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ARTICLE



Unveiling the needs of students who stutter in the language skills - a study on anxiety and stuttering in EFL learning

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to discuss the needs of learners who stutter (LWS) in the skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning based on their levels of anxiety, and their experiences as individuals who stutter in the process of learning this language. To this end, the anxiety of these students ($n = 16$) in the foreign language was measured using the Foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS), and the Specific language skills anxiety scale (SLSAS), whilst their experiences were elicited through semi-structured interviews. Their foreign language anxiety (FLA) levels were then compared to those obtained from a control group of non-stuttering learners ($n = 16$), and interview content was scrutinised mainly using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). LWS scored significantly higher in FLA and speaking anxiety than the control group; however, no significant differences were found between both groups in other language skills. Findings from the qualitative study also indicated that reading aloud was highly problematic for these learners. Suggestions to attenuate anxiety in LWS are offered to educators.

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Introduction

Stuttering is not usually considered a severe disability in comparison with other disabilities, and tends to go unnoticed mainly due to ‘the stuturer’s wily ability to go incognito’ (Pierre 2012, 19). This may explain why little is known about how stuttering affects language learning in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and learning contexts, especially in terms of the anxiety LWS feel in learning this language, namely, foreign language anxiety (FLA), and the language skills that are mainly affected by this specific anxiety type. Yet, most foreign language learners experience FLA (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986; MacIntyre 2017; MacIntyre and Gardner 1991a, 1991b, etc.), and there are clear parallels between FLA and stuttering: stuttering has been deemed an effect of the former (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986; Price 1991; Young 1991), and many symptoms of FLA (i.e. apprehension, worry, avoidance, etc.) have been more frequently and intensely observed in individuals who stutter (IWS).

In spite of these parallels, FLA has usually been researched in mainstream adolescent and adult foreign language learners to the neglect of other learner populations, e.g. LWS. This

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study aims to modestly attend to this neglect by discussing the needs of these learners in the skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in EFL learning according to their levels of FLA, and their experiences as IWS in their learning of this language. Findings from this research may shed light on FLA in LWS that study English, sensitize students and teachers to stuttering, and offer EFL teachers suggestions to meet these learners' needs.

Stuttering and anxiety

Stuttering is a fluency disorder that can take different forms, the most common being 'developmental stuttering', which originates and develops during childhood and is not a response to psychological or organic trauma. Developmental stuttering starts at the ages in between two and five when the child is going through the most intense period of language acquisition. It may persist in adulthood or may partially or fully disappear with or without treatment (Bloodstein and Ratner 2008; Guitar 2014; Ward 2017). It affects approximately 1% or less of the school-age children and adult population, and is four times more prevalent in men than women with an 8% lifetime incidence, and the sex ratio decreasing the younger the children (Bloodstein and Ratner 2008; Yairi and Ambrose 2013). Although the causes of stuttering still remain unknown, there is strong evidence that it has a genetic basis. This inborn tendency combined with other emotional factors may precipitate stuttering in a child, which is observed in the abnormal, frequent, and long involuntary interruptions of the flow of speech (Guitar 2014).

These disruptions are not commonly accepted in a society in which speech fluency is expected and prized to the extent that it is often associated with the mastery of a language (Ward 2017). Consequently, stuttering frequently induces negative beliefs and emotions, which prevent IWS from performing certain everyday tasks (Corcoran and Stewart 1998), developing meaningful social relationships (Corcoran and Stewart 1998; Crichton-Smith 2002), performing efficiently at work (Crichton-Smith 2002; Klein and Hood 2004), and fulfilling their educational potential (Crichton-Smith 2002), all of which deteriorates their quality of life (Craig, Blumgart, and Tran 2009). Such negative beliefs and feelings lead them to make a considerable effort, and devote a great amount of time to anticipating their stutter when interacting with others in order to avoid certain phonemes, words and communicative situations (Plexico, Manning, and Levitt 2009). Additionally, they tend to erroneously judge their communicative abilities negatively, whilst rating others' positively (Watson 1995). These thoughts, feelings and behaviours can cause heightened degrees of mental fatigue, which impede concentration, and result in deficient communication or poor task performance (Craig, Blumgart, and Tran 2009).

In view of the above, it is not surprising that IWS report levels of anxiety significantly higher than non-stuttering individuals (Craig and Tran 2014; Iverach and Rapee 2014). Anxiety has been described as a pervasive aspect of the self in our society, (Endler and Kocovski 2001), and the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with the arousal of the autonomic nervous system (Szyszka 2017). In evaluative contexts, researchers have traditionally distinguished 'trait anxiety', 'state anxiety' (Spielberger 1966), and 'situation specific anxiety'. Trait anxiety refers to an individual's innate propensity to experience anxiety in different degrees across situations (Endler and Kocovski 2001), whereas state anxiety is the emotional response to a definite situation experienced at a particular moment in time (Spielberger 1983). Both anxieties result in the

anxious individual decreasing his or her attention on the task in hand and focusing on the threatening stimuli, which hinders processing efficiency, and may result in poor task performance (Eysenck et al. 2007). Finally, situation-specific anxiety indicates the tendency of an individual to become anxious in one type of context 'such as public speaking, examinations, or class participation' (Ellis 2001, 480). A situation-specific anxiety approach to the study of anxiety enables the testing of more specific hypotheses on the process by which a given situation produces anxiety, and emphasizes the multifaceted, and persistent nature of some anxieties (Horwitz 2001; MacIntyre and Gardner 1991b). FL (foreign language) learning is one of those contexts in which recurrent state anxiety has given place to a unique kind of situation-specific anxiety, namely, 'foreign language anxiety' (Horwitz 1986; Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner 1991a, 1991b).

Foreign language anxiety

FLA, also labelled 'language anxiety' (LA) is one of the many individualistic and changeable affective states learners experience when reacting to learning situations (Ellis 2001; Scovel 1978), and an important factor impacting negatively on achievement in FL (Aida 1994; Horwitz 1986, 2001; MacIntyre and Gardner 1991a, 1991b, 1994; Young 1991; Woodrow 2006). This type of anxiety is also a form of performance anxiety, which emerges in situations that involve social evaluation of one's performance, and as such, it is related to, though not composed of (Horwitz 2017), other performance anxieties, i.e. communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (MacIntyre and Gardner 1991a, 1991b; Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986; Piechurska-Kuciel 2008).

Communication apprehension refers to 'a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people' (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986, 127) either in anticipated or real situations. The special communication apprehension that emerges in FL learning originates from learners' fear of failure and miscommunication due to their awareness of their limited competence to (a) communicate personally meaningful and conversationally appropriate messages through an unfamiliar syntactic, semantic, and phonological system; (b) understand other speakers who use such system; and (c) cope with the ambiguities of producing and understanding messages in the target language within the parameters of an unfamiliar culture (Horwitz 1995; Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner 1991b; Szyszka 2017).

Fear of negative evaluation is 'an apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively' (Watson and Friend 1969, 449). Like other performance anxieties, it encompasses the psychological phenomenon of social anxiety, which stems from the prospect or presence of evaluation in imaginary or real social contexts (Leary and Kowalski 1995; Schlencker and Leary 1982). However, it is more closely connected with this phenomenon because individuals who score high in fear of negative evaluation 'are more motivated to make good impressions upon others', and hence 'experience social anxiety more frequently than people low in approval seeking' (Leary and Kowalski 1995, 46). Fear of negative evaluation in FL learning is based on students' fear of receiving negative academic and personal evaluations from teachers and peers (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner 1991b; Price 1991).

Test anxiety 'is typically evoked when a person believes that his or her intellectual, motivational, and social capabilities are taxed or exceeded by demands stemming from the test or evaluative situation' (Zeidner and Mathews 2011, 21). Test anxiety has been conceptualised as a process that is contingent upon the reciprocal interaction of elements related to the individual (e.g. individual differences in threat perceptions, vulnerability, coping, etc.), and the evaluative situation (e.g. the nature of the task, time constraints, examiner characteristics, etc.) (Zeidner 1998). In FL contexts, test anxiety relates to the learner's concern of being negatively graded in the evaluation or assessment of their linguistic competence in the target language. Oral tests in such contexts are particularly anxiety provoking, because they have the potential of generating both test anxiety and communication apprehension (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986).

Foreign language anxiety in the language skills

Although FLA may be consistently present in FL learning, it also adopts the form of 'situation specific anxieties' (MacIntyre and Gardner 1991b, 90) across the different skill domains typical of foreign language classes, namely, foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA), foreign language listening anxiety (FLLA), foreign language reading anxiety (FLRA), and foreign language writing anxiety (FLWA). These anxieties exist as independent, yet related anxiety constructs (Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert 1999; Elkhafaifi 2005; Saito, Horwitz, and Garza 1999; Sellers 2000; Young 1990) and FLSA has been found to provoke the highest levels of anxiety along with FLLA (Horwitz 1986, 1995, 2017; Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986; Price 1991; Wörde 2003; Young 1990). FLSA consists of the fear and apprehension a learner feels when speaking mostly in front of the teacher and peers in class (MacIntyre and Gardner 1994; Price 1991; Young 1990). Therefore, this anxiety is based on communication apprehension, since 'the real anxiety-evoking situation is having to speak or perform in front of others' (Young 1990, 546).

FLLA is the anxiety students experience 'in any situations that require listening' (Bekleyen 2009, 665). Input that is beyond the learner's level of competence, obscured by background noise, or too fast, overloads the learner 'with unprocessed aural information' (Kimura 2008, 175) is prone to generate FLLA (Kim 2002; Kimura 2008). Dealing with this input makes the learner realise their limited listening competence in the FL, which leads to lack of self-confidence, helplessness, and other negative emotions (Kim 2002; Kimura 2008; Vogely 1998) that are the basis of FLLA. The learner's inability to follow and understand the input along with the potential interpersonal and social consequences of such inability causes worry, which interferes with effective processing at the input stage (MacIntyre and Gardner 1994), thus negatively affecting listening comprehension, effective listening practice, and proficiency (Bekleyen 2009; Elkhafaifi 2005; Kim 2002; Kimura 2008; Vogely 1998).

FLRA emerges from the inability to create (a) a sound-symbol correspondence in a phonetic-phonological system foreign to the speaker; (b) attach meaning to words within such system; and (c) understand the overall meaning of a text because of unfamiliarity with its underlying cultural content (Matsuda and Gobel 2001; Saito, Horwitz, and Garza 1999; Sellers 2000). Therefore, FLRA is contingent upon the FL under study and its specific writing system, so that unfamiliar and difficult target language sound systems are likely to increase the learner's FLRA. This anxiety type

also depends on one's self-related judgements, which tend to be more positive than in other skills (MacIntyre, Noels, and Clément 1997), because 'repetitions and clarifications are silently performed, thus limiting risks of embarrassment' (Matsuda and Gobel 2001, 230). Nevertheless, FLRA diverts the learner's attention from the reading process, slows this process down, and influences decisions about meaning and strategy use, all of which produces poor recall of relevant passage content (Sellers 2000).

FLWA or the anxiety that takes place before or during the writing process in FL is mainly based on the learner's low self-confidence about their competence in the target language, their aversion to writing, and their evaluation apprehension (Cheng 2002; Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert 1999). Such perceived low writing self-efficacy negatively impacts upon the encoding of the written message, the use of successful metacognitive strategies to complete the writing task, the learner's behaviour throughout the composing process, and their desire to write. The result is poor overall writing performance, and deficient quality of the final written outcome (Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert 1999; Stewart, Seifer, Rolheiser and 2014). This may lead to negative evaluation or feedback from the teacher, which further weakens the learner's self-efficacy in a negative cycle that can renew and exacerbate FLWA as a result.

Purpose of the study

FLA has usually been researched in mainstream FL learners as opposed to students with special educational needs such as LWS. Additionally, a focus on speech as opposed to other language skills and the use of quantitative research methods have traditionally dominated the study of this construct (Daubney, Dewaele, and Gkonou 2017; Young 1990). In line with recent calls for the consideration of different learner populations and other theoretical and methodological options in FLA research (Gkonou, Daubney, and Dewaele 2017), this study aims to explore this phenomenon in LWS within the skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in EFL learning. In particular, we set out to (a) determine whether LWS report higher levels of FLA than LWDNS in general and across the aforementioned skills, and (b) describe how these learners experience their learning of this language as IWS. The study ultimately aims to identify the areas that mainly hinder EFL learning in these students and therefore unveil their needs in this context. Consequently, the following research questions are addressed in this study:

(1) Do LWS report higher levels of FLA than LWDNS?

(2) Do LWS and LWDNS report differences in FLA across the skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing?

To provide an answer to these questions, data collection and analysis combines quantitative and qualitative methods in an attempt to move away from the somewhat limited and largely quantitative methodological perspective characteristic of FLA research.

Method

Participants

32 Spanish learners, who are currently studying English or have done so in the last three years, participated in the study. Sixteen are LWS (7 female and 9 male), aged 15–40

($M = 28$, $SD = 6.56$), and sixteen LWDNS (7 female and 9 male) aged 22–42 ($M = 26.5$, $SD = 5.35$), and from similar socio-economic and educational backgrounds. LWS were mainly recruited through the Fundación Española de la Tartamudez (Spanish Stuttering Foundation) both for the qualitative and the quantitative study, whilst LWDNS were only contacted for the latter. Therefore, all learners filled out the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986), and the Specific Language Skills Anxiety Scale (SLSAS) for the quantitative study, but only LWS participated in the semi-structured interviews conducted for the qualitative study. Consent for participation in the research was obtained from all learners.

Instruments

The instruments for data collection in this study were the two aforementioned scales (the FLCAS and the SLSAS) and semi-structured interviews. The FLCAS is the standard instrument used to measure anxiety in FL learning (Horwitz 2017). This scale contains 33 items in the form of statements mostly about speech-related situations that can induce anxiety in the FL classroom. Participants were required to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale, with their responses yielding a general anxiety score for each.

The SLSAS was devised by the authors to obtain a more complete picture of FLA in the language skills other than speaking (Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert 1999; Elkhafaifi 2005; Kim 2002; Saito, Horwitz, and Garza 1999). This scale results from the content analysis of the FLCAS, and the Overall Assessment of the Speakers' Experience of Stuttering Scale (OASES) (Yaruss and Quesal 2006). The SLSAS includes 35 items which convey FL classroom situations within the domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing that can provoke anxiety. Response alternatives range from 'nothing' to 'very much' on a 5-point Likert scale, and participants' answers offered an anxiety score for each skill, and an overall score for each student.

Finally, semi-structured interviews were only conducted with LWS in their first language (Spanish). These contained different question types, namely, narrative, descriptive, structural, comparative and evaluative questions (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009) to afford these learners the possibility to fully describe past and current experiences related to stuttering and anxiety in the process of learning English. In sum, the use of these different quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments responds to the need to go beyond quantitative-only-oriented research in the study of FLA and adopt more complex methodological perspectives that yield richer empirical findings (Gkonou, Daubney, and Dewaele 2017).

Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of participants' responses to the FLCAS and the SLSAS. Means and standard deviations were calculated, and different t-tests were performed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences programme version 24 to check whether the differences found between LWS and LWDNS were significant.

Interviews were analysed by drawing on Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009), which has been extensively used to examine the

subjective experience of individuals under various medical conditions, and that of IWS concerning their stutter (Bricker-Katz, Lincoln, and Cumming 2013; Leahy, O'Dwyer, and Ryan 2012; Trichon and Tetnowski 2011). Each author first scrutinised the interview transcripts independently in order to identify emergent themes regarding anxiety and stuttering based on patterns observed in the data. The analysis consisted of descriptive comments on the content of the interviews, semiotic/linguistic comments on learners' use of specific expressions or terms, and conceptual comments related to concepts emerging in their narrations, which illustrated constructs and categories described in the anxiety and stuttering literature. Similarly to qualitative studies on stuttering (Corcoran and Stewart 1998; Crichton-Smith 2002), the authors compared and jointly discussed their analyses, so that the initial themes were re-evaluated and fine-tuned in several sessions until consensus was reached.

Results and discussion

In this section, the results obtained from the analysis of the data are offered and discussed in light of the research questions previously established. The results from the quantitative study show the highest levels of FLA within the skill of speaking. However, reading aloud was depicted as particularly problematic by LWS in the qualitative study.

Research question 1: do LWS report higher levels of FLA than LWDNS?

LWS reported higher FLA than LWDNS in the FLCAS ($M = 108.7$, $SD = 18.7$ vs. $M = 91.9$, $SD = 16.6$) and the SLSAS ($M = 84.1$, $SD = 10.3$ vs. $M = 78.2$, $SD = 15.9$) (Figure 1). These differences were significant in the FLCAS, but not in the SLSAS according to the t-test performed on these anxiety measures for each scale ($t(30) = 2.694$, $p = 0.011$; $t(30) = 1.254$, $p = 0.220$).

Additionally, as observed in Figure 1, the differences in the overall anxiety scores of both groups are more prominent in the FLCAS than in the SLSAS. This may be due to the fact that the FLCAS emphasizes speaking over other language skills, and measures students' general FLA, thereby offering a more even distribution of this phenomenon in the FL classroom. By contrast, the SLSAS considers listening, reading, and writing in greater detail, and is more task-specific, which might yield a more irregular and precise picture of anxiety in this context. This could also explain why the differences found were statistically significant in the FLCAS, but not in the SLSAS. These findings therefore indicate that the SLSAS might not be a suitable instrument to measure learners' overall FLA as opposed to more situation specific anxieties in the EFL classroom.

Research question 2: do LWS and LWDNS report differences in FLA across the skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing?

Speaking emerged as the most anxiety-inducing skill. These findings are in line with the pervasive view of orality as 'a necessary, positive personal characteristic' in our educational world (Daley 1990, 7), and its relevance to demonstrate proficiency in any FL. Additionally, LWS reported higher levels of anxiety than LWDNS in speech both in the FLCAS ($M = 108.7$, $SD = 18.7$ vs. $M = 91.9$, $SD = 16.6$) and the SLSAS ($M = 47.1$, $SD = 6.7$

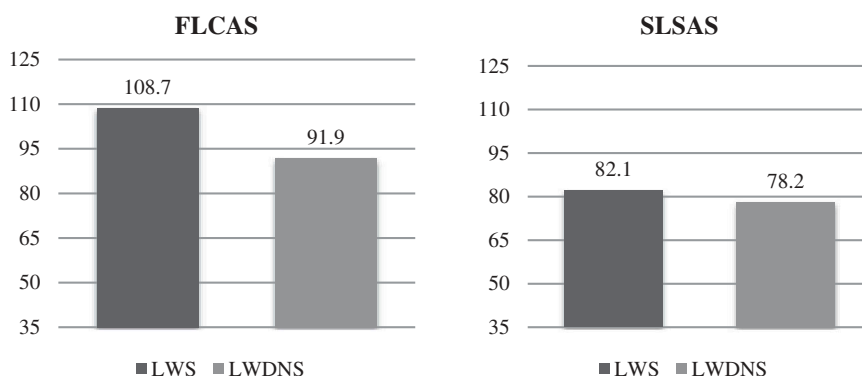


Figure 1. Overall FLA in LWS and LWDNS.

vs. $M = 41.8$, $SD = 7.6$) (Figure 2). The two t-tests conducted (one for each scale) revealed that these differences between both groups were significant with $t(30) = 3.176$, $p = 0.03$, in the FLCAS, and $t(30) = 2.072$, $p = 0.047$ in the SLSAS.

Although speaking in front of peers and the teacher generates high levels of FLA (MacIntyre and Gardner 1994; Price 1990; Young 1990), since learners become aware of their limited competence to communicate in the target language (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner 1991b; Szyszka 2017), anxiety triggered by speaking situations was particularly intense in LWS due to their fear of negative evaluation not only because of their perceived poor command of English, but mainly because of their stutter. 'Norton' (pseudonym), a female participant aged 35, illustrates these points in one of the interviews by stating that she was always more embarrassed when speaking in her English class 'por inseguridad, [...] por no conocer bien el idioma, y por la vergüenza de que me pudiera trabar por la tartamudez' (because of insecurity, because of not knowing the language, and because I was embarrassed at my stutter). Additionally, LWS felt that performing individually and being called upon by the teacher increased their FLSA (Price 1990; Wörde 2003; Young 1990).

The responses obtained for listening show that both LWS and LWDNS reported relatively low levels of anxiety in comparison with speaking and writing except for those to item 18, which reveal the presence of test anxiety in both groups (Figure 3). Although test anxiety is a different construct from FLA (Horwitz 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner 1991a), results on this item support the strong association between this specific performance anxiety and FLA (Horwitz 1986). Evaluation of learners' performance through tests and quizzes is common in FL contexts, hence even the brightest students are likely to experience test anxiety therein (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986). In spite of these results, LWS still scored slightly higher in FLLA than LWDNS ($M = 12.4$, $SD = 5.4$ vs. $M = 11.7$, $SD = 4$).

The differences between both groups were not significant ($t(30) = 0.370$, $p = 0.714$), so divergent results for other stuttering and non-stuttering learners could be expected. The qualitative study further supported these results, since listening tasks were not a problem for LWS in their learning of English. Thus, 'Davina' (pseudonym), a 28-year-old female participant, stated that 'también estaban bien los listenings, algunos eran un poco complicados, a veces te ponían a lo mejor a un escocés, así un poco rústico, y no te entendías nada, o [...] a un hindú hablando inglés y cosas así, pero [...] a mí me hacían

Anxiety in speaking - SLSAS

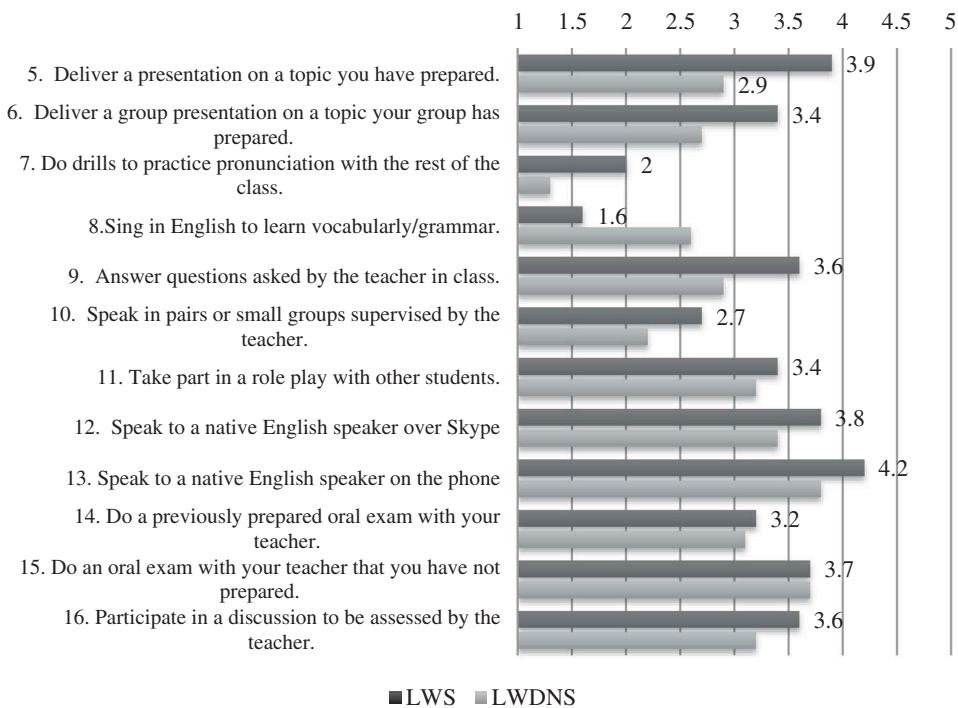


Figure 2. Anxiety in speaking in LWS and LWDNS – SLSAS.

gracia los listenings, me parecían divertidos’ (listenings were good too, some were a little bit difficult, sometimes they would put a Scottish person with a coarse accent, and you wouldn’t understand anything, or [...] a Hindu speaking English and things like that, but [...] I liked listenings, they were fun).

Reading tasks produced the lowest levels of anxiety for LWS and LWDNS vis-à-vis the rest of the language skills, which supports previous research findings (MacIntyre, Noels, and Clément 1997; Matsuda and Gobel 2001). Contrary to speaking and listening, in which the stuttering group scored higher than their non-stuttering counterparts, similar anxiety levels were observed in reading with a mean score of 4.5 (SD = 1.9) and 4.3 (SD = 1.8) respectively. However, when reading is combined with oral performance in reading aloud (items 3 and 4), anxiety considerably increased in both groups (Figure 4).

The differences between LWS and LWDNS in the reading domain in general, and reading aloud in particular, were not statistically significant ($t(30) = 0.385$, $p = 0.703$; $t(30) = 1.651$, $p = 0.109$). Yet, LWS considered reading aloud uniquely problematic in the interviews, because the rigidity of the written word restricted their use of coping strategies (e.g. word substitution), preventing them from circumventing their stammer. When comparing reading aloud to speaking, ‘RP’ (pseudonym), a male participant aged 29, affirmed that ‘leer me agobia más porque no puedes cambiar las palabras, si tú estás hablando es lo mismo, lo que quieres decir es esto, y si la primera palabra no te sale y hay bloqueo pues la cambias [...]. La lectura no, la lectura es la rigidez, la palabra está

Anxiety in listening - SLSAS

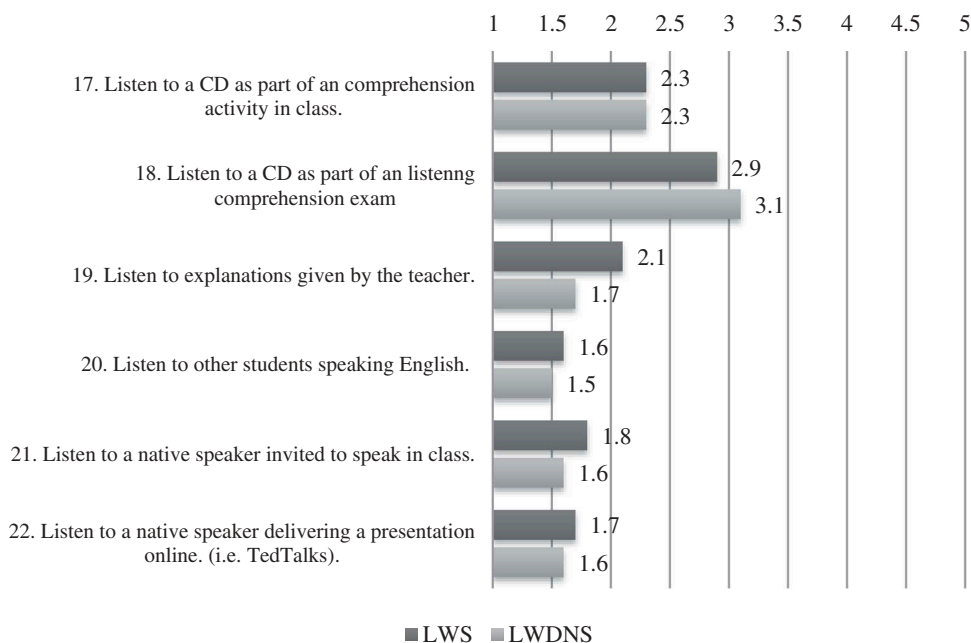


Figure 3. Anxiety in listening in LWS and LWDNS – SLSAS.

Anxiety in reading - SLSAS

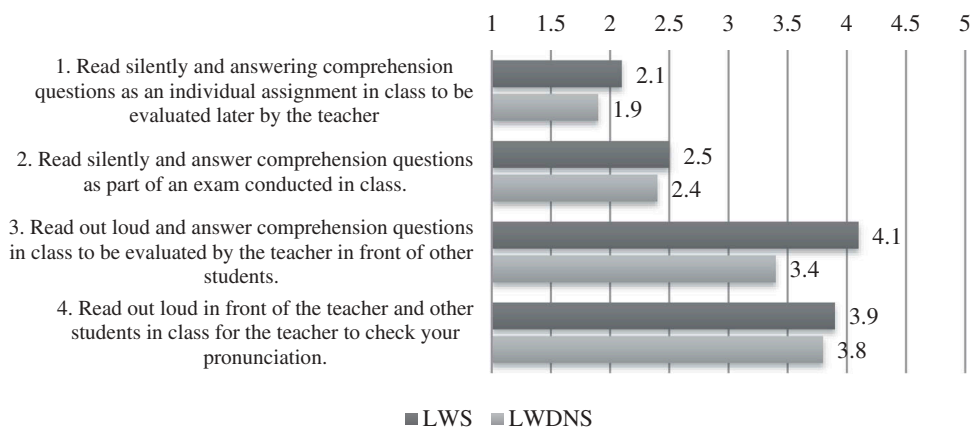


Figure 4. Anxiety in reading in LWS and LWDNS – SLSAS.

ahí y tienes que decirla [...]’ (reading stresses me because you can’t change the words, when you speak if you are blocked on the first word you can change it [...]). Reading isn’t like that, reading is rigid, the word is there and you have to say it). Consequently, more than the creation of a sound-symbol correspondence in a foreign phonetic-phonological system, FLRA in LWS emerged as a result of their inability to actually produce certain phonemes when reading aloud specific words from a text (Szyszka 2017).

Writing in EFL surfaced as the most anxiety provoking skill after speaking, and produced practically identical anxiety scores in both LWS and LWDNS ($M = 20.2$, $SD = 6.7$ vs. $M = 20.4$, $SD = 7.3$). Responses to item 27 indicate that a degree of test anxiety is present in both groups, but the most anxiety-inducing task involved computer mediated communication based on text chat with native speakers (Figure 5). These results evoke previous findings from studies on anxiety in the learning of English as a second language (ESL), in which students reported higher levels of anxiety in their interactions with speakers of English as a first language (Price 1990; Woodrow 2006; Wörde 2003; Young 1990).

No significant statistical differences were observed in this language domain between the stuttering and the non-stuttering group ($t(30) = -.076$; $p = 0.940$). Additionally, discussion of writing hardly surfaced in the interview data, suggesting that writing in EFL is not a cause for concern in LWS.

In view of the above, speaking emerged in this study as the language skill that generated the highest levels of FLA in both LWS and LWDNS, followed by writing, listening, and reading. These results contravene previous research findings with regards to listening, which has typically been depicted as one of the skills that mainly provoke FLA in students together with speaking (Horwitz 1986, 1995, 2017; Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986; Price 1990; Young 1990; Wörde 2003). Additionally, LWS mostly feared negative evaluation when speaking in front of the teacher and their peers mainly because of their

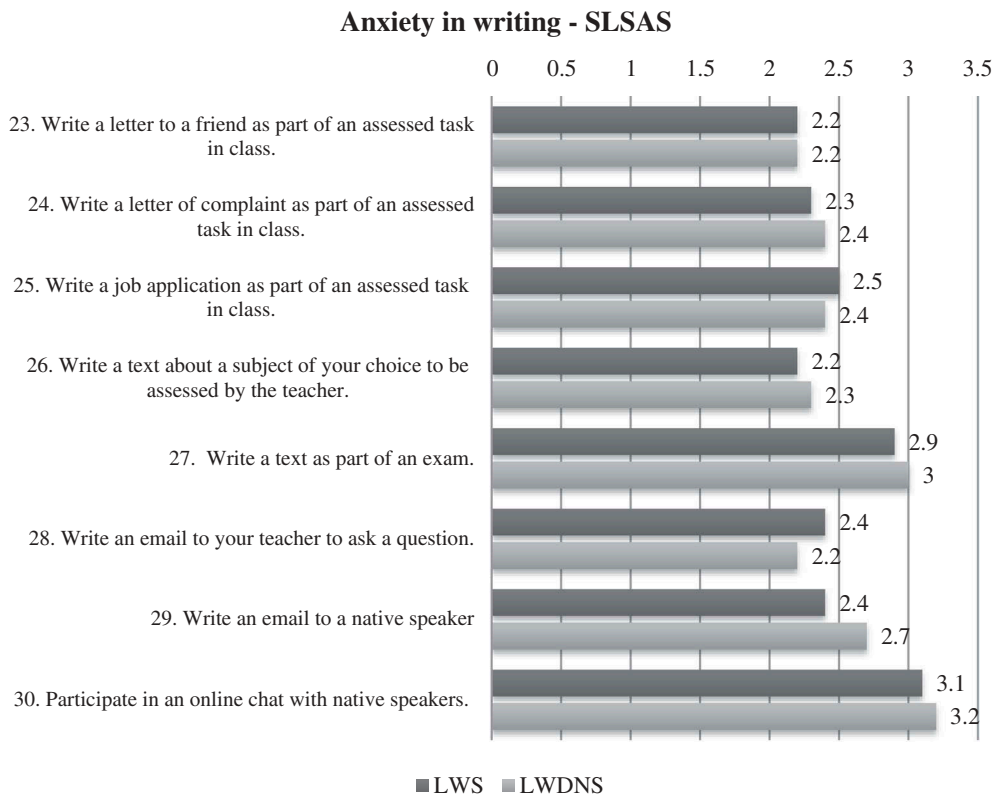


Figure 5. Anxiety in writing in LWS and LWDNS – SLSAS.

stutter, thus showing a greater tendency to experience self-stigma, shame, and low self-esteem than non-stuttering individuals (Blood et al. 2003; Corcoran and Stewart 1998; Crichton-Smith 2002). The difficulty of authentic self-presentation inherent to FL learning (Horwitz 2001, 2017; Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986) also intensifies in these learners because even if they have a good command of English, they are at times unable to demonstrate it due to their stutter. Therefore, they struggle to show their 'true self' in the FL and find it difficult to attain their 'ideal L2 self', which represents the person they would like to become therein (Dörnyei 2009).

Listening, reading and writing did not produce statistically significant differences in the levels of FLA of LWS and LWDNS, with reading and writing yielding almost equal anxiety scores in both learner groups. In spite of these findings, the qualitative study seems to suggest that with larger population samples different figures might be obtained for listening, and reading aloud. LWS (13 out of 16, that is, 81.25%) consistently reported in the interviews that they enjoyed listening tasks because listening was a receptive rather than a productive skill, and that they also felt comparatively more anxious when reading aloud in class than speaking. Reading aloud was the epitome of FLA, since, (a) unlike speaking, it does not allow for spontaneous changes in the learner's discourse, hence he or she cannot avoid stuttering, and (b) it also involves communication apprehension, which is the basis of language anxiety in speaking (Young 1990) along with fear of making errors in pronunciation (Price 1990; Szyszka 2017). Reading thus turns into an arduous task for the learner, who cannot concentrate on remember what they read (Sellers 2000).

The results for writing tasks connected to speaking may also be statistically significant for LWS and LWDNS with larger learner populations in line with those obtained for the speaking domain in these groups. The anxiety LWS and LWDNS report concerning participation in a text-chat with native speakers may be grounded on the fast moving and often colloquial nature of this medium, which is the closest representation of spoken language within written communication; and learners' expectations of potential negative evaluation from native speakers, which they view as the ideal model of target language use. Nevertheless, LWS, except for one case, reported the presence of anticipatory anxiety in EFL classes, which aggravated stuttering, generated significant cognitive interference coupled with uncomfortable somatic symptoms, and generally disrupted progress in their language learning (see Iverach et al. 2017).

These learners indicated that FLA could be reduced through collaboration, listening, understanding, patience and inclusion from both teachers and students, and highlighted the former's role in promoting low-anxiety learning environments. To this end, communication between LWS and teachers regarding stuttering and related challenges was considered an important step towards reducing avoidance behaviours and encouraging classroom participation. Furthermore, the implementation of certain strategies in the FL classroom that respond to the variable intensity of stuttering, for example, being allowed to speak first, or not being pressured to participate on 'bad speech' days, were also considered beneficial.

Implications for educators

The findings of this study suggest that LWS can benefit from teachers' collaboration, and understanding. Classroom practices that require these students to speak in front of the

teacher and their peers may be temporarily substituted for one-to-one interviews with the former as a facilitating measure in working towards more challenging tasks. Since speaking is highly valued in mastering a language, allowing LWS to avoid speech may help them feel short-term relief, but could perpetuate avoidance behaviours that will deter them from attaining their educational goals (Daley 1990). Additionally, LWS feel that there are days in which they rarely experience blocks, and others in which they constantly stutter. Teachers should give them the freedom to intervene when they feel secure, without making them wait, which can result in anticipatory anxiety. In this regard, the teacher and the student may also want to agree on a specific signal both could use, so that the latter can make their willingness to speak clear, without alerting peers.

Organising students in groups to make reading more of a collaborative task may help reduce FLA in LWS. Using web-based software like Clipflair could also be useful, since it enables students to read aloud scripts, and practice pronunciation, whilst the teacher can individually assess their performance (Talaván and Lertola 2017). Lastly, our results for listening and writing suggest that teachers should encourage listening and writing tasks by establishing routine listening activities in the classroom (Bekleyen 2009; Vogely 1998), so that learners develop a habit for 'quick judgement and appropriate timing' to decode information (Kim 2002, 4), and more collaborative writing tasks in which learners share information and experiences.

Limitations

The small learner samples used for this study may be one of its limitations. First, no statistically significant differences were found for LWS and LWDNS in their anxiety levels for listening in spite of the former acknowledging their pleasure in performing listening tasks in the interviews. Larger learner samples may therefore contribute to clarify these results, and yield significant differences in the FLA scores of stuttering and non-stuttering students in these specific FL learning situations.

Similarly to LWS, interviews with LWDNS could have helped elucidate our findings by complementing the quantitative analysis conducted on these learners. The study does not account either for the influence of age, second language proficiency, years of study, and teaching methodology in students' anxiety, although the complex nature of both FL learning and stuttering suggests that this influence is highly probable. Finally, albeit including analogous items to those within validated scales (i.e. the FLCAS for speaking, the FLLAS for listening, the FLRAS for reading, and the SLWAS for writing) the SLSAS should be validated to ensure that it is an adequate instrument to measure FLA in these different language domains.

Conclusion

This research aimed to provide insight into the needs of LWS in the skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in EFL learning in light of their levels of anxiety, and their experiences as IWS in the process of learning this language. To this end, this study used a mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis, whereby two scales, namely, the FLCAS and the SLSAS, were used to measure participants' overall FLA and their anxiety across the skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing respectively. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with LWS and analysed using IPA.

Responses to the FLCAS and the SLSAS show that LWS experience higher levels of FLA than their non-stuttering peers with significant differences emerging for speaking tasks. However, they reported similar overall levels of anxiety for reading and writing. Reading aloud was described as particularly demanding due to the interaction between FLA and stuttering, and in general, a desire for inclusive understanding to participate in EFL contexts without fear of negative evaluation was observed in the interview data. In this sense, communication with teachers regarding stammering was deemed necessary by LWS to reduce avoidance behaviours and promote collaborative strategies that aid participation. All in all, both the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study underscore the need for teachers to acknowledge the challenges that these learners face in EFL learning, so that adequate classroom practices are established. The current study therefore contributes to the literature on both stuttering in educational contexts and FLA by highlighting the experiences and needs of an underrepresented learner group, namely, LWS. It is hoped that future studies will add to the body of work regarding the specific needs of these learners in FL learning.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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