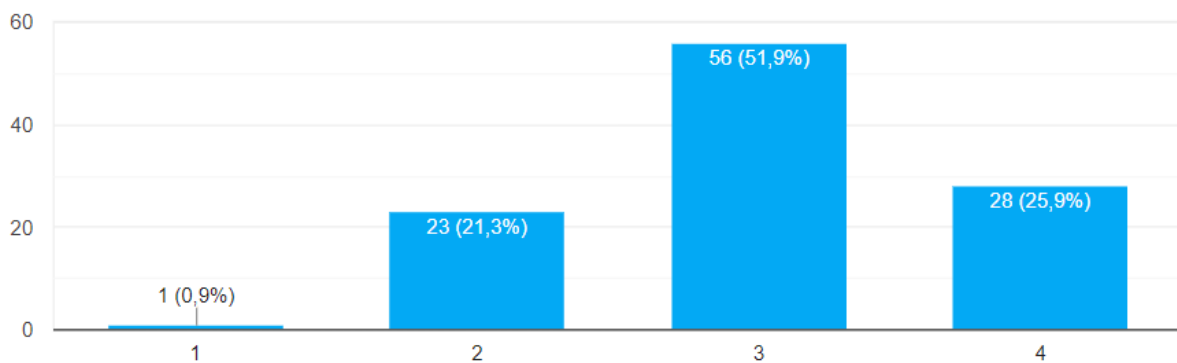
108 responses



4.1.3 Question 7

Differently from the previous question, question 7 asked students if they think they have some good qualities. The value that obtained most of the answers was “3” (51.9%), followed by point 4 (25.9%). 23 people answered "2" (21.3%), while only 1 person believes that she has no good qualities. Thus, although most of the sample sometimes feels that it is not good at anything, it also perceives to a large extent to have a number of good qualities. This finding would seem to confirm the sporadic nature of the feeling expressed in question 6.

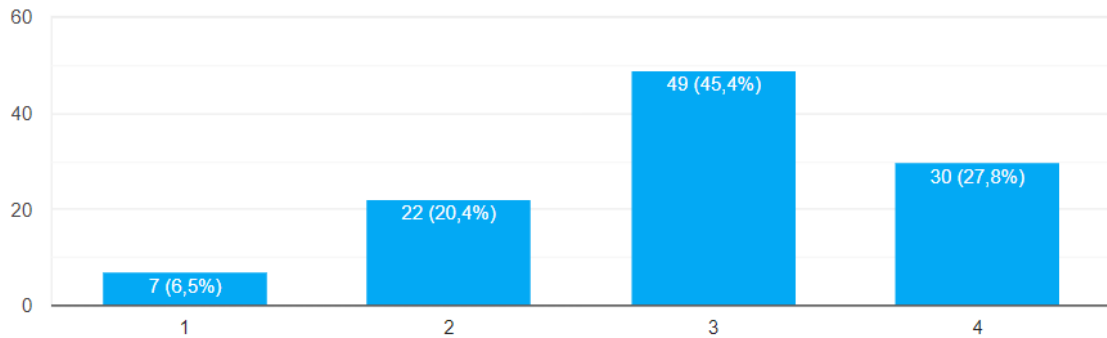
Question 7: “*I feel that I have a number of good qualities*”



4.1.4 Question 8

The eighth question takes into consideration two fundamental factors for self-esteem, namely confidence in one's own abilities and comparison with others. As described in the second chapter, one of the elements that most influences self-esteem especially in the academic context is comparing one's abilities with those of other people, especially peers. In this case, students had to respond how much they agreed with the statement: “*I am able to do things as well as most other people*”. 45.4% of them agree with this statement (point 3) and 27.8% even seem to strongly agree (point 4). However, it should be stressed that a not insignificant percentage (20.4%) answered “*disagree*”, while a smaller number of participants (6.5%) strongly disagree. An element that is common to the seven students who do not believe they have the same skills as the others (point 1) is the degree course; in fact, 5 out of 7 are attending the master's degree course.

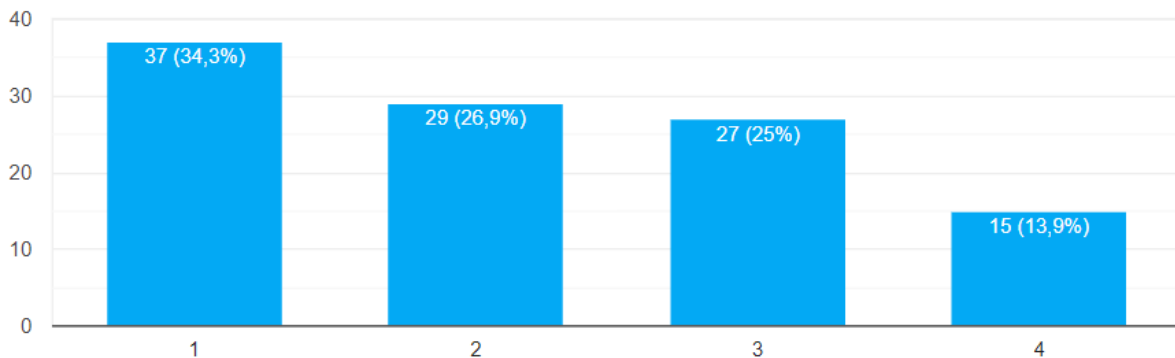
Question 8: “I am able to do things as well as most other people”



4.1.5 Question 9

This question aims to investigate how widespread the feeling of pride towards themselves is among students. 61.2% of the sample seems to experience this feeling as 37 students responded to strongly disagree with the sentence: “I feel I do not have much to be proud of”, while 29 persons answered “disagree” (point 2). However, there is almost a parity of numbers between point 2 and point 3. In fact, 27 people, that is 25% of the sample, agrees with the sentence of the question and therefore show that they have a low level of pride towards themselves. Finally, 15 people (13.9%) strongly agree that they don't have much to be proud of. From these data it emerges that if most of the students of the sample feel that they can be proud of themselves, almost 40% are not proud or only to a small extent and it would be interesting to investigate the causes of it.

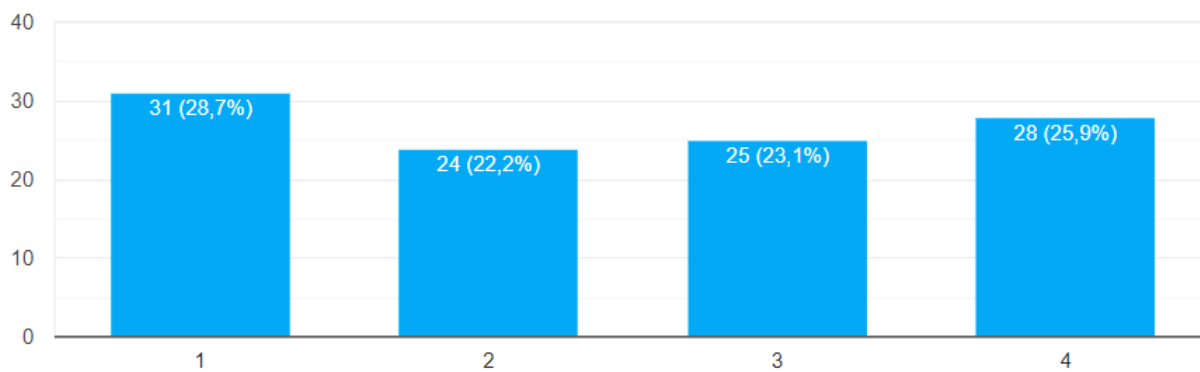
Question 9: “I feel I do not have much to be proud of”



4.1.6 Question 10

The tenth question asked students if they sometimes find themselves useless. In this case, there was no option that obtained a clear majority of responses. In fact, 28.7% of the students declared that they strongly agree with the statement, 25.9% were instead of a completely opposite opinion and replied that they fully agree, while 23.1 and 22.2% replied respectively "agree" (point 3) and "disagree" (point 2). It therefore emerges that this feeling is experienced in a more heterogeneous way by students than other aspects.

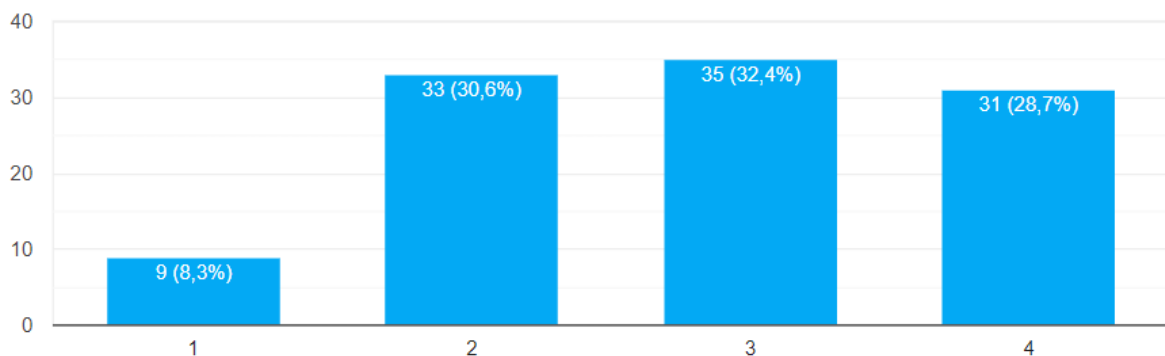
Question 10: *“I certainly feel useless at times”*



4.1.7 Question 11

The concept of self-worth is at the heart of question 11. Furthermore, the important factor of comparison with others also returns. The two central values are the ones that obtained the majority of the answers to the statement: *“I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others”*. Instead, 28.7% responded *“strongly agree”*, while only 8.3% chose point 1.

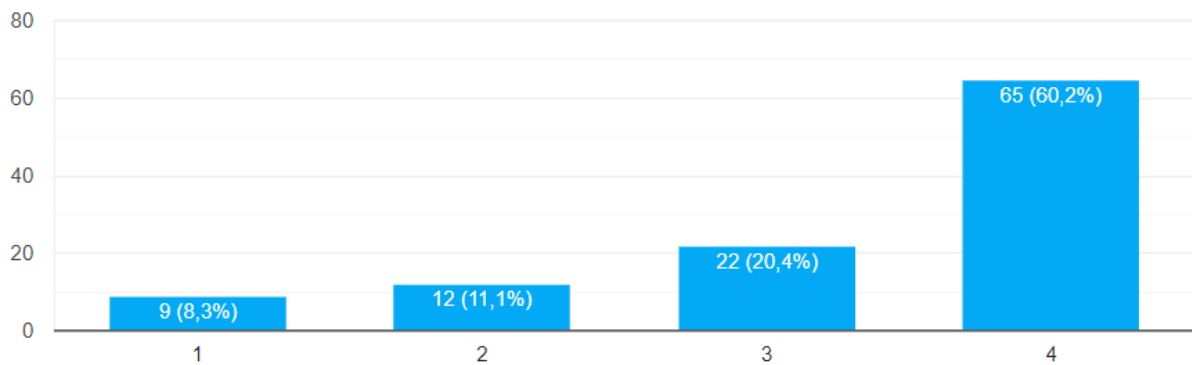
Question 11: *“I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others”*



4.1.8 Question 12

The twelfth question is the one in which a value obtained the greatest majority of answers. The purpose of the question was to investigate whether students would like to have more self-respect. 65 out of 108 learners (60.2%) answered "*strongly agree*", 20.4% "*agree*", while only 11.1% and 8.3% do not agree or strongly disagree. The fact of not respecting oneself sufficiently seems therefore to be a very common phenomenon among university students.

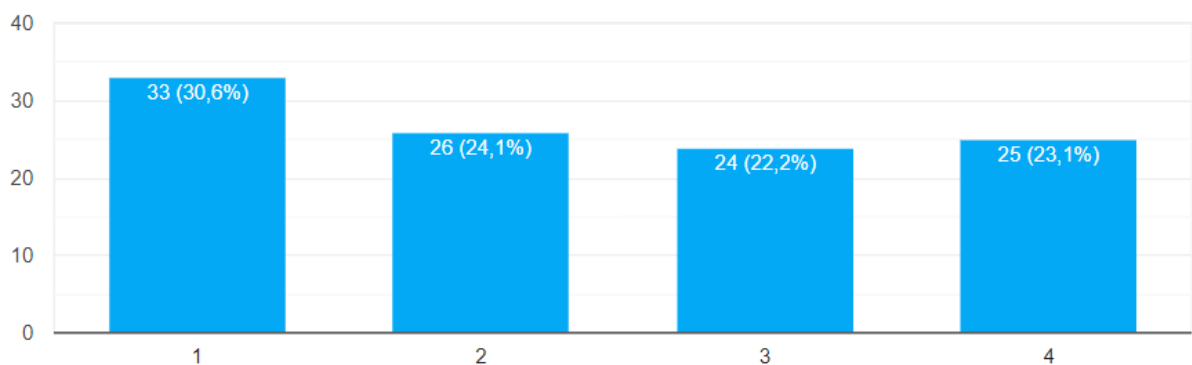
Question 12: "*I wish I could have more respect for myself*"



4.1.9 Question 13

This question asked students whether they are inclined to think they are a failure. The sample divided in two large groups, with a slightly more consistent half replying that they strongly disagree (30.6%) or disagree (24.1%), while the other part of students chose point 3 (22.2%) or point 4 (23.1%). This means that 45.3% of the sample experiences a feeling of failure, so this is another data that should not be underestimated.

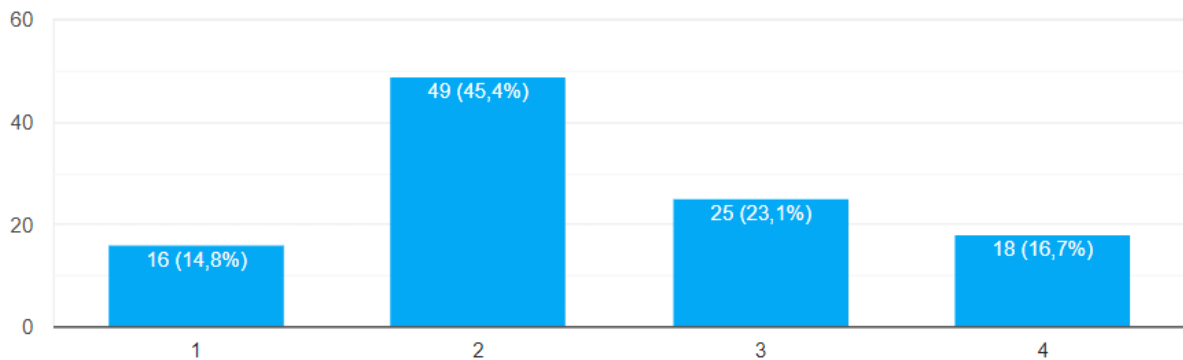
Question 13: "*All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure*"



4.1.10 Question 14

In the last question of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale students had to evaluate the statement: *"I take a positive attitude toward myself"*. Almost half of the sample (45.4%) disagrees, 23.1% agree, 16.7% fully agree while 14.8% strongly disagree. A little more than 60% of the sample, therefore, has a negative attitude towards themselves.

Question 14: *"I take a positive attitude toward myself"*



4.1.11 Mean and Mode

After the presentation of the percentages obtained by each answer, the table below will show the mean and the mode resulting for each of the 10 questions of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

Table 3- *Mean and mode of the answers of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale*

Questions	Mean	Mode
<i>On the whole, I am satisfied with myself</i>	2,7	3
<i>At times I think I am no good at all</i>	2,7	4
<i>I feel that I have a number of good qualities</i>	3	3
<i>I am able to do things as well as most other people</i>	2,9	3
<i>I feel I do not have much to be proud of</i>	2,2	1

<i>I certainly feel useless at times</i>	2,5	1
<i>I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others</i>	2,9	3
<i>I wish I could have more respect for myself</i>	3,3	4
<i>All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure</i>	2,4	1
<i>I take a positive attitude toward myself</i>	2,4	2

It emerges that the question with the higher mean is question 12 whose item states: “*I wish I could have more respect for myself*”. The question has also the higher mode (4), together with question 6: “*At times I think I am no good at all*”. Instead, the question with the lower mean is question 9 whose statement is: “*I feel I do not have much to be proud of*” and also the mode is the lowest (1) together with question 10 (“*I certainly feel useless at times*”) and question 13 (“*All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure*”).

4.2 Results regarding students’ Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

This part of the chapter will show the results emerging from the FLSAS. Taking inspiration from the study conducted by Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu (2013), it was decided to divide the 31 items of the questionnaire into six clusters that refer to some of the sources of language anxiety and its physical, behavioural and psychological manifestations. The six categories are:

- Lack of confidence
- Fear of failure
- Comparison with peers
- Perfectionism
- Physical and mental avoidance
- Lack of willingness to participate in oral activities

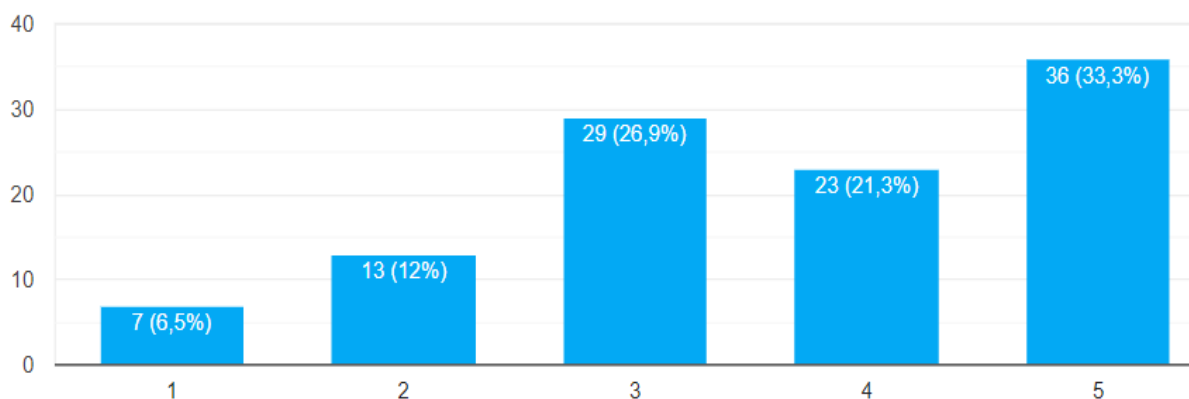
4.2.1 Lack of confidence

This group of questions includes eight items which aim to investigate students' lack of confidence in their oral communication skills in the foreign language they are studying.

4.2.1.1 Question 1

The first question of the FLSAS asked students whether they never feel quite sure of themselves when they are speaking during foreign language lessons. Looking at the data resulting from the answers of the participants, it emerges that the lack of confidence is a phenomenon that is felt by the students. In fact, 33.3% of them chose the higher point of the scale (5), 26.9% chose the intermediate point while point 4 obtained 21.3% of the answers. Points 1 and 2 were chosen by 6.5 and 12% of the sample, respectively.

Question 1: *“I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language lesson”*

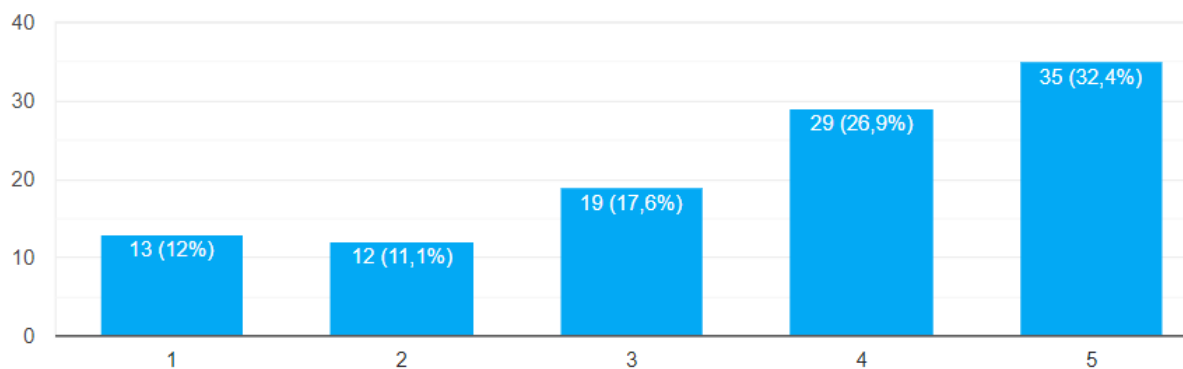


4.2.1.2 Question 12

In the first chapter it was explained how among the typical behaviours of students who suffer from anxiety and, in particular, from Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety there is the avoidance of some activities such as to intervene voluntarily in the classroom. Question 12 wants to investigate this aspect by proposing the sentence: *“It embarrasses me to volunteer answer in my foreign language lesson”*. 32.4% of students completely agree, 26.9% agree, 17.6% are neutral, 12% completely disagree while 11.1% disagree. Since more than half of the participants

feel embarrassed to intervene orally in the foreign language, they are likely to try to avoid these situations, thus losing an important opportunity to practice the language.

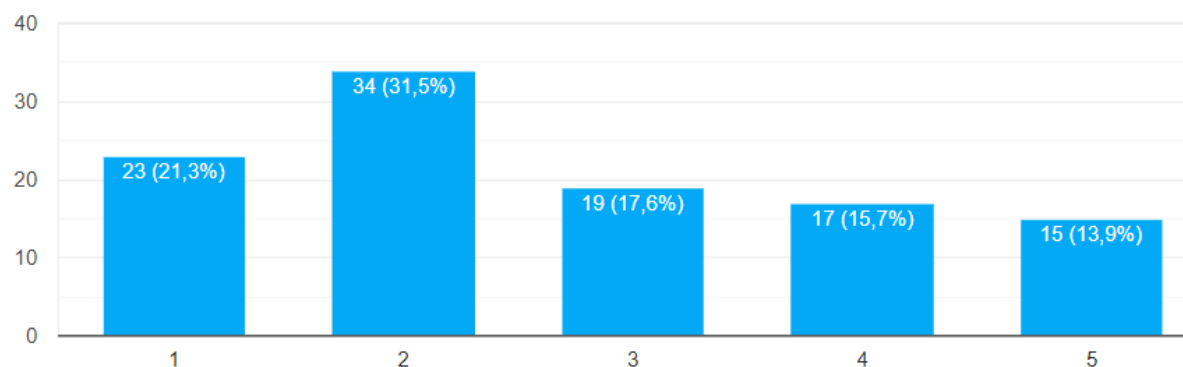
Question 12: *“It embarrasses me to volunteer answer in my foreign language lesson”*



4.2.1.3 Question 13

Question 13 investigates another aspect of the foreign language, namely the oral communication with native speakers of the target language. This is an activity that can be done both inside and outside the school, or in this case the university context. Since native speakers inevitably have a greater fluency in the language than learners, if there is a lack of confidence, the comparison could increase Speaking Anxiety. This is confirmed by the students' responses to the statement: *“I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers”*. In fact, 31.5% of them disagree, 21.3% completely disagree, 17.6% is neutral, 15.7% agree and 13.9% completely agree. Thus, 52.8% of the sample would not be at ease speaking with a native speaker.

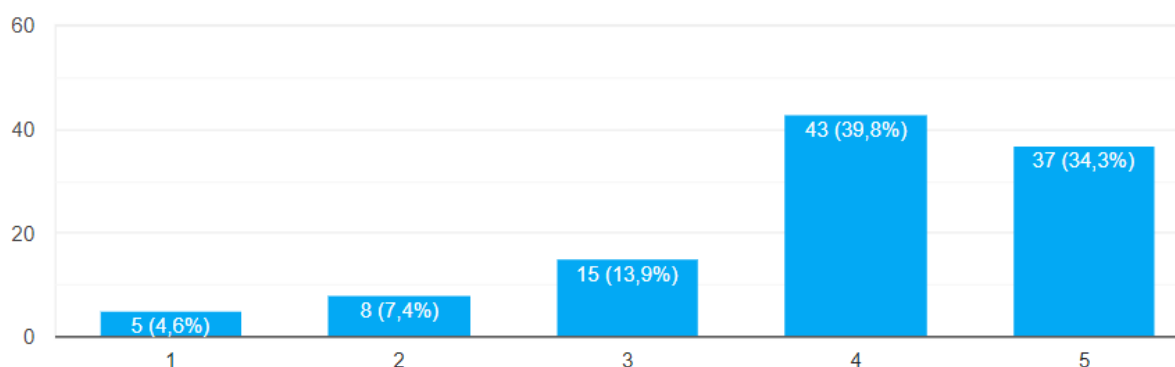
Question 13: *“I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers”*



4.2.1.4 Question 15

This question asked students if they feel anxious even when they are well prepared for the oral activities. Here the results are very clear as 39.8% answered “agree”, 34.3% “completely agree”, while lower percentages of participants answered “neutral” (13.9%), “disagree” (7.4%) or “completely disagree” (4.6%). It means that 74.1% of learners experience Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety regardless of their preparation. One of the possible consequences is that the performances of these students could be lower than the level of effort invested as anxiety acts as an emotional block.

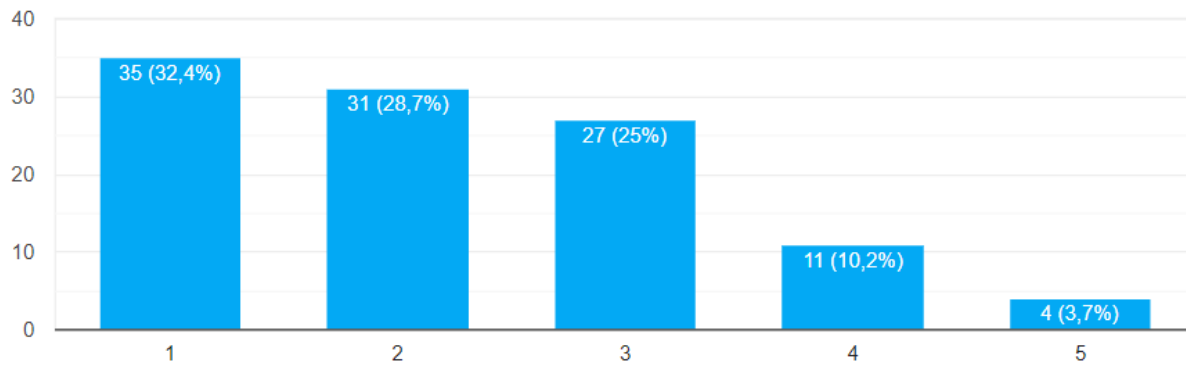
Question 15: “Even if I am well prepared for oral activities, I feel anxious about them”



4.2.1.5 Question 17

This question explicitly addresses the issue of students’ confidence in their ability to speak the foreign language. Indeed, the item claims: “I feel confident when I speak during foreign language lessons”. Also in this case the results are explicit with 32.4% of the sample replying that they completely disagree, 28.7% replying “disagree” and 25% “neutral”. Only 11 students agree with the statement and even fewer learners completely agree (4 students). It is important to take into consideration the fact that more than 60% of the sample lack confidence in speaking the foreign language during language lessons.

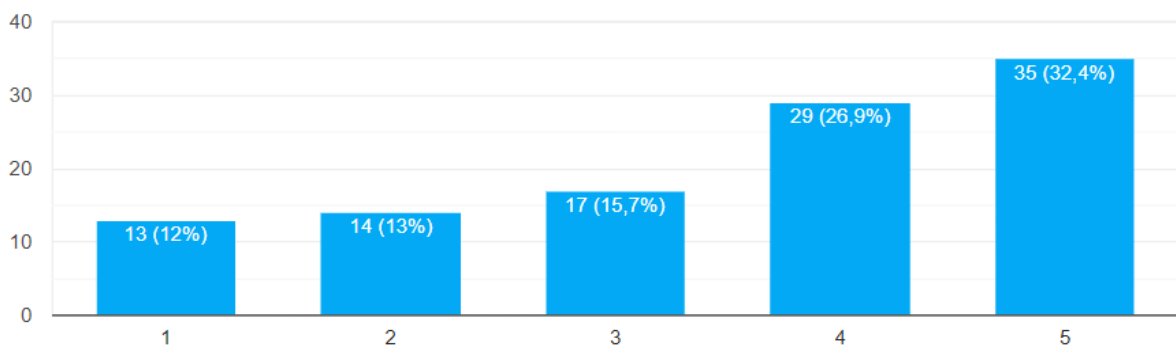
Question 17: “I feel confident when I speak during foreign language lessons”



4.2.1.6 Question 22

Question 22 investigates another phenomenon related to Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, namely the embarrassment of speaking in front of peers for fear of making mistakes and being teased or looking foolish. The students in the sample seem to experience this feeling as 32.4% replied that they completely agree with the statement: “I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students”, 26.9% agree, 15.7% are neutral, 13% disagree and 12% completely disagree. These data seem to confirm the previous answers regarding students’ lack of confidence in their oral skills.

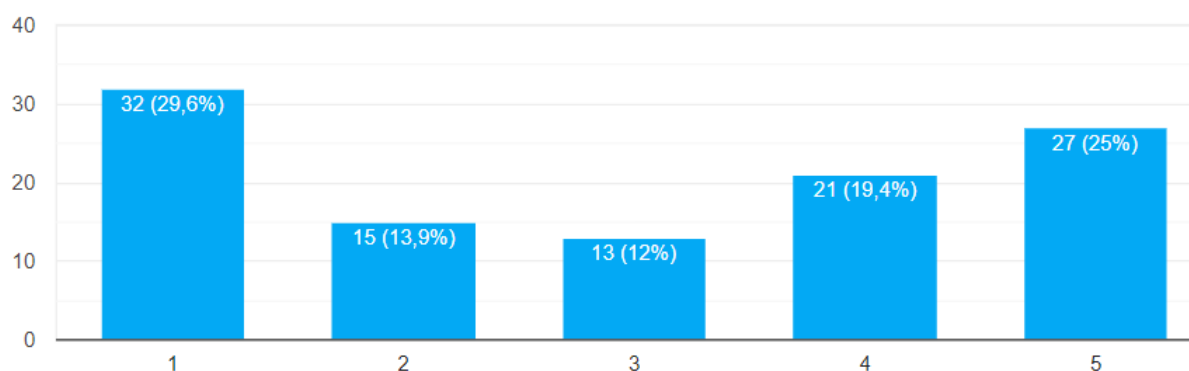
Question 22: “I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students”



4.2.1.7 Question 29

In this question the focus is on an aspect already anticipated in analysing the previous question, namely the fear of being teased by peers while communicating orally in the foreign language. The two points at the extremes of the scale were the ones that obtained the highest number of answers. In fact, 29.6% of students completely disagree with the statement: “*I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language*”, while 25% completely agree. As 19.4% answered “*agree*” and 13.9% “*disagree*”, it emerges that adding the percentages together, 43.5% of the participants do not suffer from the fear of being mocked by the other students, while 44.4% have this fear. On the other hand, 12% answered “*neutral*”. Therefore, the phenomenon almost divides the sample in half.

Question 29: “*I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language*”

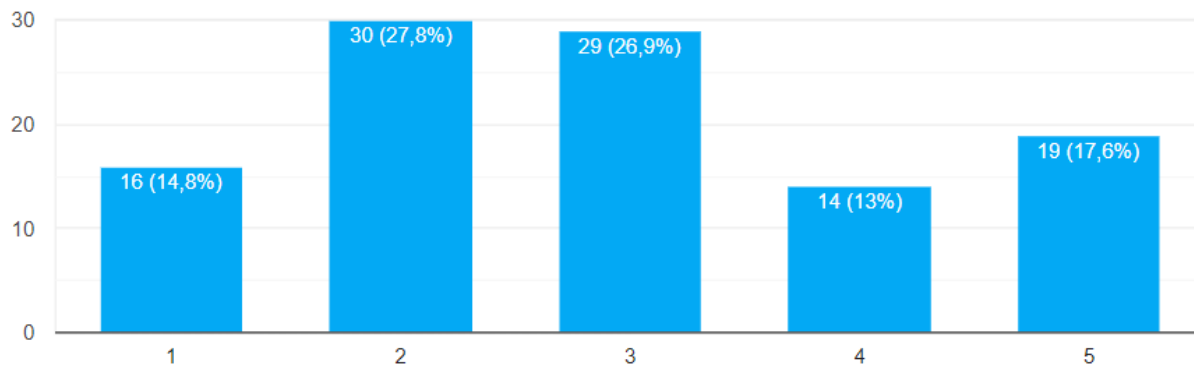


4.2.1.8 Question 30

Question 30 proposes again the topic already examined in question 13, that is self-confidence of learners in front of native speakers of the foreign language studied. The answers to the statement: “*I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language*” partly coincide with those of question 13. In fact, there are two points that obtained almost the same number of responses, namely point 2 (27.8%) and point 3 (26.9%). In other words, 30 students disagree and 29 are neutral, while 17.6% completely agree, 14.8% completely disagree and 13% agree.

As it emerged in question 13, also here the majority of the sample would not be at ease with native speakers.

Question 30: “I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language”



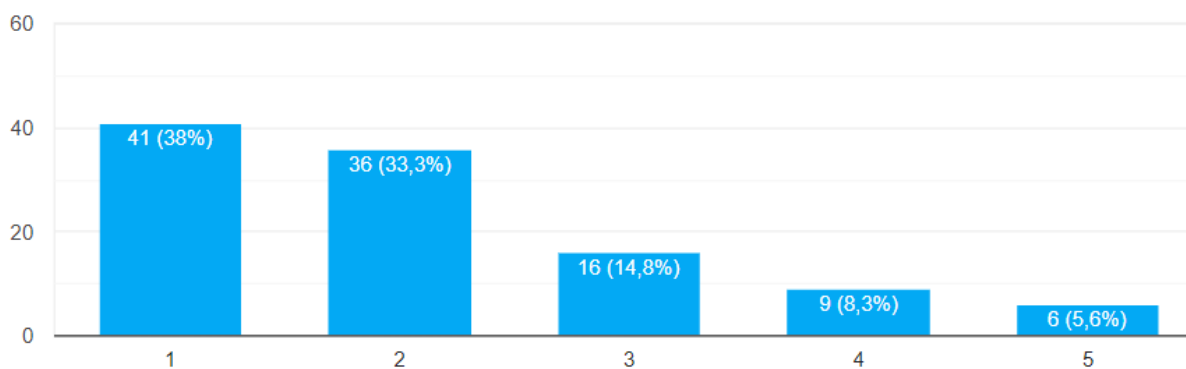
4.2.2 Fear of failure

This section will analyse the data emerging from students’ answers to seven questions concerning a problem which is involved in Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, namely the fear of failing and making mistakes that lead to a negative consequence that is the avoidance of some tasks and activities.

4.2.2.1 Question 2

This question asked students how much they agree with the statement: “I don’t worry about making mistakes in foreign language lessons”. The results are very clear: 38% of the participants answered “completely disagree”, 33.3% “disagree”, 14.8% “neutral”, 8.3% “agree” and 5.6% “completely agree”. The great majority of students therefore suffer from the fear of making mistakes during speaking activities in the foreign language.

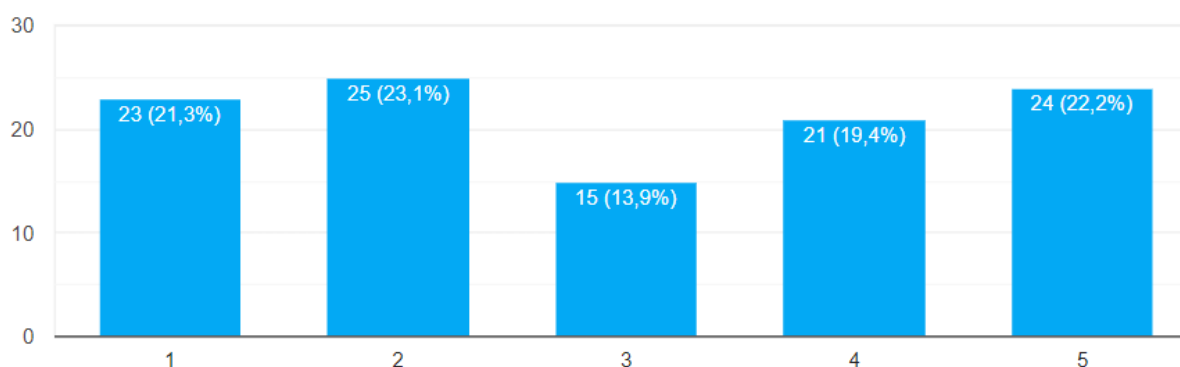
Question 2: “I don’t worry about making mistakes in foreign language lessons”



4.2.2.2 Question 4

The item: “*It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language*” obtained more heterogenous results than the previous question. Indeed, 25 students (23.1%) disagree, 24 learners (22.2%) completely agree, 23 participants (21.3%) completely disagree, 21 of them (19.4%) agree and 15 (13.9%) are neutral. It can be affirmed that the worry of not understanding what the teacher is saying is less felt than the fear of making mistakes.

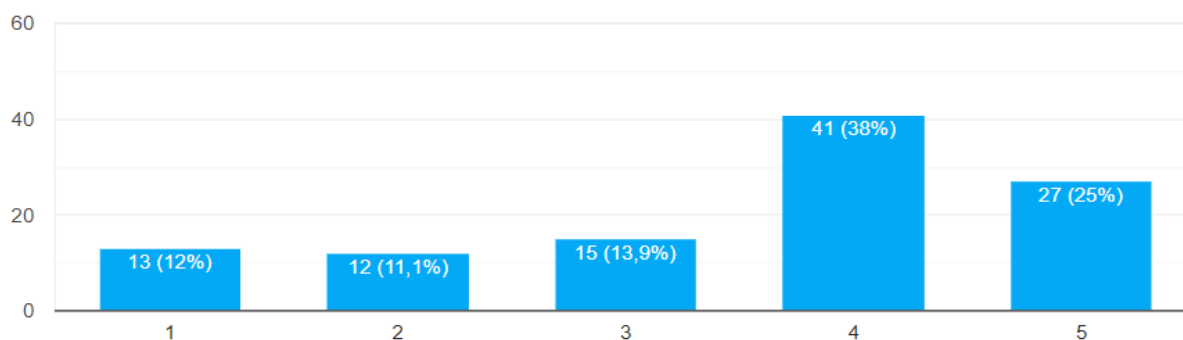
Question 4: “*It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language*”



4.2.2.3 Question 9

The sentence of the ninth question claims: “*I worry about the consequences of failing speaking activities*”. 63% of the sample experience this feeling as 38% of them answered “*agree*” and 25% “*completely agree*”. The answer “*neutral*” was chosen by 13.9% of the sample, “*completely disagree*” by 12% and “*disagree*” by 11.1%. Hence, the fear of the consequences of a possible failure in speaking seems to be one of the causes of FLSA in many students.

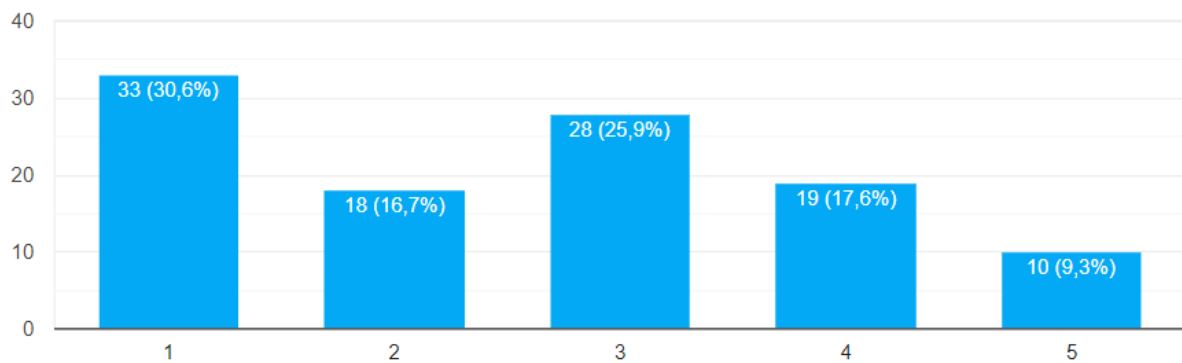
Question 9: “*I worry about the consequences of failing speaking activities*”



4.2.2.4 Question 14

Question 14 asked students how much they agree with the statement: “*I get upset when I don’t understand what the teacher is correcting*”. 30.6% of them completely disagree, 25.9% are neutral, 17.6% agree, 16.7% disagree and only 10 students (9.3%) completely agree. It can therefore be stated that this aspect is less felt by the sample than other phenomena related to Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety.

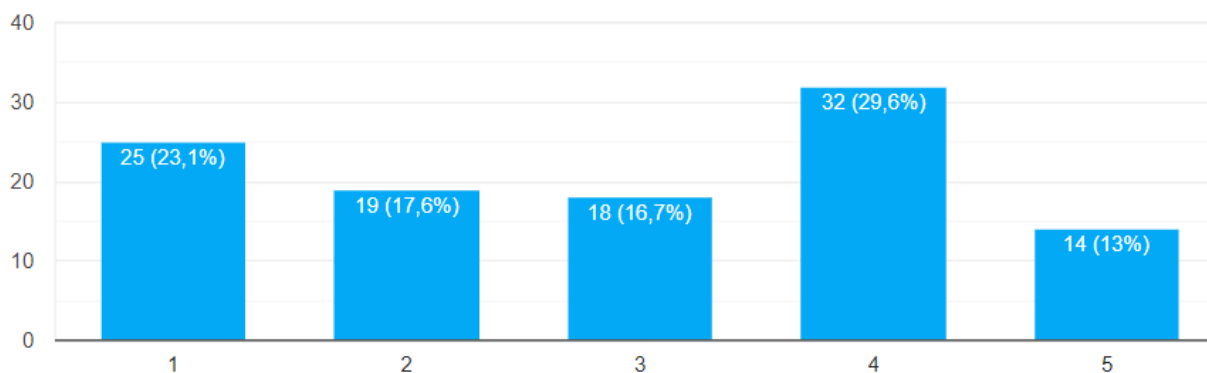
Question 14: “*I get upset when I don’t understand what the teacher is correcting*”



4.2.2.5 Question 18

An important element that can affect students' Foreign Language Anxiety is the method by which the teacher corrects and gives feedback to the learners. Question 18 focuses precisely on this topic with the statement: “*I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make*”. From the answers it emerges that 29.6% of the sample agree, but on the other hand 23.1% completely disagree and 17.6% disagree. Students who are neutral are 16.7% and only 14 participants (13%) completely agree.

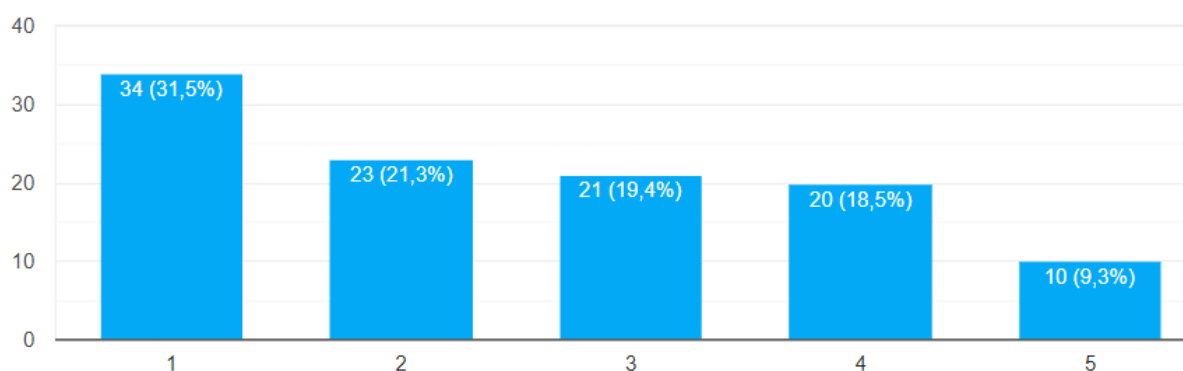
Question 18: “*I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make*”



4.2.2.6 Question 23

“Oral activities move so quickly I worry about getting left behind” is the item of question 23 with which the students do not seem to particularly agree. Indeed, 31.5% of them answered “completely disagree”, 21.3% “disagree”, 19.4% “neutral”, 18.5% “agree” and only 9.3% “completely agree”. The speed with which oral activities take place does not seem to be a particular source of concern for the participants, probably due to the fact that they are university students and therefore they have experience acquired over many years in following lessons.

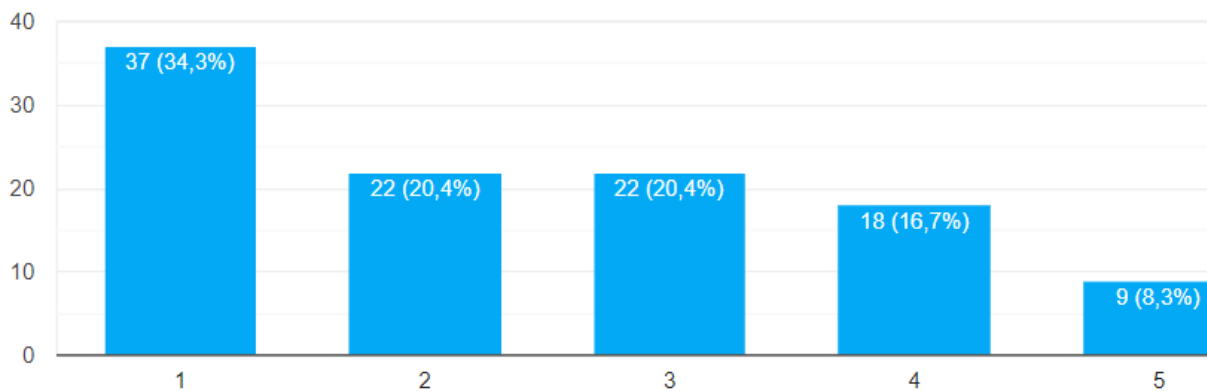
Question 23: “Oral activities move so quickly I worry about getting left behind”



4.2.2.7 Question 28

The same possible explanation given for interpreting the data of the previous question could also be adequate for question 28, whose statement says: “I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language”. The results, in fact, are similar to those of question 23 with 34.3% of learners answering “completely disagree”, two equal percentages for the options “disagree” and “neutral”, while 16.7% of students agree and 8.3% completely agree. Also in this case the data can be explained by referring to the experience acquired after many years of school by university students. To confirm this, by looking at the answers regarding the degree course attended by the participants, it emerges that most of the students who feel overwhelmed are attending a bachelor’s degree course (6 of the 9 learners who answered that they completely agree), while among those who answered “completely disagree”, most are attending a master's degree course.

Question 28: “I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language”



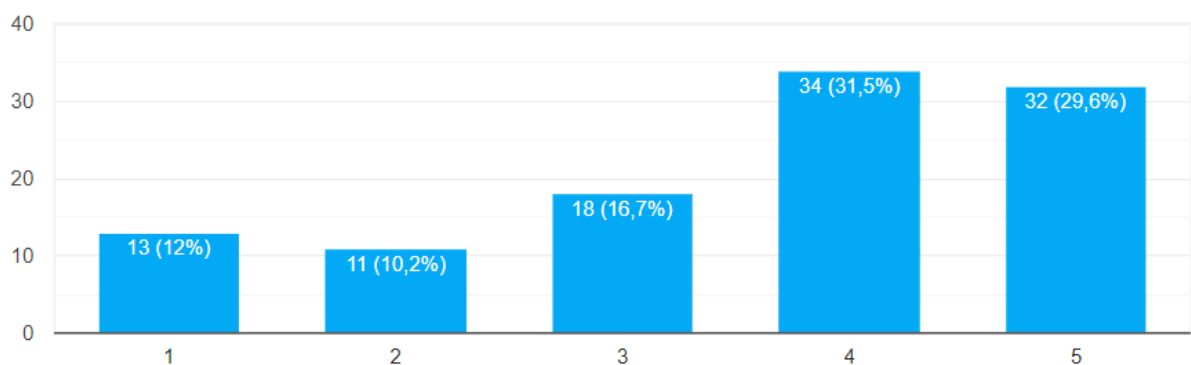
4.2.3 Comparison with peers

We have already seen in the first chapter that the comparison with peers is an element that can have an important influence not only on self-esteem but also on Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety of students. The next two questions will investigate how widespread this phenomenon is among the university students in our sample.

4.2.3.1 Question 7

The item of this question is: “I keep thinking that the other students are better at language than I am” and students seem to agree with it. Indeed, 31.5% of them answered “agree” and 29.6% “completely agree”, while 16.7% are neutral, 12% completely disagree and 10.2% disagree. From these findings it emerges that 61.1% of learners think they are worse at language than their peers while only 22.2% have a different perception. We will see that the following question confirms these results.

Question 7: “I keep thinking that the other students are better at language than I am”

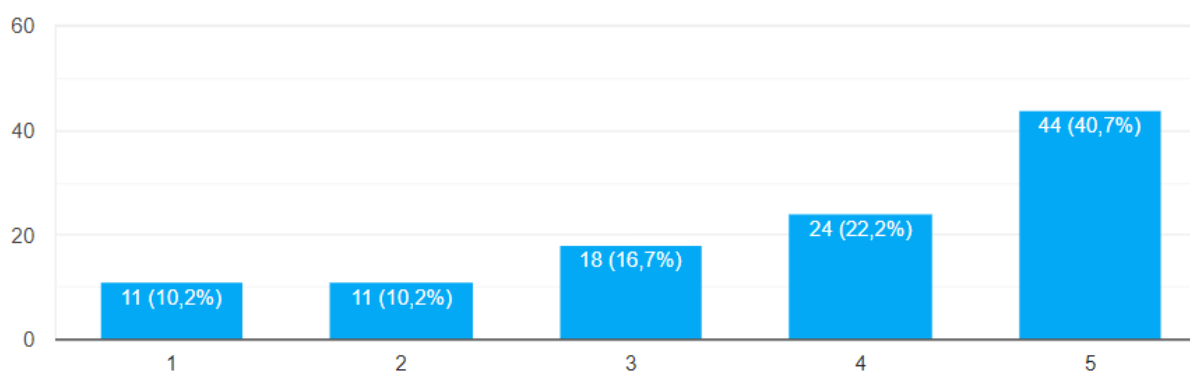


4.2.3.2 Question 21

While question 7 referred to foreign language in a generic sense, question 21 is focused on the comparison with peers that occurs during the oral activities in the foreign language. The results are even more explicit than those of the previous question as 40.7% of the sample answered “completely agree” to the statement: “I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do” and 22.2% answered “agree”. The same number of students (11) chose options 1 and 2 (“completely disagree” and “disagree”) while 16.7% are neutral. It is interesting to underline that answer 3 and answer 2 obtained the same number of responses than question 7.

The fact that a greater number of students completely agree with the item confirms that the oral activity is the one in which learners compare themselves more with others, in this case with peers, and which can therefore cause greater anxiety.

Question 21: “I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do”



4.2.4 Perfectionism

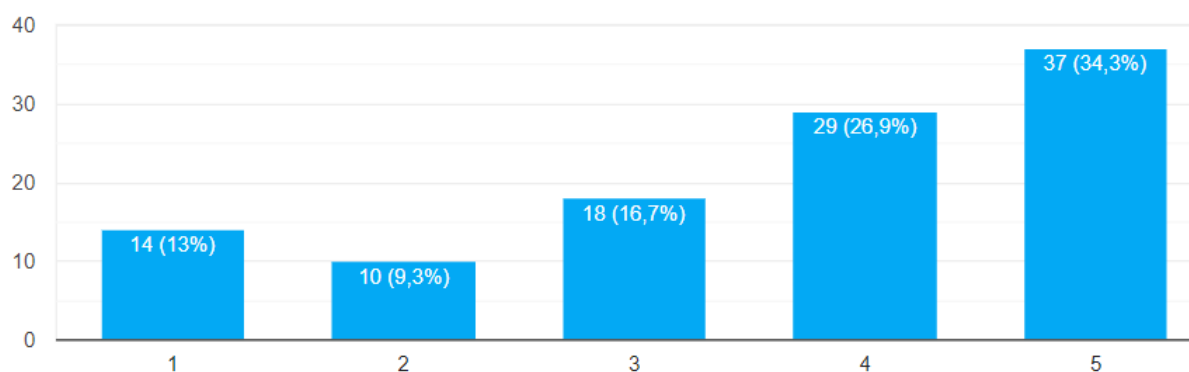
In the first chapter, the possible sources of Foreign Language Anxiety were analysed, and they also included the unrealistic expectations or objectives of students which, if disregarded, can cause frustration and therefore anxiety. Some students would like to always be found prepared and therefore they experience panic when the teacher call them by surprise or asks them about things they had not prepared for in advance or if they cannot understand every word the teacher is saying.

The next four questions will investigate how widespread this phenomenon is among university students in our sample.

4.2.4.1 Question 8

The lack of preparation seems to be an element causing Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety in students. In fact, 34.3% and 26.9% of them answered respectively that they “*completely agree*” and “*agree*” with the item: “*I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in my foreign language lesson*”. Only 22.3% do not experience this feeling while 16.7% are neutral.

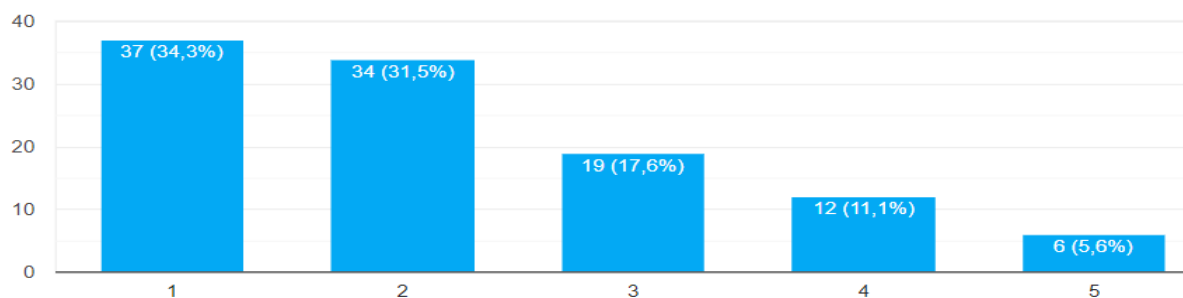
Question 8: “*I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in my foreign language lesson*”



4.2.4.2 Question 20

The importance of being prepared for speaking activities is also at the heart of question 20 which presents the statement: “*I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for oral activities*”. Once again, the results are very clear, with 34.3% of students who completely disagree and 31.5% who disagree. Only 6 students completely agree, 12 agree and 19 are neutral. It is interesting to note that 4 of the 6 students who answered that they completely agree with the item of the question do not study English as a foreign language but Chinese, Spanish, Anglo-American and German.

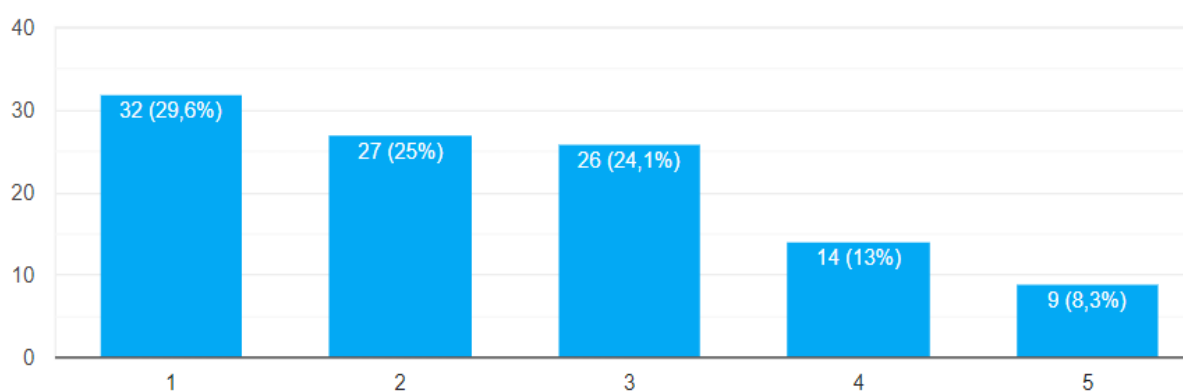
Question 20: “*I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for oral activities*”



4.2.4.3 Question 27

“I get nervous when I don’t understand every word the language teacher says” is the item of question 27. Unlike the previous two questions, here the majority of the students answered that they completely disagree (29.6%), disagree (25%), and “neutral” (24.1%). Learners who agree are 21.3%. This means that the fact of not understanding every word the teacher is saying is an element that causes less FLSA than the lack of preparation.

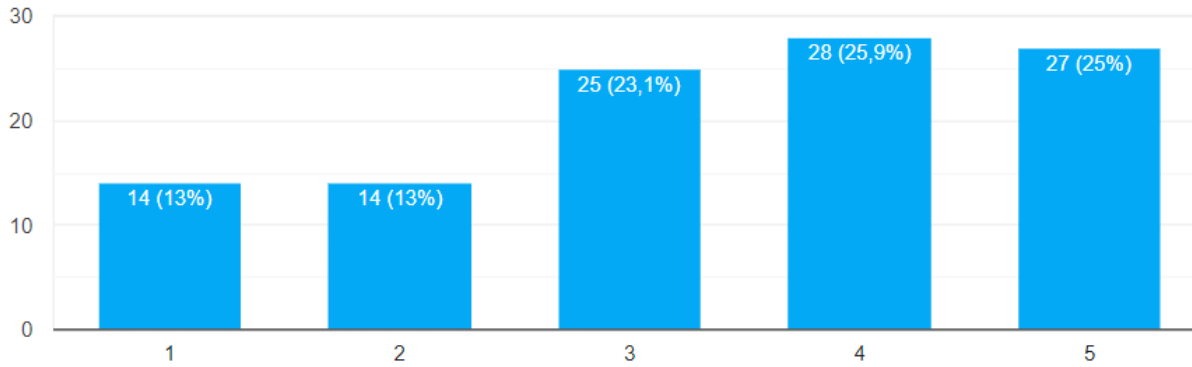
Question 27: “I get nervous when I don’t understand every word the language teacher says”



4.2.4.4 Question 31

The last question of the FLSAS returns to the topic of preparation and investigates whether or not students agree with the statement: “I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven’t prepared in advance”. The answers confirm that students fear being found unprepared as can be seen by the percentages of learners who agree with the item of the question. Indeed, 25.9% responded “agree”, 25% “completely agree”, 23.1% “neutral”, while the options “disagree” and “completely disagree” obtained the same number of answers (14 students, i.e., 13% of the sample).

Question 31: “I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven’t prepared in advance”



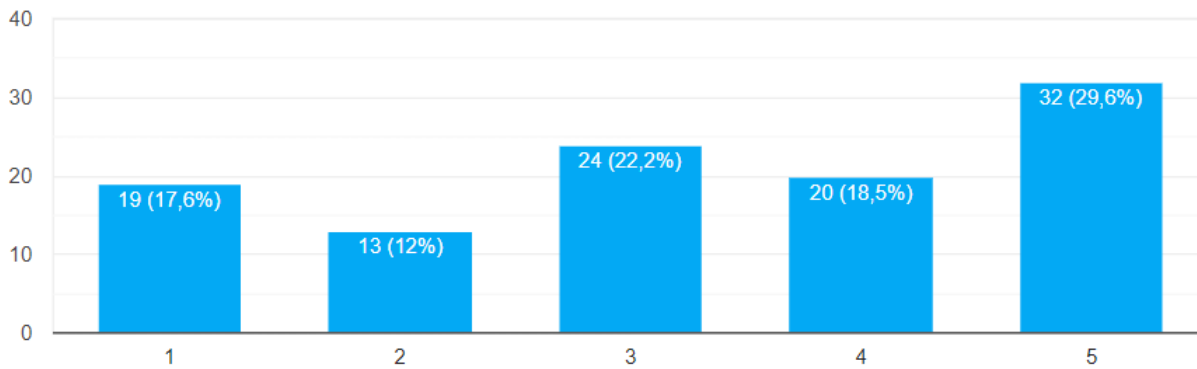
4.2.5 Physical and mental avoidance

The physical and psychological manifestations of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety have been explained in the first chapter and will now be the focus of the following seven questions of the FLSAS.

4.2.5.1 Question 3

Trembling is one of the typical physical symptoms of anxiety, including Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety. The item of question 3 claims: “I tremble when I know that I’m going to be called on in speaking activities”. This sensation is experienced by 48.1% of the sample, while 22.2% is neutral and 29.6% do not have this kind of problem.

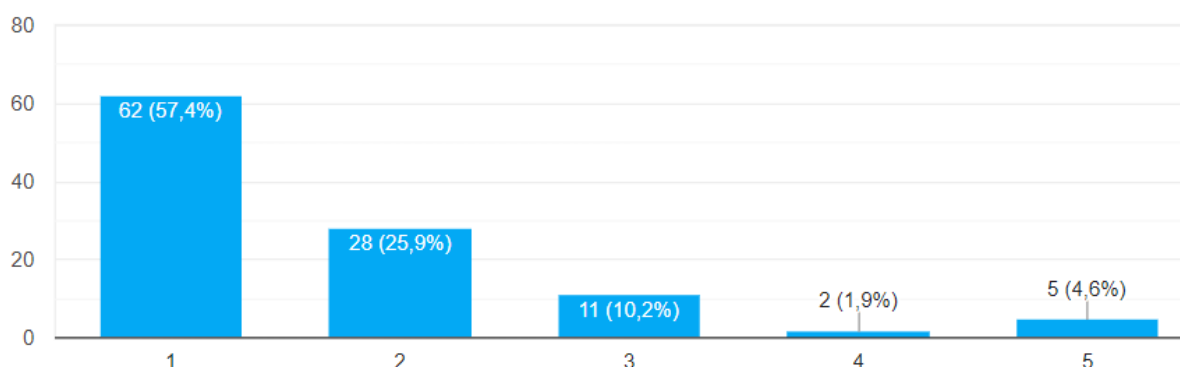
Question 3: “I tremble when I know that I’m going to be called on in speaking activities”



4.2.5.2 Question 10

The item of question 10 is: “*I don’t understand why some people get so upset over speaking activities*”. Students who completely disagree are 57.4%, while 25.9% answered “*disagree*”. The other points of the scale obtained lower percentages of responses as 10.2% answered “*neutral*”, 4.6% “*completely agree*” and only 1.9% “*agree*”. These data reveal that speaking activity is an aspect of foreign language learning which causes a feeling of stress and anxiety on students, confirming the findings of the numerous studies conducted in this field.

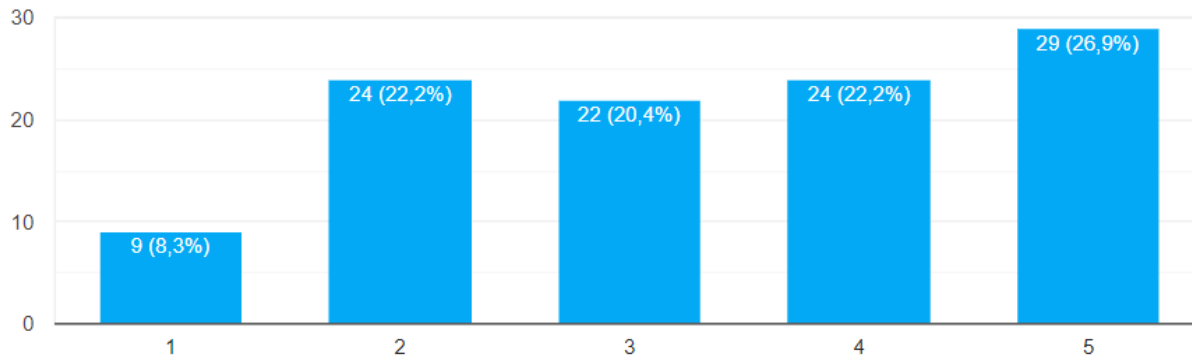
Question 10: “*I don’t understand why some people get so upset over speaking activities*”



4.2.5.3 Question 11

This question investigates another negative consequence of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, namely the risk that anxiety prevails and makes students forget things that they actually know, with a consequent poor performance and a feeling of frustration for not being able to express at best their skills and knowledge. 26.9% of the sample completely agree with the statement: “*During speaking activities I can get so nervous I forget things I know*”, while the answers “*agree*” and “*disagree*” were chosen both by 24 students (22.2%). Learners who are neutral are 20.4% and 8.3% completely disagree. Hence, almost half of the participants experience this facet of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety.

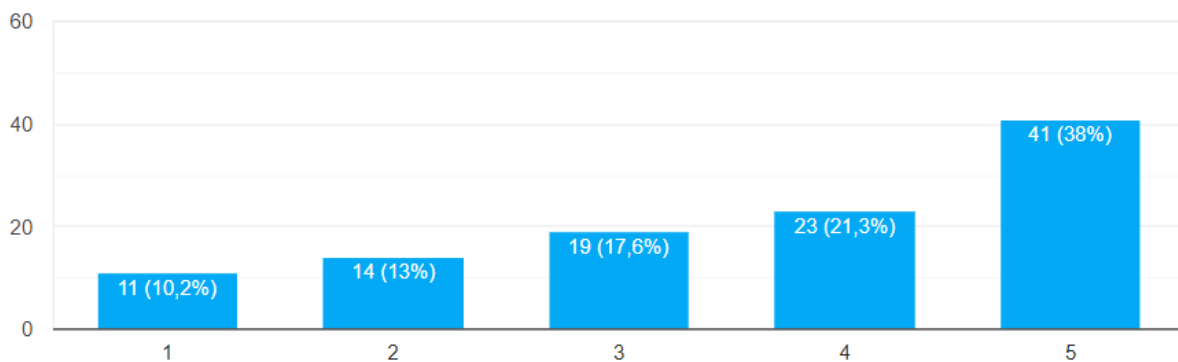
Question 11: “During speaking activities I can get so nervous I forget things I know”



4.2.5.4 Question 19

Among the physical symptoms of anxiety, one of the most common are palpitations. Question 19 aims to investigate if speaking activities in a foreign language cause such reaction in university students by proposing the statement: “I can feel my heart pounding when I’m going to be called on in speaking activities”. 38% of the sample completely agree and 21.3% agree, while 17.6% are neutral. Students who do not experience this problem are 23.2% (13% disagree and 10.2% completely disagree). The findings seem to confirm that university students who are learning one or more foreign languages suffer from FLSA with its physical manifestations.

Question 19: “I can feel my heart pounding when I’m going to be called on in speaking activities”

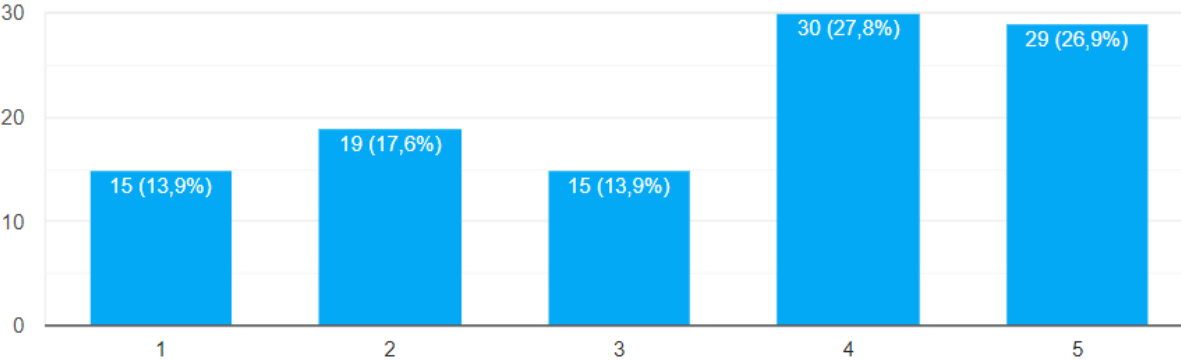


4.2.5.5 Question 24

The objective of question 24 is to analyse whether the sample of students, through their answers, confirms or not what many authors have affirmed, namely that speaking is the activity that most causes anxiety in students for a series of reasons discussed in the previous chapters. The item

of the question is: “*I feel more tense and nervous in my speaking lessons than in my other lessons*”. 27.8% of learners answered “*agree*” and 26.9% “*completely agree*”, 17.6% disagree, while both point 1 and point 3 obtained 13.9% of responses. Thus, 54.7% of participants find speaking activity more stressful than other courses, confirming the findings of many studies.

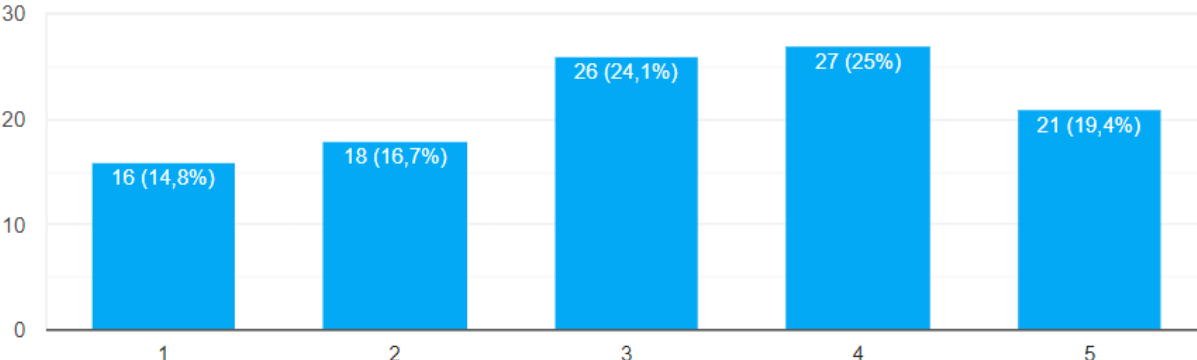
Question 24: “*I feel more tense and nervous in my speaking lessons than in my other lessons*”



4.2.5.6 Question 25

At the heart of question 25 are two other typical manifestations of language anxiety, namely nervousness and confusion. 25% of the sample agree with the statement: “*I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my foreign language lesson*”, while 24.1% are neutral, 19.4% completely agree, 16.7% disagree and 14.8% completely disagree. Since the previous questions showed that nervousness is a feeling experienced by most students during speaking activity, the lower percentages obtained in this question are probably due to the fact that the symptom of confusion is less present among the students.

Question 25: “*I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my foreign language lesson*”

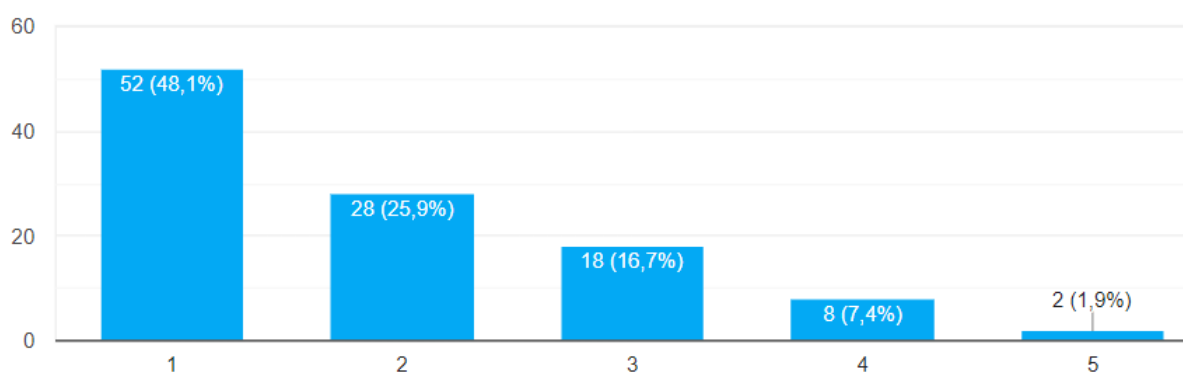


4.2.5.7 Question 26

The item that concludes this cluster of questions dedicated to the physical and psychological manifestations of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety states: “*When I’m on my way to speaking activities I feel very sure and relaxed*”. The results show that 48.1% of students completely disagree with the statement and 25.9% disagree, 16.7% are neutral and only 7.4% and 1.9% answered respectively “*agree*” and “*completely agree*”. It is interesting to underline that the two students who completely disagree are not Italian native speakers as one girl has Russian as mother tongue and the other girl is a Croatian native speaker.

The fact that 74% of learners do not feel sure and relaxed when they have to speak in class in the foreign language is a strong demonstration of how Speaking Anxiety is a widespread phenomenon in learners who study foreign languages at university.

Question 26: “*When I’m on my way to speaking activities I feel very sure and relaxed*”



4.2.6 Lack of willingness to participate in oral activities

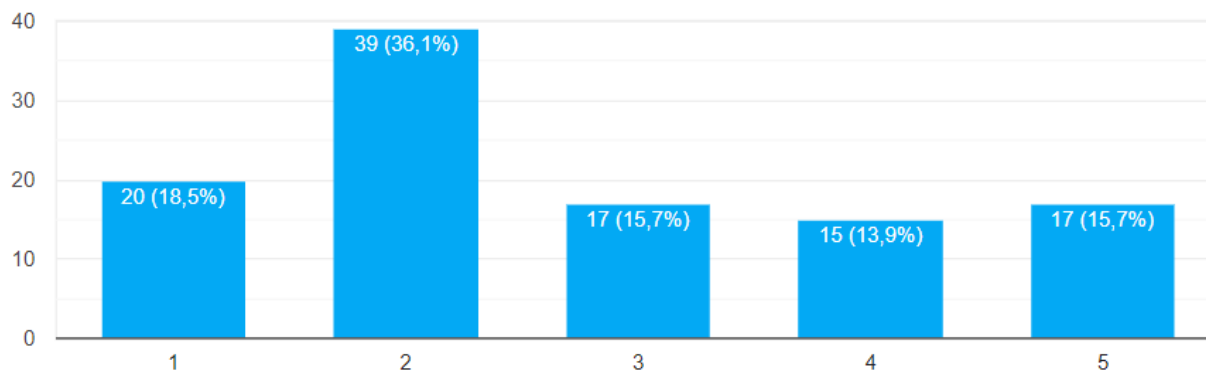
The last group of questions investigates a typical behaviour of anxious students, namely the lack of willingness to communicate orally in the foreign language. Language anxiety often leads students who suffer from it to avoid oral activities, with negative consequences on their communicative competence. The following three questions will analyse this phenomenon among the university students who answered the questionnaire.

4.2.6.1 Question 5

Question 5 asked students how much they agree with the statement: “*It wouldn’t bother me at all to take more speaking activities*”. The results show that 36.1% of the sample disagree, 18.5%

completely disagree, point 3 and 5 obtained both 17 answers and 13.9% of learners agree. Thus, more than half of the participants would be worried to do more speaking activities.

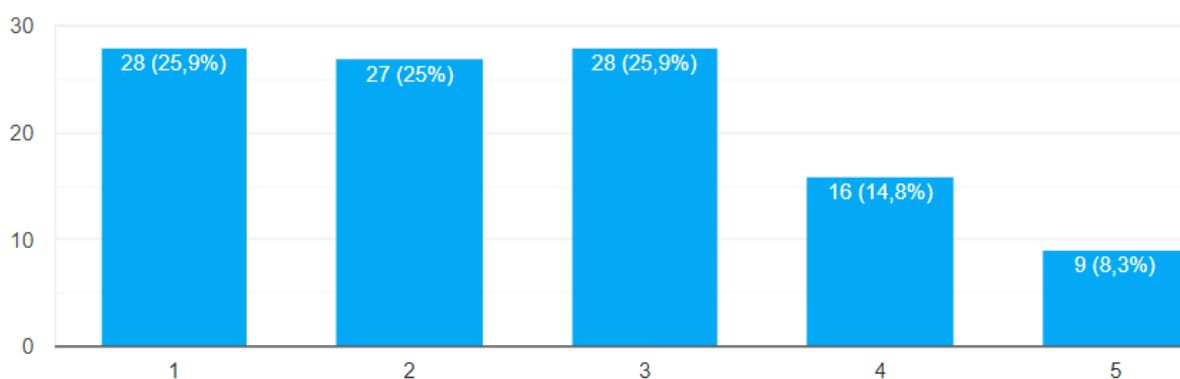
Question 5: *“It wouldn’t bother me at all to take more speaking activities”*



4.2.6.2 Question 6

This question focuses on the lack of concentration that could be another manifestation of the lack of willingness to participate in speaking lessons or activities. In this case, most students seem not to agree with the item: *“During speaking activities, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course”*. Indeed, 25.9% of them answered *“completely disagree”* and the same percentage answered *“neutral”*, while 25% disagree. Learners who agree are 14.8% while only 8.3% answered *“completely agree”*. Hence, Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety seems not to manifest itself mainly with lack of concentration.

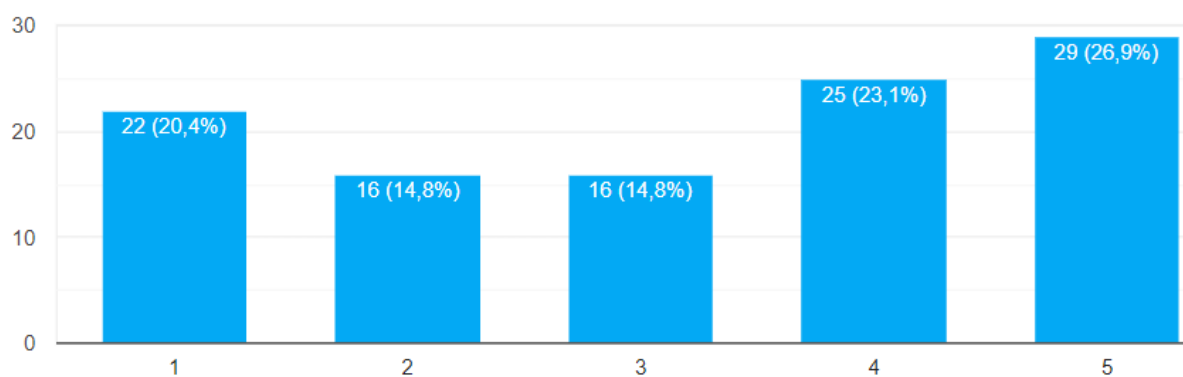
Question 6: *“During speaking activities, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course”*



4.2.6.3 Question 16

Question 16 asked students how much they agree with the sentence: “*I often feel like not going to my speaking lesson*”. From the results it emerges that exactly half of the sample agrees, 14.8% are neutral and 35.2% disagree. This means that speaking activities are a source of anxiety for a large portion of students who, as a consequence, adopt an avoidant behaviour.

Question 16: “*I often feel like not going to my speaking lesson*”



4.2.7 Mean and Mode

The following table will show the mean and the mode of each of the 31 questions of the FLSAS.

Table 4- Mean and mode of the answers of the FLSAS

Questions	Mean	Mode
<i>I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language lesson</i>	3,6	5
<i>I don't worry about making mistakes in foreign language lessons</i>	2,1	1
<i>I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in speaking activities</i>	3,3	5
<i>It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher</i>	3	2

<i>is saying in the foreign language</i>		
<i>It wouldn't bother me at all to take more speaking activities</i>	2,3	2
<i>During speaking activities, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course</i>	2,5	3
<i>I keep thinking that the other students are better at language than I am</i>	3,6	4
<i>I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in my foreign language lesson</i>	3,7	5
<i>I worry about the consequences of failing speaking activities</i>	3,5	4
<i>I don't understand why some people get so upset over speaking activities</i>	1,7	1
<i>During speaking activities I can get so nervous I forget things I know</i>	3,4	5
<i>It embarrasses me to volunteer answer in my foreign language lesson</i>	3,7	5
<i>I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers</i>	2,7	2
<i>I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting</i>	2,6	1
<i>Even if I am well prepared for oral activities, I feel anxious about them</i>	4	4

<i>I often feel like not going to my speaking lesson</i>	3,2	5
<i>I feel confident when I speak during foreign language lessons</i>	2,2	1
<i>I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make</i>	3	4
<i>I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in speaking activities</i>	3,6	5
<i>I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for oral activities</i>	2,2	1
<i>I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do</i>	3,7	5
<i>I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students</i>	3,5	5
<i>Oral activities move so quickly I worry about getting left behind</i>	2,5	1
<i>I feel more tense and nervous in my speaking lessons than in my other lessons</i>	3,4	4
<i>I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my foreign language lesson</i>	3,2	4
<i>When I'm on my way to speaking activities I feel very sure and relaxed</i>	1,9	1

<i>I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says</i>	2,5	1
<i>I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language</i>	2,4	1
<i>I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language</i>	3	1
<i>I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language</i>	3	2
<i>I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance</i>	3,4	4

The question that obtained the higher mean is question 15 whose item is: “*Even if I am well prepared for oral activities, I feel anxious about them*”, while the question with the lower mean (1,7) is question 10, namely “*I don't understand why some people get so upset over speaking activities*”. Several questions have obtained the two extreme values (1 and 5) as mode, and they confirm the fact that students feel anxious when they have to speak in class while they are not afraid of being corrected by the teacher as well as being teased by their peers and of the speed of the speaking activities or the number of rules they have to learn.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This chapter will discuss the results obtained from the two instruments that were used in order to achieve the objectives of the exploratory study.

First (section 5.1), the results emerging from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale will be discussed, then (section 5.2) those emerging from the FLSAS and finally the results emerging from the union of the two questionnaires (5.3).

5.1 Results on students' self-esteem

The results emerging from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale show that students of "Languages and Cultures" Department at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice perceive themselves in a general positive way and they are aware of their qualities and abilities, but there are some aspects that risk undermining their self-esteem.

First of all, they sometimes feel they are not good at all even if they perceive to have a number of good qualities. Thus, the lack of confidence on their abilities seems to be a sporadic feeling that can occur under specific circumstances, but it does not seem to represent a stable trait of learners' personalities.

On the other hand, the majority of participants perceive that they have a number of things to be proud of and this means that they own one of the components of self-esteem reported by Fernando Rubio (2007), i.e., worthiness. This feeling remains stable also when students compare themselves with others. In fact, most of them feel they are persons of worth at least on the same level of other people.

Thus, the comparison with others does not seem to be a threat to students' self-esteem, so much so that most of them perceive they have the same ability to do things as other persons. Participants also show a good level of satisfaction, especially those who are attending a master's degree course. This phenomenon could suggest that students who have already obtained a bachelor's degree course and are now continuing their studies have reached an important goal that has increased their worthiness and self-image.

Despite this, there are two aspects in which the self-esteem of learners seems weaker. In fact, a high percentage of students would like to have more self-respect and a great number of them do not take a positive attitude toward themselves. These are two facets that should be taken into consideration because they can menace the perception students have of themselves as persons and they could lead to negative consequences in different aspects of their lives.

In conclusion, it can be stated that from the data of the first questionnaire it emerges that most of the students are aware of their own qualities, their own value and do not feel inferior to other people, but there are some aspects that should be enhanced such as self-respect and a positive attitude towards themselves in order to further improve what Rosenberg et al. (1995) defined “*global self-esteem*” and consequently the quality of life.

5.2 Results on Students’ Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

The results of the FLSAS show that speaking activities in the foreign language cause anxiety in university students. Speaking Anxiety manifests itself with physical symptoms, mainly palpitations but almost half of participants also tremble when they are going to be called by the teacher, while mental confusion is a symptom that is less experienced by learners.

Only a small percentage of participants feel safe and relaxed when they have to speak in the foreign language in the classroom, while the vast majority of the sample get upset, and nervousness in some cases can be so high that students forget what they actually know. This phenomenon can lead to a poor performance and generate frustration increasing anxiety even more, giving rise to a sort of vicious circle, also considering the fact that the fear of failure seems to be very widespread among students.

In particular, students' concern is about making mistakes as well as about the consequences of failing, probably because foreign languages are an important element in their life and also for their future. On the other hand, other facets such as the correction of errors, the speed with which activities are carried out and the number of rules to be studied do not seem to be of particular concern. An explanation for this fact could be the experience gained by university students after many years of school. Despite this, lack of confidence appears to be a problem that afflicts most students. In fact, most of them do not feel confident when they speak in class in the foreign language and the fact of speaking in front of other students is a situation that embarrasses students who seem to experience what Horwitz et al. (1986) called “*stage fright*”, even if they are not very afraid of being teased by their peers.

As already stated by Krashen in his Affective Filter Hypothesis that we have examined in the first chapter, lack of confidence leads students to be afraid to voluntarily intervene during the lesson, thus missing an opportunity to practice the language and improve their communication skills. Moreover, the embarrassment in speaking the foreign language is not limited only to the academic context, because a large number of students would also feel nervous while talking with native speakers of the foreign language studied, a circumstance that

could also occur outside university.

Learners suffer from Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety even if they are well prepared for speaking activities and, therefore, they risk that anxiety will ruin their performance and they consequently would not demonstrate the effort they have invested to prepare for the lesson or the task. This situation could have a particularly negative impact for students as the questionnaire shows that a large part of the sample has a characteristic that Sađlamel and Kayaođlu called, as we have seen, “*perfectionism*”. In fact, the vast majority of learners even feel panic when they have to speak without having prepared in advance and they become nervous if the teacher asks them questions they are unprepared for. Hence, they suffer a lot the pressure of preparing very well while the fact of not understanding every word that the teacher says does not seem to be a cause of anxiety.

The results emerging from the FLSAS also seem to confirm what Price affirmed in 1991, namely that speaking is the first activity of the process of foreign language learning in which the comparison between the student and his or her classmates and teachers occurs. As regards the sample of the present exploratory study, the great majority of students have the perception that the other learners are better at foreign languages than they are and in particular they believe that peers are better at speaking the foreign language. It can be supposed that this phenomenon is probably related to the lack of confidence of students in their oral communication skills.

The theory expressed by Hewitt and Stephenson (2012), according to which oral activities are associated with higher levels of Foreign Language Anxiety is confirmed explicitly by students’ answers to question 24 of the questionnaire, from which it emerges that more than half of the sample feels more tense and nervous during speaking lessons than in other lessons. Therefore, the results of the questionnaire shows that Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety is a phenomenon which is common also among university learners who are studying in order to obtain a bachelor or master’s degree in foreign languages.

This specific type of anxiety leads them to acquire some avoidant behaviours due to the lack of willingness to participate in oral activities. In particular, a great number of learners would be worried if they had to take more speaking lessons or activities and half of the sample even feels often like not going to speaking lessons.

5.3 Relation between students' self-esteem and Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

With the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, we have tried to investigate the so-called “*global self-esteem*”, that Rosenberg et al. defined as “the individual’s positive or negative attitude toward the self as a totality” (1995, p. 141). On the other hand, the focus of the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale was a specific type of anxiety, namely the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety.

In the previous section, it was explained that the data emerging from the answers given by students to the FLSAS have shown that the students of “Languages and Cultures” Department at the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice suffer from FLSA, and they manifest this situational anxiety with physical symptoms such as tremble and palpitations and they feel nervous and tense.

In order to achieve the third objective of the present exploratory study, i.e., to investigate the nature of the relationship between students’ level of self-esteem and their Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, we selected the 22 students who obtained a score below 20 in the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, which is a data indicating that they have a low level of self-esteem, and the 17 learners who obtained a score above 35, thus showing an high level of self-esteem and we compared their answers to the FLSAS. By examining the answers of these two groups, it emerges that 19 out of the 22 students who obtained a low score at the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale present a level of FLSA which is above 100, meaning that their level of Speaking Anxiety is high. On the contrary, if we analyse the answers of the second group, it emerges that 11 out of the 17 participants with a high level of self-esteem obtained a score below 100 in the FLSAS, thus the majority of them has a low level of FLSA.

This phenomenon is even more clear if we calculate the mean of the answers of the two groups of both the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the FLSAS. The mean of the first group as regards the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is 16.4, while the mean of the second group is 36.9. The situation is the opposite if we look at the mean obtained in the second questionnaire, with the first group showing a mean of 123 and the second group showing a mean of 83.

Table 5- Scores obtained by the first group of students in the two questionnaires

Participant	Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale	FLSAS
1	16	126
2	14	129
5	17	71
9	16	110
18	19	100
20	17	118
22	19	113
34	19	126
36	18	140
39	19	133
43	19	154
46	17	126
55	19	97
56	15	123
58	17	130
63	13	143
70	14	131
78	17	87
83	14	136
91	14	145
100	19	113
108	10	149

Table 6- Scores obtained by the second group of students in the two questionnaires

Participant	Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale	FLSAS
8	39	83
14	40	91
17	36	72
23	38	38
25	36	61
38	36	69
52	39	67
65	38	102
75	36	134
80	38	42
81	36	122
82	36	90
88	38	105
92	35	58
93	35	61
95	35	110
101	36	106

Thus, thanks to the comparison of the results of the two groups we can answer to the third research question about the nature of the relationship between students' self-esteem and their Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety by stating that the level of self-esteem is inversely proportional to the level of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety. In fact, a lower level of self-esteem corresponds to a higher level of FLSA and vice versa. This means that students with low self-esteem are more likely to suffer from anxiety during oral activities in the foreign language than their peers with a higher self-esteem.

Thus, the results of the study conducted among a group of Iranian EFL university students by Pezhman Zare and Mohammad Javad Riasati (2012) seem to be confirmed, even if they investigated the relationship between self-esteem and Foreign Language Classroom

Anxiety.

We then divided the sample in other two groups, i.e., students who have a high level of FLSA and learners who show a low level of FLSA and we calculated the mean of each group resulting from the answers given to the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. It emerged that the mean of the first group which was composed of 66 students is 23.4, while the mean of the 42 students with a low level of FLSA is 29.7. This means that both values are within the normal range of the scale, even if learners with a lower level of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety show a slightly higher level of self-esteem.

All these findings seem to suggest the direction of the relationship between the two constructs, with self-esteem being the cause of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety.

The present exploratory study would thus confirm the theory of some authors like Foss and Reitzel (1991), according to which students with low self-esteem, as a consequence, suffer more than their peers the inevitable failures that occur during the process of the learning of a foreign language, they find their communication skills less effective than those of their peers even if their perception does not correspond to reality. Also, Young (1991) cited low self-esteem as the first source of anxiety.

Another important theory that seems to be confirmed is the one expressed by Rosenberg et al. (1995) and already reported in the second chapter, i.e., “specific self-esteem is more relevant to behaviour, whereas global self-esteem is most relevant to psychological well-being” (Rosenberg et al., p. 144). Thus, while specific self-esteem is more related to academic performance, global self-esteem is more related to psychological problems, and anxiety is one of them.

5.4 Conclusions

The objective of the present work was to investigate two aspects of a psychological nature which are involved during the process of Foreign Language Acquisition. More specifically, the exploratory study wanted to understand how was the perception that university learners studying one or more foreign languages had of themselves as persons in a general sense, including their skills and qualities, i.e., their global self-esteem.

Secondly, another objective was to investigate whether speaking activities in the foreign language were a source of concern and anxiety for students, that is, if they suffered from the so-called Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety.

Finally, the third objective consisted in investigating the nature of the relationship

between students' self-esteem and their Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety.

The results that allowed us to reach these objectives were obtained through the use of two questionnaires which were administered online to a sample of 108 students of “Languages and Cultures” Department at the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice.

The first questionnaire employed was the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale which showed that students have a good level of self-esteem. In fact, most of them are satisfied with themselves, they perceive to have a number of good qualities and also a number of reasons to be proud of. Learners sometimes experience negative feelings towards themselves, above all the perception of not being good at all, but this seems to be sporadic lowering of self-esteem, so much so that the questionnaire shows that students consider themselves to be people of worth and with the same ability to do things as others. The two aspects in which students' self-esteem seems to be weaker is the perception of not having enough self-respect and to take a not sufficient positive attitude towards themselves.

The second questionnaire used was the FLSAS thanks to which it was confirmed that speaking is the activity that causes the most anxiety in learners. Indeed, the results showed that students feel more tense and nervous during speaking activities than during other activities or lessons. The data underlined that some of the problems related to Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety are the lack of confidence in one’s own oral communication skills, the comparison with peers, the fear of failure and the lack of willingness to participate in oral activities. Students experience Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety with both physical symptoms like tremble and palpitations and psychological manifestations like nervousness and forgetfulness.

It is well known that foreign language is one of the subjects that cause most anxiety in students, as stated by Horwitz et al. (1986), so it is very important that language teachers take into account also the psychological element, which is particularly involved in the process of Foreign Language Acquisition, especially when oral communication is involved. The present exploratory study showed that speaking activity causes so much anxiety in students that a consistent part of them would often prefer to avoid undertaking oral activities.

Foreign language teachers should be particularly aware of this phenomenon, in order to adopt teaching strategies that would make oral activities less stressful, especially now that the communicative aspect has assumed central importance in foreign language courses. For example, as students feel embarrassed to intervene voluntarily during the lesson and they are afraid of making mistakes and therefore failing, teachers should address this topic together with

them and emphasize that making mistakes should not be seen as a matter of concern to be ashamed of or for which to feel like a failure, but they should underline that students can learn and improve also from mistakes. For this reason, learners should be encouraged to try to intervene and participate in speaking activities even if they have not prepared in advance. Furthermore, since the FLSAS showed that another important source of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety is the perfectionism of students, teachers should explain that the learning of a foreign language is a gradual process and that a person cannot expect to achieve goals such as perfect fluency or pronunciation in a few months or one-two years.

Another factor students show to fear is the comparison with peers, because they believe that the other students are better than them in foreign languages and, in particular, that they are better at speaking the language. Thus, it should be useful also at university to strengthen the relationship between peers, for example by proposing group or pair works.

Finally, the third research question aimed to investigate the nature of the relationship between students' self-esteem and their Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety. Thanks to the comparison between the results obtained in the FLSAS by students with a low level of self-esteem in the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale with those of learners with a high self-esteem, it emerged that the level of self-esteem is inversely proportional to the level of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety. Indeed, the great majority of students with a high level of self-esteem show a low level of FLSA and vice versa.

The findings of the present exploratory study seem to suggest that self-esteem is the cause of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, but it would be interesting to verify with future studies this result. After knowing the answer, in fact, it will be possible to implement strategies aimed at helping students during their process of foreign language learning.

5.4.1

A first weakness of the present exploratory study is the fact that the results collected refer only to a small part of the population of learners who study one or more foreign languages and for this reason they cannot be generalised.

Another important limitation is the scarcity of previous studies concerning the relationship between self-esteem and Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, which made comparison with previous literature very difficult.

As regards the instruments that were used, it must be underlined that some of the answers of the two questionnaires could be affected by the bias known as social desirability,

i.e., the tendency people have to appear in a favourable and acceptable way. Furthermore, the Likert scale of the FLSAS was composed of five points and so another possible bias could be the fact that in these cases people often tend to choose the central value of the scale.

Moreover, the lack of open questions did not allow us to obtain a deep knowledge of students' thoughts and the reasons behind their answers.

In order to examine more in depth the topic of the relationship between self-esteem and Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety, it would be necessary to have more information on the personal history of individuals such as their family background, their previous academic experiences and the social environment in order to investigate whether they could be common underlying factors. This could be a suggestion for future research on the topic, as well as the use of inferential statistics that will allow researchers to obtain more certain and significant results.

Finally, the present work hopes to pave the way for further studies that investigate the level of well-being of students, as it is now known that the psychological element is a fundamental factor in predicting students' academic outcomes and which plays an essential role in making learning what it should always be, a pleasant and exciting journey towards new knowledge to be discovered.

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APPENDIX A

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

1. What is your age?

- 19-24
- 25-30
- 30+

2. Indicate your gender

- Male
- Female
- I'd rather not answer

3. What is your mother tongue?

4. What is the degree course you are attending?

- Bachelor's degree course
- Master's degree course
- Other

5. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself

- 1 2 3 4

6. At times I think I am no good at all

1 2 3 4

7. I feel that I have a number of good qualities

1 2 3 4

8. I am able to do things as well as most other people

1 2 3 4

9. I feel I do not have much to be proud of

1 2 3 4

10. I certainly feel useless at times

1 2 3 4

11. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others

1 2 3 4

12. I wish I could have more respect for myself

1 2 3 4

13. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure

1 2 3 4

14. I take a positive attitude toward myself

1 2 3 4

APPENDIX B

FLSAS

What foreign language are you studying? (If you are studying more than one language, indicate the language on which you will focus in order to answer this questionnaire)

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language lesson

1 2 3 4 5

2. I don't worry about making mistakes in foreign language lessons

1 2 3 4 5

3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in speaking activities

1 2 3 4 5

4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language

1 2 3 4 5

5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more speaking activities

1 2 3 4 5

6. During speaking activities, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course

1 2 3 4 5

7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at language than I am

1 2 3 4 5

8. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in my foreign language lesson

1 2 3 4 5

9. I worry about the consequences of failing speaking activities

1 2 3 4 5

10. I don't understand why some people get so upset over speaking activities

1 2 3 4 5

11. During speaking activities I can get so nervous I forget things I know

1 2 3 4 5

12. It embarrasses me to volunteer answer in my foreign language lesson

1 2 3 4 5

13. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers

1 2 3 4 5

14. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting

1 2 3 4 5

15. Even if I am well prepared for oral activities, I feel anxious about them

1 2 3 4 5

16. I often feel like not going to my speaking lesson

1 2 3 4 5

17. I feel confident when I speak during foreign language lessons

1 2 3 4 5

18. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make

1 2 3 4 5

19. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in speaking activities

1 2 3 4 5

20. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for oral activities

1 2 3 4 5

21. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do

- 1 2 3 4 5

22. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students

- 1 2 3 4 5

23. Oral activities move so quickly I worry about getting left behind

- 1 2 3 4 5

24. I feel more tense and nervous in my speaking lessons than in my other lessons

- 1 2 3 4 5

25. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my foreign language lesson

- 1 2 3 4 5

26. When I'm on my way to speaking activities I feel very sure and relaxed

- 1 2 3 4 5

27. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says

- 1 2 3 4 5

28. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language

- 1 2 3 4 5

29. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language

- 1 2 3 4 5

30. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language

- 1 2 3 4 5

31. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance

- 1 2 3 4 5

