# ANXIETY OVER LEARNING ENGLISH AT PRIMARY SCHOOL: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES

## LA ANSIEDAD EN EL APRENDIZAJE DEL INGLÉS EN EDUCACIÓN PRIMARIA: PERCEPCIONES Y ESTRATEGIAS EDUCATIVAS

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**ABSTRACT**

Language learning is a necessary and an effective means of facilitating communication in modern society. Anxiety in the learning process is evident as a limiting factor. The scarcity of research among pupils of young ages and the perceptions of the teaching staff motivate us to identify schools, teachers, and educational strategies that lead to lower levels of anxiety among pupils. We proposed a two-phase mixed methodology study. In the first phase, of a quantitative nature, the Spanish version of the FLCAS was employed in which 255 pupils participated from the 5th and 6th year of Primary Education at 5 schools in Burgos (Spain). In the second phase, of a qualitative nature, we designed a *focus-group* with 5 teachers around the following categories: learning of English and training in extra-curricular activities; factors generating anxiety and organizational and didactic resources to reduce anxiety. The results offer a wide range of useful educational resources to improve foreign language learning in Primary Education.

*Keywords:* foreign language, Primary, anxiety, educational strategies.

**RESUMEN**

El aprendizaje de lenguas es un instrumento necesario y eficaz para facilitar la comunicación en la sociedad actual. La ansiedad se evidencia como un factor limitante de ese aprendizaje. La escasez de investigaciones sobre edades tempranas y la percepción del profesorado, nos motiva a identificar centros, profesores y estrategias educativas utilizadas que derivan en menores niveles de ansiedad del alumnado. Planteamos un estudio de metodología mixta en dos fases. En la primera fase, de naturaleza cuantitativa, se llevó a cabo la versión española de FLCAS en 255 alumnos de 5º y 6º de Educación Primaria de 5 colegios en Burgos (España). La segunda fase, de naturaleza cualitativa, se organizó un *focus- group* con 5 profesores sobre las siguientes categorías: factores que generan ansiedad y recursos organizativos y didácticos para reducir dicha ansiedad. Los resultados ofrecen un amplio banco de útiles recursos educativos para mejorar el aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera en Educación Primaria.

*Palabras clave:* lengua extranjera, Primaria, ansiedad, estrategias educativas.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The need to learn languages is an unquestionable fact nowadays and the development of linguistic skills constitutes a priority line of European educational policy. This priority is due to the presentation of languages as a "real means of communication and openness to the other" (Beacco and Byram, 2007:30). A change is therefore perceptible in the teaching of languages that, rather than centring the objective on the model of the ideal native speaker, considers the need to prepare pupils as plurilingual and intercultural speakers (Beacco and Byram, 2007; Byram and Zarate, 1997).

In Spain, the current Foreign Language curriculum in Primary Education (Real Decreto 126/2014, of 28 Febrero) recognizes this need to train children, so that they can participate in that plurilingual context. In addition, it insists that they have to develop their basic communicative capability in the first foreign language, both in communicative interaction and in their understanding and production of texts in real and motivating communicative situations. This initial training in the school system is presented as the basis of permanent learning, hence the recommendation that teachers cultivate a special sensitivity to create an environment that favours language learning (Commission of the European Communities, 2003). Emphasis in the affective dimension of language teaching is placed on stimulating such factors as empathy, motivation, and self-esteem, to

create positive attitudes (Arnold and Brown, 1999). Emotions and their effect in this field should bring teachers closer to didactic proposals that promote such attitudes that will, in turn, reduce other negative elements such as anxiety (Falero Parra, 2016; Liu and Chen, 2013).

## 2. IMPACT OF ANXIETY ON LANGUAGE LEARNING IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

One of the principal factors that complicates the creation of a favourable educational atmosphere for effective interaction in a foreign language is anxiety, and since the 1980s, researchers have shown great interest in studying its causes (Bailey, 1983; Lucas, 1984; Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986; Young, 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989).

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) defined it as a subjective feeling of stress, apprehension, nervousness, and worry that leads to weaknesses in learning and performance. It is precisely oral communication in the foreign language that is one of the situations that provokes greater anxiety in the classroom. Likewise, this feeling hinders acceptable functioning, as the working memory is preoccupied by worry instead of focusing its thought on the task at hand (Eysenck, 1992). It occurs most frequently with foreign language teaching than in other areas of the curriculum, due to the difficulty of grappling with communication in a language other than the mother tongue and the methodology that the teacher employs can even generate levels of anxiety (Arnold and Brown, 1999).

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) devised a specific model to measure anxiety in foreign language learning known as the *Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS). As a consequence of research into the application of the FLCAS and its different versions, the factors that generate anxiety in foreign language classes have been identified, as well as interesting recommendations and teaching strategies to grapple with those factors and to generate a favourable atmosphere for use and communication in the classroom.

However, an absence of investigations on anxiety at early ages has also been noted (Chan and Wu, 2004; Yim and Yu, 2011). As Chan and Wu (2004) and Liu and Chen (2013) noted, anxiety is a significant problem that should not be ignored in Primary Education, because of its negative consequences. Along these lines, Liu and Chen (2013) found that pupils of that age presented preoccupations with their actions in the classroom and a lack of confidence in their use of oral skills. Nevertheless, anxiety levels were reduced when they felt motivated by the learning process and expressed interest in it, working in situations that

supported playful learning (Yan and Horwith, 2008; Yim and Yu, 2011). It was thereby revealed that there is a close relation between the teaching methodology in language teaching and anxiety as a factor that hinders that learning (Hita Pedrosa and Fernández Martín, 2013).

## 3. EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES TO REDUCE ANXIETY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Teaching methods should turn learning into an interesting and motivating process for pupils (Aida, 1994; Horwith, 2001) and will, in consequence, strengthen their self-confidence when communicating in a foreign language (Yim and Yu, 2011). Teachers can reduce anxiety through the use of positive reinforcement of the oral production of pupils (Horwitz, 2001); and motivation (Silva Ros, 2005), and the creation of a playful learning environment (Bhatti, Memon and Pathan, 2016). Oxford (1999) enlarged these strategies by proposing the creation of a relaxed atmosphere through music, games, and good humour, less competitive activities, the use of self-evaluation, motivating rewards, and the adaptation of activities to learning styles. Likewise, Ortega-Cebreros (2002) suggested assisting group work to encourage practice with class mates, to give them sufficient time to prepare their oral presentations, to use a positive language when correcting them so that error is converted into part of the learning process and, finally, to reduce situations of surprise when using the foreign language.

In brief, investigations into anxiety in the learning of foreign language are numerous, but not at such early ages as those corresponding to Primary Education, particularly in Spain. The majority of studies use the FLCAS, but the need is also detected to complement that scale with qualitative studies (Yim and Yu, 2011), particularly oriented towards teacher perceptions and the methodology in use, as up until the present the majority of investigations have been related to the point of view of the pupils (Martínez Agudo, 2013).

Faced with this situation, we propose an investigation that seeks to respond to the following questions. Are there differences in anxiety levels between pupils at different Primary Education schools? What are teacher perceptions of the factors that influence pupils both in a positive and in a negative way when learning a foreign language? What educational strategies do teachers use in those schools where pupils present less anxiety?

## 4. METHOD

### 4.1. Objectives

The objectives that we pursue in this investigation are as follows:

- To identify Primary Schools where pupils present lower levels of anxiety in the learning of English.
- To recognise the perceptions of teachers from those schools on various factors that influence the processes and the contexts of learning English and acceptable strategies to approach anxiety.

### 4.2. Procedure

We are conducting an investigation with a mixed approach that will allow us to enlarge and to deepen our perspective and our comprehension of the phenomenon under study through a sequential exploratory design (Creswell, 2014). Following Yim and Yu (2011), who underlined the need to carry out quantitative investigations that offer strategies to Primary School teachers for instilling confidence in their pupils, the following phases are proposed:

- Phase 1. Application of the FLCAS to identify schools in which pupils of Primary Education express low levels of anxiety in the learning of English.
- Phase 2. Organization of a *focus-group* with the teachers from the schools that have been identified that will help comprehend the educational strategies that they use in their teaching.

### 4.3. Participants

In the first phase, intentional sampling was performed, in a search for the greatest diversity in the typology of school and educational centre. The criteria followed to request their participation was as follows:

1) Geographical location: Rural and urban. The urban zone was also split into zones by socio-economic levels.
2) Educational offer of the schools and educational centre: Bilingual or otherwise.

Finally, 4 schools from the provincial capital, Burgos (1 from a high, 2 from a medium level, and 1 from a low socio-economic zone) and 1 provincial school; 255 pupils from 5th/6th year of Primary Education, 145 boys (56.6%) and 110 girls (43.0%) aged between 9 and 12 years old (M = 10.64; DT = 0.68). Two schools offered bilingual education.

In the second, work group was organized that participated in a *focus-group*, moderated by a lecturer from the University of Burgos, a specialist in the methodology of qualitative investigation and 2 teachers from a State-assisted school with a bilingual section (English) (T1, T2), 1 teacher from a state school and bilingual section (German) (T3), a Consultant from the linguistic-communicative area in the Teacher Training (TT) Centre in Burgos and a lecturer from University of Burgos, specialist in Didactics of Language and Literature (DLL) (English).

### 4.4. Instruments and techniques

In the first phase, of a quantitative nature, the Spanish version of the FLCAS (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986; Pérez-Paredes and Martínez-Sánchez, 2000) was employed, which offers a specific model to measure anxiety in the learning of foreign languages. It is the most widely used scale for that purpose (Arnaiz and Guillén, 2012). In it, three related factors are identified with anxiety: the act of communication; pre-exam anxiety, and fear of exam failure. It numbers 33 items that are valued on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1, totally agree; 5, totally disagree).

The second phase, of a qualitative nature, began with the need to investigate the perceptions of the teachers (Martínez Agudo, 2013). We considered the findings of Yin and Yu (2011) that recommended further studies to comprehend the influence of such variables as attendance at particular classes, motivation towards the foreign language and the relation between linguistic levels and the level of anxiety. Thus, we designed a *focus-group* around the following categories: learning of English and training in extra-curricular activities; factors generating anxiety; and, organizational and didactic resources to reduce anxiety and to improve learning. The technique lasted 40 minutes and the participants were relaxed throughout the session. Few discrepancies were found between them. The analysis of the information was done in accordance with the proposal from Green et al. (2008), in which they defined the following steps: immersion in the text, codification, categorization, and generation of topics.

## 5. DATA ANALYSIS / RESULTS

### 5.1. Quantitative

In the first descriptive analysis done on the three factors indicated in the FLCAS, we found no relevant differences between the schools, as shown in Table I.

**Table I.** FLCAS scores at the participating schools.

| School | | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Standard Deviation | Variance |
|--------|--------------|----|---------|---------|-------|-----------|----------|
| C1 | Apprehension | 15 | 15.00 | 42.00 | 28.67 | 8.56 | 73.24 |
| | Fear | 16 | 16.00 | 28.00 | 21.56 | 3.63 | 13.19 |
| | Others | 15 | 34.00 | 78.00 | 45.87 | 10.01 | 100.27 |
| C2 | Apprehension | 40 | 14.00 | 43.00 | 26.67 | 6.80 | 46.28 |
| | Fear | 40 | 12.00 | 27.00 | 19.07 | 3.76 | 14.17 |
| | Others | 39 | 27.00 | 45.00 | 38.79 | 4.29 | 18.43 |
| C3 | Apprehension | 89 | 14.00 | 50.00 | 28.37 | 8.43 | 71.10 |
| | Fear | 89 | 9.00 | 35.00 | 20.83 | 5.76 | 33.14 |
| | Others | 89 | 16.00 | 60.00 | 39.38 | 6.36 | 40.42 |
| C4 | Apprehension | 96 | 15.00 | 54.00 | 32.50 | 8.89 | 79.09 |
| | Fear | 99 | 11.00 | 34.00 | 32.50 | 5.88 | 34.68 |
| | Others | 91 | 30.00 | 67.00 | 42.34 | 6.34 | 40.31 |
| C5 | Apprehension | 8 | 18.00 | 41.00 | 29.25 | 8.58 | 73.64 |
| | Fear | 8 | 16.00 | 31.00 | 22.62 | 4.53 | 20.55 |
| | Others | 8 | 32.00 | 45.00 | 38.50 | 3.89 | 15.14 |

A second analysis, by means of PCA and a subsequent classification (Foss, 2016), presents the results in Graph 1.
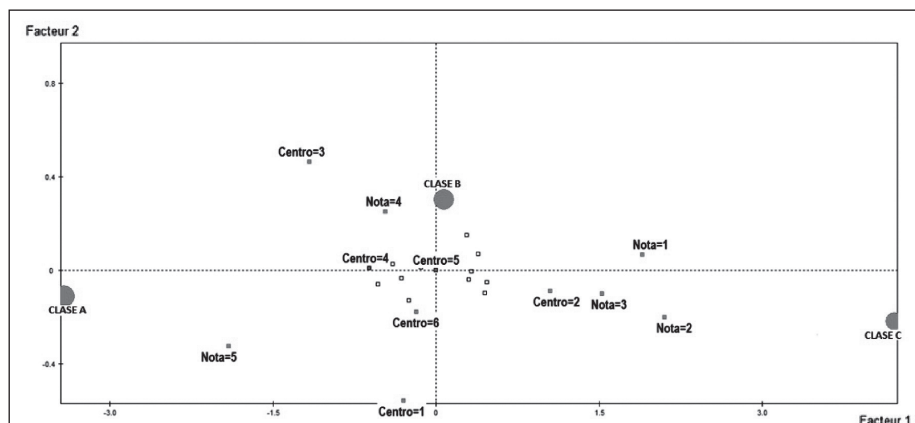
**Graph 1.** Results obtained from the PCA analysis.

The different factors of less anxiety (to the left) to greater anxiety (to the right) are organized in the graph. Thus, we may see that, among all of the participating pupils, those who obtained higher marks (value=5, Excellent) reported less anxiety than those who obtained lower marks (4= Very Good, 3= Good, 2= Pass, 1=Fail). Moreover, the schools were positioned in different situations and the analysis presented class A, with less anxiety, which grouped together two schools: both bilingual, one with a high socioeconomic level and another with pupils with high cultural diversity and a low socio-economic level. Likewise, another two classes were defined, B and C, with higher degrees of anxiety among the pupils. The teachers from the schools that defined Class A, with other language-teaching specialists, were the participants in the *focus-group*.

## 5.2. Qualitative

When completing the analysis of the *focus-group* content, we find matters emerging that appear in the discourse and that are related with factors that have a negative influence on the learning of English and the different strategies used by teachers to reduce anxiety.

### 5.2.1. Factors with a negative influence on the learning of English

We find two different contexts on this point: one related to the social and the other from the educational environment.

**a) Factors from the social context:** The learning of English at school is not unconnected to the social context in which it takes place. Numerous factors emerge on this point in the discourse:

- A high "social pressure" and from the "job market" are identified in relation to foreign language learning. It is relevant to highlight that the contributions on this point are not only from teachers, but also from mothers and fathers.

> *I think it's a parental priority, not that they get good or bad marks in English, but learning languages, to learn English, even before going to school (…) I personally do make sure they do, as a teacher and as a parent* (T1).
> *As a mother (…) from a very early age, because you are aware that it's all the same if you're an excellent engineer; if you don't speak foreign languages, they're not going to employee you. It's a social pressure* (TT).

- This pressure to learn another language is identified as a need, but some participants also define it as a "fashion" that directly influences the pupils.

> *The majority of children go to English class, to French class, to German, Chinese is becoming fashionable, they go to music and they do a sport, it's quite generalized. At the same time, I believe it's a fashion* (T2).

- Within this fashion/need, the constant "certification of learning" appears directly, in some cases, very far removed from the reality of language skills.

> *I believe that in this country there is a (…) 'glut of certificates', so, what happens? A child ends up in second place in the pre-university exams, has studied English (…) and wishes to follow (…) an Erasmus course. For example, my son did not pass in the first round, because he's got no certificate that says he has the First or the Toefl… The fact is that he has been in Canada, in Chicago… But as he doesn't have the "piece of paper" … In the end you stop and think, what he's got to do is go to an academy and get the certificate…* (T2).
> *It's just that in the end (…) however well you might speak, even though you may have been in a bilingual section, however much you've… if you don't present the piece of paper…* (T2).

The participants reported that English, finally, has become yet another activity to keep their children busy.

> *…I think that parents today, we have a workload just trying to keep the children busy as well (…) in the sense that I take him to tennis class, the boy is busy, because I don't*

> *have him at home, because he's not with a girl or watching the tv* (T2).
> *...a boy leaves class and has: English class, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday; Tuesdays and Thursdays, piano; then, guitar; as well as guitar he has to go to football (...)There are children that say: 'But I haven't done the homework" – "What's happened to you?", "It's that yesterday I got home at nine". How are you going to do the homework at nine? At nine you should be in bed!!!* (T2).

Some are especially critical because of the maddeningly busy life of young people that deprives them of valuable time for play and leisure.

> *(…) we are mad, and I wish to say so, because our children are the ones who'll suffer, we are academically ill (…) I think that a child, at a certain age will learn, and we have all learnt. (…) This obsession… small children have to play and have to learn by playing and enjoying themselves, and that is what we're taking from them, we're taking something away that is very important* (T3).

It all drives the development of extra-curricular activities linked to the learning of languages, in some cases with scant reflection on the real needs of young people.

> *We went from academy to academy, as the child was "burning out" or you were losing patience with the teacher of the day, without really reflecting on what the child was doing in those extra-curricular classes, rather than that pressure of the more English classes the better and everybody's happy* (DLL).

This social reality is found to be directly linked to the educational environment.

**b) Factors of the educational context:** Mothers/Fathers have to be aware of the reality in which their children find themselves, apart from the fashions or external pressures, and they must reflect upon them. We should trust (be able to trust) in the educational system.

> *Although I might have an acquisitive level to send them to these (extra-curricular) classes, I also ask whether that investment that we (parents) are all doing is real, whatever we may achieve or do I have to trust in the educational system. And then I say: I'm going to trust in the educational system. I clearly believe that it has the responsibility to educate* (DLL).

The educational system responds globally to the needs of pupils, but it would also be necessary to reflect on some aspects that are open to both revision and improvement (ratio, homework…).

> *I believe that we should also blame the system… when you have 25/26 children in a class (...) the activities that may be done and the way of focusing it will be completely different* (T2).
> *Well, there's a mistake there, because if parents feel that they have to help the children in class, I believe that it's a mistake:* [DLL sits down] *either the parents have not been informed that it is not their role to help the children or the homework that the children bring home is not appropriate* (TT).

A fundamental element that all the participants recognize is the inappropriate curricular structure for the learning of English. Especially relevant is the example given by one participant, corroborated by the others, on the reality of educational planning that she has experienced.

> *Every year I went to French, I started at 11 years old, there was a jump in difficulty each year. In other words, there was a jump from the first to the second year, jump after jump after jump in difficulty… when I left the Sixth Form, in other words, on finishing ESO, I spoke French. I don't see so many jumps here* (TT).
> *No, there's no jump here… Here it appears that we are repeating* (DLL).

The methodology, which is not always the most appropriate, also acquires immense importance, maintaining approaches and habits that are centred more on attachment to the textbook.

> *For example, they have extra-homework at my school, I mean: Mother of God. We punish them at playtime so that they do the homework, don't we, are we really going to leave a child without playtime, because he hasn't done his homework? (…) Great, he hasn't done the homework, we're going to speak to him, we're going to look for other means...* (T3).
> *I'm in the first* [textbook]*, but it's all the same to me (…) as, if I don't finish the four books…* (T2).

Anxiety consists of another basic element.

> *What we see in class is that the boys who have a good level, I don't think they are anxious, quite the reverse, they're all too ready to speak, to listen, to lift up their hand. It's another thing to be fearful, anxious…. over poor marks. Always, even though you have a good level of English* (T1).
> *Normally there's more to it...* [anxiety] *whether they'll correct you* (DLL).

The negative factors presented in this section are summarized in Figure 1, to be able to see them more easily.
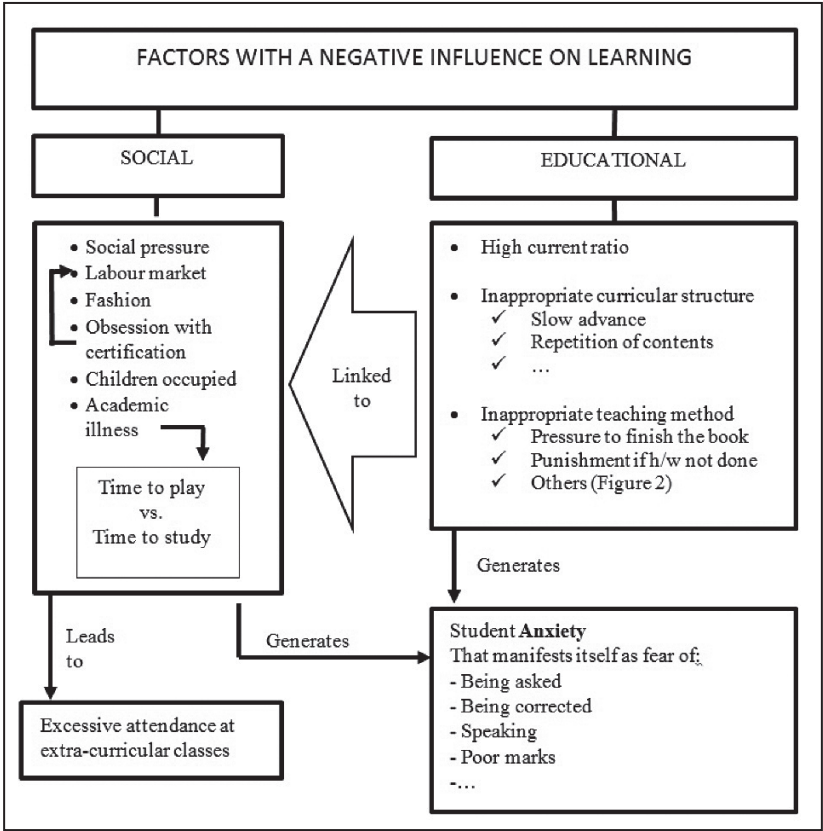
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        FACTORS WITH A NEGATIVE INFLUENCE ON LEARNING

        SOCIAL                              EDUCATIONAL

  • Social pressure                  • High current ratio
  • Labour market
  • Fashion                          • Inappropriate curricular structure
  • Obsession with                      ✓ Slow advance
    certification                      ✓ Repetition of contents
  • Children occupied      Linked      ✓ …
  • Academic               to
    illness                          • Inappropriate teaching method
                                       ✓ Pressure to finish the book
    Time to play                       ✓ Punishment if h/w not done
    vs.                                ✓ Others (Figure 2)
    Time to study

                                            Generates

  Leads        Generates          Student Anxiety
  to                              That manifests itself as fear of:
                                  - Being asked
                                  - Being corrected
  Excessive attendance at         - Speaking
  extra-curricular classes        - Poor marks
                                  -…
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Figure 1. Negative factors linked to the learning of English
as perceived by teachers. Source: Authors.

### 5.2.2. Educational strategies to reduce anxiety

We seek to summarize the principal strategies expressed by the teaching staff below.

### a) Organizational

The first point is related to academic organization and the assessment of long-term planning.

> *She's at an advantage because she's going to be the teacher of the same children, so she knows what she hasn't got time for now…* (T1).
> *They are projects* [that they develop] *in the long term, over two years, for example, you have some children from the third or the fourth year, from the fifth or the sixth, you've two years to achieve it, to get there, well, take your time. It's all fine* (T1).

The planning in addition should be in harmony with a general view of the centre and have the support of the management team.

> *You're at an advantage if the management team has the same views or not* (T3).
> *Yes, mate, that's basic* (T2).

## b) Curricular

- Basic principles: Pupil motivation is fundamental and that they enjoy learning. To do so, all the participants pointed out that it is fundamental to reduce the pressure on completing the textbooks.

> *… I go very slowly through the topics and I have realized that the important thing for me is not the topic in itself* (T3).
> *I don't think that it's important to finish a textbook* (T2).

The preparation of materials by the teachers themselves, adapted to the projects that were designed, helps the interests of pupils, the reality of the group.

> *To make it more attractive to children and so that it sticks, the work of the teacher is important to create materials and resources...* (T1).

The use of English should take up as much time as possible in the class. All the participants found arguments to defend that point of view.

> *The English class is in English* (T2).

> *I always use it even though I have a very poor level. (…) I say to them: 'there will be things that you won't understand, go on, you keep watching and listening, that's the important thing* (T3).

- Methodology: Classroom management is also notable. It begins with attention to diversity, where we find total agreement over the methodology that has to be based on cooperation.

> *We work on cooperative aspects. (…) we form a group of four or of five: (…) a pupil with a high level, one with difficulties and two of a medium level, which is what you find in a class (…) we make them work in cooperation and off they go helping each other. There are things that are done individually, but most of it is done in the group. And they help each other* (T2).
> *They change groups, every term. The roles of each group also change* (T2).

We find a topic to which they attach great importance in the completion of the activities: the way in which the response/participation is requested. There are multiple strategies that are proposed and the interest of all participants is high:

- Work on the answer in a team.

> *And if you are going to propose a question, first, do it between the four that have worked on a response, and then they will answer with the group response. It's fundamental* (TT).
> *That will give them more confidence when speaking and answering* (DDL).
> *I'm introducing this now and it's working very well so I am now introducing it and its working very well for me* (T3).

- Give enough time to prepare the response.

Or simply count up to three before asking for a response. As simple as that. You open a question… Make a short pause for them to think of the answer and then you ask for the answer (AL)

> *Well, give them time to think about it …* (DDL)

- Ask for volunteers and then work with those who have no wish to perform in front of the class.

> *I've realized all that about: "go on, you answer" …. No! It's better to say: 'who'd like to answer?'. And then you encourage the one that didn't wish to answer. But you don't encourage him in that activity, but you until they're doing some written work. (…) Because when you say: "Come on, you can do it" in front of the class, then "Everybody's looking at me… (*T3).

- Assessment: Assessment must also appear as a key element. The final tests, as in any other discipline are a stressful aspect. Nevertheless, the teachers fix their attention on the classroom activity, taking great care over correcting the pupil. This correction process can be an aspect of reinforcement and motivation or, on the contrary, a factor that generates anxiety.

> It depends on the atmosphere that you have achieved in class, if the mistake is a source of learning: "Very good, it could have been 'I see', but it would in fact be 'I son'" so you get over the anxiety like that, it depends on how those mistakes that the children make are treated. And how many mistakes do you correct? If you correct all 16 mistakes in one sentence with 16 mistakes, you destroy the pupil (TT).

We can highlight a very motivating proposal that can help the pupil to see and to value the learning that takes place (self-evaluation): the lines of learning.

> When they say to me 'I don't like English', I reply 'How do you know?' We are going to follow a line of learning in English. (…) you, how are you? There's always someone who says "I know nothing". You're no good at English? No… You'll be in a fourth year, in a fifth-year class… but knowing nothing, no. Then when we start the [teaching] unit, they place their arrow on the line and they say where they are. And when they finish, then we reflect on it. This is (…) one way of making them aware. How does the arrow move?... Well, by studying, paying attention in the classroom… (T3).

Finally, we summarized the proposals from the participant teachers in Figure 2, some of which were identified in previous studies as good practice for the reduction of anxiety.
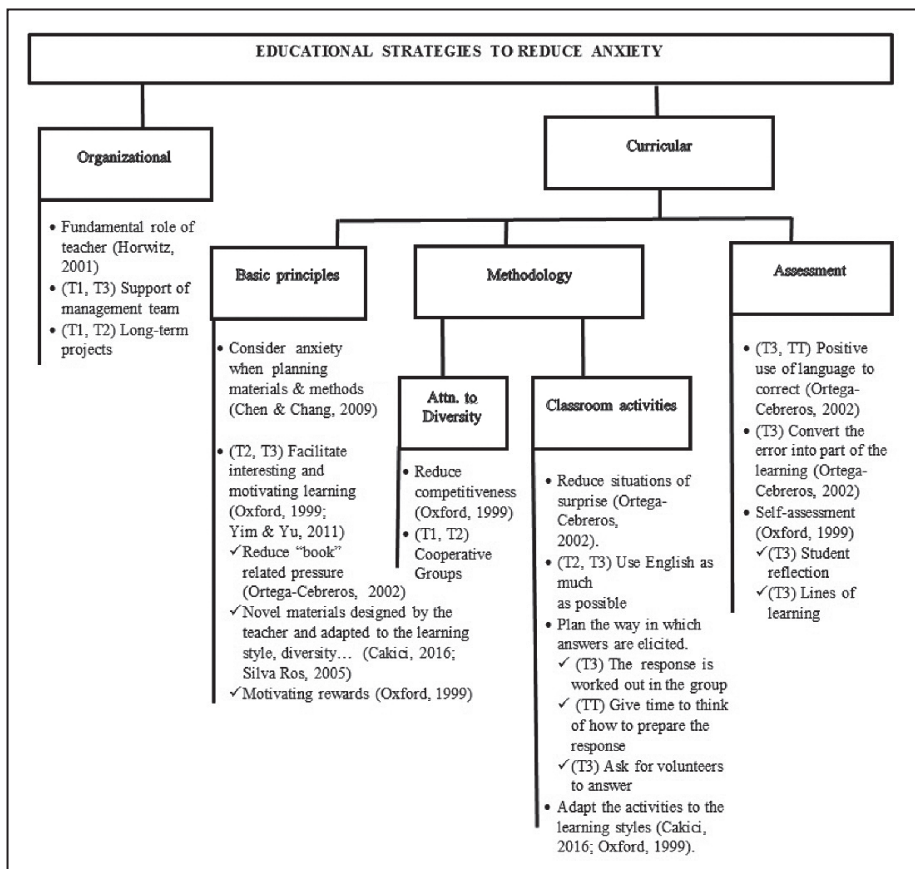
**EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES TO REDUCE ANXIETY**

**Organizational**
- Fundamental role of teacher (Horwitz, 2001)
- (T1, T3) Support of management team
- (T1, T2) Long-term projects

**Curricular**

**Basic principles**
- Consider anxiety when planning materials & methods (Chen & Chang, 2009)
- (T2, T3) Facilitate interesting and motivating learning (Oxford, 1999; Yim & Yu, 2011)
  ✓ Reduce "book" related pressure (Ortega-Cebreros, 2002)
  ✓ Novel materials designed by the teacher and adapted to the learning style, diversity... (Cakici, 2016; Silva Ros, 2005)
  ✓ Motivating rewards (Oxford, 1999)

**Methodology**

**Attn. to Diversity**
- Reduce competitiveness (Oxford, 1999)
- (T1, T2) Cooperative Groups

**Classroom activities**
- Reduce situations of surprise (Ortega-Cebreros, 2002).
- (T2, T3) Use English as much as possible
- Plan the way in which answers are elicited.
  ✓ (T3) The response is worked out in the group
  ✓ (TT) Give time to think of how to prepare the response
  ✓ (T3) Ask for volunteers to answer
- Adapt the activities to the learning styles (Cakici, 2016; Oxford, 1999).

**Assessment**
- (T3, TT) Positive use of language to correct (Ortega-Cebreros, 2002)
- (T3) Convert the error into part of the learning (Ortega-Cebreros, 2002)
- Self-assessment (Oxford, 1999)
  ✓ (T3) Student reflection
  ✓ (T3) Lines of learning

**Figure 2.** Educational strategies proposed by teachers and researchers to reduce anxiety in the learning of English.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Seeking to respond to our first research question and to achieve our set objective, we have identified schools that have pupils with high –and also with low– levels of linguistic competence and low levels of anxiety. These results coincide –and in the second case are opposed to– those of MacIntyre and Gardner (1989), who affirmed that the level of anxiety decreased as the linguistic skills of the pupils increased. The pupils with greater linguistic competence were less anxious and showed better performance (Chen and Chang, 2009). One of the participant teachers also expressed the same idea. Nevertheless, we underline the surprising result of low anxiety among children with a low linguistic level, and family mem-

bers also with a low socio-economic level; a result that we link to the work of their teacher for having created a motivating, relaxed, and playful environment, with constant positive stimulus, as Aida (1994), Bhatti. Memon and Pathan (2016), Horwitz et al. (1986), Silva Ros (2005), Yim and Yu (2011) and Young (1992) all previously found. We can therefore say that the teachers, their attitudes and their form of working are fundamental in this field (Horwitz, 2001).

The principal factors that the teachers perceive as a negative influence on the teaching of English are of a social and an educational type. Among the first, we can highlight the pressure to study English and to gain certificates of linguistic competence that, together with an obsessive tendency for the children to be busy all the time, implies overvaluing traditional extra-curricular activities (Yim and Yu, 2011). In contrast, the participant teachers highlighted the importance of entrusting the learning of languages to the educational system, in agreement with Beacco and Byram (2007) who referred to the responsibilities that educational systems have to assume, to form plurilingual competences in compulsory education. In any case, it appears recommendable to consider integrated extra-curricular activities, such as those proposed by the High-Level Group on Multilingualism (COM, 2007), where language learning is integrated in leisure and sports activities, as well as encouraging the viewing of subtitled films in the original language.

Educational factors linked to reasoning, curricular structure, and inappropriate methods have also been identified in our work as negative and anxiety-related influences. As a response to counter these influences, we have sought to organize a set of educational (organizational and curricular) strategies used by the participant teachers and/or tested by different researchers, which help to reduce anxiety. An innovative value is conferred to this work by its articulation of such strategies in Primary Education, which can be especially useful in initial and permanent training programmes of foreign language teachers in which educational strategies to confront anxiety should be included (Alshahrani and Alshahrani, 2015; Cakıcı, 2016).

In brief, we have learnt what teachers do (or can do) whose pupils present low anxiety, but it is worth asking what happens to those who work at schools with high levels of anxiety. Do they use those same strategies? If they also use them, will other factors that we have not identified also influence them? These possible limitations of the study can at the same time imply interesting challenges for future investigations. It is necessary to continue with and to deepen our study of the topic at the Primary Education stage, to increase the confidence of pupils when learning English at early ages. All the more so in contexts such as Castile and Leon –that is similar to the one described by Liu and Chen (2013) in Taiwan– where exposure to English or contact with native speakers is very infrequent and language use in the classroom is limited.

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