

# FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY AMONG FINNISH NINTH GRADE STUDENTS

Bachelor's thesis  
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## JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Kieliahdistus on monimutkainen ilmiö, joka voi vakavimmillaan aiheuttaa suuria vaikeuksia vieraan kielen oppimiseen. Vaikka kieliahdistusta on tutkittu maailmalla varsin paljon, Suomessa tutkimusta kaivattaisiin enemmän. Tämän kandidaattitutkielman tarkoituksena onkin selvittää kieliahdistuksen esiintymistä suomalaisilla yhdeksäsluokkalaisilla englannin kielen oppiaineessa. Päätaivoitteena tutkimuksessa on saada selville, kuinka suurta kieliahdistuksen esiintyvyys on, mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat siihen ja onko oppilailla selviytymiskeinoja kieliahdistukseen. Koska yhdeksännellä luokalla koulumenestyksellä voi jatkokoulutukseen etenemisen myötä esiintyä lisäpainetta, on tärkeää selvittää kieliahdistuksen esiintymistä kyseisellä ikäryhmällä.</p> <p>Tutkimus suoritettiin kyselyllä, johon osallistui yhteensä 19 yhdeksäsluokkalaista kahdelta eri luokalta. Kysely suoritettiin netissä ja siitä saatu aineisto oli sekä kvantitatiivista että kvalitatiivista. Tulokset mukailivat parinkymmenen vuoden takaista, samalla ikäryhmällä suoritettua tutkimusta; yhdeksäsluokkalaiset eivät olleet kovin ahdistuneita englannin kielestä. Kieliahdistusta yleisimmin aiheuttavat tekijät olivat puhuminen sekä koetilanteet. Tutkimuksessa selvisi myös, ettei oppilailla juurikaan ollut selviytymiskeinoja kieliahdistusta kohtaan. Voi kuitenkin myös olla, että englannin kielen aiheuttama ahdistus on niin pientä, ettei selviytymiskeinojen tiedostaminen ole oppilaille tarpeellista. Vaikka tutkimukseen osallistuneiden määrä oli varsin pieni, se tarjoaa jonkinlaista kuvaa kieliahdistuksen esiintymisestä suomalaisilla yhdeksäsluokkalaisilla.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

While studying or using a foreign language, perhaps as many as 50% of students experience the negative behavioral, cognitive, emotional or physical symptoms of anxiety (Campbell and Ortiz 1991). These symptoms may include for example a rapid heart rate, heavy breathing, nervousness or concerned thoughts (Horwitz et al. 1986: 128). This complex phenomenon is called foreign language anxiety (FLA). Many factors cause FLA, but the most common reason seems to be language output, more specifically speaking (Horwitz et. al 1986; Tikkanen 2014). Especially situations requiring spontaneous use of language create anxious thoughts in students (Howritz et al. 1986: 128; Nilsson 2019: 12; Oravuo 2021: 62). In addition, peers, teachers, and personal factors, such as perfectionism can cause FLA. It is important to acknowledge these factors and try to prevent them because FLA can affect students significantly. For example, FLA can have negative effects on classroom, academic performance and language learning (Howritz et. al 1986; MacIntyre 1995; MacIntyre and Gardner 1989).

Although foreign language anxiety has been widely researched in other countries, the research in Finland has been rather narrow. More studies in Finland are required since the context of Finnish schools is different in comparison to other countries. Furthermore, the more recent studies have been focusing on either primary school or university levels. Kyyrönen's (1997) study had the same target group as my study, ninth grade students, but their study was conducted over twenty years ago. Thus, an update to this research is needed. Moreover, ninth grade students may have additional pressure to succeed in school to continue studying in their choice of further education (Kupiainen 2019: 185–186). The aim of my study is to find out whether Finnish ninth grader students experience FLA and whether they have methods to cope with this phenomenon.

In the beginning of this study, I will introduce the phenomenon of foreign language anxiety. The symptoms, effects, coping methods and previous research on the topic are discussed. Then, the aims of the study as well as the research questions are presented. Next, I will present the data gathering and analyzing methods. Finally, I will introduce the results and discuss what they might indicate.

## **2 FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY**

### **2.1 Definition**

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986: 125) define anxiety as a complex phenomenon, including feelings such as stress, fear and concern. When this phenomenon occurs in foreign language learning, it is a situation specific anxiety called foreign language anxiety (FLA) (Horwitz et al. 1986: 125). Kralova and Petrova (2017: 110) add that FLA is both a mental and physical condition caused by multiple biological, psychological and social factors, occurring when a language learner faces a new language, and it can be either a temporary or a constant condition (Kralova and Petrova 2017: 110). In their research, Campbell and Ortiz (1991: 151) found that almost half of language students experience anxiety while learning a foreign language.

Combined with some personality traits, such as risk-taking, self-confidence and motivation, the degree of anxiety reported by students correlates with their foreign language learning outcomes (Kralova and Petrova 2017: 110). Therefore, foreign language anxiety can be an obstacle for language learners to reach their full potential (Aida 1994: 155; Horwitz et al. 1989: 125). Moreover, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) mention that FLA is one of the significant factors predicting the success of an individual's language learning. Hence, it is important to acknowledge the effects FLA has on foreign language students' learning abilities as well.

### **2.2 Foreign language anxiety symptoms and effects**

Foreign language learning has many physical and mental symptoms. Students can for instance suffer from sweating and heart palpitations as well as experience feelings such as nervousness, worry, and even dread toward the learning process, affecting it negatively (Horwitz et al. 1986: 128). Highly anxious students reported "freezing" while speaking in class and having to gather courage to even attend the lesson (Horwitz et al. 1986: 128). Furthermore, the feeling of incapability to learn due to anxiety has negative effects on the learning process (Horwitz et al. 1986: 130) because linguistic self-confidence is essential in foreign language learning (MacIntyre 2017: 17). In addition, the barrier to ask for help is high, since the students perceive it being a sign of weakness, immaturity and incompetence (Aida 1994: 164).

Learning can be affected by foreign language anxiety. It can cause major individual differences in language learning and production (MacIntyre 1995: 90). For instance, anxious students need more time to learn and remember learnt aspects for a shorter period (MacIntyre 2017: 17). Thus, FLA affects the growth of vocabulary negatively since it requires long-term memory (MacIntyre and Gardner 1989: 269, 271). As it affects learning and performance negatively (MacIntyre and Gardner 1989: 268), FLA can lead to lower academic performance (MacIntyre 2017: 17).

As learning is affected by foreign language anxiety, it can also have effects on academic performance, such as succeeding in graded schoolwork. Anxious students report forgetting the answers they know to questions in testing situations. They also tend to make accidental mistakes because of anxiety (Howritz et. al 1986: 126). Anxiety seems to take control of the students' thoughts while being tested. In addition, anxious students avoid homework and classes in order to ignore their anxious feelings (Howritz et. al 1986: 126). This then affects their learning of the language. On the other hand, anxiety may cause students to overstudy, as they cannot perform their best in class. However, the symptoms of anxiety may overrule the skills of the students and they are not able to succeed the preferred way, leading to for instance frustration (Howritz et. al 1986: 127).

### **2.3 Causes of foreign language anxiety**

Language comprehension is a significant factor causing foreign language anxiety. Foreign language anxiety most often appears in speaking (Howritz et al. 1986: 125). Thus, language output seems to be most concerning to students. Students perceive spontaneous situations requiring communication especially difficult to function in (Howritz et al. 1986: 128; Nilsson 2019: 12; Oravuo 2021: 62). Additionally, anxious students sometimes struggle to understand the message in spoken language. They believe the message cannot be understood without recognizing every word (Huang 2012: 2). Moreover, students may be afraid of being unable to express themselves with a foreign language. They can also fear giving a wrong impression caused by a misunderstanding due to the lack of language skills (Horwitz et al. 1989: 128; Tikkanen 2014: 53–54). Being unable to either understand others or express themselves can easily create frustrating situations (Huang 2012: 2; Tikkanen 2014: 53).

Beliefs and personal factors can contribute to anxiety in foreign language learning. Students who do not accept making mistakes while using a foreign language are more anxious, as they pursue to be perfect language users (Howritz et al. 1986: 127; Tikkanen 2014: 52). Thriving to be perfect can reduce the use of the foreign language, negatively affecting language learning. Students report that they would speak more in foreign language class if they were more confident about their skills (Young 1990: 545). Hence, perfectionism, being too harsh on oneself (Oravuo 2021: 69; Tikkanen 2014: 51) and unrealistic expectations on one's skills (MacIntyre 2017: 21) are not ideal in foreign language learning. In addition, negative attitudes towards foreign language learning may create anxiety. The negative thoughts are usually tied to earlier experiences on foreign language learning that then lead to anxious thoughts (Aida 1994: 162).

Additionally, peers can create anxiety in foreign language learning. Even though the learning atmosphere was found open, students reported being nervous to speak in a class full of their peers (Nilsson 2019: 13). They feel worried about peer's reactions, situations with misunderstandings and speaking incorrectly (MacIntyre 2017: 21). Moreover, anxious students compare their language skills to other students, viewing themselves as less competent compared to their peers (Tikkanen 2014: 48; Howritz et al. 1986: 128). It could be that the peers are not the main factor causing these feelings; the assumptions one has of the possible outcomes could be the leading cause of FLA in this case.

Teachers and their actions can lead to foreign language anxiety as well. The effect the teacher has is not simple, as some student groups had the same teacher but different levels of anxiety (Nilsson 2019: 10). Still, students often view the teacher as a judging authority figure, correcting all mistakes, expecting perfect language skills (Tikkanen 2014: 57–61). Teachers can then either strengthen or weaken these thoughts with their actions. Unsuitable teaching and testing methods can lead to negative feelings in class (MacIntyre 2017: 21). For instance, if students only receive negative feedback, anxiety will increase while using the language, as they expect discouraging feedback of their output in the future (Tikkanen 2014: 58). The way the teacher reacts to mistakes is also important; being afraid of the teacher laughing after making mistakes can affect the way students feel using a foreign language (Oravuo 2021: 69). Therefore, the teacher has a major role in maintaining an encouraging atmosphere in the classroom.

## **2.4 Coping with foreign language anxiety**

Educators have a significant role to help their students cope with foreign language anxiety. Teachers must acknowledge the underlying phenomenon of foreign language anxiety to help the learners suffering from it. They need to understand that the symptoms students present, such as being unprepared for class, could be signs of experienced foreign language anxiety before determining that the student has difficulties with motivation (Horwitz et al. 1986: 131). Moreover, Horwitz et al. (1986) present two ways teachers can use to aid anxious students; either provide them coping methods against stress or create a less stressful learning environment. Students can be for example advised about different study methods or relaxation activities can be practiced. Additionally, the class should have a comfortable atmosphere, so students find confidence but do not feel pressured to participate in activities (Huang 2012: 139). Teachers should encourage students to support their peers (Horwitz et al. 1986: 131) as well as to take part in tasks, complimenting them when done so (Huang 2012: 148). In addition, teachers must accept students making mistakes, focusing on giving positive feedback instead of negative (Huang 2012: 148). Constructive feedback to the students should be given so that it will not offend them (Huang 2012: 139). However, as teachers cannot provide enough help for students with severe cases of FLA, Huang (2012: 139) suggests that these students should search for help from professionals.

Another way to cope with foreign language anxiety is for the students to practice by themselves. Outside of class, students should prepare well for their lessons and practice the language intensely as well as review the learnt thoroughly afterwards (Huang 2012: 128). The students should also consider their attitudes toward class, changing it to a more optimistic view on language learning if necessary (Huang 2012: 129). Furthermore, students should show more interest in the language, be more accepting about making mistakes and build self-confidence to be able to present their skills effectively (Huang 2012: 129). Inside the classroom, students should be more open to participate in activities to gain self-confidence and ignore the thoughts of their peers evaluating their language skills (Huang 2012: 130). As my thesis focuses on the students' perceptions of FLA, it will be interesting to find out to what extent these points are brought up in this study. It seems to be difficult to cope with FLA without personally trying out different coping methods.



## 2.5 Commonness and previous research

Multiple studies concerning foreign language anxiety among students of different ages have been conducted. Nilsson (2019: 13) observed that in the Swedish primary school context over 75% of the highly anxious students viewed English more anxiety provoking compared to other subjects. Still, students found the learning environment in English class to be safe (Nilsson 2019: 13). Hence, some aspects of foreign language learning seem to provoke anxiety in students. Furthermore, Gardner et al. (1976: 203) found that Canadian English-speaking students' anxiety levels in French class increased from 7th to 11th grade. As the students' anxiety levels increased, their academic success declined. Aida (1994: 162) noted that over one third of American college students studying Japanese felt anxious about their studies. In comparison, Horwitz et al. (1989: 126) reported that over a half of US college students studying a foreign language experienced at least medium-level anxiety.

Foreign language anxiety in the Finnish context has yet not been widely researched. Hence more research is needed. In their master's thesis, Jalkanen and Ruuska (2007) focused on Finnish elementary school students' perceptions on FLA. The results were similar to previous studies conducted abroad; 55% of the participants felt nervous in English class. The most anxiety provoking causes were speaking out loud in class, peers' reactions to it as well as testing situations (Jalkanen and Ruuska 2007: 60–62). In a more recent study, Oravuo (2021) analyzed FLA in Finnish university students. Even though the anxiety levels were not high, almost half of both English and non-English major students experienced anxiety in English class to some extent. The most common anxiety causing factors followed previous studies: language output, making mistakes, and classroom situations (Oravuo 2021). Moreover, Kyyrönen (1997) examined FLA among Finnish ninth grade students. As opposed to previous studies, they found that students experienced rather low anxiety levels. However, the students' willingness to answer in Kyyrönen's study was quite low, indicating that the results could be different from reality. Since their study provided contradictory results, it will be interesting to find out whether the results of my study are aligned with Kyyrönen.

### 3 RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

The aim of the study is to examine foreign language anxiety among ninth grade students completing their last year in lower secondary school. First, because the ninth grade is the last stage of lower secondary school in the Finnish education system, ninth grade students might struggle with the pressure to receive good grades to get into the further education of their choice (Kupiainen 2019: 185–186). Therefore, it will be useful to find out about FLA among this age group. Second, the results of Kyyrönen's (1997) study indicated that ninth grade students do not experience a great deal of anxiety while studying English. However, this study has been conducted over twenty years ago and it will be useful to get an updated see-through of the phenomenon. Third, it is important to acknowledge the factors causing FLA to students, as anxiety can have negative effects on learning results (e.g., MacIntyre 2017). Educators must be familiar with the causes to reduce anxiety as much as they can. Finally, I aim to find out whether students have coping methods for FLA. Even if the anxiety levels are found to be low, it will be useful to know how students cope with these feelings. These results will also be beneficial for educators as they can receive some insight on whether students know how to cope with anxiety or not.

With these aims, my research questions are the following:

- 1) What are the main reasons for foreign language anxiety while learning English?
- 2) How common is foreign language anxiety among Finnish ninth graders?
- 3) Do students have methods to cope with anxious thoughts on English learning?

## **4 DATA AND METHODS**

### **4.1 Participants**

I asked two ninth grade classes about their perceptions in learning English as a foreign language. The participants were from two separate English classes in one lower secondary school located in Central Finland. Because of the ongoing corona virus in the school, many of the students were sick while the study was conducted, hence I received 19 answers. Out of the 19 participants, 8 were female, 9 male and 2 did not want to define. Eleven of the participants were 15 years old while eight were 16 years old. As all the participants were studying in the ninth grade, they had been studying English as a foreign language for approximately 7-8 years. Thus, they should be familiar with the feelings they experience during English class.

### **4.2 Data and data collection**

I contacted the teacher of the two ninth grade classes via email and asked for permission to conduct a questionnaire during class. As the participants were underaged and the questionnaire was to be completed at school, permission from the students' guardians and the municipality was asked as well. Once I had all the required permissions, I sent the questionnaire to the teacher and the students completed them. The questionnaire was completed during school hours to motivate the students to participate and take it more seriously (Gillham 2008: 10). I chose to gather the data with a questionnaire since it is a suitable method to find out about feelings and behavior in a more general matter (Gillham 2008: 26). The questionnaire was completed online via Webropol in Finnish to ensure comprehension of the questions. Because it was completed anonymously, the participants should have been more willing to answer truthfully as they are not recognizable (Dörnyei and Taguchi 2010: 17).

The questionnaire consisted of seven questions. The first and second questions were about the participants age and gender, to examine the distribution of the participants. With questions 3 and 4, I used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et al. 1984) as an aid. The FLCAS consists of 33 statements about communication, test-anxiety and thoughts on negative feedback in a foreign language classroom, using the Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. However, I used a briefer and modified version of it with ten statements in total about the

nervous feelings English creates. Question 5 was a single-answer question relating to the frequency of the nervous thoughts and question 6 straightforwardly asked what factors cause the nervous feelings. Last, question 7 was an open-ended question about the coping methods for the nervous thoughts. The short length of the questionnaire and placement of the open-ended question in the end were to maintain the motivation to answer the questionnaire till the end (Dörnyei and Taguchi 2010: 9, 13, 37; Denscombe 2014: 165).

### **4.3. Methods of analysis**

I presented the data in various ways. I chose to display the quantitative data in different forms of tables and figures depending on the question's form. Furthermore, I used percentages rounded to the nearest full number to present the findings because they allow the comparison of the factors. This then made it possible to search for relationships between the factors (Denscombe 2014: 258). I analyzed each question individually. With questions 3 and 4 consisting of multiple statements, I compared similar statements with each other to find correlations between them. Additionally, I had an open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire. Because I only received one answer, comparison of this data was not possible. Therefore, I used the content analysis method to analyze the single answer.

## 5 RESULTS

In this section, I will present the results of the survey. I have divided the questionnaire into three different sections and will be going through them in numerical order. The percentages of the results have been rounded to the nearest full number. The first and second questions gathered information about the participants gender and age and have been presented already in section 4.1. Hence, these questions will be left out of this section. The whole questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix 1.

### 5.1 Students' perceptions of using English in the classroom

In this section, I will present the results of the third question. It consisted of six statements about using the English language during English class which are also presented in Table 1. This question directly related to the first and second research questions as it aimed to find out what factors were perceived to cause nervous feelings and how commonly.

The first and fifth statements covered the toleration of making mistakes in spoken language. As seen in Table 1, over half of the participants either agree or strongly agree with not minding making mistakes while speaking English. However, 31% of the participants either disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. If the teacher corrected mistakes made while speaking, 32% of the participants would get upset, 26% felt neutral about it and 42% of the participants were fine with it. Therefore, as the table indicates, many of the participants accept themselves making mistakes. When they were corrected on them, the tolerance slightly decreased.

Statements two and three were about the effect peers have on causing foreign language anxiety. As Table 1 shows, the fear of peers' reactions divides the participants into three rather equally. Even though the majority of the participants were not nervous about the other students' reactions, one third of them were. Additionally, a quarter of the participants did not agree or disagree with this statement. On the contrary, 79% of the participants did not feel uncomfortable speaking English with a partner or in a small group.

Nervousness about speaking without preparation and to the whole class divided the participants' answers. Especially speaking to the whole class caused differing opinions; almost half of the

participants did not feel nervous speaking unprepared but 37% felt nervous. Furthermore, over half of the participants thought that speaking without preparation did not cause nervousness. Still, 21% of the respondents did not agree or disagree with this statement and 21% agreed being nervous speaking unprepared.

**Table 1.** Finnish EFL learners' (n = 19) responses to question 3: "Students' perceptions of using English in the English classroom"

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	In total
I don't mind making mistakes while using English.	1	5	2	9	2	19
	5%	26%	11%	47%	11%	
I'm nervous about other students' reactions when speaking in English.	2	6	5	6	0	19
	10%	32%	26%	32%	0%	
I feel unsure while speaking in English with a partner or a small group.	8	7	2	1	1	19
	42%	37%	11%	5%	5%	
I get nervous if I must speak in English without preparation.	5	6	4	4	0	19
	26%	32%	21%	21%	0%	
I get upset if the teacher corrects my mistakes while I'm speaking.	1	7	5	4	2	19
	5%	37%	26%	21%	11%	
I'm nervous to speak in English to the whole classroom.	4	5	3	4	3	19
	21%	26%	16%	21%	16%	

## 5.2 Students' perceptions on the English subject and their English skills

In this second section, I will focus on question 4 presented in Table 2. The question had four statements concerning the participants' perceptions of English as a school subject as well as their self-perceived English skills. This question was based on the first and second research questions, as its aim was to discover anxiety-provoking factors within the English subject and their commonness.

As Table 2 indicates, the first and second statements of question 4 did not cause a great deal of division between the participants' answers. Almost 95% of the participants perceived English

causing less nervous thoughts in comparison to other school subjects. Furthermore, none of the participants disagreed with this statement. This finding is the opposite compared to the findings in Nilsson’s study (2017) in the Swedish context. When asked to compare their English skills to their peers in the second statement, over 78% of the participants viewed others not being better. Only two participants disagreed with this statement.

In the third statement, most of the participants did not feel nervous if they did not understand what someone was saying in English and only one participant disagreed with this. Nevertheless, 32% of the responses did not agree or disagree with this statement. During testing situations, over half of the participants did not report forgetting the correct answers.

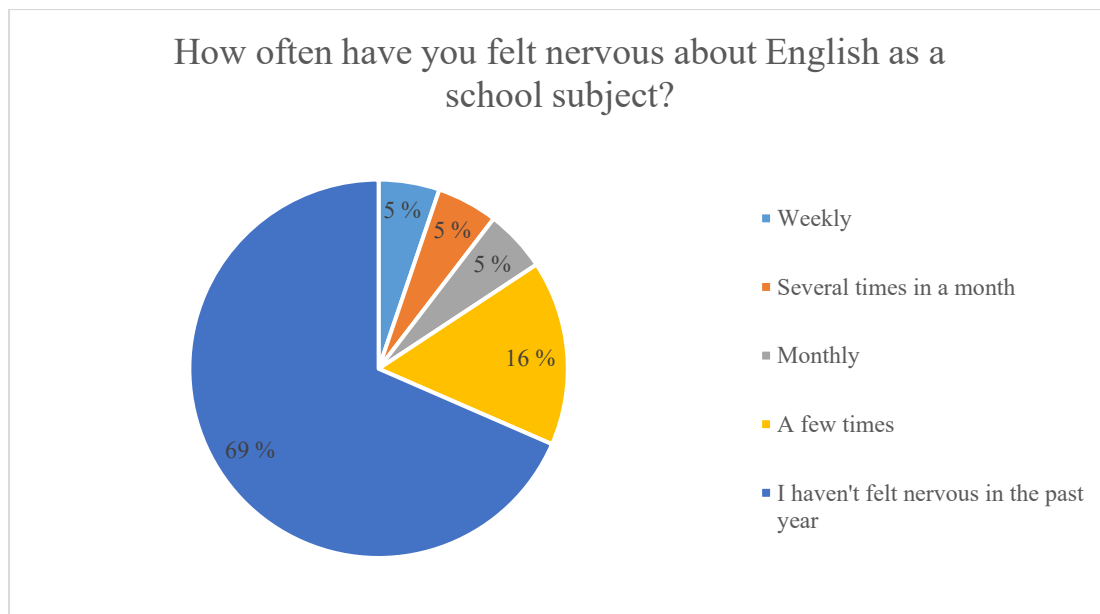
**Table 2.** Finnish EFL learners’ (n = 19) responses to question 4: “Students’ perceptions on the English subject and their English skills”

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Don’t agree or disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>In total</b>
I’m more nervous during English class compared to other subjects.	12	6	1	0	0	19
	63%	32%	5%	0%	0%	
I think others are better at English than I am.	8	7	2	1	1	19
	42%	37%	11%	5%	5%	
I get nervous when I don’t understand what the other person is saying in English.	8	4	6	1	0	19
	42%	21%	32%	5%	0%	
Even if I knew the correct answers, I tend to forget them during testing situations.	6	5	2	6	0	19
	32%	26%	11%	32%	0%	

### 5.3 Students’ perceptions on the frequency of nervousness and their coping methods

In this section, I will present the survey’s questions 5, 6 and 7. The fifth question provided answers to the second research question by asking the participants how often English had made them nervous within the past year. In the sixth question, causes of the nervousness were asked, therefore it was seeking answers for the first research question. The aim of the seventh question was to find out about the participants’ coping methods with nervous feelings, thus answering directly to the third research question.

The fifth question regarding nervous feelings due to English as a school subject is presented in Figure 1. 69% of the participants had not felt nervous about English in the past year. 16% of the respondents had felt nervous a few times whereas the options monthly, several times in a month and weekly all received a 5% answer rate. Thus, the result of this question correlates with the results of the previous questions; none of the factors presented in questions 3 and 4 seemed to cause nervousness significantly. Additionally, as 13 of the participants had not experienced nervousness, their survey ended with this question. Therefore, only six participants answered the last two questions.

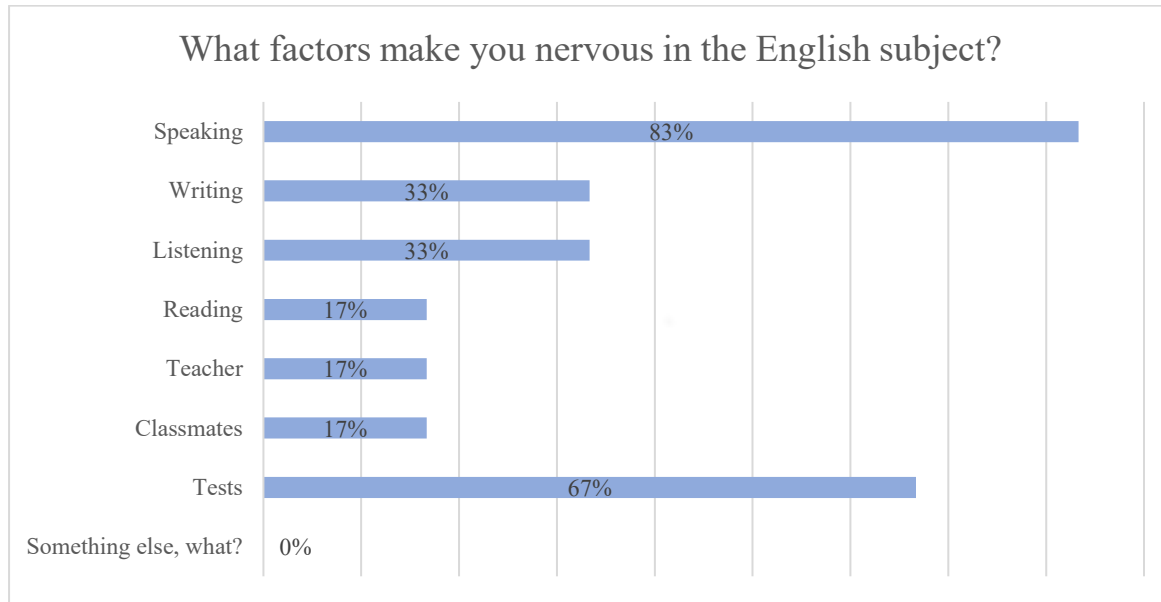


**Figure 1.** Finnish EFL learners' (n = 19) responses to question 5: "How often have you felt nervous about the English school subject in the past year?"

Question 6, presented in Figure 2, directly asked which factors have caused nervousness in the English subject in the past year. The number of answering options in this question was not limited, so the participants could choose more than one option. Speaking was found to cause the most nervousness, as 83% of the participants chose it. This compares to previous studies, in which speaking has also been found to be the most anxiety-provoking element in foreign languages (Jalkanen and Ruuska 2007; Horwitz et al. 1989; Oravuo 2021). Moreover, tests were another significant factor, because 67% of the respondents perceived it causing nervousness. These results



compare to previous studies since language output seemed to cause more nervousness in comparison to language input (Horwitz et. al 1989; Jalkanen and Ruuska 2007).



**Figure 2.** Finnish EFL learners' (n = 19) responses to question 6: "What factors make you nervous in the English subject?"

Question 7 was two-parted. The first part was a single-choice question, asking the participants if they had any coping methods to the nervous feelings caused by the English subject. Five out of the six respondents answered not having and one participant reported having coping methods. The second part of the question was a clarifying question about the coping methods for those participants, who reported having them, therefore this question had only one open-ended answer, which was:

**Example 1.** *Tekee vaan, kyllä se siitä lähtee pois*

*Just do it, it will go away*

As Example 1 shows, it is not very informative about the methods. This answer does not provide a great deal of information on how the participant copes with their nervousness. However, it seems that they could mean to just start working on the aspect causing the nervousness, such as a test, and with time it will go away.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The first research question about the causes of foreign language anxiety was answered broadly. Corresponding to previous research (e.g., Oravuo 2021; Jalkanen and Ruuska 2007; Horwitz et. al 1986), speaking and classroom situations seem to be the most common factors causing nervous feelings in the English language. Students appear to be quite confident about speaking spontaneously in English and in smaller groups; nervousness caused by speaking with a small number of peers had the second most “strongly disagree” answers. However, the peers’ reactions to the students’ own speaking caused nervous thoughts. Additionally, nervous feelings increased when the students had to speak to the whole class, and the tolerance in making mistakes while speaking decreased if the teacher corrected them. Tests seemed to also cause nervousness, as some of the participants reported forgetting answers to questions they knew during testing situations. These results could indicate that the English language itself does not cause anxiety but speaking and performing while others are listening or evaluating does (Horwitz et al. 1989).

Meanwhile, results on the third research question, coping methods for foreign language anxiety, were limited. As previously mentioned, only six participants answered the question about coping methods due to the structure of the questionnaire. Out of the six, only one reported having coping methods and the method was presented in Example 1. Although the participant number was very low, this could indicate students not having methods to cope with nervous thoughts. On the other hand, it could also suggest that the nervousness students experience is not that high that they would feel the need to cope with it in some way.

Some results differed with previous research. While in my study over 90% of the participants viewed English causing less nervous thoughts in comparison to other subjects, Nilsson (2019) found that English caused more anxiety to students compared to other school subjects. Perhaps the globalization of English and its high use in social media for instance has made students familiar with the language, reducing nervous feelings. Still, Nilsson’s study (2019) was conducted only a few years earlier. Another factor explaining this could be the setting; maybe other school subjects in Finland are more difficult compared to English. Moreover, the atmosphere of the class could have an effect. As the teacher seemed to not have a huge impact on the nervousness, it could

indicate that the atmosphere in the English classroom is open and supporting. Nevertheless, Nilsson (2019) found that the anxiety levels were high even though the atmosphere was encouraging.

As an answer to the second question, the existence of foreign language anxiety among ninth grade students, it seems that the students are not very nervous about English as a language or subject. Almost 80% of the participants disagreed with the statement of others being better at English than them. In addition, most of the participants did not mind incomprehension while others were speaking in English. Therefore, it seems like the participants are quite confident about their English skills. It would be interesting to find out whether confidence correlates with the students' English skills – i.e., if the students more confident about their skills compared to others were better at English.

Foreign language anxiety in the Finnish context should be further researched. Since the participant number of my study was low, the reliability of the results is not high. Additionally, all the participants were from the same school and had the same English teacher, so their English class experiences could be quite similar. Still, my results are comparable to previous research, providing some insight to the topic; it seems that English does not cause a great deal of anxiety among Finnish ninth grade students. For further research, it would be interesting to compare these results with other ninth graders from another school. Moreover, comparing FLA levels on different levels of education should be researched. It would be beneficial to find out whether FLA underlies in some education level more than in others.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Questionnaire

# Tutkimus kieliahdistuksen esiintymisestä yhdeksäsluokkalaisilla englannin kielen oppiaineessa

Tervetuloa vastaamaan kyselyyn!

Tämä kysely on osa Jyväskylän yliopistossa tehtävää kandidaatin tutkielmaani, jossa kartoitan kieliahdistuksen esiintymistä yhdeksäsluokkalaisilla englannin oppiaineessa. Kysely koostuu sekä monivalinta- että avoimista kysymyksistä ja on kestoltaan noin 10 minuuttia. Osallistuminen on täysin vapaaehtoista ja sen voi keskeyttää missä vaiheessa tahansa. Vastaaminen tapahtuu anonyymisti, joten osallistujia ei ole tunnistettavissa antamiensa tietojen perusteella. Tutkimuksessa kerättyjä tietoja käsitellään luottamuksellisesti.

Kiitos yhteistyöstä jo etukäteen!

Jos sinulle herää mitään kysymyksiä, ole yhteydessä sähköpostitse:

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## 1. Sukupuoli \*

Nainen

Mies

Muu

En halua kertoa

## 2. Ikä \*

14 tai alle

15

16

17 tai yli

## 3. Nämä väittämät koskevat tuntemuksiasi käyttäessäsi englantia englannin oppitunneilla. Valitse parhaiten sopiva vaihtoehto. \*

Täysin eri mieltä	Eri mieltä	En samaa enkä eri mieltä	Samaa mieltä	Täysin samaa mieltä
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Minua ei haittaa tehdä virheitä käyttäessäni englantia.

Jännitän muiden oppilaiden reaktioita, kun puhun englantia.

Tunnen itseni epävarmaksi puhuessani englantia parilleni tai pienissä ryhmissä.

Minua jännittää, jos joudun puhumaan englanniksi valmistautumatta siihen.

Minua harmittaa, jos opettaja korjaa tekemäni virheet puheessani.

Minua jännittää puhua englantia koko luokan kuullen.



**4. Nämä väittämät koskevat muita tuntemuksiasi käyttäessäsi englantia. Valitse parhaiten sopiva vaihtoehto. \***

Täysin eri mieltä	Eri mieltä	En samaa enkä eri mieltä	Samaa mieltä	Täysin samaa mieltä
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Minua jännittää englannin oppitunneilla enemmän kuin muiden aineiden oppitunneilla.

Ajattelen muiden oppilaiden olevan parempia englannissa kuin mitä itse olen.

Jännitän tilanteita, joissa en ymmärrä, mitä toinen osapuoli sanoo englanniksi.

Vaikka tietäisin oikeat vastaukset englannin kokeissa, unohdan ne koetilanteessa.

**5. Kuinka usein olet jännittänyt englannin oppiaineen vuoksi viimeisen vuoden aikana? \***

Viikoittain

Monta kertaa kuukaudessa

Kuukausittain

Muutaman kerran

En ole jännittänyt viimeisen vuoden aikana

**6. Mikä tai mitkä tekijät jännittävät sinua englannin oppiaineessa? \***

Puhuminen

Kirjoittaminen

Kuuntelu

Lukeminen

Opettaja

Luokkatoverit

Kokeet

Joku muu, mikä?

**7. Onko sinulla keinoja käsitellä englannin oppiaineesta aiheutuvaa jännitystä? \***

On, mitä?

Ei