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## **EFL FUTURE ENGINEERS' LANGUAGE ANXIETY: FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATIONS AND ORAL EXAMINATIONS**

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### **Abstract**

*For many years, undergraduate students' foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been investigated. These students have experienced different levels of FLA due to several variables leading them to feel anxious during final summative examinations. In this context, several EFL future engineers show anxiety when performing classroom final project presentations and oral examinations at ESPRIT, School of Engineering, Tunisia. Despite the significance of FLA for research and researching, few studies missed the correlation between anxiety and final oral assessments in Tunisian academic settings. Thus, the researchers in this study were interested in reviewing the factors and causes of anxiety as experienced by EFL students so that the right strategies can be implemented. This study collected data from 129 participants of both electromechanical and civil*

*engineering second-year students through an adapted version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, et al. (1986). The results show eight factors and six causes impeding undergraduate students from speaking their minds orally. It follows some implications for language teaching are offered to reduce EFL Future Engineers' English Language Anxiety while performing Final Project Presentations and Oral Examinations.*

### **Keywords**

Anxiety, Foreign Language Anxiety, Second-year students, Factors, Causes, Oral Performances.

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## **1. Introduction**

Recent concerns about foreign language anxiety (FLA) have generated a considerable body of research. Starting from the 70s, several research projects investigated the importance and complexity of FLA as a research area. “There are many researchers who made an investigation into students’ foreign language anxiety” (Karatasa, Alcia, Bademcioglu, & Ergin, 2016, p. 383); “The concept of foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been well established in sociolinguistic studies since the 1980s” (Alsowat, 2016, p. 196). Moreover, this psychological phenomenon can be both negative and positive as it can sometimes motivate the EFL learner to acquire the target language. “To sum up, foreign language anxiety is considered an essential phenomenon that needs to be investigated...” (Rafada & Madini, 2017, p. 310).

### **1.1. Scene Setting**

FLA has always been considered a confusing psychological phenomenon when learning a foreign language. This phenomenon “... is closely related to the psychological system of individuals who are experiencing feelings beyond what it would normally be.” (Almira, Rachmawati, & Faridah, 2018, p. 57). It follows, this complex construct can be experienced while learners endeavor to master the four English language learning skills. One of these skills is speaking publicly. The connection between EFL anxiety and oral performances is generally discussed in several researches. According to Rafada and Madini (2017) “... speaking is the most anxiety-provoking skill among the four main English language skills” (p. 309). In addition, Fadlan (2020) states that “Speaking a foreign language in front of people usually triggers an anxiety.” (p. 219). Within this context, the present research is conducted to investigate further the correlation between EFL anxiety and final oral examinations at the School of Engineering (ESPRIT), Tunisia: final mini-project presentations and oral B2 level examination.

Researchers have identified several factors contributing to FLA. One major factor is communication apprehension. “It refers to an individual’s level of anxiety when interacting with other speakers.” (Bensalem, 2017, p. 236). It follows, learners prefer not to communicate with others and remain silent. Test anxiety is still another factor contributing to FLA. “... an unpleasant experience held either consciously or unconsciously by learners in many situations.” (Yahya, 2013, p. 230). According to Horwitz and Young (1991), this factor occurs in any academic assessment as learners are generally afraid from failure and the negative impression that may accompany it. The most important factor is the fear of negative evaluation. It “... involves fear from being evaluated in any setting, not just the classroom.” (Bensalem, 2018, p. 214). This factor is the result of the learners’ lack of self-confidence while performing the target language. In other words, this factor refers to “... the fear of being evaluated by the instructor as well as by peers.” (Bensalem, 2017, p. 236).

Other factors may interfere with learning a foreign language. Some recent surveys (Hanifa, 2018) detected various factors leading to the learners’ anxiety (Fadlan, 2020). For example, the lack of practice as in our case in Tunisia, the competition between learners inside the classroom, and the difficulty levels of classroom activities. In short, these factors contribute to learners’ anxiety in an EFL context.

Over decades, second/foreign language anxiety has been investigated by several researchers to depict not only different factors but also different reasons impeding students’ learning. One major reason for FLA is the classroom size, where students will not enjoy the same opportunities of practicing the target language. Another reason for FLA as presented by researchers is low self-esteem (Fadlan, 2020). Generally, learners prefer to remain silent or chat with their peers during classroom sessions instead of asking questions. They believe that practicing the target language is an opportunity for others to laugh at them and therefore they lose face. “They are afraid of being ridiculed and not accepted as an authority.” (Kráľová & Petrova, 2017, p. 112). Other researchers claimed that the traditional teaching methods are still another reason discouraging the speaking of foreign languages. “Studies have shown that Saudi teachers have been reluctant to adopt a style consistent with contemporary methods.” (Tanielian, 2017, p. 125).

Instructors generally tend to prepare their students to take exams and forget all about preparing them to speak and practice the target language in authentic contexts. It follows learners

will be more reluctant to speak the target language. Hence, their FLA will increase, and this can be noticed in their public speaking performances. Al-Saraj (2014) investigated the FLA levels in a college. The findings showed that the participants' average mean scores ranged from 2.00 to 4.30 out of 5.00. According to Chen (2015), students get nervous while presenting publicly. "The results suggested that L2 students' anxiety forms mental blocks during presentations, ..." (p. xii). Putri and Marlina (2019) found that 80% of the participants experienced moderate levels of speaking anxiety. Finally, Yulian and Ruhama (2020) identified low, moderate, and high as three levels of language anxiety. "... Low Language Anxiety with a range of scores 16-27, Moderate Language Anxiety with a range of scores 28- 45, and High Language Anxiety with a range of scores 46-60." (p. 233). However, this high language anxiety score may not be the case at ESPRIT because our foreign language learners are encouraged to perform publicly. In short, despite this communicative approach at ESPRIT, FLA may occur while performing orally.

ESPRIT Second-year students undergo different methods of evaluations such as oral presentations as it is more engaging and active. "... since conventional lecture is no longer used as the best way to engage students in active learning." (Yulian & Ruhama, 2020). These students are encouraged to work in small groups to design a smart city mockup and give fifteen-minute presentations after six weeks of collaborative work representing thirty percent of their final module average. Another important method of evaluation is the final B2 level oral assessment. Successful students receive a B2 level certificate to obtain their final graduation engineering degree.

## **1.2. Purpose of Study**

This research study has to investigate the EFL future engineers' speaking anxiety while performing classroom final project presentations and oral B2 level examinations. It aims to understand the roles and causes regarding foreign language anxiety in mastering oral skills. In a nutshell, this study seeks to address the following questions:

- 1- What levels of FLA among EFL future engineering students?
- 2- What psychological factors does anxiety play in EFL final oral examinations?
- 3- What causes anxiety to occur when presenting publicly or sitting for an oral B2 level examination?

## **2. Literature Review**

This literature review seeks to clarify the concept of FLA, its factors, reasons, and solutions for better foreign language oral performance in a way to reduce its ambiguity for researchers and research.

### **2.1. Anxiety**

Anxiety as an intense tension can be activated with a “trigger” (Kráľová & Petrova, 2017) that occurs in different situations. This trigger is a stimulus resulting in “... adaptive reaction which mobilizes the organism and helps it defend, attack or avoid...” (Kráľová, Foreign Language Anxiety, 2016, p. 3). We can differentiate between three psychological classifications of anxiety: trait, state, and situation-specific anxiety (Horwitz E. K., Language Anxiety and Achievemen, 2001). However, Fadlan (2020) challenges this widely held by suggesting other types of anxiety in presentations. “...facilitative, debilitating, and non-effecting anxiety.” (Fadlan, 2020, p. 225). One major example of situation-specific anxiety in foreign language learning. “... anxiety is a complex phenomenon that is connected to a specific language learning context.” (Bensalem, 2017, p. 235).

### **2.2. Foreign Language Anxiety**

According to Horwitz et al., FLA is “a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process.” (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p. 128).

In two studies of their first kind in Tunisia examining FLA levels, Bensalem (2017) reported a significant correlation between FLA and language performance. With seventy-three Tunisian students learning general English, his first study showed that these Tunisian students “... experienced average levels of FLA.” (p. 244). Similarly, in his second study conducted on “... the profiles of 277 quadrilingual learning English as a Foreign Language in Tunisia.” (Bensalem, 2018, p. 213), he concluded that EFL Tunisian learners witnessed low to average levels of FLA. The study was another evidence proving the negative correlation between FLA and language performance in the Tunisian context.

### **2.3. FLA and Classroom Presentation**

Unlike the writing skill, speaking as performance occurs in front of an audience such as classroom presentations and public announcements. “It is necessarily crucial for students in

higher education to experience a genuine experience such as a business presentation.” (Yulian & Ruhama, 2020, p. 228).

Unfortunately, FLA as an emotional factor is apparent in classroom presentations, too. “Anxiety in the classroom presentation has a debilitating effect on students’ success in learning a foreign language (FL)” (Djumingin, Weda, & Juanda, 2019, p. 01). This study was conducted on sixty-two undergraduate students. The finding revealed the significant role FLA can play in the failure of classroom presentations.

Huda and Ma’mun (2020) took an attempt to investigate further students’ anxiety while presenting inside the classroom. They researched preselected forty-one students. The findings of the study revealed a strong existence of anxiety among freshmen students. “The highest score of speaking anxiety is 54, the lowest score is 26, and the average is 39.025.” (Huda & Ma’mun, 2020, pp. 81-82).

Another study investigating further students’ anxiety while presenting was a study conducted by Yulian and Ruhama (2020) at the University of Muhammadiyah Pontianak, Indonesia. The total number of participants was 50 students. The findings of the study informed a strong existence of high anxiety levels among business students. “The mean scores of language anxiety scale indicated that students possessed High Language Anxiety.” (Yulian & Ruhama, 2020, p. 233).

To further investigate this psychological concept, researchers tried hard to understand the relationship between language learning and several linguistic variables such as factors and causes (Kráľová, Foreign Language Anxiety, 2016). The following section will review separately the various factors as well as causes to FLA as dealt with by the researcher.

#### **2.4. Foreign Language Anxiety Factors**

“One of the most important affective factors that affect language learning is Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)” (Alsowat, 2016, p. 194). The investigation of this psychological factor helped Horwitz et al. (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) to identify three sub-factors: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. However, they were not enough for researchers to base their study upon. Indeed, several studies received a lot of attention to better understand FLA factors such as age, gender, language achievement (Bensalem, 2018); English as a lingua franca; (Kráľová, 2016); and lack of preparation (Huda & Ma’mun, 2020).

To identify the FLA factors while presenting, Huda & Ma'mun (2020) interviewed some English Department freshmen students at UIN Walisongo Semarang University. eleven questions were enough for these researchers to identify the FLA factors responsible for the "... respondents' anxiety during a presentation in front of the class" (Huda & Ma'mun, 2020, p. 81). These factors "... are overthinking, lack of preparation, bad experience, low proficiency, low self-confidence, afraid of making mistakes, and test." (Huda & Ma'mun, 2020, p. 82).

## **2.5. Causes of Foreign Language Anxiety**

Hanifa (2018) presented in his paper several factors and sources to FLA in a way to review this psychological phenomenon. Take the example of collaboration. "Performing a speaking task on your own is generally harder..." (Hanifa, 2018, p. 234). Consequently, the learners' level of anxiety will rise because not only they are alone during their oral performance, but also no peer to support or help them like in small group conversations, where anxiety is low.

In a recent study article, Fadlan (2020) identified ten internal causes of FLA in classroom presentations. His qualitative research subjects were six graduate students conducting presentations, yet the researchers did not state whether his subjects are males, females, or a mixture.

## **2.6. Research Gap**

The pressure to learn the target language increases the levels of anxiety inside Tunisian classrooms. Despite this FLA's importance for research and researching, few attempts have been made to clarify this concept. Some researchers like (Bensalem, 2017); (Boustani, 2019) have focused on speaking anxiety inside the Tunisian classroom during normal session hours. However, these studies missed the correlation between anxiety and final oral assessments such as public presenting and oral examinations in Tunisian academic settings. We noticed this missing part in all reviewed articles above. Hence, the significance of this research as it fills this gap perfectly.

## **3. Methodology**

This study uses qualitative analysis to gain insights into the participants' FLA factors as well as causes. Hence the necessity of a whole process of conducting the survey, collecting data, analyzing, and finding out results.

### **3.1. Participants**

This study used a convenience sample of 129 second-year electromechanical and civil engineering students at a private Tunisian University during the academic year 2020/2021. These participants are studying the CCCA2 module in their first semester. They were invited to complete two pre-task questionnaires. The total invited number of students to take each questionnaire was 157. Both questionnaires were available in Google classrooms one week before the target task. The CCCA2 is a 42-hour module including 10 hours of mini-project mockup preparation and final classroom presentations along with three hours of B2 level oral examination. In case the students fail this B2 oral assessment, they will be offered another chance in their Senior year. All the participants are sophomore male and female students, who have already studied the 42-hour CCCA1 module as freshman students. The participants' English proficiency levels range from A2 to B2 according to the CEFR standards.

### **3.2. Questionnaires**

The researchers designed two different questionnaires in both Arabic and French. Arabic is the students' mother tongue and French is their second language. The design of the questionnaires was based on the original Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed in 1986 to measure the levels of anxiety in foreign language classes (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). The modifications were done on purpose due to the redundancy that characterizes the original Horwitz et al.'s anxiety scale.

### **3.3. Observation**

To find an answer to the research questions raised above, classroom observations were used in this study. The researchers have resorted to two types of observations while EFL learners are performing an activity: incidental and planned observations. First, incidental observations during teaching activities such as expressing a personal point of view about a warmup topic. Second, planned observations during final classroom presentations.

## **4. Results and Findings**

### **RQ 1: What levels of FLA among EFL future engineering students?**

The first pre-task questionnaire concerned the final mini-project presentations. The level of FLA reported by students as shown below in (Table 1) was moderate.



**Table 1.** Mean, Standard Deviation, and Level of FLA in Mini-Project Presentations

Statements	Total	MEAN	SD	Level
24	69	3.367754	0.497802	Moderate

(Source : Mini-Project Présentation Questionnaire)

As can be seen in (Table 1) above the mean score reported by students was (M= 3.36, Std. 0.49). The findings reveal that second-year students at ESPRIT School of Engineering Tunisia experienced moderate FLA before giving their final mini-project presentations.

The second pre-task questionnaire concerned the final B2 level oral examination. The level of FLA reported by students as shown below in (Table 2) was moderate, too.

**Table 2.** Mean, Standard Deviation, and Level of FLA in Oral B2 Level Exam

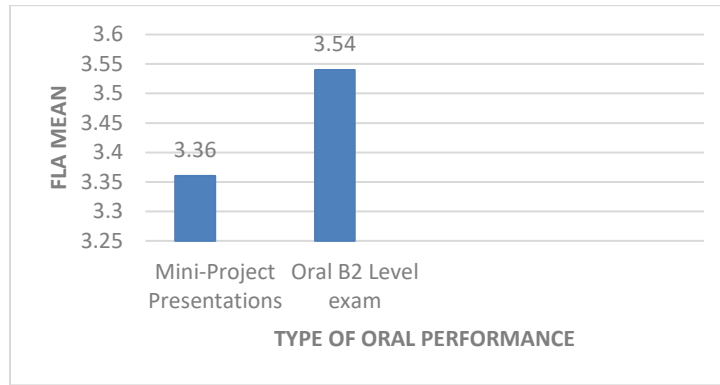
Statements	Total	MEAN	SD	Level
23	60	3.541304348	0.21786279	Moderate

(Source : Oral B2 Levels Questionnaire)

It can be seen from the data in (Table 2) the mean score reported by students is (M= 3.54, Std. 0.21). The results show that second-year students at ESPRIT experienced moderate FLA levels before sitting for their final oral B2 level exam.

Overall, these findings indicate that the second-year students at ESPRIT experienced moderate FLA levels in both final oral performance exams (Figure 1). However, it should be noted that the participants scored slightly higher rates of FLA in the pre-task final B2 level oral examination. This slight difference is due to the importance given to the oral B2 level exam. Indeed, students are taking this exam for the first time in their engineering cycle as opposed to classroom presentations.

**Figure 1:** *FLA Means of 2nd-year students in Final Oral Performances*



*(Source : Mini-Project Presentation & Oral B2 Level Questionnaires)*

The survey results of this study were further investigated using factor and cause analysis. Due to factor and cause interpretability, both pre-task questionnaires generated data about the second-year engineering students' FLA.

**4.1. The Pre-Task Mini-Project Presentation Questionnaire**

This anonymous questionnaire posted on Google classroom stream consists of (24) statements taken voluntarily by 69 students. It is a five-point scale line up from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

**4.1.1. FLA Factors**

The analysis of the (24) statements in the pre-task presentation questionnaire revealed seven factors to FLA (Table 3). These factors are ranked from moderate to high FLA levels.

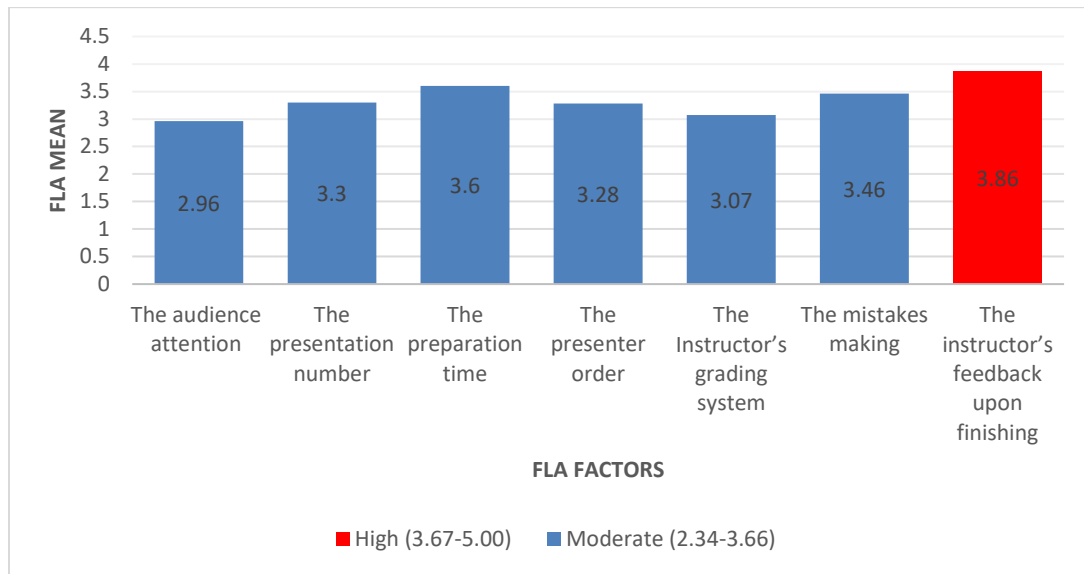
**Table 3.** *Factors and Statement Number of Mini-project Presentation*

	<b>Factor</b>	<b>Statement Number</b>
<b>1</b>	The audience attention	11, 14, 16, 20, and 23
<b>2</b>	The presentation number	5
<b>3</b>	The preparation time	8 and 13
<b>4</b>	The presenter order	3
<b>5</b>	The instructor's grading	4
<b>6</b>	The mistakes making	2
<b>7</b>	The instructor's feedback upon finishing	12, 21, and 24

*(Source : Mini-Project Présentation Questionnaire)*

These factors scored moderate high-level anxiety (figure 2). The participants experienced moderate FLA levels in the audience attention factor, but this FLA level was high in the instructor’s feedback upon finishing the presentation factor. Moreover, the participants scored close to high FLA levels in the preparation time factor. That is, (3.6) out of (5) which is close to a mean score of (3.67).

**Figure 2:** Means and Factors of the Mini Project Presentations



(Source : Mini-Project Présentation Questionnaire)

**4.1.2. FLA Causes**

The analysis of the (24) statements as provided in the pre-task presentation questionnaire revealed six causes (Table 4). These Causes vary between moderate and high FLA levels.

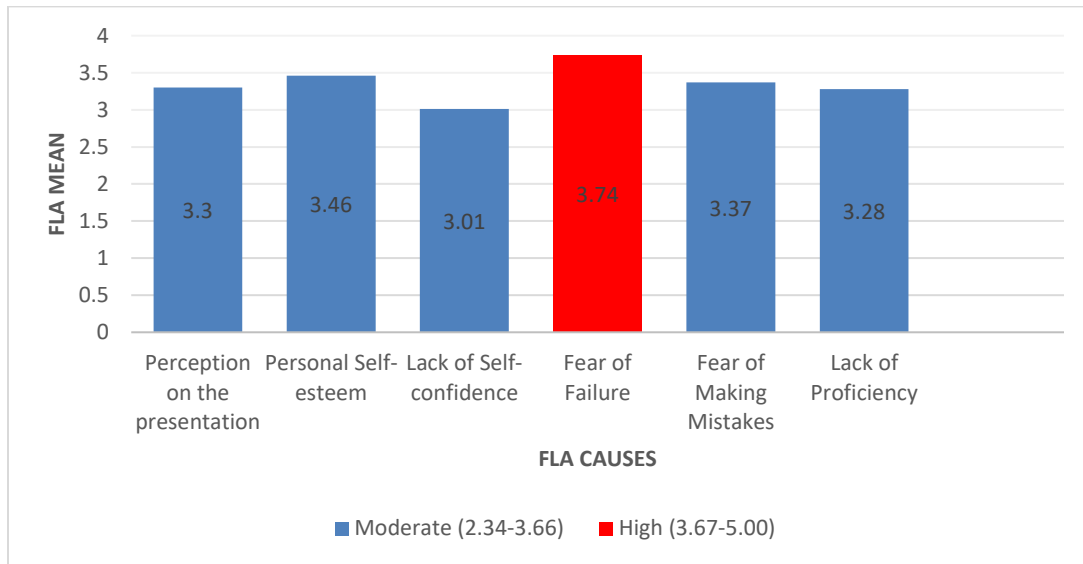
**Table 4.** Causes and Statement Number of the Mini-Project Presentation

	<b>Causes</b>	<b>Statement Number</b>
<b>1</b>	Perception on the presentation	18
<b>2</b>	Personal Self-esteem	1 and 7
<b>3</b>	Lack of Self-confidence	6
<b>4</b>	Fear of Failure	9 and 17
<b>5</b>	Fear of Making Mistakes	10 and 22
<b>6</b>	Lack of Proficiency	15 and 19

(Source : Mini-Project Présentation Questionnaire)

According to the cause analysis of the (24) statements, we can say that our participants felt moderate to high levels of FLA during the mini-project presentation. Overall, the students experienced moderate levels of FLA is due to five causes while presenting. However, they experienced high FLA levels once because of the fear of failure cause scoring a mean of (3.74). Hence, the importance of this mini-project presentation assessment in succeeding or failing their CCCA2 module (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Means and Causes of the Mini Project Presentations**



(Source : Mini-Project Présentation Questionnaire)

## 4.2. The Pre-task Oral B2 Level Examination Questionnaire

This anonymous questionnaire consisting of (23) statements was taken voluntarily by 60 students. It is a five-point scale line up from strongly agree to strongly disagree posted on Google classroom stream before the oral B2 exam.

### 4.2.1. FLA Factors

The analysis of the (23) statements as provided in the pre-task oral B2 level examination questionnaire revealed eight factors (Table 5). These factors vary between moderate and high FLA levels.

**Table 5. Factors and Statement Number of the oral B2 level examination**

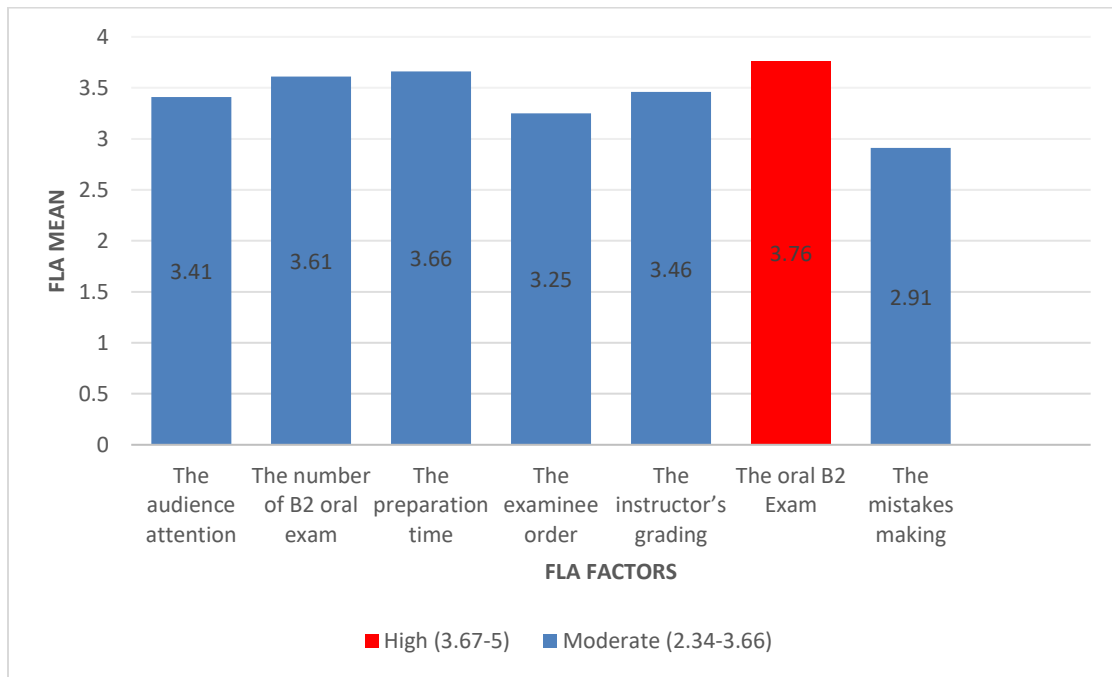
	<b>Factor</b>	<b>Statement Number</b>
<b>1</b>	The audience attention	12 and 11
<b>2</b>	The number of B2 oral exam	5

<b>3</b>	The preparation time	7, 10 and 15
<b>4</b>	The examinee order	3
<b>5</b>	The instructor’s grading	4
<b>6</b>	The oral B2 exam	9 and 22
<b>7</b>	The mistakes making	2

*(Source : Oral B2 Level Questionnaire)*

The factor analysis of the participants’ answers to the pre-task oral B2 level questionnaire suggests seven factors leading to FLA. The highest factor among these is the oral B2 exam factor scoring a mean (3.76) (Figure 4). This finding is expected because our second-year students are taking this oral B2 exam for the first time in their lives. Another important factor contributing to FLA is the preparation time scoring a mean (3.66). Therefore, the high FLA level recorded in this factor plays a significant role as second-year students are lacking in preparation time skills.

**Figure 4: Means and Factors of the Oral B2 Level Exam**



*(Source : Oral B2 Level Questionnaire)*

#### **4.2.2. FLA Causes**

The analysis of the (23) statements as organized in the pre-task oral B2 level examination questionnaire revealed six causes to FLA (Table 6). These causes rank from moderate to high levels.

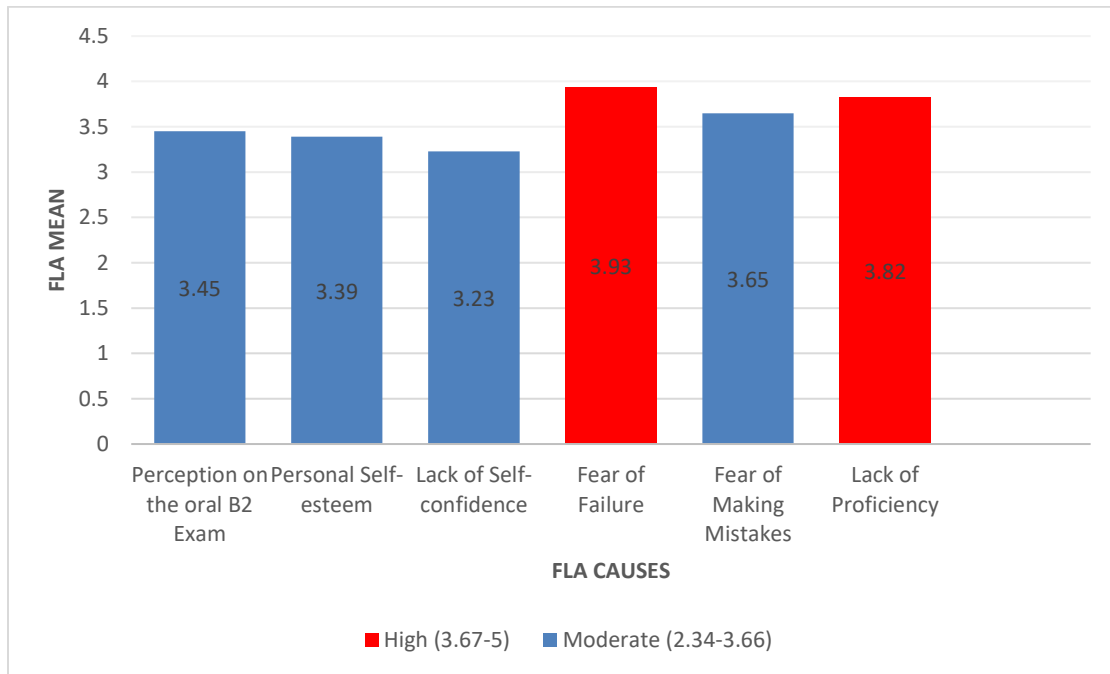
**Table 6.** Causes and Statement Number of the Oral B2 Level Examination

	<b>Factor</b>	<b>Statement Number</b>
<b>1</b>	Perception on the oral B2 level examination	21, 14, and 23
<b>2</b>	Personal Self-esteem	1 and 20
<b>3</b>	Lack of Self-confidence	6 and 17
<b>4</b>	Fear of Failure	8
<b>5</b>	Fear of Making Mistakes	18
<b>6</b>	Lack of Proficiency	13, 16, and 19

*(Source : Oral B2 Level Questionnaire)*

The cause analysis of (23) statements suggested six causes to FLA as experienced by second-year students while taking their B2 level oral exam. These results shed light upon two major causes of FLA during oral B2 level exams. These causes are the fear of failure scoring a mean (3.93) and the lack of proficiency scoring another high mean (3.82). The other four causes scored moderate FLA levels, which is significant for an oral B2 exam taken for the first time in their academic engineering cycle.

**Figure 5:** Means and Reasons of the Oral B2 Level Exam



*(Source : Oral B2 Level Questionnaire)*

**RQ 2: What psychological factors does anxiety play in EFL final oral examinations?**

Based on the two translated questionnaire questions, this study revealed several psychological factors leading second-year students to feel anxious during final oral performances. These FLA factors vary from moderate to high levels and they can be classified into two major categories as follow:

#### **4.2.3. Moderate FLA Factors to Oral Performance Exams**

One major factor is the audience attention factor. This moderate finding can be explained by the familiarity of our students with giving presentations or discussing topics in front of their instructor or peers. Moreover, the participants felt anxious while giving a speech when some of their peers tended to laugh at them or their instructor corrected their grammar or spelling mistakes during their oral B2 assessment. This finding is consistent with that of Huda & Ma'mun (2020) who found that 68% of their participants get anxious when speaking in front of a class.

The second factor leading to FLA is the number of oral assessments. This moderate level anxiety factor contributes to FLA, yet it is controllable because our students are getting more and more familiar with giving presentations and discussing classroom topics. However, this outcome is contrary to that of Huda & Ma'mun (2020) who found that 84% of their participants witnessed high anxiety levels when asked to present more than once in English.

The preparation time factor is our third factor in this study. The second-year students felt anxious when preparing for both oral performances because they are not prepared enough for such types of oral assessments due to a shortage of time. As a result, they show up with an unorganized presentation. Furthermore, recorded data revealed that our students prepare one night before, which is not enough at all. This factor recorded moderate FLA levels and this finding observed in this investigation is far below those observed by (Djumingin, Weda, & Juanda, 2019) who found that 88.8% of their participants felt anxious when not prepared to give disorganized presentations. On the contrary other study agrees on this point (Hanifa, 2018).

The order of both mini-project presentation and oral B2 exams is still another moderate factor leading to FLA. The researcher's observation indicates that our second-year students are not generally willing to start first because they want to hear about their peers' experiences first. This finding is moderate in FLA against that of Huda & Ma'mun (2020) where 70% of the students were anxious when called to present. "It is quite high percentage which anxiety does exist among students in EFL learners." (2020, p. 75).

The instructor's grading factor is still another factor contributing to FLA where students experienced moderate levels of FLA. According to both oral assessment performances, our students' FLA is not that high because they are familiar with their instructor's grading system and feedback during normal class sessions. Our observations recorded the participant's repetitive questions about who is going to assess them during both oral performances before their due dates. Moreover, they experienced moderate levels of anxiety as their instructors cannot offer them good grades effortlessly.

The final moderate finding factor contributing to second-year students' FLA is making mistakes. Indeed, the participants looked anxious making mistakes in front of their critical audience.

#### **4.2.4. High FLA Factors to Oral Performance Exams**

This study also revealed two specific high FLA factors as experienced by second-year students during both mini-project presentations and oral B2 level exams.

One major factor specific to mini-project presentations is the instructor's feedback upon finishing. The recorded high FLA levels are due to the final discussion questions to which our students have no answer or simply because they did not prepare to answer them in advance.

Another important factor specific to the oral B2 exam and leading to FLA is the oral B2 exam factor. This high anxiety level is expected as mentioned earlier in this study because the students never took such an oral B2 exam. Moreover, the research observations recorded a huge number of questions concerning this oral B2 exam. Consequently, our students are anxious from not only not understanding the oral B2 exam topic, but also not defending it with reasonable supporting sentences.

#### **RQ3: What causes anxiety to occur when presenting publicly or sitting for an oral examination?**

Based on the two translated questionnaire questions, this study revealed several psychological causes producing anxious second-year students during final oral performances. These FLA causes vary from moderate to high levels and they can be classified into two major categories:

#### **4.2.5. Moderate FLA causes to Oral Performance Exams**

One major cause to FLA as reported by second-year students in both questionnaires is the perception of the presentation and the oral B2 level exam. Participants experienced such an



anxious feeling because they keep thinking that their feelings are controllable during these oral tasks.

Another important cause of FLA as reported by second-year students is personal self-esteem. Participants scored moderate levels because they do not feel at ease and relaxed during oral performances. They reported that they feel different and abnormal while being assessed and this explains the feeling of joy the participants feel upon finishing the target task. The research observation recorded anxious candidates while performing orally. Take the example of strict facial expressions, looking angry, and unmotivated. Some of the students admit they have trouble sleeping the night before. This moderate FLA outcome is contrary to that of (2020) who found “69% others still anxious before doing a presentation and could not enjoy yet to do a presentation.” (p. 77).

The third cause as reported by second-year students during both pre-task questionnaires is lack of self-confidence. The participants scored moderate FLA levels because they are under the limelight while presenting or sitting for the oral B2 exam. As a result, these participants fear communicating and expressing their point of view as they underestimate their true capacities. This finding was nearly the same in Huda & Ma'mun's study (2020) as they found that 61% of their students “... still felt unconfident in presentation.” (p. 77). Other studies agree on this point (Kráľová, Foreign Language Anxiety, 2016) and (Al-Khasawneh, 2016).

Finally, the fear of making mistakes is another cause of FLA. This cause prevented our students from finishing and verbalizing the thoughts in their minds. “... they form negative expectations, which lead to avoid any opportunities that may help them to enhance their communication abilities.” (Rafada & Madini, 2017, p. 309). The research observations recorded shy students in both target language oral performances. Huda & Ma'mun (2020, p. 73) showed that “Making mistakes while speaking especially in presentation is highly anxiety-provoking ...”.

#### **4.2.6. High FLA Causes to Oral Performance Exams**

This study also revealed two specific high FLA causes as experienced by second-year students during both mini-project presentations and oral B2 level exams. First, the fear of failure produces high FLA levels on the part of second-year students performing final mini-project presentations and oral B2 level exams. Indeed, the participants scored high FLA levels. One major cause is the consequences of failure because falling makes our students feel deep shame inside in front of their instructors, peers, and parents. Moreover, the research observations

recorded students admitting last-minute headaches or stomach aches before starting their mini-project presentations. This finding agrees with (Fadlan, 2020) which showed that students felt so anxious about failure in the exam.

Another major high FLA cause is the lack of proficiency in the oral B2 level exam as reported by participants. This causes students to feel highly anxious during the B2 oral exam because they lack experience on how to present and defend a point of view fully in a way to convince their critical audience. Another study agrees on this point (Huda & Ma'mun, 2020).

The findings of the two previous research questions of this study provide further support for the hypothesis that FL learners experience various levels of anxiety, which negatively impact the students' oral performance skills. This psychological phenomenon is the outcome of several factors and causes together play a major role in increasing or decreasing FLA levels. Consequently, for reaching well-planned learning outcomes, instructors should be equipped with few strategies to reduce anxiety inside their foreign learning contexts "... foreign language teachers should be aware of foreign language anxiety inside classrooms to facilitate learning and motivate students to overcome this obstacle." (Alsowat, 2016, p. 194).

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study is another proof that FLA is a complex psychological concept worth exploring. The obtained findings confirm that second-year students studying English as a foreign language encounter moderate to high anxiety levels in their endeavor to acquire their target language.

The findings of this investigation complement those of earlier studies about FLA. These methodological contributions concern not only teachers, educators, and curriculum designers, but also learners, too. "... all have a role to play." (Jing & Junying, 2016, p. 182). However, this study was limited by the absence of valuable insights into foreign language anxiety levels from the instructors' perspective. "... teachers remain the key to reducing anxiety." (Tanielian, 2017, p. 127). Moreover, this study was also limited by the absence of other variables to FLA such as gender, culture, the social background of learners, the instructor's attitudes, etc. Finally, the generalizability of these results to all Tunisian second-year students studying EFL is subject to certain limitations. For instance, the teaching approach at ESPRIT, School of Engineering differs

from that of Tunisian public engineering schools. In short, this study presents some significance and limitations that could be the subject of other research work.

In future work, we will focus on other English language skills such as listening, reading, and writing. Students have always claimed that English writing represents one of the most challenging skills to master. Therefore, other questionnaires and observations investigating the writing anxiety levels at ESPRIT are needed.

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