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An analysis of test anxiety in English L2 oral tests for university level students

**A study on test anxiety in two instances of oral evaluations in *Licenciatura en
Lingüística y Literatura Inglesas* at Universidad de Chile**

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Abstract

When learning a second language, oral evaluations are one of the most reliable evaluative methods. One commonly overlooked aspect of this is the anxiety associated with these instances. The influence of test anxiety during oral evaluations is an area of linguistics poorly studied to say the least.

The study reported in this paper aims at identifying if and how anxiety can influence learners' performance in oral evaluations and in their learning process. This investigation was carried out on a group of students and graduates from the programme *Licenciatura en Lingüística y Literatura Inglesas* at Universidad de Chile, regarding two instances of high-stake oral exams: the second year *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* oral exam and the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* oral exam taken to third year students.

The data collection procedures consisted of a qualitative survey that asked students to indicate which factors they considered contributed to their test anxiety. We also applied the STAI questionnaire to students, which distinguishes anxiety as a personality trait from anxiety as a response to a situation. The results show that students experience anxiety in the previously mentioned exams due to various factors, which go from the overall design of the evaluative instance to its evaluators and the consistency of the exams with the programme. Additionally, we found that students' anxiety levels were not reflected on their exam scores, yet they did present anxiety levels higher than normal. This may be a reflection of the normalisation of anxiety in evaluative instances in the programme, especially in oral exams.

Key words: Test anxiety, anxiety, evaluations, oral exams, learning process, evaluative instances, English, L2.

1. Introduction

This report accounts for a study on test anxiety in learners of English as an L2 in Universidad de Chile in two instances of high-stakes oral exams. One of them is the final oral exam of *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* applied to second year students, while the second one is the final oral exam of *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* taken to third years students. Evidence for test anxiety was collected by asking about it to a group of students and recent graduates of the *Licenciatura en Lingüística y Literatura Inglesas* programme at Universidad de Chile.

Test anxiety is a topic that has received attention in the fields of psychology and language testing as it is related to students' cognitive behaviour when facing evaluation situations. Test anxiety is associated with maladaptive phenomena since it is linked to negative consequences in the learners' academic performance. Such consequences include, for example, the inability to concentrate on demanding tasks, poor study skills, fear of negative evaluation, the tendency of comparing themselves with their classmates, perfectionism, objection to participating in classes, avoidance of the evaluation, etcetera (Brown et al., 2011; Chapell et al., 2005; Eum & Rice, 2011; Sanghvi, 1995; Szafranski et al., 2012).

Test anxiety is manifested when students take evaluations in the form of emotional states of nervousness, dizziness, feelings of panic, tension, worry, feelings of pressure, etc. It promotes test-takers' lack of self-confidence, emotional instability, stress and feelings of fear and threat, as they tend to be scared of facing a test and failing it. In other words, **test anxiety is a relevant phenomenon in the field of L2 assessment because it affects students' academic performance and interferes with their L2 learning process.**

Our motivation to study test anxiety in the context of our undergraduate programme are the experiences that we have lived collectively when facing English L2 evaluations, particularly in instances of oral exams. In our experience, oral exams are cases of remarkably challenging evaluations, which produce high levels of anxiety.

Overall, the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* oral exam is characterised by various factors that increase anxiety levels for students. From our experience as test-takers, the design of the test has several aspects that seem to produce anxiety when taking it. For example, the research team agreed that the high number of possible topics to present on and the expectation of communicating at a very high proficiency level, near native, were aspects of the exam that we associated with our states of anxiety.

Regarding the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* oral exam, we also agreed that it was characterised by producing high levels of anxiety. Some of the reasons we agreed that accounted for anxiety included, for example, the little time in which the exam is taken and the amount of content that is evaluated.

Despite these initial perceptions, we did not know what anxiety was as a psychological phenomenon, how to determine its characteristics or how it was actually affecting our performance in the tests indicated above. We therefore agreed that it was important to carry out a study that focused on the features of test anxiety and the effects it could have in students' performance during oral evaluations.

In the following chapter we will present a theoretical framework to understand and study test anxiety in the two oral exams already indicated. The framework includes explanations of main approaches to the concept of test anxiety, different anxiety measuring methods, and the effects of anxiety in evaluations and, more specifically, oral evaluations.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper reports on a study of the effects of anxiety in university English L2 learners in two instances of high-stakes oral exams. Two oral exam situations were observed. These are important parts of the final grade of their respective courses and, consequently, for the success of students in the programme.

The study aims at noting and characterising the variety of factors that can produce test anxiety and to know about the aspects of evaluation situations that can have a negative impact on the tranquillity and confidence of L2 learners. To this purpose, we examined the perceptions about test anxiety of a group of learners of English as an L2 in relation to two evaluation situations that produce anxiety in students. We also conducted an analysis of anxiety that could be affecting students' performance in the tests.

The chapter is organised as follows: we first introduce the concept of test anxiety and its main characteristics. Then we explain the distinction between state and trait anxiety and how anxiety affects the performance of students. Later, we explain how oral tests and test anxiety interact and the way test anxiety can be measured. With this information, we introduce the study of cases of test anxiety in the context of the programme of *Licenciatura en Lingüística y Literatura Inglesas*.

2.1 Defining test anxiety

Test anxiety is related to students' cognitive behaviour and consists of distressing feelings or emotional states of nervousness prior to, during and after taking different types of evaluations (as explained in Baig et al., 2018, p. 48).

Some authors have investigated the notion of test anxiety and its respective characteristics, concluding that it is manifested by emotional physiological responses such as dizziness, nausea, feelings of panic, increased galvanic skin responses and heart rate. Test anxiety is also associated with other emotional states such as worry when considering the consequences of failure, comparing self-performance to classmates, loss of self-worth, among others (Cassady & Johnson, 2002, p. 271).

Hill and Wigfield (1984) have shown that anxious children are more sensitive to failure and tend to react more to evaluation from adults by trying to avoid criticism, being more competitive and feeling pressure to do a better performance than others (p. 106). Baig et al. (2018) adds that test anxiety not only infuses negativism by decreasing students' self-esteem and confidence, making them emotionally unstable, but also decreases their academic performance and hinders their learning by promoting the failure to achieve their academic goals (p. 48).

Some of the most noticeable reactions towards test anxiety are students' inability to concentrate on demanding tasks, their objection to participating in classes, and even the attempt to escape the situation of confronting an evaluative task or postpone it. Such behaviour is the result of thinking that, if they fail the exam, they will be a failure as a person (as explained by Szafranski et al., 2012, p. 668).

2.1.1 The distinction between state and trait anxiety

The distinction between anxiety as a trait and anxiety as a state is well-established in the literature. *Trait anxiety* is related to a factor in a person's character which is always present, causing the person to be alert of a possible situation that can make them feel threatened. Reiss (1997) points also that "Trait anxiety is not observed directly, but is expressed as state anxiety when stress is experienced" (p. 204).

In contrast, *state anxiety* is related to a particular and transitory situation which makes the person feel worried, stressed, tensioned, etcetera. In most cases, this circumstance is followed by the enabling of the autonomic nervous system, which is the primary mechanism in control of the fight-or-flight response. Spielberg (1985) defined it as "a temporal cross-section in the emotional stream-of-life of a person" (p. 10).

Anxiety as a trait is a quality related to someone's personality in their everyday life, making the person susceptible to feel bad under several circumstances, since they are in a state of alert. In contrast, anxiety as a state is an emotional condition observed in people when they have to face a specific threatening situation.

2.2 The effects of anxiety in test situations

The consequences of anxiety during instances of evaluation can vary according to how each person deals with these instances. People are all different and, therefore, test anxiety may affect them in different ways depending on how stable their mental health is, among others.

Most practical consequences of anxiety in tests are negative, due to the fact that they are related to bad performance, getting bad grades in evaluation situations or even failing a course or programme. These and other similar scenarios, are, more often than not, seen as failures in the formative development of students. This perception of failure, in turn, causes fear among students, since they are scared of facing a test and obtaining an insufficient score (Spielberger, 1985).

Test anxiety is what some experience at the moment of having to carry out any kind of evaluation. The thoughts of the person that feels anxiety are quite negative and demotivating, which makes it harder to have a good performance. Anxiety is often linked with low levels of selfconfidence, which leads the sufferer to expect bad results from a test (Cassady & Johnson, 2002). This expectation exists even if the students have prepared for the test, because they do not see their own potential and, therefore, consistently assume that they will get a failing score. Since students constantly compare themselves to each other and believe that if they get a failing score, they are the ones who are a failure.

This specific kind of anxiety is associated with a number of maladaptive phenomena including fear of negative evaluation (Brown et al., 2011), poor study skills (Sanghvi, 1995), poor test performance (Chapell et al., 2005), and perfectionism (Eum & Rice, 2011). Test anxiety can even lead to physiological responses such as an increase in heart rate and dizziness. While dealing with anxiety and its associated states, people are unable to concentrate, which causes even more anxiety.

2.2.1 Anxiety in oral tests

Oral tests are one of the most challenging evaluating instances that students have to go through in a language course, due to the complexity and cognitive demands of this type of task. While carrying out an L2 oral test, one must pay attention to many different dimensions of

performance such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and fluency. Being aware of these dimensions while trying to formulate an adequate response to the L2 tasks is very demanding.

When the L2 oral evaluation occurs in a context of high-stakes assessment, it may be a justifiable cause of test anxiety.

According to MacIntyre (1995), language anxiety is directly linked to the social and, most importantly, communicative aspects of language. This kind of anxiety may even lead to reactions such as increases in sympathetic nervous system arousal, which makes people feel the need to attempt to escape the situation, or to carry out more inhibited actions.

Anxious students are less likely to succeed in oral standardized tests, since they are not only focused on having to carry out a specific task, but also on the way in which they are reacting while performing (MacIntyre, 1995). An anxious student is constantly revolving around the social implications of the answer that they are formulating, while also trying to respond to the task itself. As we can see, while having to deal with anxiety, our brain works differently, since when dealing with stressful situations, our levels of self-related cognition increase, while the levels of task-related cognition and performance drop (Spielberger, 1985).

The fact that people that suffer from anxiety have such negative concepts of themselves as language learners leads to low expectations for language learning (MacIntyre, 1995). These low expectations, in turn, lead to difficulties in their learning process, since students tend to be way less motivated because they feel as if they have already failed.

It is possible to affirm that anxious and relaxed students will not learn at the same pace and speed. Students who do not suffer from anxiety see these instances merely as ones in which they can acquire knowledge, while anxious students focus more on their fear of failing the evaluation. This difference, however, does not imply an actual difference in the capacity of learning an L2, as with effort, both kinds of students should be able to reach the same levels of proficiency in a specific language (Cassady & Johnson, 2002).

2.3 How to measure anxiety

According to Zheng (2008), there are three main ways to measure test anxiety levels, “including behavioural observation or rating; physiological assessment such as heart rates or blood pressure tests; and participants’ self-reports, in which internal feelings and reactions are measured” (p.3).

Due to its subjective nature, the most frequently used methods to measure anxiety levels rely on self-reports. Even though we can observe the behaviour and measure physical reactions related to anxiety, these are all a response to a psychological state. Anxiety has to do with how an individual perceives a situation. This means that the most direct access to the origin of such feelings relies on the perception of the person who is undergoing the emotion.

There are two well-established self-report methods to measure test anxiety levels in the literature, namely, the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory scale (STAI) and the Test Anxiety Scale for Children scale (TASC). The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory scale was created by Charles D. Spielberger in 1970 to study the anxiety levels of adults. It has been updated and applied by many researchers and it is currently being used in many languages and countries to develop studies related to anxiety levels during evaluations. The STAI reflects the important distinction between state anxiety (transitory feeling in specific situations) and trait anxiety (personality trait) (as explained in 2.1.1 above). The STAI scales consist of 20 statements that ask participants to describe how they feel in general and in specific situations. Students must measure how they feel with a number scale, which goes from 0-3 or 1-4 depending on the level of anxiety they experience.

The TASC (Test Anxiety Scale for Children) is a scale that measures the anxiety levels of children during tests, designed by S. Sarason in 1960. This scale measures anxiety levels regarding test performance and classroom performance. It consists of 30 items or statements. Fels and Lewis (1969) were able to update the format and identify four main factors to categorize children's responses. These factors are “concerned specific worry about tests, physiological reactions to evaluative pressure, negative self-evaluation, and worry about school while at home” (Fels and Lewis 1969 in Hill and Wigfield, 1984, p. 108) Both versions of this scale are also currently used to study anxiety levels in children and young students.

2.4 The programme and its oral exams

This report gives an account of a study aimed at seeing the characteristics of test anxiety and its impact in the performance of students facing two specific instances of high-stakes oral exams in a specific L2 learning programme: *Licenciatura en Lingüística y Literatura Inglesas* at Universidad de Chile.

The *Licenciatura* is a four-year undergraduate programme in which students have to take around 6-7 courses per semester on a variety of topics regarding linguistics and literature, in addition to an intense training in the use of English as an L2. Additionally, most of the courses of the programme are taught in English. The ability to use English is critical to succeed in the programme and thus evaluations in this domain become high stakes.

The two instances of oral exams chosen for this study were considered interesting cases by the research team because of the potential impact they can have on students in terms of test anxiety. As pointed out in 2.2.1 above, these exams are high-stakes tests. The results of students' performances in these tests represent 40% of their final scores in each of the respective courses. This means that, in order to pass in both courses, students must have a good average score that will correspond to 60% of their final score for the course. When students have scores lower than 5.0 as their presentation score, the final exam becomes even more critical for the success in the course.

In this programme, if a student fails a course, they have to take it again and will not be able to take more advanced courses until they get a passing score. The failure of a course is, therefore, a very important issue for students. For them, failing these exams and the course means being held behind and taking more years than the normal four to finish the programme, with the repercussions on students' personal lives.

2.4.1 Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio oral exam

The oral exam of the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* course of the programme is applied every year starting from the second-year level. It consists of an oral presentation in which students develop a topic and answer questions from a panel of evaluators in approximately ten minutes. The exam is performed individually. Students make a presentation in a room in front of two

teachers/evaluators, who record the presentation and take notes as they evaluate the student's English performance.

The rubric and topics for the presentations are made available to the students generally one week prior to the exam, in the form of a document that is uploaded to the University platform *Ucursos*. The list of topics extends from twenty to thirty in number. Each topic is related to the contents discussed in the *Practice* module of the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* course.

The same day topics are published, blank lists are left at the Linguistics Department in the Faculty with spaces to fill in students' names depending on the days and times during which the exam will take place. As topics are not assigned prior to the day of the exam, students are expected to prepare all of them in detail. Once it is the turn of the student to present, all topics are displayed in the form of small pieces of paper in a face-down position. The student has to choose two of these pieces of paper randomly, then proceed to show them to one of the examiners, and finally decide which of those two will be the basis for their presentation.

Following that, the student is given ten minutes to prepare the presentation in a different room from the examiners and is also given a blank piece of paper to elaborate an outline. During preparation time, the students are not allowed to have either cell phones or their notes to help them. In the meantime, the preceding student delivers their presentation. After ten minutes have passed, the student is asked to move to the room with the teachers. As soon as the teachers start recording, the student must say their name and state the topic they will present, and then deliver the corresponding presentation.

The presentation must last between four to five minutes. Exceeding that amount of time would make the teachers stop the student. Following the presentation, the examiners ask questions and the student must answer them as well, until the ten minutes are met, and the examination concludes. Upon the closing of the exam, the students are required to give the piece of paper in which they developed their outline to the teachers.

Feedback consists of scores that are uploaded to the *U-cursos* platform up to one week after all students have taken the exam. Teachers provide more feedback and explain the scores to students only if they are asked to do so by students individually.

2.4.2 Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I oral exam

The oral exam of the *Fonología Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* course is applied in the first term of the third year of the programme. The exam consists of an oral interrogation in which students answer up to seven questions by the teachers in approximately five minutes.

The exam is performed individually, and students are asked questions in a room by the teachers of the course, who act as examiners. Two of them ask questions while the third one records the performance and takes notes regarding the student's pronunciation as the student responds.

The contents for the evaluation include all the topics that are discussed throughout the semester by the teachers. No rubric is shared with the students prior, during or after the evaluation process.

Three weeks prior to the exam, blank lists are left at the Linguistics Department for students to sign up and choose the time of their examination. All exams for a course group are scheduled for the same day.

Once it is the turn for the student to be evaluated, they are asked to enter the room, leaving all their belongings outside, and sit in front of the teachers. As soon as the teachers start recording, the student must say their name, and then answer the examiners' questions. The questions are asked one after the other by two of the teachers. If the students' responses are not considered clear enough by the teachers, they ask the student to continue developing them, unless the student decides to pass to the next question or if the answer is not fully addressed in the second chance.

After the student has answered or skipped the questions, the teachers ask the student to leave the room and then finish the recording. Afterwards they discuss the responses and conclude the examination. Scores are also uploaded to *U-cursos* the same week after the exam is carried out. Teachers provide feedback if asked, yet feedback is not supported by a rubric or established criterion. This means that students have little opportunity of knowing exactly what they need regarding knowledge and performance to get a passing score as support.

2.5 Introducing the study

The review offered in this chapter indicates that test anxiety is a crucial factor with regards to L2 learners' test performance. This situation is usually aggravated in the case of oral evaluations, due to reasons such as the complexity of the task and the learners' perception of threat. Nonetheless, there is still a need to know which factors particularly influence test anxiety on L2 learners within the context of specific oral evaluations, and how test anxiety may hinder learners' test performance in actual practice.

In order to observe the occurrence of test anxiety in a real context, we conducted a study in which we observed test anxiety associated with the two exams already described. The objectives of the study were the following:

- 1) to explore factors that may be associated with test anxiety under the two evaluation conditions (in the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* and the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* oral exams) as perceived by L2 learners in those contexts, and
- 2) to establish how test anxiety could be affecting the performance of learners in those tests.

The analysis in the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that influence test anxiety in the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* oral exam?
2. What are the factors that influence test anxiety in the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* oral exam?
3. In which way does anxiety affect performance in the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* oral exam?
4. In which way does anxiety affect performance in the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* oral exam?
5. Is there a relation between the scores in the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* oral exam and the scores in the STAI test?

6. Is there a relation between the scores in the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* oral exam and the scores in the STAI test?

In the next chapter, the methodology that was designed to conduct this study and obtain evidence of the way test anxiety occurs in the evaluation situations selected is presented and explained.

3. Methodology

This section accounts for procedures to collect and analyse data on the aspects that produce anxiety in a group of undergraduate English L2 learners when facing two specific oral examinations. The study also observed potential effects of test anxiety when taking oral evaluations and the subsequent results in the evaluations. The study aimed at identifying the reasons students may feel anxious when taking these types of evaluations and other related emotional states/conditions, such as fear, nervousness, worryness regarding expectations, etc. As explained in chapter 2, all these emotions may arise in the application of a test and affect the performance and its resulting scores that each student has in the corresponding evaluations.

The procedure of data collection in this investigation consisted firstly of the application of a qualitative survey on participants' perceptions about the features that produce anxiety in each of the oral evaluations observed in the study. Additionally, a quantitative test was employed following the STAI model (as described in 2.3), in order to obtain evidence of the degree of anxiety participants exhibited both as an individual trait and as a state produced by a particular test examined in the study (see explanation in 2.1.1). Finally, a correlational analysis of participants' STAI test scores and their grades in both exams was conducted to observe the potential relation of test anxiety and test performance in both evaluation situations.

This chapter is organised as follows: firstly, an account is given of the selection of participants, and the tools used to gather the data (i.e. a qualitative survey, the STAI questionnaire and the cores of the exams). After that, an explanation is provided of the data collection procedures and of the analysis of data, including the procedures and criteria used to answer the research questions of the study.

3.1 Data Collection

In this part of the report, we will present the participants and explain the selection criteria used to group them. We will also describe the study programme and the requirements that were necessary for the participants to be part of this study. We will also describe the tools used to collect the data, namely: the STAI questionnaire, the surveys and the participants' test scores. The STAI questionnaire, surveys and test scores were used to obtain information about the levels of test

anxiety of participants, the relation between anxiety and test performance, and the aspects of the evaluation situations that produce anxiety in students.

3.1.1 Participants

For the purpose of the study, two groups of participants were selected. All participants were students of the *Licenciatura en Lingüística y Literatura Inglesas* undergraduate programme at Universidad de Chile or had graduated from it in recent years. For the first selection, there were 32 participants of which 15 are still students in the current year, 2020. The other 17 had graduated between the years 2016 and 2019. As we needed to know the participants' opinions about the two tests under examination, we reached out to both current students and recent graduates in order to have opinions regarding several instances over time of the observed evaluations. The first group selected responded to the qualitative survey.

The second group of participants were 23 students currently undergoing the last year of the program. As to this instance, we needed a group of participants who had taken both exams, just as before. The difference lies in that this group had a fresher memory of how they felt during these oral exams as they were the ones who had most recently taken them. These were the participants to take the STAI questionnaire and give us their scores for the midterms and final exams for the correlational analysis of test anxiety and test performance.

Students that had taken one or the two exams online due to the current national situation of distant learning were excluded.

3.1.2 Data Collection Tools

Data on opinions and perceptions regarding the exams was collected through an online survey. The survey was also used to know the scores participants obtained in the corresponding exams. Data on state and trait anxiety was collected using an online version of the STAI questionnaire.

3.1.2.1 Measurement of test anxiety: the STAI questionnaire

The State/Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) is a questionnaire used for research purposes that aims to report the intensity levels of anxiety in a person, both as a state and as a trait. This tool was designed by Charles D. Spielberger in 1970 and it was originally created as an instrument to study

anxiety levels in the adult population with no psychiatric/psychological disorders and to determine how anxiety is linked to people's learning abilities (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970).

The STAI is designed to measure both state and trait anxiety levels. State anxiety is defined as “a temporal cross-section in the emotional stream-of-life of a person (Spielberger, Gorsuch & Lushene, 1970), a transitory feeling of nervousness, worry and tension, it shows how threatening a situation is perceived by an individual (see explanation in the chapter above). Trait anxiety, on the other hand, is defined as “the tendency to respond to situations perceived as threatening with elevations in A-State intensity”. This type of anxiety is not directly noticeable, since it is expressed as state anxiety in threatening or stressful situations. The key element to differentiate them is the tendency individuals show to increase anxiety levels in various stressful situations (as specified in chapter 2). The distinction between state and trait anxiety is relevant as it is necessary to identify whether the feeling of anxiety is transitory and related to the situation the person is in at a particular moment, or if it is a permanent trait of someone's personality.

The questionnaire was originally designed to be self-administered. It has all the instructions necessary to complete it included in the questionnaire form, both for the state and trait scales. People can take 15 to 20 minutes to finish both questionnaires. Instructions for state anxiety are different from the trait anxiety ones. The state anxiety questionnaire requires participants to report how they feel at the moment and the trait anxiety scale requires them to indicate how they generally feel in their everyday life. When both scales are given together, it is recommended to hand out the state scale first, followed by the trait scale (a copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix 2 and 3).

To complete the questionnaire, participants have to select the number next to the item that reflects how they feel related to the statement given. The participants rate themselves on a 4-point scale on a set of statements. The minimum scoring is 20 and the maximum is 80 on both scales. On the state scale the categories of the statements reflect intensity of the feeling in a moment, whereas the trait categories ask for tendency, i.e how often the person experiences the feeling.

Even though most participants with 5th or 6th grade reading level have no problem performing the test with no special instructions, a clear understanding of what is being asked is still recommended. If two or less items are omitted by a participant there is a procedure to validate their

answer, which consists in counting the points, multiplying it by 20 and then round that number to the closest whole number. If there are 3 or more unanswered items, the test is considered invalid.

This test was chosen mainly because it has been widely validated to observe test anxiety in adults, it has been applied in various languages, including Spanish, and it has been used and tested successfully in Chile before (for example, see Burgos Fonesca, P. & Gutierrez Sepulveda, A., 2013).

3.1.2.2 Exploring test anxiety in context: survey

The purpose of the survey designed for this study was to discover the characteristics of how stressed or anxious students experienced test anxiety while having to carry out oral exams for the courses of *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* and *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I*.

The survey was implemented in a Google Form and asked for the level in which the student was and what grade they got on both the exams and midterm for comparison. It also proposed open-ended questions about how they felt while having to deal with those evaluations. The expectation was to collect data that allowed us to analyse how anxious students felt while facing these evaluations and which factors may cause their anxiety.

The survey contained one open question that enquired directly into the causes that made the participants feel anxious while being evaluated. In order to avoid any kind of preconceived ideas that would bias participant's answers, participants had to answer the same question referring to both of the tests under examination. Open-ended questions were used so the answers were not influenced by our own opinion about the exams. Therefore, we asked them to write how they felt while being evaluated, referring only to their personal experience. Participants responded according to their personal experience. Questions were open-ended in order to explore unbiased perceptions and opinions. A full copy of the survey can be found in Appendix 1.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

The first instance of data collection was the implementation of the survey, in which we asked the participants to give their opinions as to what factors they thought caused them anxiety when facing two major oral exams in the programme.

The survey was sent to the participants through Whatsapp chat groups. These chat groups are composed by students in the senior year of the programme and graduates. We needed the participants' honest and unbiased opinions regarding how these exams were carried out and their own personal experiences going through them. Whatsapp was used, therefore, because of its informal nature, as a way not to put the pressure of a formal procedure onto the participants and present the questions in a non-threatening context. As the responses filled in, they were organised through Google forms platform and into a Google spreadsheet.

In order to observe the levels of anxiety of participants, three questionnaires of the STAI tool were handed to them. The first two were related to state anxiety during two different instances of oral evaluation, the oral exams for the subjects *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* and *Fonología Suprasegmental y Dialectología I*. The questionnaire for each test had 20 statements and 4 selfrating categories with different points: *Nada* (0), *Algo* (1), *Bastante* (2), *Mucho* (3).

The third STAI-based questionnaire was related to trait anxiety and consisted of 20 statements, different from the statements in the other two questionnaires. It had the same 4 selfrating categories as the other two questionnaires. Items in the questionnaire were aimed at reflecting the regular levels of anxiety of the participants overall and not in a specific situation.

The STAI questionnaire was adapted from its traditional physical format into an online multiple-choice test. This questionnaire was also sent to the participants using Whatsapp group chats and responses were collected in a Google spreadsheet.

Once the spreadsheet was completed, data was organised and the points for each section of the test were added to inform us of the state-anxiety associated with the two different oral exams and the trait-anxiety of the participants.

To observe the possible relationship between anxiety scores and test performance, scores for the two exams observed in the study were asked in the form used for the STAI test.

3.3 Data Analysis

For analysis of responses to the open-ended questions of the survey, responses were grouped by question and analysed by the whole group one question at a time. To this purpose, the group conducted three rounds of content analysis: two were carried out by the research team and a

third included the teacher of the Seminar, for expert validation. Specific terms and statements were agreed between the teacher and the research team, to refer to responses with similar contents.

While analysing, the group deliberated as to what were the main ideas expressed by participants. In order to ensure reliability, main ideas expressed were only confirmed as evidence of common perceptions when the agreement on them was unanimous, including that of the teacher.

After the application of the STAI questionnaire, we analysed the answers following standard scoring procedures for the test. Accordingly, we did the addition of the scores obtained by the participants. The lowest score obtainable was 20 and the highest was 80. These were divided in three categories; low-anxiety (20 to 40 points), normal-anxiety (41 to 60 points), and high anxiety (61 to 80 points). These categories were used to interpret the levels of anxiety for each individual participant and for the group.

Finally, we conducted a correlational analysis of the STAI scores, and the scores obtained by participants in each text. To this purpose, we used the Pearson Correlation Coefficient Calculator (Pearson Correlation Coefficient Calculator, 2020). Observed high and significant correlations were to be considered to be evidence of a relation between anxiety levels and test performance. The objective here was to confirm if higher state or trait anxiety were related to lower scores on the two exams under observation.

3.4 Conclusion to the methodology

The purpose of this methodological design was to have evidence of both the relation between anxiety and test performance, through a correlational study of anxiety and test scores. At the same time, it attempted to explore the qualitative descriptions of participants of how anxiety is manifested in actual test situations and the factors that may be significant in the generation of that emotional state. In the next chapter, both the qualitative and quantitative results of the study are presented and discussed.

4. Results and Discussion

In this section we present the results of the application of the procedures described in chapter 3. We introduce results of the qualitative questionnaire first and the results of the correlational analysis of STAI and exams' scores later, together with the presentation of results, we provide a discussion of the results observed.

The organisation of the chapter is as follows: first, we offer a summary of the results of the qualitative analysis. Here we present evidence of the main features and common causes of test anxiety in the evaluation situations under study as reported by participants. Most frequent responses to the qualitative questionnaire are organized, reported and discussed in the order they were sent to students.

Once the results of the qualitative analysis are presented and discussed, we report the STAI questionnaire scores. Here we describe the scores of both scales of the STAI questionnaire. The report will discuss the levels of state and trait anxiety expressed in the scores participants obtained in each STAI scale.

Finally, we present and discuss the results of the correlational analysis between STAI scores and the scores of the two exams under analysis to observe the possible relationship between test anxiety and test performance.

4.1 How test anxiety occurs: Results of the qualitative analysis

Throughout the analysis of students' responses of the qualitative questionnaire, we could identify that participants reported that both instances of evaluation situations under examination were highly demanding and produced anxiety to them. Some differences were identified in the presence of different related emotional states/conditions in relation to the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* and the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* oral exam, respectively.

Significantly, only two students indicated that they did not experience anxiety in the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* evaluation as they felt prepared and selfconfident, even though they saw their classmates distressed because of the instance. On the contrary, in relation to the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* oral exam, all the participants specified that they experienced anxiety.

Furthermore, while in the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* oral exam three students literally mentioned that they felt fear of failure (failing the exam and the course), in the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* oral exam six students used the word “*miedo*” (fear) to describe their feelings regarding the evaluation. They pointed out that they felt anxious about failing the exam and not being able to answer what was being requested. One participant said explicitly that the evaluation was felt as a “torture”, comparing it with a final exam of another program known as being demanding.

As presented above, most students explicitly indicated that they felt afraid of both evaluations. Following the general agreement on feeling afraid of the evaluations, students’ responses pointed out the design of the task as ineffective, because most of them sustained that both exams were not instances on which their knowledge and skills were adequately assessed. Overall, participants indicated that both exams were artificial instances of language use, and that students’ memorising skills rather than their language proficiency were more relevant to succeed in the test.

As for each exam in particular, students’ responses were also consistent. In the case of the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* exam, the most recurrent cause of anxiety identified by our participants were the number and content of the topics, which were considered too many in number and too complex to develop, as some of them dealt with too specific contents and required more effort on research by students. On the other hand, the expectations and difficulty of the task were also observed by students as causing anxiety in the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* exam.

We observed that the most prominent factors that were reported as producing anxiety in the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* oral exam included:

- High expectations regarding performance.

Here, the participants indicated that they were very concerned about their mistakes because if they failed in the pronunciation of one word, the grammatical structure of a sentence or the use of the vocabulary of the unit, that would immediately have a big impact in their test score. Moreover, they mentioned explicitly that they were afraid of not having enough time to think about their

responses or not being prepared to present the topics with specific details. This would impact negatively in their performance and consequently created the fear of failing the evaluation or the entire course because of a bad test score.

- The presence of a large number of topics.

It was frequently mentioned by students that the large number of topics included in the design of the task were promoters of anxiety. Students have to pick one among more than twenty topics randomly and develop a clear idea of the chosen topic in a lapse of between three and four minutes. They commented that the uncertainty about the topic they would choose, forced them to memorise the performance of as many topics as they could in a particularly short period of time to prepare for the test.

- The restricted use of language.

It was mentioned that the expectation of communicating at a very high proficiency level (near native, without hesitations) produced test anxiety. Thus, their pressure to pronounce wrongly an unusual word or not articulate sounds successfully was seen by participants as a cause of anxiety.

- The discordance in relation to what had been practiced in classes and what was asked of the students in the exam.

Participants also pointed out that the instances that they had to prepare their performance were mainly class discussions where they interacted with each other. They indicated that this practice environment was less stressful than the test situation since they did not have the same pressure of the exam. Participants mentioned that it did not make much sense for them that the exam was a task completely different from the one practiced in class, as in the exam students have to be on their own, in front of two teachers who asked for questions and opinions. The newness of the task was therefore considered a factor that increased the demands of the task and so increased the possibilities of failing.

- The space and organisation of the teachers.

It was also commented by participants that the presence of two or three teachers selected randomly as examiners increased participants' anxiety, since they do not know what teachers will be applying the exam and how demanding they would be.

- Participants' worryness because of uncertainty.

It is important to mention that several participants defined their anxiety literally as the fear that they felt before and during the evaluation as they did not feel prepared to comment on every topic in a different language from their L1, they did not know what teachers would be giving the exam, what topic they would pick and especially they were worried about failing the course because of a bad performance which might be influenced by external factors.

- The relevance of the course.

The high percentage of the test score in relation to the course score (as detailed in 2.4) was also emphasized by participants. Participants indicated that they were worried about their final score and the consequences of failing the course. They pointed out that they were aware of how fundamental the course of *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* was for the success in the programme. This promoted the thinking that participants must not make any mistakes, which in turn increased their feelings of worryness, nervousness, fear and anxiety.

- The fact that the evaluation is recorded.

Finally, a few participants commented that they felt anxiety because their performance was being recorded. It led them to be distracted and nervous as they were too concerned about whether their performance was being successful or not, since the teachers would review it later.

- The incidence of anxiety in participants' performance.

In this exam, one participant pointed out the artificiality of the evaluation that involves specific contents to take into account, an aspect which increased their anxiety before and during the exam.

On the other hand, we observed repeated aspects of the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* oral exam reported to cause anxiety. Some of them were the same of the previous exam, but described from other perspectives:

- High expectations regarding performance.

In this case, participants also indicated that they were concerned about every mistake as this particular exam involves all the content of the semester, so they not only have to be concerned about their pronunciation, but also about their performance when answering questions about the content.

- The discordance in relation to what had been practiced in classes and what was asked of the students in the exam.

Here, the participants pointed out that the exam task is not practiced accurately during the course, since the teachers do not provide students with instances to practice such as oral tests or quizzes, thus the context of the exam is too demanding. Additionally, they highlighted that the exam creates uncertainty as they could be asked specific (more difficult) questions regarding the content as they could also be asked general (easier) ones. This means the way that each student is evaluated is not consistent because questions are not weighted in terms of difficulty, which increases their anxiety.

- The space and organization of the teachers.

The participants commented that the presence of all the three teachers of the course during the evaluation increased their anxiety. They indicated that it makes them feel confused about the focus of the content they are going to be asked as they could not answer what was expected by the teachers.

- Participants' expectations that the exam will be stressful.

It is relevant to discuss the way that participants literally repeated that they felt fear of failing this exam. They said that this fear is transmitted from generation to generation and thus it is common to be anxious before taking the exam.

- The relevance of the evaluation in the course.

The relevance of the course is taken into account by the participants when considering their performance in the exam, as they are aware of the percentage of this exam in relation to the average of the course. By this, they tend to worry about the consequences of not passing the course.

- Too much content for a short period of time.

Furthermore, participants noted that the amount of the content they needed to learn for the exam was seen as disproportionate in relation to the time allocated for the exam (five minutes, approximately).

- The reputation of the teachers and the exam.

This external factor is significant when considering the anxiety of the students even before taking the evaluation. The bad reputation of the exam encourages anxiety among students as other classmates let them know how difficult it is. Furthermore, the academic reputation of the teachers/examiners inside of the program and the university makes students feel nervous and not prepared enough to present in front of them.

- Reactions and attitudes of the teachers/examiners.

Another factor that was identified by participants was the way teachers reacted sometimes to students' performance. The participants emphasized that this observation indicated some attitudes which make them feel anxious and nervous during the exam. These attitudes included gestures of disapproval, negative comments about their performance, lack of attention and distraction when students were performing, and even laughing at a wrong answer.

- The impact of the space/environment.

Some participants highlighted the environment as an important external factor that increases their anxiety. Before taking the exam, all the students have to wait their turn in the hall of the building, so they tend to see other classmates experiencing anxiety (crying, having panic crises, etc) as they prepare for the exam.

- The incidence of anxiety in participants' performance.

Differently from the previous exam, two participants described explicitly how anxiety affected their performance. The first one indicated that they forgot key words and academic concepts because of their nervousness during the evaluation, and the second one that when the teachers asked for an example, the student did not remember any illustration of their answer because of their anxiety, even when they knew it.

4.2 Is test anxiety related to test performance? Results of the quantitative analysis

As indicated in 3.3, a correlational analysis between the programme exams and the STAI scores was conducted to observe possible relations between test anxiety levels and test performance.

The STAI questionnaire consists of two parts of 20 questions each. The first part measures anxiety as a state (I.e. a transitory sensation of threat towards a situation). The second part measures anxiety as a trait (i.e., a characteristic of a person’s personality). While both measurements are important for this study, we will focus more on the scores of the state part of the questionnaire as it is the part that can show the impact of test anxiety on the performance of the students in the two specific instances of evaluation that are considered in this study. The two types of results are presented in the tables below.

Table 1. Results of STAI, trait anxiety section.

Minimum score	36
Maximum score	60
Average	48
Standard deviation	6.71

As observed in appendix 10, the anxiety as trait scores are generally higher than what is considered as normal anxiety levels. The lowest score was 36 and the highest, 60. Four out of the

24 participants scored within the range of low anxiety category. The average for the trait section was 48 with a standard deviation of 6.71, which indicates that results are very varied within the group. These results show that the students of the programme suffer from higher anxiety levels than what the scale considers normal as part of their everyday life.

The state section of the questionnaire was taken two times by the participants, each corresponding to one of the oral exams under study. Results are summarised in Appendix 11 below.

Table 2. Results of STAI, anxiety as a trait in the two exams.

	STAI-S (<i>Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio Oral Exam</i>)	STAI-S (<i>Fonología Inglesa y Suprasegmental y Dialectología I Oral Exam</i>)
Minimum score	30	30
Maximum score	50	50
Average	40	41
Standard deviation	5.30	5.64

For the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* oral exam the lowest score was 30 and the highest 50, its average being 40 with a standard deviation of 5.3. Scores are here lower than those obtained in the anxiety as a trait part of the scale. This can be interpreted as the normalisation these oral exams have of students being under severe stress. This normalisation results in students having to perform at the best of their capacity overlooking their emotional situation. Therefore, the participants report a lower sensation of anxiety when taking them. These results are not consistent with the participant's responses in the qualitative survey implemented priorly. As observed in 4.1,

all but two participants in the study reported feeling important degrees of anxiety caused by very specific aspects of the exams.

Subsequently, the scores for state in the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* oral exam are slightly higher than those for the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* one. The lowest score for this was 30 and the highest 50 again, however, the average was 41 with a deviation of 5.6. This time, there is one more student that shows characteristics of mid-level anxiety for this exam than the previous one.

Overall, results from the STAI questionnaire indicate possible relationships between STAI scores and the scores of the two exams under study. Results of the correlational analysis between STAI scores and scores of the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* oral exam are presented in the Appendix 12 below. Results here indicate that there is no correlation between the STAI and the exam scores. Therefore, there is no evidence that indicates a relationship between anxiety levels and test performance. This indicates that test anxiety is not affecting negatively the final results of the oral exam.

Table 3. Correlations between STAI and the Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio oral exam.

	STAI-T	STAI-S	Prueba	Examen
STAI-T	1			
STAI-S	0.2248	1		
Prueba	0.2337	-0.1725	1	
Examen	0.2023	-0.2438	0.3536	1

Results of the correlational analysis between STAI scores and scores of the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* oral exam are presented in Appendix 13 below.

Table 4. Correlations between STAI and Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I oral exam.

	STAI-T	STAI-S	Test	Exam
STAI-T	1			
STAI-S	0.2717	1		
Test	0.1682	0.0545	1	
Exam	0.2396	0.0345	0.4297	1

Results here indicate that there is no correlation between the STAI and the exam scores. As with the previous analysis, we cannot affirm there is a relationship between the variables under study. Test anxiety, therefore, does not explain the performance of students in this exam according to the data from this study.

4.3 Discussion of results

The results already presented are in general valid to the extent that both the execution of our methodology and participants’ responses tend to be consistent. The surveys effectively allow us to identify clear perceptions students hold regarding factors that influence their levels of anxiety within the context of the two instances of oral evaluations that were presented. The quantitative results that we presented through the application of the STAI questionnaires are valid too, as they were obtained through standard statistical tests of correlational analysis.

The results of the qualitative analysis of students’ responses to the questionnaire are consistent with the literature on test anxiety. Participants reported negative effects of anxiety in the

test situations under study, making them feel anxious to face the exams and, because of that, finding it harder for them to have a satisfactory performance while taking the exams.

The specific concept of “fear” was mentioned on several occasions in the qualitative results, which shows that students actually reported the emotion of worry to the maximum level. This emotion is clearly associated with fear of failing the test and the consequences of that failure. The fear of failing, in turn, seems to be the effect of the perception of both tasks as being very complex and demanding. This perception is complemented by the idea that aspects of the implementation of the tests make their development uncertain, so that a failure is a possibility even if you prepare for the exams.

Some of the effects of anxiety that are described in the literature appeared in the responses of participants, including fear of negative evaluation, poor test performance and physical consequences, such as nausea and increase in heart rate, among others. We believe this should be a matter of concern, as these are undesirable effects in the kind of evaluation examined in this study.

In contrast with the results of the qualitative analysis, quantitative results show that students that felt test anxiety did not necessarily obtain lower scores than students who felt lower levels of anxiety. These results are not consistent with the evidence in the literature, which points to a negative effect of test anxiety in test performance. However, qualitative results do seem to indicate a relation between anxiety and test performance as the majority of participants still reported feeling anxiety because of the tests, feeling that they were less likely to succeed in them, and having very clear observations of what made them anxious about the exams.

According to the literature, people that suffer from test anxiety are more likely to have a negative image of themselves, which leads to a decrease in the motivation that they have to learn, because they are very afraid of failing. These specific characteristics appeared in many of the responses that we were able to collect. Participants in the study reported feeling scared of how mistakes had such a big impact on the score that they would get on their tests. Several students also made the point that the anxiety they felt was inevitable while facing these kinds of evaluations.

Although the STAI scores were not as high as expected, students still reported that they suffered from elevated levels of anxiety. A possible explanation for this apparent inconsistency is that the scores reflect how normalized anxiety is among students. As it was stated on the qualitative results, most of them felt anxious and have felt anxiety while facing these kinds of evaluations for most of the time that they have spent on this programme. Therefore, students have learned how to work while feeling anxious, due to the fact that, no matter how they felt physically or mentally, they still had to have a good performance on these evaluation situations

Under this assumption, test anxiety is so recurring among students, that they are forced to continue with their learning process, no matter how anxious they are. Even though the evidence is not strong enough to link lower scores with higher levels of anxiety, it is possible to state that the anxiety that they feel is real and it is normalised. The normalisation is a consequence of the fact that participants are forced to study and to face tests even if they get to the point of having panic attacks or suffer from any kind of discomfort. Anxiety does not stop them from being active participants in their courses, because they are used to feeling anxious on these kinds of instances.

An alternative and complementary explanation has to do with the possibility that the score of the exams are simply not consistent with the construct of L2 performance. Evidence in this study shows that there are factors that may be affecting the construct validity of the tests under observation. Such factors include the newness of the task (there is no practice of the task in the class) and the randomness in the selection of topics to respond to, the lack of weighing of questions in terms of difficulty. These factors, alone or in interaction, are typical causes of construct validity weaknesses in a test situation. If they are affecting the validity of the exams under study, it means that test scores are not necessarily a function of performance only. If so, it could not be expected that scores correlated with anxiety scores or any other measure typically associated with L2 performance. The validity of the anxiety scores can be confirmed as the standard procedures for its application were followed.

In conclusion, quantitative results in this study are not consistent with the literature and are open to questions as to the validity and reliability of the exams under study. However, qualitative results matched some of the expectations for this study, as we were able to observe how most of the students that had to take the oral exams of both *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* and *Fonología*

Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I and were part of our study felt anxiety while dealing with those evaluations. At the same time, they thought that anxiety had an impact on the grade that they would get, and mentioned different factors, which were previously addressed, that increased their levels of anxiety. One of the expectations was to prove that many students feel anxiety in instances that should be aimed at the objective evaluation of the learning process. Results showed so, therefore, the results are valid, consistent and matched the expectations.

In the following chapter, the conclusions, limitations and suggestions for further research to this study are presented.

5. Conclusions

In the final chapter to this study, we will firstly provide a summary of our results. Following that, we indicate and explain the limitations to our study. Directly linked to the observed limitations, we make suggestions for further research as academically interesting and meaningful additions to the literature on test anxiety. Lastly, we share our final comments with regards to what we accomplished in this investigation process.

5.1 Summary of results

This study aimed at identifying the levels and effects of anxiety on two evaluation situations: the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* and the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* oral exams. To carry out this investigation, we employed tools to measure anxiety. These tools were surveys that participants had to answer, the STAI questionnaires which measured trait anxiety and state anxiety, and the scores obtained by participants in those exams (see details in chapter 3).

Qualitative results indicate that test anxiety is a pervasive emotion for participants and that the factors that influence students' test anxiety during the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* oral exam are high expectations regarding performance, the presence of a large number of topics, the restricted use of language, the discordance in relation to what had been practiced in classes and what was asked of the students in the exam, the space and organisation of the teachers, participants' worryness because of uncertainty, the relevance of the course, the fact that the evaluation is recorded and the incidence of anxiety in participants' performance.

Regarding the factors that influence students' anxiety during the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* oral exam are: high expectation regarding performance, the discordance in relation to what had been practiced in classes and what was asked of the students in the exam, the space and organization of the teachers, expectations that the exam will be stressful, the relevance of the evaluation in the course, too much content for a short period of time, the reputation of the teachers and the exam, reactions and attitudes of the teachers/examiners, the impact of the space/environment and the incidence of anxiety in participants' performance.

Overall, participants reported that all these factors influenced the levels of anxiety they experienced during both evaluations, manifesting in a general fear of the evaluative instance, which influenced their confidence and performance. Some of the effects mentioned were students forgetting content, grammatical structures, and a negative perception of their performance.

The scores from the STAI questionnaires indicate that, regarding the trait scale results, students present anxiety levels above normal. The lowest score was 36 and the highest, 60, whereas the average for the trait section was 48. These results show that students experience higher levels of anxiety than what is considered normal by the scale in their everyday life. According to the scores from the state scale, students present an overall lower level of anxiety than in the trait scale. The results of the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* oral exam are slightly higher than those for the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* one. The lowest score for this was 30 and the highest, 50, again.

Regarding the correlation between the results from the STAI questionnaire and the scores obtained in the oral exams, the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* oral exam and the STAI results present no correlation between them. According to the results obtained from the *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* oral exam, we can affirm there is also no correlation with the scores from the STAI questionnaire. Overall, there is no correlation between the scores obtained in the oral exams and the results from the STAI questionnaire.

Generally speaking, the results can be interpreted as the normalisation of the severe stress and anxiety students experience during oral evaluations, and normalising having to perform at their best overlooking their emotions. The findings on correlation are overall not consistent with the qualitative results that show how much anxiety and stress students experience during these evaluations and how much they felt they affected their performance.

5.2 Limitations to the study

Although results seem to compound a clear picture of how test anxiety occurs in the situations under examination in this study, results cannot be generalised to evaluation situations different from the ones examined here because of several reasons. One of them is that, since we reviewed oral exams, evidence is limited to oral evaluation instances and not other tests assessing

different skills and with different configurations of complexity and expectations (for instance, writing tests).

At the same time, being strictly related to exams given in the English language as an L2, our results cannot be associated with oral exams in other languages because each one has different grammatical structures, phonological contexts, vocabulary, etc. We cannot know whether oral tests given in other languages promote anxiety in the way observed in this study because complexity and demands are dependent on the relation of learners' L1 and L2.

Moreover, the study only observed perceptions and performance of university-level L2 learners who study a second language as a subject matter. Therefore, results cannot be generalised to perceptions and performance of students in evaluation situations with different levels of demand and content focus, as is the case of high school level L2 learners, L2 learners of programmes not related to linguistics or the English language, or even students of the same program who have not yet taken the same oral exams.

Furthermore, critical factors of the complete evaluation situation were not taken into account in our study. For instance, in the case of the *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* oral exam, the specific construction and components of each topic and the rubric were not studied. Moreover, the actual design of both exams was not examined, as it only focused on self-reports and test scores. In addition, the study only represents what the learners who participated in it reported. This means that we do not have information on the perceptions of other stakeholders of the evaluation situation, such as teachers and academic coordinators of the programme.

The depiction of qualitative responses is also limited in that we only observed initial, general responses of the participants, which are broad. We did not consider, for example, more specific accounts of anxiety through personal interviews related to the same or other exams with similar components. Therefore, the picture of how anxiety works we offer in this report is still preliminary, as it does not show how different components of the situation affect the performance of the students when taking an evaluation while dealing with anxiety, or how the same factors may operate in different evaluative instances.

The quantitative results are also limited since the correlational analysis only took into account the scores obtained in the oral exams and the scores from the STAI questionnaire. Although we know that anxiety affects their performance in general and the participants' memory and ability to concentrate, we did not consider more information related to each student's performance in the programme, which could provide a more comprehensive view of the effects of anxiety in the general performance of students in oral contexts.

5.3 Suggestions for further research

The study only represents what the learners who participated in the study thought. This means that we do not have information on the perceptions of other stakeholders of the evaluation situation, such as teachers and academic coordinators of the programme.

Further research might also focus on observing test anxiety in other L2 assessment situations, such as writing tests or any other evaluation different from oral exams. Moreover, the language in which the learner is evaluated can be changed in future investigation to observe possible variations in the relation between anxiety and performance.

Further research could also inquire about the situation of test anxiety in diverse institutions, grades or courses. Furthermore, other factors can be studied, such as rubrics, test design, and number of topics, to have a broader view of the evaluation processes and tools. Other perspectives can also be included, especially that of teachers.

5.4 Final comments

The study presented in this report shows that different factors of a test design and implementation can cause different degrees of test anxiety in students. Many participants indicated that they felt worried and even afraid of the exams. They observed that the anxiety that they felt affected their confidence and performance. Students also felt intimidated by the idea of evaluative situations being a matter of concern. There is also room for concern that test anxiety may be normalised as a natural part of L2 assessment and the validity and consistency of the L2 assessments may be also compromised.

The study contributes to the identification of different elements that cause anxiety and how students experience L2 test performance when feeling anxious. In this way, it can motivate an

interest in understanding the role that anxiety may be playing not only in test performance but in the L2 learning process as whole.

We hope this study contributes to the discussion of the way in which L2 learners are evaluated nowadays and how the demands of L2 evaluation situations affect not only their performance and L2 learning process but also their self-confidence, self-image and mental health, in general.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Survey.

Hola, somos las chicas cursando el Seminario de Evaluación de L2. Específicamente estamos indagando sobre la influencia de la ansiedad frente a exámenes orales en inglés. Por esto les pedimos que contesten estas preguntas para poder tener datos iniciales para la investigación.

Les pedimos por favor que ingresen con su email institucional, esto se hace para tener una base de datos que asegure que son o han sido estudiantes del programa. Sus nombres y correos no serán publicados ni utilizados en la investigación.

Gracias por su participación.

¿Eres estudiante de 4to año o graduada/o? Si no eres ninguna, por favor indícanos en qué nivel estás.

Si eres graduada/o, ¿De qué generación? Indicar año (en que te graduaste/defendiste tu tesis). Si aún eres estudiante responde "0000".

¿Qué factores crees que producen ansiedad en el examen oral de Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio de 2do año?

¿Qué factores crees que producen ansiedad en el examen oral de Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I de 3er año?

Appendix 2: STAI S questionnaire: Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio Oral Exam

A continuación, encontrará unas frases que se utilizan corrientemente para describirse uno/a a sí misma/o. Lee cada frase y señala la puntuación 0 a 3 que indique mejor cómo te sentiste al dar el examen oral de 2do año. No hay respuestas buenas ni malas. No emplees demasiado tiempo en cada frase y contesta señalando la respuesta que mejor describa la situación.

Me sentí calmado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí seguro/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Estaba tenso/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Estaba contrariado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí cómodo/a (a gusto)	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí alterado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí preocupado/a por posibles desgracias futuras	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí descansado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí angustiado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí confortable	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí con confianza en mí mismo/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)

A continuación, encontrará unas frases que se utilizan corrientemente para describirse uno/a a sí misma/o. Lee cada frase y señala la puntuación 0 a 3 que indique mejor cómo te sentiste al dar el examen oral de 2do año. No hay respuestas buenas ni malas. No emplees demasiado tiempo en cada frase y contesta señalando la respuesta que mejor describa la situación.

Me sentí nervioso/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí desasosegado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí atado (como oprimido)	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí relajado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí satisfecho/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí preocupado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí aturdido/a y sobreexcitado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí alegre	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
En ese momento me sentí bien	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)

Official translation was slightly modified to contain past tenses and inclusive language.

Appendix 3: STAI S questionnaire: Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I Oral Exam

A continuación, encontrará unas frases que se utilizan corrientemente para describirse uno/a a sí mismo/a. Lee cada frase y señala la puntuación 0 a 3 que indique mejor cómo te sentiste al dar el examen oral de fono de 3er año. No hay respuestas buenas ni malas. No emplees demasiado tiempo en cada frase y contesta señalando la respuesta que mejor describa la situación.				
Me sentí calmado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí seguro/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Estaba tenso/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Estaba contrariado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí cómodo/a (a gusto)	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí alterado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí preocupado/a por posibles desgracias futuras	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí descansado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí angustiado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí confortable	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)

A continuación, encontrará unas frases que se utilizan corrientemente para describirse uno/a a sí mismo/a. Lee cada frase y señala la puntuación 0 a 3 que indique mejor cómo te sentiste al dar el examen oral de fono de 3er año. No hay respuestas buenas ni malas. No emplees demasiado tiempo en cada frase y contesta señalando la respuesta que mejor describa la situación.

Me sentí con confianza en mí mismo/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí nervioso/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí desasosegado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí atado (como oprimido)	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí relajado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí satisfecho/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí preocupado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí aturdido/a y sobreexcitado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me sentí alegre	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
En ese momento me sentí bien	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)

Official translation was slightly modified to contain past tenses and inclusive language.

Appendix 4: STAI T questionnaire

A continuación, encontrará unas frases que se utilizan corrientemente para describirse uno/a a sí mismo/a. Lee cada frase y señala la puntuación 0 a 3 que indique mejor cómo te sientes en general. No hay respuestas buenas ni malas. No emplees demasiado tiempo en cada frase y contesta señalando la respuesta que mejor describa te sientes en general.

Me siento bien	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me canso rápidamente	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Siento ganas de llorar	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me gustaría ser tan feliz como otros	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Pierdo oportunidades por no decidirme pronto	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me siento descansado	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Soy una persona tranquila, serena y sosegada	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Veó que las dificultades se amontonan y no puedo con ellas	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me preocupo demasiado por cosas sin importancia	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Soy feliz	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)

A continuación, encontrará unas frases que se utilizan corrientemente para describirse uno/a a sí mismo/a. Lee cada frase y señala la puntuación 0 a 3 que indique mejor cómo te sientes en general. No hay respuestas buenas ni malas. No emplees demasiado tiempo en cada frase y contesta señalando la respuesta que mejor describa te sientes en general.

Suelo tomarme las cosas demasiado seriamente	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me falta confianza en mi mismo/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me siento seguro/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Evito enfrentarme a crisis o dificultades	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me siento triste (melancólico)	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Estoy satisfecho/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me rondan y molestan pensamientos sin importancia	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Me afectan tanto los desengaños que no puedo olvidarlos	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
Soy una persona estable	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)

-

A continuación, encontrará unas frases que se utilizan corrientemente para describirse uno/a a sí mismo/a. Lee cada frase y señala la puntuación 0 a 3 que indique mejor cómo te sientes en general. No hay respuestas buenas ni malas. No emplees demasiado tiempo en cada frase y contesta señalando la respuesta que mejor describa te sientes en general.

Cuando pienso sobre asuntos y preocupaciones actuales, me pongo tenso/a y agitado/a	0 (Nada)	1 (Algo)	2 (Bastante)	3 (Mucho)
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Official translation was slightly modified to contain inclusive language.

Appendix 5: STAI questionnaire section that asked for participants' scores in *Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio* evaluations.

Ponga atención a las instrucciones. Si has cursado el ramo más de una vez, por favor indica los resultados de la primera vez.

¿Cuál fue tu nota en el oral test en segundo año? (Puedes encontrar tu nota en u-cursos, ingresando a 'Mis cursos' los encontrarás por año en que lo rendiste)

¿Cuál fue tu nota en el examen oral de Lengua (fin de semestre) de segundo año? (Puedes encontrar tu nota en u-cursos, ingresando a 'Mis cursos' los encontrarás por año en que lo rendiste)

Appendix 7: STAI questionnaire section that asked for participants' scores in *Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I* evaluations.

Ponga atención a las instrucciones. Si has cursado el ramo más de una vez, por favor indica los resultados de la primera vez.

¿Cuál fue tu nota en la prueba escrita de Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I de tercer año? (Puedes encontrar tu nota en u-cursos, ingresando a 'Mis cursos' los encontrarás por año en que lo rendiste)

¿Cuál fue tu nota en el examen oral de Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I de tercer año? (Puedes encontrar tu nota en u-cursos, ingresando a 'Mis cursos' los encontrarás por año en que lo rendiste)

Appendix 8: Results for STAI-T questionnaire.

STAI-T
40
50
45
50
56
41
42
53
50
60
49
52
38
38
55
52
54
48
48
47
36
43
47

STAI-T
60

Appendix 9: Results for STAI-S questionnaire: Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio Oral Exam and Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I Oral Exam.

STAI-S (Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio Oral Exam)	STAI-S (Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I Oral Exam)
43	47
42	30
43	47
34	33
42	48
30	32
44	42
34	39
40	48
38	40
37	34
46	45
31	36
38	37

STAI-S (Lengua Inglesa Nivel Intermedio Oral Exam)	STAI-S (Fonología Inglesa Suprasegmental y Dialectología I Oral Exam)
38	42
50	49
42	41
39	43
30	37
46	42
42	40
41	45
41	42
47	50