

# Teachers' and Students' Beliefs about Foreign Language Anxiety

*Comparing Students and Teachers of English in Sweden*



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## **Abstract**

The aim and purpose of this essay was to investigate if the students of the chosen school, experience foreign language anxiety. Then the answers from the students was used to investigate what teachers' beliefs was concerning this issue of foreign language anxiety. At the same time this study investigated whether teachers know the difference between general anxiety and foreign language anxiety, and if they are aware of that there is a term called foreign language anxiety. The material for this study that was used, was an upper secondary school in Sweden, which teaches English 5 and English 6. There were 50 students participating to answer a questionnaire. Then there were two teachers being interviewed for the teachers' point of view on this issue. The way of collecting the information from the students was done by sending out a link to a survey site to the teachers of the students, who then proceeded this link to the students. The answers from the teachers were collected by semi-structured interviews. The major findings of this study was that teachers have a difficulty to distinguish between general anxiety and foreign language anxiety. It was also clearly shown that the students were suffering from foreign language anxiety, there was no majority, but a few students.

**Keywords:** Foreign language anxiety, teacher awareness, general anxiety, English in Sweden

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Foreign Language Anxiety and its Place in Sweden within the English Subject</b>	<b>1</b>
2.1 <i>English Role in the Swedish School System</i>	2
2.2 <i>What is Language Learning Anxiety?</i>	2
2.3 <i>When do we Experience Anxiety?</i>	3
2.4 <i>Why is Foreign Language Anxiety Important to Keep in Mind as a Teacher?</i>	5
<b>3. What does Existing Research Say about Foreign Language Anxiety?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4. Methodology</b>	<b>7</b>
4.1 <i>The Questionnaire</i>	9
4.2 <i>The Interviews</i>	10
<b>5. Results</b>	<b>12</b>
5.1 <i>Summarization of the Questionnaire</i>	12
5.2 <i>Table of the Results from the Questionnaire</i>	14
<b>6. Analysis</b>	<b>14</b>
6.1 <i>Acceptance of the Term Foreign Language Anxiety</i>	15
6.2 <i>Competition between Students</i>	16
6.3 <i>Nervousness within the Students Concerning the Understanding of Teachers' Information</i>	18
6.4 <i>Correcting the Students</i>	18
6.5 <i>Classroom Atmosphere</i>	19
6.6 <i>Diversity between the Teachers' Answers</i>	20
<b>7. Conclusion</b>	<b>21</b>
7.1 <i>Difference between Foreign Language Anxiety and General Anxiety</i>	21
7.2 <i>How do the Teachers Try to Help their Students?</i>	22
7.3 <i>Limitations of the Study</i>	23
<b>References</b>	<b>25</b>

## Appendix

### A. The interview questions

## **1. Introduction**

It has been a very discussed topic the last couple of centuries, that foreign language anxiety is a factor that impedes the language learning process (Huang,2012). English in Sweden is an important language since it is taught in school. Not only is the English language important in Sweden, but it is also important in the world and it is seen as the lingua franca (Seidelhofer, 2004). If then the English language is so important, not only in Sweden, but all around the world, how will the students with foreign language anxiety deal with this? Perhaps they have the knowledge within this language, but what happens if the anxiety stops them from reaching their maximal development within this subject? How can then a teacher know if a student suffers from foreign language anxiety? How can a teacher promote and develop students' willingness to communicate? What factors make students feel foreign language anxiety? Can one as a teacher make a clear difference between foreign language anxiety and anxiety in general? The purpose of this essay is to investigate what students think about foreign language anxiety and if they experience this in their education. However, the essay will also investigate what teachers think about these occurring problems, and if they see it as a problem or not. It will also look more deeply into what teachers believe is the cause of foreign language anxiety. This study will focus on these questions, and try to investigate what the case is, at the selected upper secondary school in Sweden.

## **2. Foreign Language Anxiety and its Place in Sweden within the English Subject**

This section will present a general overview of what place English has in the Swedish school system, and why it is important to consider foreign language anxiety when it comes to teaching this subject. There will be brief explanations about what foreign language anxiety is, but also what some of the reasons for feeling this way might be.

## **2.1 English Role in the Swedish School System**

English is one of the core subjects in Sweden, which means that it is obligatory in every class. If one does not have a grade in English there is no possibility to continue with further education on university level. Oral communication is a big part of the English subject. We can read from Skolverket that students should be given the opportunity to develop an all-round communicative skill (Skolverket, 2011). In this all-round communicative skill, things such as, speaking, listening, reading, and writing all count as skills they need to develop and acquire. The Swedish Syllabus stresses that the teaching of English should: “as far as possible be conducted in English” (Skolverket, 2011). By this quote we can see how important the oral part is in the English subject. The teachers are supposed to speak English as much as possible in the classroom, which brings a large amount of input and output for the learners. Even though a lot of people speak several languages, the one we feel most secure in is our first language. One does not feel as much boundaries when it comes to expressing our self in our first language. In this case, boundaries represent a lack of words or missing knowledge of grammatical rules, which might be experienced in the second language. This means that for students to get a high grade in the subject of English, they must be able to communicate in English. What is relevant to consider in this situation, and what is crucial to think about, are the students who suffer from foreign language anxiety, will they be able to reach the goals?

## **2.2 What is Language Learning Anxiety?**

“When I’m in my Spanish class I just freeze! I can’t think of a thing when my teacher calls on me. My mind goes blank.” (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p 125). This is a statement that comes from a student, and for a foreign language teacher, this statement is not something unfamiliar. Language anxiety has become a concern all over the world the last three decades. It is also a topic that brings and triggers different opinions from researchers

(Tran Thi Thu, T. 2012). Since foreign language anxiety is common among students according to (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Tran Thi Thu, 2012; Huang, 2012, Wei, 2014; Effiong, 2016), teachers need to put more weight on how to help their students. First of all, to be able to help our students, teachers need to acknowledge that there is something called foreign language anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). What we must keep in mind at all time is that students, depending on what level their proficiency is at, might experience anxiety in different ways and because of different reasons (Horwitz, 2016).

What is anxiety then? Anxiety is a very confusing general term. The reason for this confusion is that the word anxiety brings a lot of different meanings, and can be applied to different experiences. According to Vanin, Helsley, & Morgan (2008) anxiety is a vague, uneasy feeling of discomfort or dread accompanied by an automatic (self-controlling) response (p.1). When learning a new language there are many feelings inside a person. For an example one can feel excited, happy, anxious, or stressed. Not only do we feel different things inside our body, we can also show symptoms such as sweaty palms, the feeling of our whole body sweating and one can also feel how red we become in the face. Within the field of foreign language anxiety, the researchers Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope have become very famous. In their well-known article, they define the term foreign language anxiety as: “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). They also want to be clear about the fact that there are different types of anxiety. Foreign language anxiety is a situation-specific anxiety and it is important that it is not mixed with general classroom anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

### **2.3 When do we Experience Anxiety?**

It is most common to feel anxiety when experiencing something new or when one is confronted with something that is challenging. Since there is no human being on earth that function in the same way, we feel anxiety towards different situations and different things we get confronted with, and the same goes for our students. If we think about our self, things we often feel uncomfortable doing, or things we get anxious about, are often things that we have been having bad experiences with. Skiöld is a lecturer that confirms that students with speaking anxiety often are self-conscious and afraid of making mistakes, and of making themselves look like fools (Skiöld, 1989, p.9). There are students who are more logical, and therefore math and physics suit them better. Perhaps this will lead to them feeling anxiety towards language learning. On the other hand, there are students who feel this anxiety about math and physics which count as logical subjects. In this research the focus will be on students who feel foreign language anxiety.

It is not unusual that our students become less talkative in situations where they feel uncomfortable for any given reasons. This is not something that is new; a lot of people can become less talkative in a new situation, where they do not feel as secure as in well-known situations. A lot of people can feel nervous when they attend new things, job interviews, new schools, a new class, or even a new job. Luckily, in most cases this feeling does not stick for a very long time.

In (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p.126) we can read that students who feel writing anxiety always end up writing less than those who do not suffer from writing anxiety. This can then be drawn to the speaking part, where those who suffer from speaking anxiety will speak less than those who do not suffer of speaking anxiety. According to Effiong, students feel less anxiety when it comes to speech events that they can prepare at home. It is when they are asked on the spot that they suffer from speaking anxiety the most (Effiong, O. 2016). Speaking anxiety can sometimes be taken for that students do not want to participate, that

they lack the interest, or even that they have a proficiency that does not match the class. It is hard for teachers to distinguish between anxiety and if the students are less motivated or simply do not have the proficiency to participate in class discussions.

## **2.4 Why is Foreign Language Anxiety Important to Keep in Mind as a Teacher?**

To be able to learn a language, one must use it. One thing that has been repeated, and will be repeated for a long time, is that to learn a language, one must be exposed to the target language and use it (Harmer, 2015). Even in the Swedish syllabus we can read that the English subject “should as far as possible be conducted in English.” (Skolverket, 2011). If students feel foreign language anxiety, this will affect their contributions in class, which might lead to a grade that they are not satisfied with.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was common to teach students grammar and translation in English. The speaking was almost excluded from the teaching (Harmer, 2015, p.47). Whereas today the focus rather lies on function than form. Authors such as Abrahamsson (2009) and Estling Vannestål (2007) claim that during the last 40 years, the teaching of language has gone from focusing on grammar and translation to actually have more focus on interaction. In other words, today teachers focus on the function of the language rather than the form. This means that once again students who suffer from foreign language anxiety will suffer. For students to be able to develop their proficiency in speaking, it is the teacher’s responsibility to create opportunities where it is possible to develop. In this case, there must be a lot of situations where the students can speak and practice their proficiency within speaking.

To become good speakers in English as is mentioned above, one must be exposed to the language. Therefore, it is very crucial to practice speaking in the classroom. However, the process to initiate or contribute to an ongoing interaction involves several factors. Things such as psychological, linguistic, educational, and communicative factors have a huge impact on



the students' willingness to communicate (Mystkowska-Wiertelak, & Pawlak, 2014). As mentioned above, the communicative part in English is very important and for the students to learn we as teachers must promote to their willingness to communicate. Since the oral part is an important part when looking at how the students are to be graded in English, the foreign language anxiety is important to remember. To achieve the grade E in English 5, a student must "In oral and written production in different genre the student can express oneself relatively varied, relatively clear and relatively coherent. The student can formulate oneself with some fluency and somewhat appropriate for the recipient." (skolverket,2011). To ask a student with foreign language anxiety to do this is not always the easiest. Since there is no clear guidance of what "relatively" is it is up to every teacher to decide. This might cause trouble for the students or not.

### **3. What does Existing Research Say about Foreign Language Anxiety?**

There has been a lot of previous research on the topic foreign language anxiety, but there has been limited research when it comes to comparing the students' answers, with the teachers' answers and beliefs about this frequent topic.

According to previous researchers, one of the biggest barriers for students in a language class is to overcome their anxiety (Wang, & Chang, 2010; Harmer, 2004; Gardner, & MacIntyre, 1993). It is said that students are afraid of making mistakes in front of their peers. Brown 2001 states that students feel stupid or that they simply have the feeling that their oral performance is wrong, and therefor there is a feeling of anxiety created in them.

What is worth mentioning is that Horwitz et al. 1986 were the first scholars to deal with anxiety in language learning. Before they made their research, it was hard to find a connection between anxiety and foreign language achievement. They suggested that one of the reasons for this failure, was that there was no specific scale which measured the anxiety

towards foreign language learning. There was one made by Gardner, Clement, Smythe, & Smythe (1979), although this scale was restricted in scope. The one made by Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) is called Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). This scale is now often referred to and used in many studies.

Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) developed a theory that foreign language anxiety has three components that are connected to each other. These opponents are; communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. To make this even more clear these opponents need to be defined. Communication apprehension is defined as “a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people” (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope 1986, p. 127). Fear of negative evaluation refers to “apprehension about others’ evaluation, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively” (p. 128). Last but as important as the others, is test anxiety. This component refers to “a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure” (p. 128). Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that this theory that was created by Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope is not perfect, even though their theory has been used within a large number of studies (Tran Thi Thu, p.73, 2012).

After the concept about foreign language anxiety was proposed by Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986), there has been many researchers who have done various studies on foreign language speaking anxiety. Some of the results have been overlapping with each other, whereas some have got results that are very distinctive in relation to the key findings that was done by Horwitz et al. (1986).

#### **4. Methodology**

Previous research has often just had a focus on either the students’ or the teachers’ view on foreign language anxiety. It has been shown in previous research that students suffer

from foreign language anxiety, but it has not been shown whether the teachers of these students are aware of it. One of the research question in this study is, do the students suffer from foreign language anxiety? Secondly, are the teachers aware of this term and the meaning of it? What connections can be made between the students' and teachers' answers? How do the teachers in question try to help their students? And the last research question is can one as a teacher make a clear difference between foreign language anxiety and anxiety in general? This study used a combination of the qualitative and quantitative approach. For the quantitative part, there was a questionnaire which was based on Horwitz's already existing questionnaire. The qualitative side of this study was the interviews with the teachers. Interviews were used because I did not want the answers to be restricted. The plan was to see whether teachers know about students' speaking anxiety or not, and if they know, to see how they handle it.

This study was conducted at an upper secondary school in Sweden. There were 50 students who answered the questionnaire. I asked the teachers who were going to be interviewed if they wanted to help me and ask their students to answer this questionnaire, luckily they were positive about this and their students participated. The students were attending English 5 and English 6. The answers were all collected anonymously, and the gender of the students was not asked of them to provide since it is not important for this study. Also in this study the teachers have been given pseudonym names. The main goal for this study was to see what connections there are between the students' answers and the teachers' answers, and to see if the teachers were aware of the students' foreign language anxiety. For the interview part of this study, two teachers were interviewed. The interviews were made separately. The reason for choosing to interview the teachers separately was because as an interviewer I wanted to see where the interview went. The goal was for the teacher to speak as freely as possible regarding foreign language anxiety. As can be seen when comparing the

two interviews, there was a different outcome. I also did not want the teachers to feel that they could not speak, if the case was that one of them liked to speak more than the other. Of course, interviewing them together perhaps would strengthen some of their thoughts, and lead to more follow up questions, and discussion. Although, for this study the interview was chosen to be done with one teacher at the time.

#### **4.1 The Questionnaire**

This questionnaire is well-known among many researchers which have their focus on foreign language anxiety, for example Çağatay, (2015); Gopang, Bughio, & Pathan, (2015); Dogan, & Tuncer, (2016) among many others. More specifically, the questionnaire developed by Horwitz contains 33 statements, where the students are asked to answer with a scale from 1-5: 1 is that they strongly agree, whereas 5 is that they strongly disagree. The result is then calculated in percentage, and is rounded to the nearest whole number (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, p.129, 1986). In their questionnaire, only answers which are answered with number 1,2,4, and 5 count and are later used in the calculation. This is the case for this research too. For this research there were 21 questions/statements on the questionnaire. 20 of the statements are answered through a scale, whereas the last question is a box where they can write if they have any comments concerning anxiety. In this questionnaire 18 of the statements were picked from Horwitz's already existing questionnaire. The reason for using as many as 18 questions from the famous questionnaire was to make this research more reliable and easier to compare with other studies. The reason why these statements were used was that they intended to investigate if anxiety was present in the classroom. Mostly the questions consisted of statements that concerned the oral performance in class, but also how much the teacher contributed to the anxiety and what effect the peers had on the foreign language anxiety. The whole questionnaire can be viewed in Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope 1986. The reason for

choosing to use this questionnaire is firstly because I wanted to investigate if the students felt foreign language anxiety or not. This questionnaire gives the students the opportunity to keep their answers anonymous. Also, I believed that this way was easier for them. That they would not feel comfortable to answer these questions as freely if they were interviewed.

## **4.2 The Interviews**

Seidman (2006) argues that if one as a researcher wants to “understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience” (p.11) interviews are necessary to use. This is one of the reasons for choosing interviews for this research. It is important to understand the teachers point of view concerning speaking anxiety. The reason for choosing to interview the teachers and not the students is because the students might feel shy, and not tell the truth if the interviewer sit with them. This way of comparing the students’ answers and then interviewing the teachers, will bring the most out of this research. The fact that I as an interviewer chose to do interviews made it easier for me to lead the conversation. Also, it was easier to get the bigger picture and let the teachers speak about their experience. I believe it is easier to interview an adult, in this case the teachers, than it would be to interview a student. The teachers are perhaps not as insecure as the students are when it comes to this issue in question.

Interviews can be conducted in several ways. According to (Nunan 1992, p.149) interviews can be characterized in terms of their formality. An interview can be everything from unstructured to structured (Nunan 1992, p.149). In other words, it means that an interview can be everything from uncontrolled to controlled. According to Seidman, the uncontrolled way of interviewing can be seen as a friendly conversation, whereas the controlled is seen as closed questions (Seidman, 2006, p. 15). In this study, a semi-structured approach was used. This made it possible for the interview to in some way be open minded

and free but not completely uncontrolled. With this kind of approach, the interviewer had a general idea of where the interview should go, but did not have a predetermined list of questions (Nunan,1992, p.149). Since it was a semi-structured way of interviewing, of course there were topics and general ideas that were going to be discussed. If the topic got too far from the original topic one could, with the help of guidelines made at home steer the conversation to the right path again. It can be seen in the analysis that the original questions were not followed 100%. Truly an interviewer's dream is that the interview will go in the right direction, without them pushing the participant. This way of interviewing gives the participant the opportunity to speak freely, yet the interviewer has the control if it would get too far from the wished topic. In other words, for this study topics and general issues concerning speaking anxiety were conducted at home. General questions and ideas were also written down, and used when the topic got too far from the wished direction. The reason for this way of interviewing was because I believe that it is important to listen to the teacher, concerning what they have to say about this issue. The interviewer should be open to all paths of the interview, as this sometimes can be more of interest than only having the answers to 30 questions.

There were of course more important things to consider when choosing to interview someone. Nunan mentions that things such as the position where one is seated can have a great impact on the outcome (Nunan,1992, p.152). Therefore, I as an interviewer chose to sit beside the one being interviewed. For the sake of reliability, the interview was audio-recorded and during the interview there was some brief note-taking. There are pros and cons using audio-recording, one of them being that it is very time consuming to transcribe them, but on the other hand, there are ample of opportunities to listen to everything again and transcribe. With the note-taking the central issues were noted, and this way of putting down data may be more relaxing for the one being interviewed, since things can be said "off-record" (Nunan,

1992, p.153). Although, it is very hard to take notes on everything the teacher says. That was one of the most important reasons for choosing to audio-record the interviews. These things are equally as important to remember, since the goal of the interview was to get as much information as possible.

## 5. Results

The section below will contain a summary of the topics which are included in the questionnaire and a table which will present the results from the questionnaire which was given to the students.

### 5.1

These are the statements which were used in the questionnaire:

1. Never feel confident when speaking FL.
2. Do not worry to make mistakes.
3. Tremble when being called on to answer.
4. Frightened when they do not understand what the teacher says.
5. Think about other things during language class.
6. Feel that other students are better than them.
7. Start to panic when they are not prepared to speak.
8. Embarrassed to speak in class.
9. Do not understand why so many are afraid of speaking the FL.
10. Get so nervous they forget the things they already know.
11. Even if they are prepared, they feel anxious about contributing in language class.
12. Do not feel pressure to prepare for class.
13. Feel that the other students always speak better than themselves.
14. Very self-conscious about how they speak
15. Language class moves on so quickly that they worry about falling behind
16. Nervous when they do not understand everything the teacher says.
17. Afraid students will laugh at them.



18. Gets anxious when they think the teacher will pick them to answer.
19. Afraid of answering incorrectly, because it will affect their grade.
20. Do not have problems speaking in front of their peers.

## 5.2

In this section the results from the questionnaire are presented.

Table 1

*Results from the Students' Answers of the Questionnaire*

1.	10%	28%	26%	28%	8%
2.	12%	28%	20%	28%	12%
3.	14%	20%	36%	26%	4%
4.	34%	32%	16%	12%	6%
5.	10%	22%	32%	30%	6%
6.	12%	20%	34%	22%	12%
7.	12%	30%	36%	20%	2%
8.	8%	42%	30%	16%	4%
9.	12%	24%	34%	26%	4%
10.	8%	24%	24%	34%	10%
11.	14%	30%	18%	30%	8%
12.	8%	22%	34%	26%	10%
13.	10%	28%	34%	22%	6%
14.	8%	18%	46%	20%	8%
15.	28%	30%	34%	8%	2%
16.	20%	46%	26%	6%	2%
17.	24%	30%	24%	14%	8%
18.	12%	22%	40%	24%	2%
19.	10%	18%	32%	28%	12%
20.	10%	12%	34%	24%	20%

SD                      D                      N                      A                      SA

SD= strongly disagree, D= disagree, N= neither agree nor disagree, A= agree, SA= strongly agree.

## 6. Analysis

This section will include a discussion of the teachers' answers from the interview, and compare them with the answers from the questionnaire which the students have answered. It will also contain connections with some of the sources that have been presented in the previous research section. To summarize the results briefly in this section, one can observe that the students who were asked to answer this questionnaire do not feel a very strong anxiety towards foreign language learning. Although, one cannot say that it is not present either. There are not many statements where the majority have answered the same. What is

more important and what should be taken in consideration when looking at this, is that there are students who feel language anxiety at different times.

### **6.1 Acceptance of the term foreign language anxiety**

As can be seen from the results of the questionnaire, there is a present anxiety within the students concerning foreign language anxiety. When analyzing the different statements and the answers some might argue that the percentage of those who feel anxiety are low, but it should not be overlooked, on the contrary it should be considered when teaching. Huang (2012) states that anxiety impedes the language learning process. With this said, even the small percentage is important. All students are important and therefore it needs to be taken into consideration when having foreign language classes with students, all students should be given equal opportunity to develop their proficiency within the foreign language. The first teacher I interviewed is called Malena. The second teacher is called Susanne. Both of the teachers have their classes at upper secondary school. The two teachers were not familiar with the term foreign language anxiety at first. After a brief explanation of what it is, Malena actually said that she recognized it. It was even more interesting that Malena said that she has experienced that her students suffer from foreign language anxiety, and that she acknowledges that there is something called foreign language anxiety. This is important because as Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) writes in their article, the most important thing a teacher must do to be able to help the students is to acknowledge that there is something called foreign language anxiety. Already at this stage the interview with the other teacher had taken a different path. The second teacher Susanne, did not acknowledge something so specific as foreign language anxiety. She said it to be more of a general anxiety. She said that the students who had issues speaking in front of the class in English did not only have issues with it in English, but in other subjects too.

## 6.2 Competition between students

In the classroom there might be some competition between the students. When saying competition, it stands for that the students always compare themselves with each other, and try to be better than the other (Effiong, 2016, p.134). With this said, one can look at statement number 6: “I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.” There is a high amount of students that actually feels this way. Thirty-four percent of the students have answered that they agree/strongly agree to this statement, although, the percentage is not very high looking at it, but when considering that there only were 50 participants to this study, the percentage becomes high. Statement number 17 was about whether the students were afraid of speaking because of the possibility that other students would laugh at them. There is a very high amount of students that are not afraid of this. There is 54% which disagreed/strongly disagreed to this, which is more than half of the participants. More importantly, it is important to not forget about the 22% who actually agreed/strongly agreed to this. According to Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) it is not unusual that students feel that others are better than them. They claim that students who experience foreign language anxiety often are afraid of being laughed at by their peers. But also that they will get negatively evaluated by their peers (p.41). When interviewing Susanne, she said that competition between the students is good because it can motivate some students to do even better. Then a question was asked: “Do you think it is good for the students who already feel anxiety to compete, do you think this will increase their anxiety?” Susanne: “Of course, if one already feels anxiety competition between the students will be even more hard and increase the anxiety.”

The interview with Malena showed that she actually feels that students sometimes compete with each other, or rather they are nervous to speak in front of each other. She has noticed that when she in one of her classes hands out different types of tasks that should be done in groups the students tend to start speaking in the mother tongue Swedish, as soon as

she leaves them. Even though she knows that the students are perfectly capable of speaking English, they tend to get nervous when it comes to speaking in front of their peers. One of my questions to Malena was: “What do you think it is that makes them this nervous?” The answer was that: “I believe that every class has a different culture. I believe that the students tend to get very nervous when they need to use the language, and that it is a thing they need to come over” The follow up question on this was: “So you believe that the way one feels in class, and what type of connection one has to one another has a big impact on whether one feels comfortable to speak or not?” Malena: “Yes I do.” When asking her what she does to makes them less nervous about speaking in front of each other, she said that she tries to make the students work in pairs and in groups just for the sake of them getting to know each other, and make them feel more relaxed. A lot of the task she hands out for her students are about them speaking to each other. Of course, if the students only speak Swedish this will not help. Then it is important Malena says to keep pushing them to speak English, to remind them that they can do it, and have a positive attitude towards the different tasks. She also pointed out how several students have thanked her for her motivation and that her positive attitude has helped them several times. At several occasions the students have actually said that they enjoy the class more and are more willing to contribute in class when they see how positive the teacher is towards the different activities that should be done. She also pointed out how it is her job as a teacher to make sure there is an environment in class were everyone feel comfortable to speak. According to Wei (2014) one of the ways a teacher could make the foreign language anxiety less intense is to create a relationship with the students. If a teacher creates a relationship towards the students, perhaps the relationship among the students will be stronger too. This is also supported by Tsiplakides & Keramida (2009). Hopefully this will make the students feel less anxiety when it comes to speaking in front of their peers. If we then connect the thing Malena is doing with her student and what Wei (2014) means, she is working

towards helping her students who experience foreign language anxiety.

### **6.3 Nervousness within the students concerning the understanding of teachers'**

#### **information**

The students say that they do not get nervous when they do not understand everything the teacher says. On question 16 there was a percentage of 46 who felt this way. On the other hand, Malena said that in some classes she cannot take all the information in English because then a couple of students would not know what to do. So sometimes she takes everything in English and then takes the difficult part in Swedish, or she chooses to speak to these students separately. This particular statement has in Gopang, Bughio, & Pathan (2015) study also received low percentage of students who agree to this. Malena clearly has a good overview of what her students are capable of and what they are not capable of. Which might be the reason for why this particular statement has received a low percentage. This might go for other teachers too.

### **6.4 Correcting the students**

Statement number 19 can in some way be connected to number 17. A high amount of students are afraid of speaking because they are afraid of making mistakes and that these mistakes in their turn will affect their grade. Thirty percent out of the 50 students are afraid of answering incorrectly, believing that this will affect their grade. As a teacher one must think of that correcting the students too much might lead to anxiety. Because of this one must let the students decide what they learn, and how they learn it, otherwise the correcting of mistakes might lead to anxiety (Mak, 2011). Instead it is suggested that the teacher should assure the learners that their mistakes are not negatively evaluated. Interviewing Malena about this was interesting. She said that she particularly works with this. She says that she

consciously creates different types of work for the students where they are not assessed right away, but rather get the chance to practice several times before they get assessed. She also pushes the point on how important it is to make sure that the students know that they are not being assessed always. Malena says: “It is important to tell you students, now there is no right or wrong now we are practicing.” Susanne, had the same view on this point – that it is important to let the students know that not everything they say or do is being assessed. What is even more important is to keep in mind that the syllabus says how one should assess different aspects of the language. Taken from the Swedish syllabus, for English 5, criteria to get an E: “In oral and written production in different genres the student can relatively varied, and relatively clear, and relatively coherent express themselves.” (Skolverket,2011).

## **6.5 Classroom atmosphere**

The last question on the questionnaire was if the students had any other comments to add about foreign language anxiety. One student answered: “I don’t feel anxiety when speaking English, but when it comes to speaking in French class it is a bit harder, since I don’t know that language as good as I know English.” An interesting thing is that Susanne made a comment about this. She believes that students in Sweden are so good in English, that it should not be that they experience foreign language anxiety in English, but rather that the anxiety would appear in other languages such as German/French/Spanish. One of the students answered: “I tend to be more nervous when the class is new. When I know my classmates, I am not as nervous as before.” As a teacher, this can be important. As Malena has said, she tries to create a more relaxed classroom atmosphere where all the students feel relaxed. Effiong (2016) brings up that the classroom atmosphere can be a crucial point for the students. If they feel relaxed, and the classroom atmosphere is enjoyable, the students will feel less anxiety towards foreign language learning. This is also supported by Al-Khasawneh

(2016). Çağatay is another researcher that claims that the classroom atmosphere is important. She argues that the teacher should create an atmosphere where he or she can scaffold students oral competence (Çağatay, 2015, p.655).

### **6.6 Diversity between the teachers' answers**

In this particular study it is hard to use Susanne's answers, since she from the start neglected the term foreign language anxiety. Although, one cannot completely keep them out of the study. On one of the interview questions concerning how she works with students who she sees suffers from some type of anxiety when speaking, she answered something similar to what Malena has said: "I try to make as many tasks where they are to practice their speaking. A lot of the work then is done in smaller groups. I believe if one speaks for less people the anxiety is not as intense as it is when they have to speak in front of the whole class." Another thought this teacher had was that the relationship amongst the students had a great impact on how intense or less intense the foreign language anxiety was within the class. She points out how she believes that a teacher should make sure that the students have a good relationship among them, and make sure they know that it is not allowed to laugh at each other during different types of presentation if someone says something wrong. One of the things she thought was important was the fact of how she acted towards the students. She did not want to be too friendly with the students, but neither did she want to be a "dictator". She explains the word dictator in this context as someone who only hands out different types of assignments and do not joke with the students at occasions. A strict person who do not have any passion for the teaching, and for the students' best.

## **7. Conclusion**

When working as a teacher one meets all different kinds of students. Some of them will



love to speak, whereas others will have difficulties due to different things. One of the things might be foreign language anxiety. In this case it is important to remember that there is something called foreign language anxiety. The only way to help the students overcome their fears is to be aware of them. One of the major findings in this study is that the foreign language anxiety is present with the students, at least within some of the students that took part of this study. Even though looking at the percentage of the questionnaire, there was not more than half of the students that felt this way, nevertheless, the percentage that suffers from this, are as important as the ones who do not. Since the answers from the students were to be compared with the teachers' beliefs about this issue, it was, and the result showed that one of the teachers was aware of foreign language anxiety within one of her classes, whilst the other did not acknowledge this term. The fact that only two teachers were interviewed is also one of the limitations of this study. It does not mean that because of this there are many teachers that are not aware of this problem, or that they are not familiar with this issue. It can be seen from the point of view that if one of two teachers are not aware of this term, or rather that the teacher does not acknowledge this, there are many others that feel this way as well.

### **7.1 Difference between foreign language anxiety and general anxiety**

One of the research questions was about if the teachers could make a clear difference between foreign language anxiety and anxiety in general. The fact that none of the teachers knew about this term in the beginning of the interview might show that they could not make a clear difference. It is hard to distinguish these two terms, since when thinking about the effects that are given when experiencing one of these two terms they are similar. Although, general anxiety then is not only concerning the foreign language learning. One of the teachers even said that she did not believe that Swedish students suffered from something so specific as foreign language anxiety in English. She believed that the students are too good in English

in general to be suffering from this, although, she did not exclude it in subjects such as German/French/Spanish. This might not just be the case for this teacher perhaps there are several teachers who think like this.

## **7.2 How do the teachers try to help their students?**

When the teachers were asked what they do to help their students who experience foreign language anxiety, both of the teachers answered similarly, even if only one of the teachers believed in something called foreign language anxiety. Can one then assume that the teachers who are aware of this issue will help their students better? No, of course not.

Although, it will definitely be easier for the students if the teacher has understanding for them and their foreign language anxiety and to be able to help the students with these issues, the teacher must be aware of the term and what it means (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Even though it is important that teachers know about foreign language anxiety, it is as important to remember to motivate the students. As it is shown by this study, the motivation has a great impact on the students' willingness to participate in class and to do different types of activities. Nevertheless, it is equally important to be positive about the different activities and tasks that are given to the students. Sometimes, the positivity has a tendency to be transferred to the students, according to this study.

This study has also shown, that the students experience foreign language anxiety, at different times and for different reasons. We have students that experience this when they are about to speak in front of their peers, whereas, we also have students who experience this when they are to perform a speech or something similar in front of the teacher. Looking at the results from the questionnaire a lot of them think that other students are better than themselves when it comes to speaking. Perhaps then the anxiety becomes more intense when there is some kind of pressure on them. Effiong (2016) pushes the fact that a competition between the

students is present. Then on the other hand it is also stated that the competition decreases in group work, and that this might be a thing to keep in mind when teaching (Effiong, 2016, p.147). When interviewing the teachers, both of them stated that they try to work a lot in groups. First of all, they do this because of the fact that this is a good way for the students to get to know each other. Secondly, this might also help the students feel less foreign language anxiety. They said that it is easier for the students to speak in smaller groups. According to the teachers who were interviewed, one must have a big focus on letting the students practice, to give them a chance, and make sure that they know that they are not being graded all the time. There are several ways of working with this and they are stated in the discussion.

### **7.3 Limitations of the Study**

This study has its limitations of course, which should be taken in mind when reading. There was not a very large amount of students participating to answer the questionnaire. Neither was there a large amount of teachers being interviewed. This study has been small and considering the small amounts of participants in both parts of the study, the outcome to someone might not be strong enough to believe. Nevertheless, it is shown even if it is a small study, that there are students who experience foreign language anxiety and that teachers of these students are not aware of it. This on the other hand, is why the study was done. The fact that there is something such as foreign language anxiety should be known to all teachers, not only in Sweden, but all around the world. One more important thing that is equally important to remember is that if this study has shown this result, that there are students who suffer from this and the teachers are not aware, what would the results be if the study was done in a larger scale? For further directions of this study it would be interesting to know why not all teachers are aware of that this is a problem for the students. As it has been shown in previous research, it does impede the language learning process and this should be prevented. As teacher we

should improve the students' chances of learning and make sure they have the possibility to at least pass the different English courses. It is after all one of the core subjects, and not only is it the core subject, but English is also the lingua franca in our world Seidelhofer (2004). This study has also shown that in Sweden, the schools that were investigated in this case are not as afraid of not understanding the teachers, as they are in other studies such as Effiong (2016), Dogan, & Tuncer, (2016). Perhaps this has to do with how English is portrayed in the countries where the studies have been done. This cannot be stated since this study has not been investigating that point of view it has only opened thoughts, ideas, and perhaps inspiration for further research. It would be interesting to know more about how this issue is dealt with in Sweden. Future research could possibly investigate about foreign language anxiety in Sweden, although, in a larger scale than in what it has been done here. It could be possible to investigate why not all teachers are aware of this issue, even though the curriculum points out how important it is for students to develop communicative skills. As this is the end of this study, it must be said that the awareness of foreign language anxiety must be raised, so that all teachers are aware of this issue. The students need to be supported in this, and the teachers' job is to make sure that all students get the grade and knowledge they deserve.

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## Appendix A. The interview questions

1. Are you familiar with the term foreign language anxiety.
2. Have you noticed something along this line in your classroom?
3. Can you distinguish between foreign language anxiety and general anxiety?
4. Do you believe that your students are afraid of making mistakes because the fact that it might lead to a bad grade?
5. Do you believe that there is a competition between the students – and if there is, is it good?
6. Are you able to take all your information in English?
7. What do you think it is that make the students so nervous?
8. In what way do you try to help your students?