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“Sources of FNE among First Year LMD\textsuperscript{1} Students of Abderrahmane Mira University”

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Abstract

The aim of this study was first to diagnose the existence of Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) and its perceived sources by first year university EFL learners at Abderrahmane Mira University. For this, we used Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope’s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and mere items reflecting FNE were treated. Results showed internal reliability with an alpha coefficient of .704. Then, to investigate the possible sources of FNE, we interviewed eight students. Findings revealed that teachers and peers were cited as the major sources (interaction and error correction). Besides, interviewees referred to low proficiency and low self-confidence.

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Keywords: LMD System; Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA); Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), language proficiency, error correction, classroom interaction, evaluation

1. Introduction

After decades of parallel, but separated, studies on anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) have built a framework and made a relation between them. From this perspective, they were the first who introduced the construct of FNE to the educational domain. This construct is what makes up the core of the present study. The concept of FNE is simply referred to as the fear of being laughed at (Brown, 2004). Our concern is to test the significance of four sources of FNE stated in the problem. Our aim is first to diagnose the significance of FNE and its perceived sources by first year university learners enrolled in the LMD system.

2. Background

2.1. Anxiety and FNE: A Theoretical Background

A growing body of educationalists, psychologists, researchers and teachers become more interested in the study of anxiety in language classrooms and its three constructs by using diverse methods and means though the purpose remains approximate (Kleinnmann, 1977; Scovel, 1978; Krashen, 1985; Crookal and Oxford, 1991; Bailey, 1991; Aida, 1994; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994; Nascente, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2003; Brown, 2003, 2004; Williams and Andrade, 2008;). Additionally, many works also dealt with Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), its causes and the way to cope with it. However, few of them treat the three sources of anxiety separately and very few dealt with FNE.

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independently from the two other constructs (Kitano, 2001; Brown’s, 2004). This work treats FNE as a source of FLA, searches a number of the causes that lead to FNE and that we judge influential in our EFL classrooms.

To begin with, Horwitz et al. (1986) argued for the existence of an anxiety specific to FLL, conceptually related to the three specific varieties; communication apprehension, test anxiety and FNE. In this concern, they relate the FLA’s conceptual foundation to performance evaluation and social contexts and claim: “Because foreign language anxiety concerns performance evaluation within an academic and social context, it is useful to draw parallels between it and three related performance anxieties: 1) communication apprehension; 2) test anxiety; and 3) FNE”. Horwitz et al., then, developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to capture the specific anxiety reaction of a student to a foreign language situation, and which integrates the above stated anxieties. Later on, MacIntyre and Gardner’s (1991) study employed a separate dimension of language anxiety scales of communication apprehension; FNE and test anxiety were not associated with this dimension. Supporting the suggestion that language anxiety is a specific, relatively unique type of apprehension, it was also evidenced by Young (1990) that the most anxiety-provoking tasks in language classrooms involve public communication and/or evaluation, comprising the three sources of anxiety identified by Horwitz et al. (1986). Hence, FNE can be one of the prominent causes which engender FLA. It is also called social evaluation or social apprehension. It was Watson and Friend (1969) who introduced the concept and characterized it as "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectations that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (cited in Collins, 2005:346). Again, social evaluation apprehension emerges from the social nature of language use, because foreign language communication involves self-presentation in a language with which only limited competency has been attained (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993: 5). In classroom settings, it may be fear to be negatively evaluated by peers and teachers. This view is also pointed out by Horwitz et al. (1986:16) who believe that FNE “is not limited to test-taking situations; rather, it may occur in any social, evaluative situation ... Unique among academic subject matters, foreign languages require continual evaluation by the only fluent speaker in the class, the teacher. Students may also be acutely sensitive to the evaluations- real or imagined - of their peers”.

2.2. Background of the Study and Problem Statement

When attempting to wave through the literature on FLA and FNE, we have noticed the great interest researchers give to anxiety in FLL in the last four decades. However, we have come across research dealing with the three varieties of language anxiety, but we have seldom found studies that dealt with FNE in its own. This phenomenon has been investigated by few researchers particularly in Algeria. Hence, there is a need of further research if not to find out a new knowledge related to FLA, FNE and evaluation, but to contribute in providing the body of knowledge with more explications and establish further links amongst the variables we have embedded in the present research. Moreover, we need to try finding new techniques and conditions which might add a stone to the field of research on anxiety and evaluation. It is also for the sake of investigating the significance of and correlation of a number of factors that lead to FNE that our research is to be held. Furthermore, through research we may augment the findings of the other studies with a new population, a new context and an innovative methodology. The originality of the present work is in the choice of the population at hand and the research context in which it is held. That is, research on FLA and FNE has never been dealt with by researchers in Béjaia University especially under the reign of the LMD system. Our population is first year LMD students of English, the thing which makes it unique.

In this research, we have established a link between evaluation in EFL and FLA. This psychological construct is an educational crisis from which we have selected a more particular problem related to its varieties FNE. Our problem, then, is stated as follows: how can negative evaluation related to peers interaction, the foreign language, the teacher’s error correction experienced and perceived by first year LMD students learning EFL at Béjaia University cause fear?

The above problem can be guided by the following research questions:
- To which extent do first year LMD students of English at Abderrahmane Mira University feel FNE?
- How do these learners perceive evaluation, negative evaluation and the sources of FNE?
- Are the causes we enumerated in the problem the anxiety triggers in our first year EFL university students?

2.2. Methodology

2.2.1. Participants

The selected population of this study was first year English LMD system students at Abderrahmane Mira University of Béjaia. The total number of the students subscribed in the first year was 424 at the beginning of the year. Then, the number of the students was reduced to 332; a fact that can be negatively interpreted and needs more
enquiry. These students quitted or changed the stream. Within the remaining ones, we have 212 females and 120 males. These students have been studying EFL for at least five years; that is from the second year of elementary school. The number of the students who participated in the survey was 108 randomly selected students; a number that represents 32, 53% of the whole population. We, then, conducted a face to face interview with eight volunteer participants.

2.2.2. Research Techniques and Methods

To collect data, we have gone through two phases. First, we used Horwitz, et al.’s (1986) FLCAS to diagnose the existence of FNE in our 108 university learners as part of the quantitative investigation of our study. The second phase of data collection is the semi-structured interview. Eight volunteers participated and revealed their views on the potential sources of FNE from a student position. Hence, our research is based on a mixed methodology relying on both qualitative and quantitative methods.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The FLCAS

Using the FLCAS remains a safe step for us to identify FNE among our participants. Its authors have conducted several validity and reliability studies on the FLCAS showing satisfactory reliability, internal consistency, construct validity, and test-retest reliability (Horwitz, 1991; Horwitz et al., 1986 In Ganschow and Spark, 1994: 202). The scale has established internal reliability, achieving an alpha coefficient of .704 compared to .93 reached by Horwitz et al. (1986: 129); which is considerably lower. The scale’s items obtained reflect communication apprehension, test anxiety, and FNE in the foreign language classroom, but only replies to the items related to FNE are reported in Table 01 and discussed here. These items are: 2, 7, 13, 15, 19, 23, 25, and 31. To analyse data, we used the SPSS software for more accurate results.

Table 01: FLCAS Items Relative to FNE with Percentages of Students Selecting Each Alternative

| Item | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|------|----|---|---|---|----|
| 2. I don't worry about making mistakes in language class. | 15 | 42 | 8 | 23 | 13 |
| 7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am. | 10 | 25 | 18.5 | 24 | 21 |
| 13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class. | 7 | 29 | 25 | 28 | 11 |
| 15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting. | 36 | 44 | 11 | 9 | 0 |
| 19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make. | 14 | 28 | 7 | 35 | 16 |
| 23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do. | 14 | 24 | 15 | 26 | 21 |
| 25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind. | 14 | 37 | 23.5 | 22.5 | 3 |
| 31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language. | 14 | 13 | 11 | 38 | 24 |

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

Data in this table are rounded to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Results from the FLCAS are shown in the above table, most of the learners confirmed experiencing FNE in one situation or another. Worth to mention, we have two situations where students scored high; error correction and the fear of being left behind by the class. This shows that the two situations are the most FNE breeding cases in their classes. In our analysis, we shall treat the results in more details.

Our first source has to do with language proficiency. Here, items 7 and 19 are revealing. For item 7, we have 35.2% of the learners agreed and 45.4% disagreed. This shows that the level of learners who feel self-confident and competent is a bit higher than the ones who feel less self-confident and less competent. Given that FNE is socially
bound and closely related to evaluation and judgement, feeling lower than others remains a sign of the occurrence of FNE in these learners.

The second source we stated in the problem is *error correction*. In the scale, items 2, 15 and 19 reflect the significance of this variable. From item 2, it seems that more than the half of the population is not afraid of making mistakes in their classes. However, the number of those who agreed and strongly agreed is also important, 23.1%, 12% respectively. Thus, this is a sign that FNE exists in our classes although the rate is lower than the one found by Horwitz et al. (1986) which was 65%. When making errors, most students do not worry. Yet, errors should be corrected. In fact, 13.9% answered strongly agree, 27.8% agree; which make nearly the half of the answers. It seems that our learners fear more about the evaluation than making the mistake. Such learners, as Horwitz et al. (1986) stated, seem to feel constantly tested to perceive every correction as a failure. When it comes to item 15, the results are highly surprising. More than 75% of the population agreed/strongly agreed. This reveals again that error correction may be a determinant factor in generating FNE among our learners. Within the same topic, making errors, in a reply to item 19, 13.9% answered strongly agree, 27.8% agree. Thus, we have 41.7% of the learners who agreed. In this case, we can clearly see the difference between just worry of making the errors and fear of being corrected the errors.

Dealing with *classroom interaction* as a source calls upon treating the results obtained from items 13 and 31. After dealing with competence in languages, this item comes to talk about the environment and interaction in class. In fact, item 13 shows whether learners feel at ease when volunteering answers or not. For the case of this item, the number of learners who agreed and disagreed is almost the same, 27.8%, 26.9% respectively. In sum, we have 34.3% of the learners agreed and 38% disagreed. This may be due to the classroom environment which may not be suitable for those who agreed on the statement. That is, if the teacher is judgmental or his corrections are not understood, and if peers make comments and laugh at them; this may make them vulnerable and avoid such situations. To this last item, item 31 shows that most of the learners do not really worry about others laughing at them. We have 26.9% of the learners agreed and 61.1% disagreed.

Finally, the notion of *assessment and evaluation* is crucial here as a source of FNE. In the scales’ items, questions 7, 23 and 25 are related to self-assessment. Here, items 7 and 23 are related to language aptitude whereas item 25 is related to fear of failure. Generally, we have 38% of the learners agreed/strongly agreed and 45.4% disagreed/strongly disagreed. Hence, feeling less competent in the target language may also be considered as an important factor in generating FNE. For item 25, most of the learners agreed on the statement. From the table, we can see 50% of the learners agreed/strongly agreed and only 25% disagreed/strongly disagreed. This means that our learners meet difficulties in following the pace set by their teachers. This can, of course, have a great consequence upon them as they worry about being left behind. This makes them constantly under pressure; they have to follow in order to succeed. In addition to this, we should note that all the new information given to the learners is in English in which learners are not totally proficient. Thus, combination of these two elements may lead to the feeling of fear. All in all, fear can be engendered by the fact of being left behind and also possible negative evaluation as learners do not really follow and understand. This seems also a real problem from the side of Horwitz et al. (1986), 59% of the learners agreed on this statement.

| Items | 2. I don’t worry about making mistakes in my language class | 7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am | 13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class | 15. I get upset when I don’t understand what the teacher is correcting | 19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make | 23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do | 25. Language class moves so quickly that I worry about getting left behind | 31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Table 02: Students’ Replies on the FLCAS Relative to FNE and their Means | | | | | | | | |
In the above table, means show clearly that the items which scored high (≥ 3) are: 7, 13, 19, 23 and 31. Such items mean that FNE is more a matter of interaction and comparison to other students. Such items are related to negative evaluation and results from performance. Hence, our participants’ most concern is related to how they appear in front of others and to their results when performing in the classroom.

3.2. Interview

Our interview comes to gather qualitative data to complete the results we got from the FLCAS. We shall go through the sources as mentioned in our problem and in relation to what the learners themselves affirmed. To begin with, our participants have all agreed that their attitudes towards their classes and the English language are positive. Hence, the problem of fear does not seem a matter of negative attitudes as revealed through the interviewees’ answers on item 01 and 02. When asking about things students like and they do not like; their answers were summed up according to their importance as follows:

Likes: the language, the teacher, peers
Dislikes: Some teachers and the methods they use, some peers, and finally some modules

The learners’ dislikes group the sources we have indicated in our problem and we shall, then, illustrate with their quotes when treating these sources in the coming paragraphs.

3.2.1. Language Proficiency

Given the nature of the courses given in foreign language classes, they must be associated with language learning and mastery. That is, being proficient in the taught language is the targeted objective of any foreign language learner. If not achieved, the learner is more likely to be apprehensive since language is perceived as a source of negative evaluation. In this, Interviewee (A) declared “the language itself is the one that makes me fear from negative evaluation because the English language is difficult”. Here, the difficulty of the task comes from the difficulty of understanding and mastering the language. Again, Interviewee (G) affirmed: “the problem is in me, I am not really proficient”. Research put focus on speaking as the most challenging skill. This was confirmed through the results we obtained from the FLCAS. In addition, the inability to do things and speak is more likely to be due to lack of proficiency in the taught language. This lack of proficiency may eventually lead to misunderstanding or non-understanding, and hence to negative evaluation (as found through the scale’s results) and as confirmed by Interviewee (E) who simply declared “lack of proficiency”. In this, Kitano (2001) pinpointed that an individual student’s anxiety was higher as he perceived his ability as lower than that of peers.

3.2.2. Error Correction

As stated in the problem, error correction can be source of FNE. Among the interrelated reasons that we consider, we believe that low language proficiency correlates with low performance. These flaws learners have lead undoubtedly to low performance, a high occurrence of errors and, hence, to error correction. These repeated evaluative situations are more likely to engender fear if perceived negatively. Here, we can state the example of Interviewee (c) who declared “I don’t like some of my classmates because they don’t look to the mistakes they make, but just pay attention the others’ mistakes, as if they don’t know we are all first year students; besides if a learner
has a better level than the other one, he will humiliate him”. As first year learners, such students are not supposed to be proficient in the language. These learners, even being at the same level and less proficient, provide others with negative evaluation when making errors and do not encourage each other.

According to the body of the literature, many have been said about error correction as part of the teacher-learner relationship. Harsh error correction, ridicule and uncomfortable handling of mistakes in front of a class are among the most important instructor-learner interaction issues related to language anxiety (Arnold, 1999: 66). These factors were strongly present in our participants’ responses. To illustrate, Interviewee (C) stated “I don’t like some of the teachers because they don’t correct the student directly, but first humiliate him in front of everybody, then they correct”. Here, it seems that the major problem is harsh error correction. Oxford, Ehrman and Lavine (1991) stated in this concern that harsh error correction is one of the most anxiety breeding factors.

3.2.3. Interaction

Given that the classroom is made up of the teacher and the learners, group interaction constantly plays a focal role in the process of evaluation with all its forms (self-evaluation, peer evaluation and teacher evaluation). That is why; we added this component as a possible source of FNE. Learners can fear the “Others’: teacher or peers” way of evaluating them and can anticipate negative evaluation, especially if their evaluation of themselves is negative. Let us consider Interviewee (B) who referred to peer-interaction: “I don’t like some of my friends because they make some arbitrary comments, and some of them laugh at me”. This learner seems to experience FNE which is mainly caused by his friends who laugh at him. Besides, he added the comments which he considers arbitrary, subjective. In this concern, Nascente (2001) stated that FNE is an interactive construct. Moreover, she added that “Even individuals with no predisposition to FLA, might fear to be negatively evaluated in the foreign classroom if the group interaction is not a positive one” (Nascente, 2001: 114). Hence, even if he is not anxious, when his peers laugh at him or make negative comments, he will fear from such reactions, especially if he judges them subjectively. Hence, he is more likely to experience FNE.

In addition to peer interaction, learner-instructor interaction has been focused; such an issue has been omnipresent throughout the interviews and in most items’ answers. We can back our study with the following quotes:

Interviewee (D) “some teachers like the one of oral expression traumatized me, so I can never speak in her class”. Here, it is clear that she had a previous experience with this teacher. For her, speaking again in her class may mean being ridiculed, humiliated and traumatized again. The damage this teacher’s reactions have created seems detrimental to this learner’s affect since she used the word “traumatized”. Such feeling may lead to fear and to avoidance behaviour of any similar situation to evade ridicule and humiliation.

For Interviewee (E) Oral expression, it is not because I can’t speak, but it is because I can’t speak in front of others, there are too much people because also the teacher has some of these bad manners every time we speak she says that our level is so low. He does not come down to our level”. For this learner, the thing that makes her dislike the subject is fear of speaking in front of others and also due to the teacher’s humiliation and negative feedback. Through her quote, it is noticeable that a level of FNE is experienced. Interviewee (I) in relation to this issue added: “I don’t like my teacher of oral expression because he is really authoritarian; I don’t learn anything from him, and we don’t do any activity”. This shows again the instructors’ role. In this case, the instructor is authoritarian, so the learner does not like him. Result of such behaviour from the instructor may lead to withdrawal of the learner.

3.2.4. Evaluation

We finally created our last category through the thematic analysis of the interview which deals with the learners’ perception of evaluation in their EFL classes. To this category, questions 3 and 4 of the interview are dedicated. To illustrate how important is the teacher’s feedback is, Interviewee (D) asserted: “teacher of oral expression always says that we are poor students, this disturbs me”. In general, evaluation according to the Interviewees can be both positive and negative. At the beginning, they said that it is a good thing. Then, they talked about the negative side. They claimed that evaluation in itself is positive. However, the way they have been evaluated makes the difference. Cases in point are:

Interviewee (C): “I think that evaluation is a good thing. If we make mistakes the teacher corrects us. It is a good thing because we learn from our mistakes. From another point of view, it is negative, the fact that we make mistakes and others laugh we feel ourselves like we are a clown”.


Interviewee (D): “Personally, being evaluated does not disturb me because after all I am here to learn. When I want to say something I just say it, for me the teacher is here to teach us and the other students we are in the same level. So, that does not disturb me except if the teacher does not give a chance to speak or humiliate me. In this case it disturbs me. For example the teacher of oral expression always says that we are poor students, this disturbs me. For my friends it is ok, no remarks or laughs for the moment.”

As stated by these learners, evaluation is positive if not accompanied with ridicule and/or humiliation, example of the oral expression teacher who always says that they are poor. Such feedback is perceived as a negative evaluation. Within FNE, it is known that these aspects of evaluation are among the main factors that engender fear. There are other students who do not like evaluation and consider it negative as a whole. For instance: Interviewee (G) asserted: “Personally I am against evaluation; I consider evaluation as a negative point. If we are here it is for the sake of learning. But it depends on the manner of how they do this evaluation because there are some students even teachers when they evaluate, there are some who laugh. For me, when I hear the word evaluation I directly think it is negative. Sometimes, it is ok to make a mistake, but at our level, as students at university, we do not have the right to make them. So, if we make them, the teacher may see it as something really bad.” This statement reveals that evaluation makes the student in question feel not at ease. Apparently, Interviewee (G) and Interviewee (H) have negative perceptions of evaluation as it is bound to negative experiences. Evaluation in the new philosophy of teaching highlights positive aspects of what a learner has achieved. However, what makes it negative for learners is the way this assessment is conducted. The evaluator may not assess the worth or merit, but assess the non-merit and the unworthy; which is the traditional way of evaluation. The learner here answered about evaluation but other sources of this negative evaluation are also embedded. That is, the interviewee referred to interaction when mentioning students’ and teachers’ reactions and to errors and the way these errors are treated. These are also two of the sources of FNE we enumerated in our problem.

4. Implications

Our aim is enumerating a number of implications to help reduce anxiety and FNE in our EFL classes. We also follow what Horwitz et al. (1986) said: “In general, educators have two options when dealing with anxious students: 1) they can help them learn to cope with the existing anxiety-provoking situation; or 2) they can make the learning context less stressful”. We can, then, end up this work with the following recommendations:

* Making students aware that being fluent and getting a good accent in the TL take in most cases several years of study and practice.
* Providing students with positive reinforcement and creating a relaxed classroom environment.
* Helping students that have a mental block towards language learning by providing them with out-of-the-classroom individual assistance.

Some teaching methods that can also be adopted to reduce classroom anxiety may be

* Conducting class activities in small groups.
* Forming support groups for performance-concerned students so they can discuss concerns and difficulties encountered in language learning.
* Using smaller classes to help instructors identify students experiencing anxiety and give them special attention and support.
* Helping learners identify their anxiety and cope with it
* Raising the learners’ awareness about the importance of evaluation, correction and testing instead of perceiving them as threats.
* Reinforcing the learner-learner and learner-teacher interaction through peer-tutoring and instructor tutoring respectively

5. Conclusion

In sum, through the questionnaire, we found that great many of learners suffer from FNE. Learners’ listing of the sources of FNE, the instructor was the first anxiety trigger as they relate him to method, environment, and error correction. Then, they talked about peers, laughter and comments as part of negative evaluation. Besides they referred to low competence, low self-confidence, low self-esteem, these are more seen as personality traits.

To sum up:

- Statistical findings of the questionnaire confirmed the existence of FNE in our classes
Interviewees revealed some of the perceived sources namely: Teacher, peers, language proficiency, the target language and previous experience.

As these sources of FNE are known, working in creating a low FNE breeding environment should be the focus of every teacher.

To conclude, we may say that this study has shed light onto potential sources of FNE in our classes. In fact, we found that this phenomenon subsists in our classes. Thus, this research has not only confirmed the existence of FNE but also revealed its causes. Therefore, this may give hints for future researches in order to try to identify it and cope with it.

The fruit of our work on anxiety since 2003 is the following suggested self-made digramme. this final product of our research project makes the link between teachers’ feedback and learners’ reactions:

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 01: Teachers' Role in Creating Positive or Negative Responses when Providing Feedback**

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Appendix: The Designed Semi-Structured Interview
1. To begin with, would you tell me what’s your age?
2. Many students seem to be motivated in learning English. They also seem to have a positive view towards their English classes. How about you?
3. What do you like/ do not like in your English classes?
4. You are generally subject of evaluation either by your classmates or your teachers during your classes (when you speak, you participate, you make errors, etc). What can you say about this?
5. Do you consider this as a negative experience (classmates and teachers)? Would you explain more?
6. Can you tell us about your feelings when experiencing these sorts of negative evaluations?
7. Does this experience produce fear in you (when negatively evaluated by classmates and teachers)?
8. Can you, then, enumerate the factors that make you negatively judged by others and which make you feel afraid?
9. What happens to you when feeling afraid (your behaviour, your body reactions, etc)
10. What do you suggest to diminish any kind of negative evaluation in our classes (both classmates and teachers are concerned)? Any suggestion is welcome from your part to have less threatening classrooms in terms of evaluation.