



Foreign Language Anxiety vs. Willingness to Communicate:

A Qualitative Study on Swedish EFL Learners' Perception of
Language Anxiety in Correlation With Their WTC



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Abstract:

This study aims to investigate the perceived levels of foreign language anxiety (FLA) among six English as a foreign language (EFL) learners and how their personal perceptions affect their willingness to communicate (WTC) in the English classroom. The study utilizes a qualitative approach using semi-structured pair interviews, focusing on the learners' personal experiences. Factors such as group size and group dynamics, the role of the teacher, and task types are explored to see the impact it has on the learners' WTC. The findings of the study suggest that learners' perceived FLA can negatively affect their WTC in the classroom, particularly in larger groups, when interacting with more dominant interlocutors, and when performing complex tasks in formal settings. The study concludes by highlighting the importance of teachers and learners being aware of FLA and its impact on WTC and suggests further investigation regarding potential strategies for reducing FLA in the EFL classroom.

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1 Introduction

According to Long (1996) and Swain (2000), performance promotes competence. Yet, why do some learners seek interaction while others avoid it completely? This leads to the importance of investigating the reticence that certain EFL learners feel when orally producing a second language. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a teaching approach that emphasizes the importance of communication in language learning (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 31). In CLT, language is taught in different contexts, and learners are encouraged to use it to communicate with others to reach their full potential. The ultimate goal of CLT is to develop learners' communicative competence, which involves not only their ability to use the language accurately but also their ability to use it appropriately in a variety of situations. However, based on previous research, it has become apparent that not all learners seek interactive situations and that some struggle with their willingness to communicate (WTC). Littlewood (2014, p. 358) discusses the use of communicative language teaching and states that for some learners, the classroom is the only place they acquire and apply the target language. Therefore, the use of CLT has the potential to promote EFL learners' WTC as it highlights the importance interactive classroom activities have on their language development.

English as a foreign language (EFL) learners often face various challenges when learning a new language, and one of the most significant barriers they encounter is foreign language anxiety (FLA) (Khudobina, Hopiaynen & Bondarenko, 2019; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Zhou, Xi & Lochtman, 2023). FLA refers to the feeling of apprehension and nervousness that arises when a person is required to use a foreign language, particularly in public settings. This anxiety can have detrimental effects on learners' willingness to communicate (WTC), hindering their ability to interact effectively in the target language.

Despite the growing interest in the field of FLA and WTC, there is still much to be learned about how these factors affect EFL learners' language acquisition and overall success in learning a foreign language. This study aims to contribute to the existing research by investigating the impact of FLA on EFL learners' WTC and their ability to communicate in English. This is especially relevant since the curriculum for upper secondary school (Lgr22, 2022, p. 19) emphasizes the importance of finding strategies to increase learners' communicative interaction in Swedish classrooms. This study will explore the various factors that contribute to FLA and how it affects learners' attitudes toward English communication. Ultimately, the goal is to provide insights that can help teachers better understand and address

FLA among their students. Given the significance of FLA in the EFL context, it is essential that further research is conducted to better understand this phenomenon and how it affects learners. The findings of this study aim to provide a valuable contribution to the existing literature and include practical implications for current and future language teachers and learners.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to investigate six Swedish EFL learners perceived foreign language speaking anxiety, focusing on finding a correlation with their willingness to communicate. In order to receive potential answers, the relation between FLA and WTC will be investigated using the following three elements: group size/group dynamics, the role of the teacher, and lastly, task type/s.

As a future teacher, applying communicative language teaching in the classroom is of great importance, especially bearing in mind that the communicative approach (CA) lays the basis for most current education as it is tailored to enhance learners' real-world communication needs (Cook, 2008, p. 11). Although there is a broad field of research investigating EFL learners' foreign language speaking anxiety, not many have been in connection to their willingness to communicate. Hence, this study attempts to collect and analyze EFL learners' overall perception when communicating in English. The following research questions lay the basis for this study:

1. How do group size/group dynamics affect EFL learners' FLSA and WTC?
2. How does the role of the teacher affect EFL learners' FLSA and WTC?
3. Which task type/s do EFL learners believe increases/decreases their WTC?

1.2 Overview of Study

In Chapter 2, key terms are defined in order to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of their meanings and importance in relation to this study. The following chapter will present previous research in the area. This section is relevant as it will create a connection between the two central concepts for this study, Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC). Furthermore, chapter 4 introduces the methodology section by going through essential steps relevant to the data collection and analysis.

Chapter 5 presents a selection of the findings using thematic analysis. In addition, chapter 6 discusses the findings in correlation to the research questions and previous research. Finally, the last chapter, concludes the study by considering pedagogical implications, followed by suggestions for future research.

2 Theoretical Background & Definition of Terms

2.1 An Era of Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative language teaching (CLT) originates all the way back to the 1970s when linguists and educators began to criticize traditional language teaching. Swan & Smith (as cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 11) discuss the development of language teaching from the Grammar-Translation method to the Audio-Lingual method. This type of language learning emphasizes learning grammar rules and sentence patterns through drilling and repetition. CLT, however, is an approach in which learners are given the possibility to interpret and express themselves in interpersonal contexts (Hymes, 1972, p. 21). An important branch in CLT is *communicative competence*, a term that today plays an important role in the discussions of language use and second or foreign language acquisition (Habermas 1970; Hymes 1971, Jakobovits 1970; Savignon 1971, as cited in Savignon, 2002, p. 1). Furthermore, CLT is an approach that tends to be student-centered and aims to have a language teaching practice that is primarily situation-oriented.

CLT has made several differences in language teaching since its inception. One of the main differences is the shift in focus from form-based instruction to meaning-based instruction. As Littlewood (2014, p. 356) notes, CLT emphasizes the importance of authentic

communication and provides opportunities for learners to use language in context rather than solely focusing on grammar and vocabulary.

Another important aspect of CLT is the role of the teacher. The teacher in a CLT classroom is seen as a facilitator of communication rather than a transmitter of knowledge. The teacher provides opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful and authentic tasks which supports them in their communicative language development (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 72). As Vygotsky has emphasized, teachers play a crucial role in promoting students' learning by facilitating social interaction. From a sociocultural perspective, language learning inherently benefits from a dynamic and socially interactive process in which the teacher holds the tools for creating the environment (Vygotsky, 1981, as cited in Tornberg, 2015, p. 17). Thus, the role of the interlocutor influences EFL learners' WTC to a certain extent. Therefore, as a teacher, one carries a significant role in supporting EFL learners in their language acquisition, but more so, their willingness to partake in communicative contexts.

2.2 Willingness to Communicate

Initially, WTC was introduced by McCroskey and Baer (1985) as they discussed various factors that influence a person's willingness to communicate. However, it was MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément & Noels (1998, p. 546) who introduced WTC as a part of second language acquisition by defining it as a choice in which a student can decide between the act of speaking or remaining silent when placed in a communicative context. Following this, a heuristic 'pyramid' was created, stapling several types of variables potentially influencing WTC. These variables were categorized into six layers, varying from the learners' personality type to the social situation that they are in. The aim of the pyramid was to emphasize that learners' WTC did not depend on one single variable and that it is, in fact, context-based (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 558). In addition, more recent studies have also brought up the lack of EFL learners' WTC due to several influencing factors (Yashima, Macintyre & Ikeda, 2018; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Chen, Dewaele & Zhang, 2022).

In more recent research, Chen, Dewaele, and Zhang (2022, p. 1) carried out a study that indicated that WTC is a variable that influences learners' target language process differently. Thus, the role of the teacher is crucial as they must aim to find strategies that cultivate learners' communicative competence. One potential approach explored in the study is the effects teachers and teaching styles (TTS) have on the learners' WTC. The results revealed

TTS to be related to L2 WTC, although the strength of the relationship was shown to be dependent on the context.

In terms of relevance to the Swedish school system, the Swedish syllabus for the subject English (2022, p. 1) emphasizes the need to enable students to utilize English in various situational, functional, and substantive situations. Furthermore, it states that teachers must present pertinent and important material for students, especially materials that spark the learners' interest in the target language. Lastly, the syllabus further states that pupils should be given the chance to develop the confidence to generate and utilize English for a variety of objectives. Thus, it is the responsibility of the teacher to provide for these possibilities in the classroom and to promote WTC growth.

2.3 Foreign Language (Speaking) Anxiety

Another crucial term for this study is foreign language anxiety (FLA). This term was initially defined by Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986, as cited in Xiangming, Liu & Zhang, 2020) as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 2).

According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), foreign language anxiety can be categorized into three groups. Test anxiety, or the dread of failing a test, is the first of these. It carries a strong connection to prior test-taking adversity. The second sort of anxiety is characterized by a fear of criticism. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), this involves “concern about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively” (p. 128). The final category is communication apprehension, which is described by Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 127) as “a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people”. After processing such information, it is no wonder that lessons held in a foreign language are often bound to engender anxious learners, especially when they are placed in settings that require oral output.

In conclusion, research on FLA is expanding as it is a prominent concept in EFL classrooms. As each year passes, more studies are being carried out to determine what factors could potentially decrease learners' foreign language anxiety, primarily in various classroom settings.

3 Previous Research

3.1 Willingness to Communicate & Foreign Language (Speaking)

Anxiety: The Correlation

Although there has been a limited number of studies on EFL learners' FLA in relation to their WTC, many studies reveal that there are several factors that can decrease as well as increase learners' WTC. Khajavy, MacIntyre & Barabadi (2018) examined a correlation between classroom environment and WTC. The findings stated that teachers control the classroom climate and are responsible for making it a pleasant space for learners. The findings of the study suggest that a supportive classroom environment initiated through an interrelationship between students and teachers decreases learners' anxiety and positively affects WTC. This conclusion is relevant to the aim of this study as it pertains to information regarding contextual settings in which learners' anxiety is reduced, resulting in their WTC being affected.

Another relevant study was carried out by Gallagher & Robins (2015), where situational variables of groups were discussed. For instance, one finding stated that high WTC students tended to dominate low WTC students. Based on the environment that the less willing students are in, it can increase their language anxiety and, in turn, decrease their participation. Therefore, as a teacher, one must be aware of such situational variables as they affect learners' willingness to communicate. Correspondingly, Hermansson (2021, p. 25–26) made a similar finding in her study by discussing the number of people involved in an interactive segment as well as each student's level of willingness to communicate. It was stated that despite the groups consisting of fewer people, the students who did have the upper hand in the actual discourse were more willing to communicate, whereas the more reserved students remained quiet and avoided further dialogue (p. 25). These findings can be seen as problematic as they state the insufficiencies that occur within certain group dynamics and the affects it has on learners' WTC.

Additionally, Dewaele & Pavelescu (2021) discussed the relationship between incommensurable emotions and willingness to communicate. Variables such as personality, social background, and overall experiences with English were established to affect participants' enjoyment and anxiety in relation to their WTC. One student, for instance, mentioned how the act of speaking "kills them" due to their own perceived lack of

communicative competence, thus limiting their production of speech (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2021, p. 74). The incommensurable emotions were dependent on various factors, such as learner-internal and contextual variables.

In relation to other factors enhancing EFL learners' FLSA and limiting their WTC, Yentürk (2020) investigated the role of native versus non-native English teachers on learners' FLSA. Factors such as gender, age, and length of study were taken into consideration when collecting the data. The study employed a quantitative research design and obtained ethical approval from three universities. The participants included EFL learners from native or non-native English-speaking countries. Data were collected through a Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale and later analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The results indicated that FLSA was higher in courses taught by non-native English-speaking teachers. Additionally, female participants reported a higher level of FLSA. In relation to this finding, age was not found to be a significant predictor of FLSA. However, the length of the study was found to be highly influential, with participants reporting higher anxiety levels when their length of study in English decreased. In terms of potential implications to reduce EFL learners' FLSA, they suggested teachers prioritize collaborative learning and provide pronunciation practices to learners. For instance, incorporating such practices could potentially address the fear of making mistakes due to foreign accents (Yentürk, 2020, p. 1947).

In 2011, AbuSeileek conducted a study at a Jordanian University involving 216 undergraduate EFL learners with the aim of investigating the impact of cooperative group size on learners' participation in interactive activities. The average age of the participants was 19, and they were initially assigned randomly to two identity statuses: anonymous and disclosed. They were then divided into different treatment groups and taught in computer-based environments. Within each cooperative group, each member worked through a two-way set-up, completing assigned open tasks and communicating through text and voice chats. The study found that group size was a significant factor in reducing learners' foreign language anxiety, particularly in a computer-based teaching environment. Specifically, groups of five students showed increased efficiency in teamwork as they worked collaboratively and evenly distributed tasks among themselves.

In terms of potential environmental holdbacks, Maher & King (2022) did a study on the relationship between 'silence' and EFL learners' speaking anxiety in the classroom. The aim of the study was to find out how in-class silent behaviors affect the oral participation of language learners who experience speaking-related anxiety in an EMI class (p. 219).

Seventeen participants volunteered in the study and underwent three interviews each using a CBT approach. Out of the seventeen participants, nine participants expressed 'silence' to be a triggering factor, resulting in negative emotions. In the words of Maher and King, silence

[...] made them hyper-aware of what was happening around them, which often resulted in negative emotions related to speaking. Also, silent behaviours tended to trigger negative emotions that led to negative thoughts about their language proficiency, fears of receiving unwanted attention due to not speaking when expected to, and feeling pressure to speak because of their peers' 'silence'. (Maher & King, 2022, p. 226)

The study of Maher and King can be summarized by a quote in which a student states verbatim how the silence kills her: "I feel uncomfortable waiting for my classmates to speak. The silence kills me. What should I do? I don't want to speak either" (Maher & King, 2022, p. 226).

Similarly to Maher and King (2022), Al-Murtadha (2019, p. 134) carried out a study investigating the effects of visualization and goal-setting activities on enhancing Yemeni rural EFL learners' WTC. In the introduction section of the study, the author mentions the negative aspects of silence and how it affects EFL learners' WTC. Thus, the need for an interactive classroom that encourages students to engage and produce oral language is of great importance. Although the study did not aim to investigate anxiety-related matters, the results indicated that the visualization of the learners' ideal L2 selves was plausible.

In contrast to Maher and King's (2022) and Al-Murtadha's (2019) studies, Ingram & Elliott (2014) examined the influence of silence in EFL classrooms focusing on the role of the teacher. The study deduced that enforced extended wait time resulted in higher oral production, with students presenting longer and more detailed answers than they did without extended wait time. The findings argued that silence can be re-constructed into a supporting act where learners' WTC is challenged and promoted.

One would assume that one potential factor affecting learners' reticence to partaking in oral discourse is level of language proficiency. Kim (2020) carried out a study investigating how 12 adult EFL learners engaged in pair work and how their willingness to engage was affected. The findings of the study showed that the different levels of English proficiency among the members of the pairs did affect their participation. For instance, a less proficient participant expressed that having a more proficient partner helped them actively participate in

activities due to them trusting their partners' language skills (Kim, 2020, p. 147). In contrast, one participant expressed that being in pairs with a partner where the proficiency gap is distinct, it had a negative effect on the conversation since they could not always understand what their partner intended to express. In turn, this student felt as if they administered the dialogue. Overall, the study discussed that relationships formed when working in pairs must work parallel with the learners' proficiency as this could potentially affect their approach to collaborative interactions (Storch & Aldosari, 2013, as cited in Kim, 2020, p. 150).

In terms of task types, Brown and Lee (2015, p. 357) mention the use of authentic language in meaningful contexts. As a teacher, one must be creative. However, even the most creative teacher sometimes fails to perform on the spot. Therefore, it is of great importance that the teachers aim to appeal to students' interests by providing them with tasks that may be relatable to their daily lives outside of the four walls of a classroom. Creating a space where learners are given the opportunity to utilize authentic materials will certainly engage learners' willingness to communicate.

Similar to Brown and Lee's (2015) description of the importance of task types, Jamalifar and Salehi (2020, p. 165–167) carried out a study with 90 Iranian EFL learners, all of whom were divided into three groups: a rehearsal group, a strategic task planning group, and finally, a control group. All groups were given different instructions regarding the task. After the intervention, the participants' WTC in various communicative situations was measured through a questionnaire. In the end, the findings suggested that strategic task planning could potentially lead to a more significant improvement in L2 WTC in comparison to rehearsal groups.

In terms of the role of the teacher, Peng (2019, p. 168) carried out a study exploring potential factors in which teachers could foster in-class interpersonal relations and influence learners' WTC. The study discovered a correlation between WTC and teacher gestures/spatial positioning. The findings of the study suggested that teacher gestures, both voluntarily or involuntarily, could be used to gain learners' attention and positively influence their WTC.

Conclusively, one can arguably state that classroom WTC is impacted by numerous variables. For instance, Cao and Philip (2006) emphasize group size and the interlocutors, classroom seating (Riasati, 2018), and the teacher's wait time (e.g., Zarrinabadi, 2014; Ingram & Elliot, 2014). More common are the situational variables of the topic matter, meaning they vary from lesson to lesson (e.g., Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2016, Riasati & Rahimi, 2018). Additionally, one can also argue for and distinguish between environmental

and individual variables (Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2016, p. 656). Environmental variables cover aspects such as task type, group size, and interlocutor, whereas anxiety and confidence are examples of individual variables.

4 Methodology

Although FLA is measured through a well-known scale originating back to 1986 (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale: FLCAS), this study will not proceed from it (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986). Although useful and, more importantly, reliable, this study was conducted by carefully selecting six EFL learners, all of whom show signs of anxiety when forced to use the English language in communicative settings. However, it is important to note that these are the learners' descriptions of their personal experiences regarding the matter.

4.1 Choice of Method

In this study, a qualitative methodology was used. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. This type of method allows researchers to gather in-depth and nuanced information about participants' experiences, beliefs, and attitudes (Bryman, 2012, p. 472). Semi-structured interviews are often used when the research question is exploratory and the phenomenon under investigation is complex or not well understood. It is further argued that semi-structured interviews are particularly useful when investigating complex or sensitive topics, which, in return, provides researchers with broader flexibility to explore the topic of interest (Maxwell, 1996). Similarly, Kvale and Brinkmann (2014, p. 17) emphasize the use of a qualitative research method as the kind that invites the researcher into the world and beliefs of the informant. In addition, Graneheim and Lundman (2004, p. 111) promote the use of a qualitative interview method as it provides the researcher with in-depth data that potentially highlights complex phenomena.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to ensure the accuracy of the data. The interviews aimed to generate opportunities for the participants to share their perceptions of challenges when communicating in English. As mentioned earlier in the methodology section, no scientific scale laid the basis for the participants' foreign language anxiety. The results were solely individual-based and strictly portrayed their own experiences and beliefs.

Additionally, one important aspect that determined the basis of the procedure was to create a safe space where learners felt comfortable sharing ideas about their perceived FLA. Topics regarding personal obstacles, especially for younger learners, can be rather complex. Therefore, diving into this project, one of the main criteria was to create and structure the interviews in ways that attempted to elicit rich answers from the participants. As a result, all interviews were carried out in the learners' first language, Swedish. Patriksson, Berg, Nilsson and Wigert (2017, p. 249) carried out a study discussing the language barriers that occur in important meetings with non-native speakers of a language. This is one of the main reasons why this study's interviews were conducted in the participant's first language. In terms of comfort, it was evident that the respondents preferred conducting the interviews in their native language. This was particularly necessary as sensitive and complex topics were discussed, especially since certain nuances and subtleties tend to be lost in translation. Such factors were therefore taken into consideration in hopes of allowing the participants to be authentically themselves when taking part in the interviews.

4.1.1 Participants

For this specific study, six upper-secondary students in Sweden were selected with the help of their English teachers' assessment. The selection of the participants was also based on the learners' participation in class. Prior to asking if the participants wanted to take part in the study, observations were made during class to determine they carried some level of FLA when initiating conversation and communicating in English. After the selection of participants was finalized, the interviews were proceeded in pairs. The reason for this decision was due to potentially collecting truthful and light-hearted answers from participants who shared some type of relationship with the opposite partner. This decision can be supported by a study made by Dale, Johns, and Walsh (2021, p. 580) where they used paired interviews to explore participants' shared experiences. This research method allowed participants to share their experiences and perspectives in a supportive environment, which facilitated a more open and in-depth discussion. The complexity of topics like in-class participation and anxiety was another reason why this type of approach was considered. The aim of the interviews was to create a safe space for the students so that they could share their honest experiences about their foreign language anxiety in correlation to their willingness to communicate.

One critical aspect worth mentioning about the depiction of participants is that factors such as age and gender were not taken into consideration when selecting participants,

especially since the aim of the study was not to see how such factors affected their FLA and WTC. The reason for this decision was due to not wanting to create a comparative analysis based on gender and proficiency levels but rather to raise awareness of the participants' feelings and perceptions about communicating in English. However, in terms of relevance to the methodology section, each interview session consisted of one pair from each English level (English 5, 6 and 7). Finally, the participants' foreign language speaking anxiety was never measured through a FLCAS scale.

4.2 Data Analysis

In this study, the collected data were analyzed through a thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, as cited in Echenique, 2014), thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 165). The use of thematic analysis is appropriate and applicable for a wide range of research across different types of qualitative data. For this project, a thematic approach was of great use as it created opportunities to discover patterns in the participants' answers after the interviews. The thematic analysis aimed to identify key factors that influenced the learners' perceived levels of foreign language anxiety and their willingness to communicate in the English classroom. This type of analysis process allowed for a deeper understanding of the learners' experiences and provided insights into potential strategies that address foreign language anxiety in the EFL classroom.

The results section has been divided into three subcategories, all of which were related to the research questions. These categories were also determined by the structure of the interview guide. Although the finalized themes of the results were based on the interview guide, the participants were still given the opportunity to share all their thoughts and ideas throughout in case other themes were to be developed during the interviews. However, during the analysis process, it became evident that the pre-made themes correlated with the overall results, hence supporting this decision.

In contrast to other analysis methods, a thematic analysis has allowed this study to explore and analyze the participants' answers with a lot more flexibility (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 11). However, with flexibility comes certain drawbacks — for instance, the ability to narrow down the findings into different coding schemes and, finally, established themes.

Hence, the collected data has been read through thoroughly to ensure that no essential data is excluded.

4.3 Reliability and Validity & Research Limitations

This section will discuss the terms reliability and validity, focusing on their adaptability for qualitative research. Furthermore, potential research limitations will be discussed and emphasized.

Mackey and Gass (2011, p. 106) state that in order for a research study to be valid, the findings must “reflect what we believe they reflect”. Similarly, Mason (1996, as cited in Bryman 2012, p. 389) refers to validity as a receipt in which a researcher observes, identifies, and measures what they intend to measure. Following this definition, Lecompt and Goerz 1982; Kirk and Miller 1986 (as cited in Bryman, 2012, p. 390) state that there are several layers to validity in qualitative research. Firstly, there is internal validity. This branch of validity is often said to be a strength in qualitative research (primarily ethnographic studies) as it allows the researcher to ensure a level of congruence between concepts and observations (Bryman, 2012, p. 390). Mackey and Gass (2011) define internal validity as “the extent to which the results of a study are a function of the factor that the researcher intends” (p. 109). In other words, the internal validity can be estimated as high if the researcher has controlled for other variables to have had an impact on the results.

The second term, external validity, refers to the generalizability of the findings. Such limited studies often tend not to be generalizable as the conclusions cannot be placed outside of the context of that specific study. In contrast to internal validity, LeCompte and Goetz (as cited in Bryman 2012) argue that “external validity represents a problem for qualitative researchers because of their tendency to employ case studies and small samples” (p. 390). Small-scale studies can, nevertheless, contribute to the field in extensive matters. Ultimately, this study manages to cover a limited selection of EFL learners’ willingness to communicate in correlation to foreign language anxiety. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized.

In terms of reliability, like validity, it is divided into external and internal categories. The external aspect refers to the extent to which a study can be replicated. As LeCompte and Goetz (as cited in Bryman, 2012, p. 390) state it, reaching this criterion is rather difficult in qualitative research. Similarly, this study does not aim to provide readers with replicable findings but rather findings that can be further explored. Internal reliability refers to the

consistency in the responses provided. In relation to this study, this was followed with a structured interview guide and transcribed interviews. Although the structure of the interviews varied, the aim of collecting a consistent set of answers was met.

Research limitations are necessary as they provide the researcher with limitations both prior to and throughout the study process. As stated previously, one choice that may have given rise to a research limitation was excluding the participants' background information, such as age, gender, and level of proficiency in the data analysis. Although some participants do highlight some of their insecurities regarding their English proficiency, no questions regarding their acquisition levels were asked. In addition, due to time constraints, the study only collected data from six Swedish EFL learners. More participants would have yielded much broader, richer, and varied data.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

In terms of ethical considerations, there are a set of requirements one must operate when conducting such an in-depth and qualitative study. The most crucial ones are guaranteed confidentiality and informed consent (Ahrne and Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2015; Arne and Svensson, 2015). Furthermore, the Swedish Research Council highlights its research ethics principles, being the information requirement, the consent requirement, the confidentiality requirement, and the use requirement (The Swedish Research Council, 2017). Therefore, in terms of this study, providing the participants with a research proposal stating the aim of this study was of great importance. They were also told that their participation was voluntary and that they were allowed to withdraw participation at any given time. Finally, the participants were provided with the information that their contribution to this study would in no way affect their grades.

5 Results

5.1 Findings Analysis

Due to the wide range of data collected, only a selection of the questions from the interview guide will be reported in this section. The motivation for this choice is due to time restraints. In addition, some of the findings had to be eliminated in order to depict and produce the most

nuanced data relevant to the aim of this study. For instance, the interview questions sometimes correlated with each other, and it resulted in the participants wandering away in their thoughts. Thus, the exclusion of data was necessary as some of the provided responses involved thoughts and ideas outside of the motifs and themes relevant to this study.

5.1.1 Group Dynamics & Group Size

This section will discuss the participants' experiences in speaking the target language (English) in different group sizes and settings. In addition, group dynamics will also be touched upon, i.e., the inner emotions and energies that the group projects out to the participants. The findings highlight how learners feel these factors affect their FLA and, in turn, their WTC.

When asked about how a specific setting affects WTC, Students A & B pointed out that when placed in group settings with learners more proficient than them, they tend to worry about making errors and being less proficient, and in turn, their WTC is negatively affected. Student A for instance explains that "If I am in a setting in the classroom where I know someone else carries more knowledge in English and is a better English speaker, it creates some type of worry and stress within me (Student A)". Student B expresses a similar feeling "I feel a constant worry that maybe I must pronounce things correctly, and I have to produce the language well because my peers tend to show a more advanced level of English and have more flow" (Student B). Student B then proceeds to reply to a statement that Student A makes about how the English language has taken over and creates "expectations" on people and their ability to speak it more proficiently: "Yes, simply that you feel you are not knowledgeable enough and it creates some kind of limitation in communication".

Similarly, Student E expresses that when put in any type of group setting, communicating in English is anxiety-provoking: "I think I become nervous and anxious whether it is in front of 100 people or on a regular Zoom call with a few listeners. I automatically think, "Now someone else is listening; I cannot mess up". However, when asked a different question, the participant highlights one specific situation where they felt comfortable participating despite being in a group:

[...] I ended up in a group with people that I usually hang out with at breaks. The assignment was to record it and then hand it in. We did it, and it felt nice, actually. I did not feel as nervous as I usually would; I felt comfortable. (Student E)

Moreover, the participants share their perceptions on the effects of group size and how it affects their FLA, and in turn, WTC: Student A specifically mentions not enjoying answering open-ended questions that teachers ask in front of the whole class. However, when placed in smaller groups with peers that share the same proficiency level, Student A feels more willing to communicate:

[...] if you sit in a smaller group and have to hold a conversation or a discussion and talk and you know that you are in a group that is the same level as yourself, you almost suddenly feel that you are not afraid to speak because you are not afraid to mispronounce or say things incorrectly. What you say might not always be the right term in that context. But you talk, you still dare to talk about it more. (Student A)

Student B engages in the conversation with their own input regarding using the English language in a classroom setting and how it does not come naturally to them. However, when placed in a different setting (vacation), the language use falls more naturally:

Sometimes I feel like the only time it does come a little more naturally, and I feel a little more comfortable in using the language is when I am on a trip abroad. Because there you can't just add Swedish words while you are communicating either, because now no one speaks Swedish and you have to challenge yourself to be understood, but with room for errors because the group is now different, you are not in school anymore. You are comfortable in a different way. (Student B)

Student A nods in agreement and proceeds to say:

In that specific scenario, no one forces you to speak in English. However, in order to receive help, you have to. The stress revolving around the use of the language is lessened in that specific situation because your only goal is to receive help. You do not care if you make any potential errors because you will most likely never meet those people again. (Student B)

In terms of group dynamics, Students A, C & D express a feeling of ease when placed in groups with people whom they know and are comfortable with: “When I am with my friends, I tend to forget that I am as anxious because I know them, and they know me”. (Student D) However, Student B shares a different opinion:

I tend to abstain from the discussion and become more anxious. Those are people I talk to and spend time with, and I am more anxious to make errors in front of them due to them potentially judging me because I have some type of relationship with them. However, if it is someone I do not usually talk to, I am not as invested in their opinions about me. (Student B)

This is an interesting contrast as it shows that group dynamics between learners can vary. One expresses a feeling of comfort when having to communicate with friends, while the other explains that it creates a feeling of unease.

However, one cannot ignore the patterns of the negative effects the learners' FLSA has on their WTC. When asked about whether they have ever abstained from speaking in English due to worries about making errors, Student C states:

Yes, I have. I usually think in my head before I actually say what it is that I want to say. And sometimes, when I cannot make it up in my head, I tend to avoid saying it. I completely skip partaking in the discussion. (Student C)

Furthermore, Student D replies: "Yeah, same for me. I almost freeze. It is as if I cannot formulate one single correct sentence in my head, and suddenly, nothing makes sense. So yes, I freeze, and I avoid". Similarly, student B states: Yes, I can relate to this. I think everyone is (unintentionally) afraid of making a fool of themselves" and follows with the explanation that "making a fool of themselves" refers to making errors in front of others and, in turn, feeling bad about it.

5.1.2 The Role of the Teacher

In terms of the role of the teacher, the participants share interesting thoughts and ideas regarding the level of English their teacher holds and how this affects their FLA in communicative settings. For instance, Student D emphasizes the following:

Like... for instance, if the teacher has higher expectations of us, we automatically think we must aim high or try extra hard. Or like, I create thoughts in my head that I will never be enough because no matter what I do, it will never be enough. (Student D)

Student C shares a similar outlook: “If the teacher is very, very advanced in English, I think I become more pressured. Because the comparison between my language acquisition and the teachers’ language acquisition has such a big gap, that you cannot help but compare yourself”. Similarly, Students A & B agree by stating that a teacher that shows a great set of skills tends to have higher expectations of their language production, resulting in them believing they must aim higher. In contrast, during another interview, Student E expresses a different point of view: “I actually enjoy it if the teacher’s level of English is high. It means they possess a lot of knowledge, and it inspires me to aspire high as well and try to take up space” (Student E).

One interesting input is when two of the participants discuss the differences if they were to have a substitute teacher in the classroom instead: “[...] if we have a substitute teacher for one lesson and one lesson only, my language use is facilitated as the lesson is more laid back” (Student A). In addition, Student B agrees and replies: “The lesson with a substitute teacher usually feels more laid back, and it feels as if it is okay to make more errors and not be on your best behavior. You may not take it as seriously”.

Moreover, the participants discuss the role of the teacher in terms of teacher engagement and encouragement. Student E mentions one potential strategy teachers could use to help ease their anxiety and motivate learning:

Taking me aside and letting me know that they see me and want to push me toward reaching a specific goal (in this case, speaking in English). It motivates me because they are putting time and effort into my success... Do you know? But if I see or sense that a teacher does not really care and is not taking the initiative to reach out to me, chances are, I will most likely not do it myself either. (Student E)

During the second interview, one of the participants shares a different strategy teachers could implement in their teaching to potentially help increase learners’ WTC:

But one thought is that if the teacher allows you to practice in front of people you are comfortable with during your lessons, then maybe that could help a little bit. Because you are less worried in front of your friends maybe and can perform better, and if you can practice performing better, then it will become easier when it is time to do it in front of others. (Student C)

Finally, during the first interview, Student A emphasizes one crucial aspect of teacher engagement: “If a teacher shows reassurance when you are taking part in a discussion or holding a presentation, it can be by smiling at you, they somehow send positive energy towards your way, and it makes it less frightening”. The participant proceeds to say:

[...] What I would expect from a teacher would be to know me for me. That the teacher knows what I struggle with and somehow stimulates that aspect, encouraging and challenging me to push against any barriers. I think hearing reassuring comments encourages me to want to succeed. [...] So, to give your students positive feedback that allows them to learn from potential mistakes and continue developing would, in my opinion, boost me and encourages my willingness to communicate. (Student A)

5.1.3 Task Type/s

In terms of task types, several participants highlighted the importance of being provided with tasks that interested them:

When it is about a topic that you like... I remember a different scenario where I held a presentation alone, and it was about a topic that I truly enjoyed. So... like, I had some “pre-information” about that specific topic, so it felt easier, and it made the task more fun to complete. (Student E)

It becomes evident that the participants embrace tasks that are authentic and close to their hearts. Similar to Student B’s perception, Student A takes a stance regarding performing tasks that have learners’ interests in consideration: “[...] as a teacher, you can create room for students to pick and choose from topics that interest them. That way, you give them a safe space to communicate about something that they are interested in”. Lastly, Student B emphasizes the structure of the tasks and all the partial moments leading to the “exam”:

I appreciate partial moments leading up to the actual exam/test. Although my willingness to communicate is low due to my foreign language anxiety, I think that through this, my teacher creates room for me to feel more comfortable with my language skills. They give me a chance to find my way forward. (Student B)

When asked about strategies the participants used to decrease their FLSA, Student A described that when given a task to participate in whole group discussions, one helpful strategy is when they are allowed to practice in advance with the peer they are sitting next to:

One step would be for the teacher to allow me to take some notes and slowly start the discussion with the peer sitting next to me. Start small. And then do it with the whole class. That way, I collect relevant information before being exposed in front of everyone else. Good preparations really do affect if and how much I would like to later partake in discussions. (Student A)

Similarly, Student B mentions a strategy called “The EPA Model” that one of their old teachers frequently used to encourage students to interact with one another:

This reminds me of a strategy my old teacher used in the classroom. It is called EPA (short Alone, Pairs, Everyone; SW: Ensam, Par, Alla). You start by yourself; you move on to pairs, and you exchange thoughts and ideas. And lastly, you do it in front of everyone. (Student B)

Moving forward, the participants were asked whether they found formal or informal tasks easier on their FLSA and, in turn, WTC. Student A started expressing that it varied depending on the day and how much time they had been given to prepare:

Sometimes the preparation time makes you less anxious about the topic that you are presenting. Therefore, the formal setting can be seen as “easier”. However, although an informal setting does not require as much preparation time and may come more naturally, it can also be too spontaneous. It depends on whom you are talking to. (Student A)

However, Student B disagrees by saying that informal tasks are more to their liking as it does not allow them to dwell on their insecurities:

I think spontaneous and informal tasks are easier because we are all doing the same thing, and there is no time to dwell. I feel like formal settings can become frightening because I tend to push my deadline forward. So... Although I was given more time to prepare, that does not necessarily mean that I am more prepared. So, I prefer informal settings. (Student B)

Similarly, Student C shares ideas that are equivalent to what Student B believes:

[...] I feel pressured because I am expected to deliver since I have had time to practice... But if we are given a task out of nowhere, then at least I know no one is prepared, and we might all share the same stress regarding speaking. (Student C)

As the interviews progressed, the participants were asked whether they could describe a time when they successfully communicated in English despite being in a group setting and feeling anxious. Student C starts to answer by bursting into nervous laughter and proceeds to state:

I do not think I have ever fully succeeded with that. I tend to say the bare minimum when we are expected to speak in English, for instance, in presentations. I usually feel like I never get to finish everything that I intend to say, so no, I do not think I have ever gone "Yeah, nailed that. I don't" (Student C).

Student D agrees and states they experience the same feeling regarding their English production, no matter the amount of preparation time: "Yeah, I share the same thoughts on that. No matter how prepared I am, once I know I am supposed to speak English in front of others, I become anxious".

In contrast to this, during the final stages of the last interview between Student E and F, Student F starts grinning and proceeds to reply to the question by stating:

When it comes to presentations in English, I have this feeling of "Oh no, it is in front of others" and I feel nervous. But usually, when I am standing there on the actual day, I ask myself, "Who are these people, actually? Why should I feel anxious and nervous...? Who are they?". I get there, I do my thing, I receive my grade, and I sit down. And then, it is the next person's turn. It is like a loop. At least, I try to tell myself that. (Student F)

Ultimately, when asked whether practice makes perfect, Student A expresses that the combination of clear instruction and teacher guidance is the key to potentially decreasing one's anxiety:

[...] if you are given the right instructions and know what is expected of you, the teacher guides you and gives you the opportunity to develop in your own way. The feeling of knowing

that you have succeeded also encourages you to want more. So yes, I think you can work on decreasing your anxiety as long as you are given the correct support. (Student A)

Upon collecting and analyzing the data, a clear observation emerges: all six participants exhibit indications of anxiety when placed in settings requiring some degree of WTC in English. It is especially prominent in more formal settings, for instance, during examining presentations in front of peers that they are not fully comfortable with.

6 Discussion

The following section is divided into the same three subheadings as the results section in order to allow for a structured discussion of the findings in relation to previous research. The results show that several factors carry the potential of increasing EFL learners' FLSA, resulting in a limited WTC. Although there was never a scientific scale to determine the learners' FLA, based on their perceptions and experiences, it could be established that all six participants showed anxiety-loaded feelings toward communicating in English.

6.1 Group Dynamics & Group Size

According to Gallagher & Robins (2015), group size and group dynamics are one of the main factors that either enhance or diminish EFL learners' WTC. Similarly, the findings of this study emphasized this specific statement. The majority of the participants (A-F) pointed out that, when placed in a setting with people they do not feel genuinely comfortable with, communicating in a second language can be rather difficult and anxiety-provoking.

In addition, AbusSeileek (2011) specifically discusses group sizes in which EFL learners are expected to communicate and produce the English language. The findings show that a "group of five students is of preference" since all students were given clear instructions to finish their tasks individually prior to solving them as a group. This argues for the fact that smaller groups tend to provide students with the opportunity of accomplishing the task given to them with more care. This can be compared to a statement made by Student B where they expressed that being given clear instructions in advance allows them to feel more prepared and, in addition, contribute to the conversation regardless of the group that they are in. Although this statement emphasizes the importance of the task, it still touches upon the

crucial aspects of being placed in groups where learners feel the need and responsibility to participate based on the instructions given to them.

In terms of environmental factors hindering learners' reticence to partaking in oral discourse, both Maher and King (2022) and Al-Murtadha, (2019) carried out a study emphasizing the negative effects of silence in relation to learners' WTC. Although the participants of this study do not mention any specific emotions regarding silence, the participants do highlight a flight response when having to partake in oral discourse: "Yeah, same for me. I almost freeze. It is as if I cannot formulate one single correct sentence in my head, and suddenly, nothing makes sense. So yes, I freeze, and I avoid" (Student D). Similarly, another student emphasizes that the reason for this is due to the anxiousness of making errors in front of others. This could be correlated with the findings revealed in Kim's (2020) study. The study indicated that students' willingness to engage in collaborative interactions was in fact affected by different proficiency levels. Although one of the lower proficient participants did state that the higher proficient student encouraged them to participate, the participants in this study shared other views. Hence, one may draw the conclusion that, when placed in a silent context or with participants that share different levels of language proficiency, less willing students would not take the initiative to start a discussion and preferably remained silent.

6.2 The Role of the Teacher

Khajavy, MacIntyre & Barabadi (2018, p. 609–610) examined a correlation between classroom environment and WTC. The findings reported that teachers control the classroom climate and are responsible for making it a pleasant space for learners. Teachers possess the power to create a deeper understanding of learners' strengths and weaknesses simply by showing that they care for their development. As Student E expressed earlier:

[...] It motivates me because they are putting time and effort into my success... Do you know? But if I see or sense that a teacher does not really care and is not taking the initiative to reach out to me, chances are, I will most likely not do it myself either. (Student E)

As stated multiple times throughout this study, teachers play a significant role as they act as the heart of the classroom. Therefore, their teaching abilities can either make or break students' confidence and motivation to participate in oral settings. In one of the studies,

Yentürk (2020) investigated the role of native versus non-native teachers and the effects it had on learners' WTC. The findings of that study showed that the participants' FLSA was higher in courses taught by non-native English-speaking teachers. This is an interesting contrast to the findings stated in this study. For instance, most of the participants in this study claimed that a more competent teacher increased their anxiety and decreased their WTC. They argue that this is due to the teachers' high expectations and how it has a negative effect on them instead of a positive one. In contrast, one of the participants states that a more proficient teacher encourages them to aim higher.

As Vygotsky once emphasized, teachers play a crucial role in promoting students' learning by facilitating social interaction, especially with the sociocultural perspective as a part of departure (Vygotsky, 1981, as cited in Tornberg, 2015, p. 17). Finally, teachers must sometimes seek opportunities in unfamiliar places and do everything in their power to create environments that enhance learners' WTC. These environments may then lead to contexts in which learners have the upper hand. However, if the teacher has clear and concise classroom objectives, they increase their authoritative role in the classroom.

In conclusion, the role of the teacher is more important than one would think. Ultimately, an educator that balances a great set of competence skills and still shows adaptability to their learners' interests could potentially be the answer to a successful classroom.

6.3 Task Type/s

As previously mentioned in the group dynamics & group size section, both Maher and King (2022) and Al-Murtadha (2019) carried out a study mentioning the negative effects of silence in a classroom context, especially in relation to learners who had a low WTC. In relation to this, several of the participants of this study did express that they tend to avoid initiating conversation in several tasks, resulting in sometimes remaining silent. In contrast to this, Ingram and Elliot's (2014) study argued that silence could be re-constructed into a supporting act where learners' WTC would be challenged and promoted. In this specific case, it is clear that the guidance of the teacher can either enhance or inhibit the learners' WTC.

In this study, several of the participants emphasized the importance of the task and the positive effects it had on their WTC:

When it is about a topic that you like... I remember a different scenario where I held a presentation alone, and it was about a topic that I truly enjoyed. So... like, I had some pre-information'' about that specific topic, so it felt easier, and it made the task more fun to complete. (Student E)

In addition, Student A highlights that tasks that are close to the learners' hearts most certainly will be easier to communicate about: "[...] as a teacher, you can create room for students to pick and choose from topics that interest them. That way, you give them a safe space to communicate about something that they are interested in". Based on previous research, many findings have emphasized the use of authentic tasks (Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Brown & Lee, 2015, Littlewood, 2014). Correspondingly, the task type followed by the preparation time given to the learners also has been shown to be an influencing factor in terms of limiting their FLSA and, in turn, enhancing WTC. Although not stated in the previous research section, the findings of this study demonstrate that most of the students preferred informal tasks, such as spontaneous in-class activities, considering the feeling of being in a relatively similar state to their peers:

I think spontaneous and informal tasks are easier because we are all doing the same thing, and there is no time to dwell. I feel like formal settings can become frightening because I tend to push my deadline forward. [...] So, I prefer informal settings.
(Student B)

Although some of the participants of this study expressed that they enjoyed informal tasks due to them being less frightening, one cannot ignore the fact that good practice is a key factor in performing better. As demonstrated in Jamalifar and Salehi's (2020) findings, suggestions stated that strategic task planning could potentially lead to a more significant improvement in L2 WTC in comparison to rehearsal groups. As stated in these findings, any type of preparation time, whether it is for formal or informal tasks, is to the learners' benefit: "Good preparations really do affect if and how much I would like to later partake in discussions" (Student A). Finally, this demonstrates that task planning does have an impact on learners' willingness to partake in oral discourses. Thus, providing teachers with the correct tools can be to the learners' advantage in terms of reducing their language anxiety. Many studies have been conducted in the hopes of finding strategies that enhance EFL learners' participation and engagement in all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Therefore,

good lesson planning that provides space for students to practice and develop their learning is of great value. Although it is never guaranteed that practice does make perfect, as Student A so precisely stated: “[...] I think you can work on decreasing your anxiety as long as you are given the correct support”. When teachers provide learners with tasks that increase their engagement in the classroom as well as act in parallel with their interests, the outcome will evidently benefit them.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study suggest the following pedagogical implications for current and future EFL teachers. Firstly, as teachers, one should always be aware of the potential impact FLA has on learners' WTC. Therefore, one must take steps to create a supportive and encouraging classroom environment. Secondly, teachers should provide opportunities for learners to engage in low-anxiety communication activities, such as pair and group work. By doing so, they can gradually build the learners' confidence and improve their WTC. Finally, teachers should be sensitive to learners' individual needs and provide tailored support and feedback to help them overcome their FLA and increase their WTC.

Since Swedish EFL learners are no strangers to the English language, it seems as if the overall norm is for all learners to feel comfortable speaking in English. Especially in consideration of the fact that most learners use online platforms where English is used regularly. However, one cannot forget the overwhelming feeling of anxiety and how it has a negative effect on learners' performance. Therefore, it is of great importance that teachers discuss the many causes of anxiety in different context-based situations and implement this knowledge into their everyday teaching. The more it is spoken of, the more it can be prevented in advance.

In terms of engaging in conversational tasks, the participants expressed that being placed in situations where they were the center of attention restrained their willingness to communicate. Hence, one pedagogical implication would be for teachers to create tasks that are held in smaller groups, preferably in pairs. As defined in the syllabus, teachers must engender a “desire and confidence to use English in different situations and for different purposes” (Skolverket, 2022, p. 1). This can possibly be done by allowing learners to engage

in smaller groups in which they are given the space and time to successively work their way forward.

7.2 Suggestions for Future Research

As a soon-to-be teacher, the eager desire to figure out why some learners seek conversation while others avoid is yet to be discovered. Based on the findings of this study, the correlation between EFL learners' FLA and WTC can be highlighted through three focal points: group size & group dynamics, the role of the teacher, and finally, task type/s. However, due to time constraints and other influencing factors, the findings ultimately seek to provide readers with suggestions for future research.

One aspect that would most likely increase the validity of the study would be to try longitudinal studies. That way, the researcher would manage to gather more in-depth answers as to why and how EFL learners' foreign language speaking anxiety affects their willingness to communicate. In addition, the findings may indicate more straightforward strategies that could potentially help teachers enhance learners' WTC. In addition, in terms of increasing reliability, using a mixed-methods study approach could be of great use. For instance, creating a questionnaire with a wide selection of participants could potentially dig deeper into the effects of FLSA in correlation to WTC.

Finally, one interesting aspect worth investigating is how cross-cultural studies would have been carried out in comparison to this specific study. Sweden is a multicultural country that carries a wide range of diversities, especially in relation to its schooling system. For instance, certain learners come from different educational backgrounds, hence affecting their approach to different classroom environments. One interesting point of departure would be to explore the cultural differences among Swedish EFL learners and discover how these differences affect their perceptions and beliefs of WTC.

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Appendix A

Dear participant,

I am currently writing a degree project on the topic of EFL learners' willingness to communicate in correlation to foreign language speaking anxiety. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the relationship between these two factors and how they affect learners' encouragement and ability to communicate in English. To do so, I will be conducting interviews with 5-6 Swedish upper secondary learners to gather their perspectives and experiences.

I am writing to ask for your participation in my study in the form of a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews can be summarized as the type of interview method where you, as a participant, will be asked a set of open-ended questions and follow-up questions to further explore your responses regarding the topic of interest.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any given time. The data collected will be used solely for study purposes and kept strictly confidential. All data will be anonymized, and no identifying information will be included in the final report.

Please be aware that by participating in this study, you consent to the use of any information gathered during the interviews as part of the study. However, if at any point you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, you may decline to answer them, and your decision will be fully respected.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me. Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated and will contribute to a better understanding of foreign language speaking anxiety and its effects in contrast to EFL learners' willingness to communicate.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Sincerely,
Samar Gharibi

Appendix B

Dear participant(s),

The following interview will be divided into three categories, all of which are believed to have some correlation with EFL learners' foreign language speaking anxiety when placed in a setting of communication. However, as an introductory question:

Have you ever experienced anxiety while speaking English? If so, can you describe the situation and how you coped with it?

Moving forward, we will now focus on the three categories (aspects) mentioned earlier. These will set the tone for the interview and, hopefully, help collect essential data useful for this study. The categories are the following: *Group size & group dynamics, the role of the teacher, and finally, task type.*

Group size & group dynamics:

1. Can you tell us about your experience with speaking English in a group setting?
2. Have you ever abstained from speaking English because you were worried about making mistakes or being judged by others?
3. Does this experience vary based on the size of the group? E.g., pair discussions, group discussions, debates, etc.
4. Does this experience vary based on who the participants in the group setting are? E.g., classmates, close friends, strangers, etc.
5. How much would you say that the environment that you are in affects your FLSA and in return, WTC? Elaborate
6. Can you describe a time when you successfully communicated in English despite being in a group setting and feeling anxious?

Role of the teacher

7. Do you think that the language level of your teacher affects your willingness to communicate in English?
8. How do you perceive the role of the teacher in your level of FLA and your willingness to communicate in English?
9. Have you ever received feedback from a teacher about your level of FLA? How did you react to the feedback?
10. How do you think EFL teachers can encourage students to feel more comfortable and confident in using English for communicative purposes?

Task type/s:

11. Do you have any useful strategies that you go by in order to decrease your FLSA?
12. Do you feel more comfortable speaking English in a formal or informal setting?
13. In what types of tasks do you feel most confident speaking English?
14. Do ‘pre-planned’ tasks increase your willingness to communicate?
15. Does practice make perfect? Can enough practice *decrease* your FLSA?