

SELF-REGULATION STRATEGIES AND ORAL TEST ANXIETY

**Self-Regulation Strategies: A Supportive Way to Help Students Overcome Test Anxiety in  
Oral Production Test at UGC University**

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**Abstract**

This study aimed to identify and analyze test anxiety levels among pre-intermediate students at La Gran Colombia University using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Additionally, it sought to explore factors contributing to oral test anxiety. The pre-test results from the sample of 28 students revealed that students had test anxiety. Other dimensions of the test: communication apprehension, confidence in using the language, and negative attitudes towards the language were key to having a wider view of the phenomenon. Qualitative data from student responses indicated that peer and teacher observation significantly contributed to anxiety, manifesting in symptoms such as nervous laughter and hesitation. Despite implementing self-regulation strategies like self-monitoring, goal setting, progressive relaxation, guided visualization, and self-explanation, the workshops showed limited impact on reducing test anxiety, likely due to inconsistent participation. However, the students improved their scores in the post-test and communication apprehension was notably reduced. Also, the students who engaged in goal setting and self-monitoring reported progress in areas like healthy habits, English learning, and socialization, suggesting increased self-awareness and motivation. Overall, the study underscores the complexity of test anxiety and highlights the need for more targeted and consistent interventions to support students' oral performance and emotional well-being.

**Keywords:** Test anxiety, oral test, self-regulation, self-regulation strategies, communication apprehension, confidence when using the language, negative attitudes towards the language, goal setting.

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### Resumen

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo identificar y analizar los niveles de ansiedad ante los exámenes entre estudiantes de nivel pre-intermedio de la Universidad La Gran Colombia utilizando la Escala de Ansiedad en el Aula de Lengua Extranjera (FLCAS). Adicionalmente, buscó explorar los factores que contribuyen a la ansiedad ante los exámenes orales. Los resultados del pre-test de la muestra de 28 estudiantes revelaron que los estudiantes tenían ansiedad ante los exámenes. Otras dimensiones de la prueba: aprensión comunicativa, confianza en el uso del idioma y actitudes negativas hacia el idioma fueron clave para tener una visión más amplia del fenómeno. Los datos cualitativos de las respuestas de los estudiantes indicaron que la observación de compañeros y maestros contribuyó significativamente a la ansiedad, manifestándose en síntomas como risa nerviosa y duda. A pesar de implementar estrategias de autorregulación como automonitoreo, establecimiento de metas, relajación progresiva, visualización guiada y autoexplicación, los talleres mostraron un impacto limitado en la reducción de la ansiedad ante los exámenes, probablemente debido a la participación inconsistente. Sin embargo, los estudiantes mejoraron sus puntajes en el post-test y la aprensión comunicativa se redujo notablemente. Además, los estudiantes que participaron en el establecimiento de metas y automonitoreo informaron progreso en áreas como: hábitos saludables, aprendizaje de inglés y socialización, lo que sugiere un aumento de la autoconciencia y la motivación. En general, el estudio subraya la complejidad de la ansiedad ante los exámenes y destaca la necesidad de intervenciones más específicas y consistentes para apoyar el desempeño oral y el bienestar emocional de los estudiantes.

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**Palabras clave:** Ansiedad ante los exámenes, prueba oral, autorregulación, estrategias de autorregulación, aprensión comunicativa, confianza al usar el idioma, actitudes negativas hacia el idioma, establecimiento de metas.

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### **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the effectiveness of self-regulation strategies on oral test anxiety while discovering possible factors that generate this anxiety in students.

Throughout the document, the reader will find the statement of the problem, the research rationale, the research question, the objectives, and a description of the setting and participants. Twenty-eight students from the Pre-intermediate English course at La Gran Colombia University were selected to participate in this study, and a mixed approach and exploratory design was implemented. On one hand, we use the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to evaluate the levels of anxiety that students experience in the context of learning foreign languages, and the evaluation rubric of the Cambridge PET (English Preliminary Test) as instruments to measure and compare quantitative data. On the other hand, we use a Fanzine and a tracker to measure qualitative data such as experiences, motivations, reflections, habits, and psychological and emotional aspects of the students.

Furthermore, with the conceptual and theoretical support of different authors, the topics addressed in this research are: oral production testing, test anxiety, and self-regulation. In addition, the description of the intervention is explained. First, the FLCAS is used to measure linguistic anxiety levels. Through an oral activity, the Cambridge PET evaluation rubric was implemented to evaluate the students' performance during their oral production. In addition, possible behaviors and anxiety patterns are evident, which are deepened through the creation of a fanzine. Second, two self-regulation workshops were created, designed, and implemented, focused on providing students self-regulation strategies to manage test anxiety. Finally, the FLCAS and the observation rubric were administered again to the participants.

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Last of all, this document shows the analysis and comparison of data. As well as, some conclusions, implications, and suggestions for further research.

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

Test anxiety is a persistent issue affecting many students across different learning fields and its negative impact on performance is well-known, particularly in language learning. At La Gran Colombia University, pre-intermediate English students face significant challenges in oral production tests due to test anxiety. This research aims to explore how self-regulation strategies can help these students deal with test anxiety in oral production tests. A Needs Analysis was conducted through a Google form survey to confirm the existence of this issue. The survey was made to 28 students of pre intermediate who had an A1 to A2 English level. The students' ages range from 17 to 21 years old.

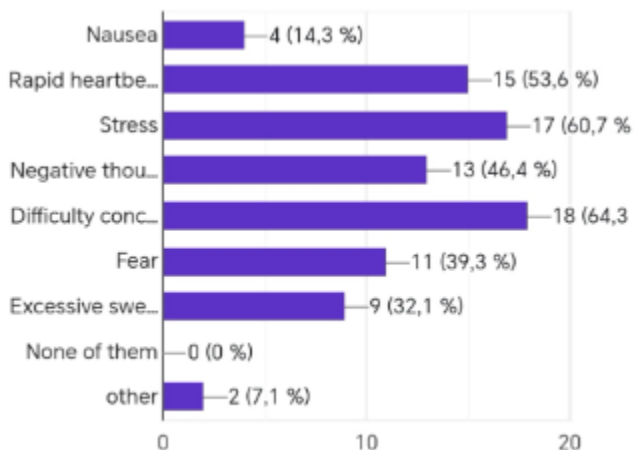
In the survey, they were asked to select the sensations they had experienced in previous English oral tests. It has to be highlighted that they could select more than one option or, instead, they could select “none of them” to indicate that they did not experience any of these before. According to the results, many students assure that they experience at least two symptoms and the most common ones include: rapid heartbeat, stress, negative thoughts, excessive sweating and difficulty concentrating (see figure 1). These symptoms are closely associated with test anxiety.

In the option “others” given, students had the option to add more sensations, feelings or symptoms they experience during an oral English test. Few students gave more variety and added crying, body shaking and dizziness as part of these sensations.

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**Figure 1**

*Needs Analysis: Participants' symptoms during oral exams*

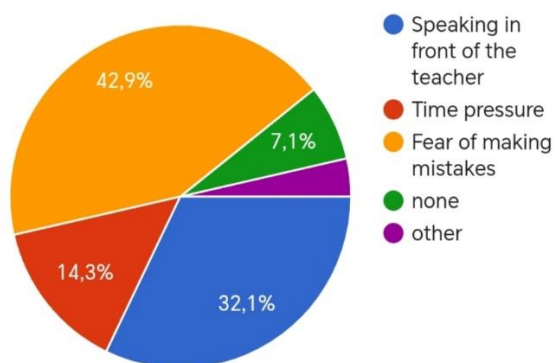


*Note.* Author's elaboration

Additionally, the survey revealed that the students considered fear of making mistakes, speaking in front of the teacher and time pressure as the main triggers of test anxiety (see figure 2) and, in the option “others”, social pressure was included as well. This could mean that students give a lot of importance to the judgment of others, especially the teacher's opinion or reaction to their mistakes.

**Figure 2**

*Needs Analysis: Participants' triggers of test anxiety in oral exams*



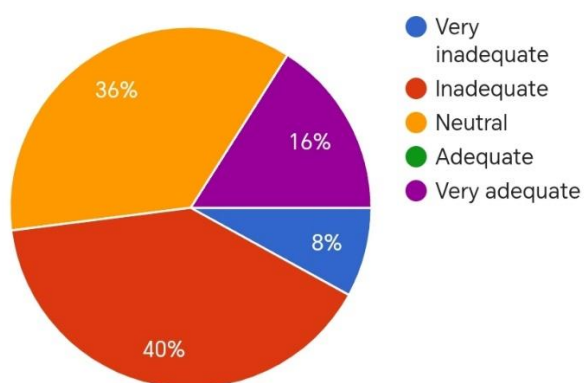
*Note.* Author's elaboration

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Moreover, it was found that many participants believed the university's support for managing test anxiety is inadequate or limited. A smaller number of students maintained neutrality and even fewer students considered adequate support from the university. This indicated a significant gap in resources and intervention strategies for many students who suffer from test anxiety (see figure 3 and see Appendix 1 for further survey results).

### Figure 3

*Needs Analysis: Participants' perception of university support*



*Note.* Author's elaboration

The absence of resources to address test anxiety, as suggested by some students, may indicate a lack of awareness among teachers regarding the negative impact that high test anxiety can have on students' performance. In fact, these participants proposed several strategies that teachers could implement to help students. The most commonly mentioned strategies include incorporating relaxation or fun activities before exams, providing more opportunities or extra time to practice speaking, and setting dialogue between teachers about this concern. Additionally, some students highlighted the importance of how the interaction with students encourages confidence.

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### 1.2. Research Rationale

This research project is essential due to the persistent issue of test anxiety that significantly impacts students' oral production test performance and their overall language learning process in a second language at La Gran Colombia University. To address these gaps and challenges, the project aims to intervene in a pre-intermediate group throughout three terms of the semester by implementing two workshops on self-regulatory strategies. The initiative is designed to serve as a supportive way to provide students with the necessary resources to develop effective strategies for identifying and coping with oral test anxiety, thereby reducing its adverse effects on their language learning process and enhancing academic performance.

One of the key benefits of this project is the potential for students to gain control over their emotions not only during tests but also before and after. By implementing self-regulatory strategies, students would become more self-aware of their test anxiety, providing them with the knowledge of what to do and how to manage this anxiety effectively. This, in turn, is expected to boost their confidence and overall well-being.

Furthermore, it can encourage teachers to incorporate these strategies into their everyday language lessons. This can lead to widespread improvements in education at La Gran Colombia University, ultimately benefiting the entire academic community.

By acknowledging the importance of addressing test anxiety, this project not only has the potential to help teachers identify test anxiety in students, but also, to encourage reflection on the current assessment strategies used. For instance, teachers might carefully consider which methods to use (presentations, role plays, debates, group discussion), which format to use (face to face, recorded presentation, individual or group presentation) or whether to follow a pre-set format like an international exam. Additionally, teachers might reflect upon which methods or

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formats are more comfortable and functional for the students and which triggers their test anxiety. Consequently, this change in perspective can transform assessments from being anxiety-inducing experiences to constructive tools for improvement and skill development.

On the other hand, although the project seeks to address a range of problems related to test anxiety, oral performance in tests, student well-being, and autonomy, it might face big challenges. The first one has to do with the collaboration from the teacher in charge of the group since the time from the class is required to intervene in the group. If a positive response from the teacher is not received, another space to intervene will have to be looked for. The second one has to do with student engagement, collaboration, and honesty. If students are not interested enough or honest during the intervention, the results of the project might change drastically, not to mention that keeping students motivated and committed with the activities might be difficult. Finally, another big challenge is balancing the demands of the project with the academic calendar. None of the phases of this study can be postponed, because the project is strictly aligned with the semester schedule.

Currently, La Gran Colombia University community faces significant challenges stemming from test anxiety. Many students suffer from this condition without even realizing it. This fear of being tested impacts students' performance when speaking, as it inhibits their capacity to react quickly, articulate their thoughts, and recall what they have learned. This, in turn, leads to suboptimal performance and can result in demotivation, reduced confidence, and other negative consequences for students' language learning process: that is why an intervention is imperative. Bearing this in mind, the following question and objectives are addressed.

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### **1.3. Research Question**

How does the implementation of self-regulation strategies impacts oral test anxiety in Pre-Intermediate students at La Gran Colombia University?

### **1.4. Research Objectives**

#### **General Objective**

To inform the impact of self-regulation strategies on oral test anxiety in Pre-Intermediate students at La Gran Colombia University.

#### **Specific Objectives**

1. To identify Pre-Intermediate students test anxiety levels through the foreign language class anxiety scale (FLCAS).
2. To analyze the possible factors that produce anxiety when presenting oral production tests in order to create self-regulation workshops.
3. To explain the impact of self-regulation strategies on oral test anxiety.

### **1.5. Hypothesis**

The implementation of self-regulation strategies provides meaningful tools to manage test anxiety among Pre-Intermediate level students at La Gran Colombia University during their oral production tests.

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### **2. Theoretical Framework**

In the pages that follow, this conceptual and theoretical framework explored the landscape of test anxiety, its causes, manifestations, consequences in the context of language learning, and the scales or ways it is measured. Additionally, it inspected the theoretical underpinnings of self-regulation strategies, examining how these might serve as a way to regulate anxiety; as well as the construct of oral production tests, and what other authors have found about students' feelings during their examination.

#### ***2.1.1. Oral Production Testing***

To start, it is widely known that the oral production test is one of the most challenging parts of an exam for many FL/ SL students as it includes many important sub skills and there are various factors that affect performance. According to Dippold and Heron (2020), the sub skills are organized in four categories: "physical skills, like accurate pronunciation; language skills, like accurate grammar and vocabulary; cognitive skills, like engaging with others' arguments; social skills, like confidence and working together". Also, something to bear in mind is that "Speaking is complex because speakers are involved in a rapid and dynamic process incurring" (Johnson, 1996, as cited in Anggini & Arjulayana, 2021, p. 2)" this means that speaking implies not only knowledge related to language but also a constant and fast reaction to create logical utterances that answer to the teacher questions and sometimes to the partners arguments or responses.

On the other hand, Antía Hortua, García García & Arcila Arévalo (2018) highlight those other factors that might hinder students' performance are: the fear of speaking in public or, in this case, the fear of speaking in front of the teacher and also the lack of strategies that make them aware of their mistakes (p. 13). Similarly, the previously mentioned researchers mention another

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author who assures that students "(...) tend to make oral mistakes when they have to present individual activities with limited time, when they are being partnered, and they are exposed to spontaneous activities or when teachers make constant interruptions" (Padmadewi, 1998 as cited in Antía et al, 2018, p. 20). These factors are relevant to the research question of this study as some of them have to do with anxiety and the purpose is to discover the factors that cause anxiety in oral production tests and thus, look for strategies to help students cope with this issue and enhance their performance.

Furthermore, it is important to know which are the oral test formats that are more commonly used in the educational context that will be intervened to determine the factors that might affect students' performance the most. The first one is the test based on the Common European Reference Framework for Languages (CEFR) which in this case, for Pre-intermediate (A2 level), it is composed of four sections: the first one is a personal introduction; in the second one, the student chooses a topic from various options provided by the teacher and makes a short presentation; the third one is a discussion with the teacher based on the presentation; and the last one is a role-play with the teacher (Association of Language Testers in Europe, 2014). This format might make students feel either very comfortable or very anxious because they are presenting this test only to and with the teacher, they don't have any partner, which means that depending on the type of student and how comfortable they are with the teacher this format could raise or lower anxiety.

Another well-known and similar speaking test is the IELTS, which consists of three parts. The first part is a set of questions about personal information and family; in the second part, a topic is given by the examiner and the presenter has to talk about it. In part three, there is a longer discussion between the examiner and the presenter about the topic from the previous part.

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This oral test lasts eleven to fourteen minutes and is graded on a 9-band scale (British Council, n. d). This kind of test could be based on academic or general English and doesn't require a partner, except from the teacher, to complete any of the parts.

The importance of understanding commonly used oral test formats such as CERF and IELTS in this research educational context is closely related to McKay (2005) who emphasized the importance of incorporating a variety of oral assessment techniques, including simple question-and-answer tasks, oral interviews, mini-dialogues, role-plays, and oral information gap tasks (p. 97-139). Formats like the one based on CERF or IELTS, offer different structures for oral assessment, affecting how students feel during the tests and their overall performance. Some of these oral assessment techniques, including role-plays and interactive tasks, aligns with the oral test methodology used at La Gran Colombia University with the small difference that some sections the students have the possibility to perform in pairs, highlighting the importance of offering students a holistic approach to evaluate their oral language skills.

In conclusion, the oral production test is a challenging component of language exams, involving multiple subskills that impact students' performance. These sub skills encompass physical, language, cognitive, and social aspects, making oral assessment a complex process. In this way, it is important to take into account the profile of students who are in Pre-Intermediate at La Gran Colombia University since, as mentioned previously, some students might feel more anxious depending on the format of the exam. For that reason, applying different mixtures of formats like CEFR or IELTS and the implementation of sections, both individual and in groups with the use of strategies for students to make aware of their mistakes, correct them or improve previous arguments while improvising, can lead the students to address test anxiety and enhance their performance in oral production assessments.

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### *2.1.2. Test Anxiety*

Before exploring the theories and results about how test anxiety affects students, some definitions will be presented. According to Barnes (2023) test anxiety is the feeling of nervousness people may get when they are about to take a test, a feeling which is related to stress where "the body releases a hormone called adrenaline, which prepares it for danger. This is the "fight or flight" reaction" (pr, 5).

Similarly, Stöber & Pekrun (2004) described test anxiety as a type of performance anxiety that occurs when people feel that their performance is being evaluated by others. It is commonly experienced in educational settings, but it shares similar antecedents with other performance anxieties such as sport anxiety. In this case, students may feel pressured because they are being evaluated by the teacher.

Moreover, Mowbray and Carmelo (2017) claim that "Test Anxiety (TA) is an emotional, physiological, behavioral and cognitive construct that has been found to play a role in student underachievement and reduced well-being." (pr. 1). This means that this type of anxiety affects students negatively and, as it is a concept that encompasses many dimensions, various possible factors may produce it.

Secondly, it is important to mention the symptoms that test anxiety can produce in order to recognize them when students are performing an oral test. According to Barnes (2023), some common symptoms of test anxiety are sweating, fast heart beating, fast breathing, some people may feel butterflies in the stomach, stomachache, or headache. Not to mention the feeling of passing out or throwing up, all of them cause a strong stress reaction. (pr. 5-8).

In the third place, it is essential to understand the impact of test anxiety in performance so that students are aware of what occurs when they face such situations and feelings to look for

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strategies. Some authors such as Costello Mustillo, Erkanli, Keeler & Angold (2003) claim that "Test anxiety is the most widely recognized cognitive issue affecting students' academic achievement scores. It can influence students' sense of pride, companion connections, and social practices"; this means that test anxiety not only affects the students' academic field but many other aspects of their lives. As this phenomenon seems to be very common in schools and universities and, in order to enhance students' performance when learning a second language as well as their mental health and academic life, it is important to know the cause of this anxiety: however, it should be taken into account that each context is different and also each student might have different background experiences with the language that affected him/her in a certain way.

Hill (1980), for instance, suggested that a possible cause of the test anxiety has to do with social and emotional factors, "Some students become terrified in tests or examinations because of the apprehensions of the reaction of or their parents in case of their low academic achievement or failure". This fear of disappointing people can lead to heightened anxiety and stress during exams. For this reason, it is necessary to implement strategies that involve students, teachers and parents, if possible, to decrease the negative effects of test anxiety and create a more nurturing and less stressful educational experience for students.

### ***2.1.3. Self-Regulation***

According to The American Psychological Association (n.d), self-regulation is defined as "the control of one's behavior through the use of self-monitoring (keeping a record of behavior), self-evaluation (assessing the information obtained during self-monitoring), and self-reinforcement (rewarding oneself for appropriate behavior or for attaining a goal)" (p. 1). This first definition can be considered as a general one since it can be used in different contexts of daily life. Zimmerman (1990), on the other hand, focused on the field of education and defined

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self-regulated learning (SRL) as "the self-directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills" (pp. 4-6). In other words, although both definitions share similar processes, Zimmerman's definition applies to learners' academic performance as it involves students taking control of their own learning process, setting goals, monitoring their progress, and making adjustments as needed to achieve academic success.

Once the concept has been defined and focused within the learning context, it is crucial to mention its role in academic achievement. Zimmerman (1990), for instance, highlighted that SRL allows students to take an active role in their own learning processes. This approach allowed students to become more effective and independent learners, ultimately leading to improved academic performance and better long-term outcomes.

Furthermore, a recent study indicated that "when students possess better cognitive self-regulation, they can manage their emotions and mitigate emotional influences effectively. This enhanced emotional management, combined with motivation and targeted planning, contributes to superior educational performance" (Sahranavard et al., 2018, Discussion section). This clearly demonstrates that SRL is indispensable if teachers aim to help the students become more autonomous in their processes, more confident with themselves, and stronger in terms of emotional management.

In addition, Sotomayor Cantos et al. (2024) conducted an academic review of the most recent articles in the Google Scholar database, highlighting various factors that cause anxiety, such as low self-esteem, fear of making mistakes, and pressure from peers and teachers. However, new strategies for reducing anxiety in the (EFL) English Foreign Language classroom are found. One of the articles reviewed contains the qualitative study by Akramy (2020), where coping strategies such as daily speaking practice, watching videos of English speakers, creating a

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relaxed atmosphere, and using relaxation techniques like deep breathing and body language were developed. Similarly, Netta et al. (2020) explored anxiety in the context of learning a foreign language. They identified moments of high anxiety, emphasizing the importance of teaching coping mechanisms, such as relaxation techniques and positive thinking strategies. These findings underscore the importance of self-regulation strategies for students to have effective coping strategies to enhance their learning experience in the context of foreign language education.

Nevertheless, as Sahranavard et al. (2018) pointed out "Learners do not inherently employ self-regulation strategies unless they receive instruction on how to use them and are encouraged to apply these strategies". Therefore, educators should incorporate these strategies into their teaching methods to enable students to experience a positive impact on their learning outcomes. For instance, one of the types of intervention implemented in previous years is self-regulation strategies instruction (SRS) which according to Weinstein, Husman & Dirking (2000) aims to help students improve their academic performance by teaching them how to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning processes.

Moreover, SRSI can involve explicit teaching of specific learning strategies, such as summarizing, note-taking, or self-testing, as well as metacognitive skills, such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reflection (p. 727). Following the lines of the previous author, Veenman (2013) assures that these strategies establish an encouraging atmosphere for learning, enabling students to harmonize their application of metacognitive strategies with the demands of a given assignment, which cultivates student autonomy, motivation, and active participation in the learning process. This entails the decision-making process of selecting appropriate activities at specific junctures within the context of a specific task.

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Nonetheless, Diganth and Veenman (2021) proposed an alternative approach to implementing SRS, where a teacher fosters students' self-regulated learning skills without placing direct emphasis on strategy deployment. This approach is termed implicit. In this context, "implicit" means that the teacher demonstrates a process without verbally expressing their actions or providing an explanation for employing a specific strategy (p. 20).

Finally, as another way to foster SRL in students, Zimmerman (1990) pointed out that teachers can provide students with specific progress feedback and support as they develop their self-regulated learning skills by offering guidance when needed, so students become more effective self-regulated learners (p.p. 7-10).

### **2.2. State of the Art**

In the following pages, a variety of international, national, and local studies were considered to provide a clear understanding of the impact of self-regulation strategies on students to overcome test anxiety in oral production tests. However, research in this field is limited and it is necessary to carry out this study in this context.

To start, a study conducted by Garcia & Gamba (2012), was a descriptive qualitative case study in which they aimed to know how anxiety in students is featured when cooperative learning is involved. For this, a group of five sixth graders from a public school in the northwestern part of Bogotá were included. The researchers planned eight lessons following the SIOP planning model, and in each lesson, they used a different topic and a cooperative strategy while observing and monitoring students' anxiety. Then, the researchers used instruments such as field notes from a non-participating observer, recordings of students when talking in front of the class, students' trackers, and interviews. To conclude, some of the findings say that students' anxiety stems from factors such as low self-esteem and pressure from peers and teachers. Also,

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the authors found that group activities facilitate increased participation among all students, allowing them to receive feedback from the teacher and peers. At the same time, it creates a more supportive and relaxed environment that helps students overcome anxiety-inducing factors like pressure and language limitations.

Similarly, Adesola and Li (2018) explored and investigated the relationship between self-efficacy, self-regulation, test anxiety, and motivation, as well as the relationship between test anxiety and academic performance. Twenty-four second-year students from the Federal College of Education participated through mixed research methods proposed by the researchers. The quantitative measures and qualitative data showed that the use of cognitive strategies and self-efficacy are positively correlated with motivation, test anxiety, and academic performance. Overall, the study suggests the importance of implementing cognitive and self-regulation strategies to improve students' academic performance.

Moreover, a study made by Azimi and Sham (2018) proved the relationship between school-based oral performance and communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Firstly, they randomly selected 30% of fourth-year high school students who had passed the Intermediate exam in Putrajaya, Malaysia. Secondly, they implemented questionnaires to obtain demographic information and quantitative data through the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The results revealed that the students obtained high grades and good performance on the SBOE (State Board of Education), thus demonstrating the effectiveness of that tool to evaluate linguistic performance. Finally, the study indicates that test anxiety exists when students are not competent enough in English and proposes new instruments to measure linguistic anxiety inside and outside the classroom.

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García Torrecillas, and Fadda (2020) that aimed to determine if students' ability to control themselves and how teachers taught affected their coping strategies. They applied questionnaires on students' stress management and regulatory teaching. They collected data from 944 university students. At the end of the quasi-experimental research, they found that both self-control and how teachers taught, had a big impact on how students handle stress. It was concluded that when students have low-medium levels of self-control they use strategies such as avoiding distractions and reducing anxiety.

Furthermore, Larasati (2020) applied Zimmerman's clinical theory of self-regulated learning to understand how students plan, monitor, and evaluate their performance. Larasati interviewed 20 English education students and conducted descriptive qualitative research to describe their self-regulated learning process for their academic performance. As a result, the researcher analyzed and showed good academic performance of students who used self-regulated learning strategies. In the end, the findings suggest that students are more receptive to errors and can use an appropriate learning plan with strategies that help them achieve their goals and can be applied to other skills or subjects.

Lastly, Amate Romera and De la Fuente (2021) conducted a quantitative study in which they aimed to establish the relationship between test anxiety, self-regulation, and strategies for coping with stress among 142 students from academies in Almería, Spain that were preparing for a professional examination. The data was collected through questionnaires that were analyzed using ANOVAS and MONOVAS, two statistical techniques used to analyze the relation between variances and different groups. In the case of test anxiety and self-regulation, the researchers found a negative impact on decision-making especially in students with high emotionality. Nevertheless, positive relationships were found between test anxiety and strategies for coping

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with stress. In other words, the students who focus on strategies to deal with stress are more likely to deal better with test anxiety.

As a conclusion, it could be said that the previous studies give a clue on which instruments to collect data could be used (interviews, reliable questionnaires or surveys, field notes, and students' trackers). Also, it was noticed that the use of qualitative and quantitative tools can give this study greater support when drawing conclusions. Furthermore, some of the previous studies suggest that the relationship between teacher-student is highly important to determine if it is necessary to not only work with the students but also with the teacher.

Finally, the previous investigations vary on the scope. This also allows a closer look to the different types of studies and their advantages and disadvantages: for instance, while some researchers worked with a very small sample and focused on description, others worked with big samples and focused on numerical or statistical data. On one hand, small samples might be beneficial as it is easier to analyze the information collected and the students would have a more careful observation of their process and as a consequence it could give more detailed findings, however these findings cannot be representative enough for all the students. On the contrary, working with big samples might be difficult and consume a lot of time but it could give more reliable results.

### 3. Methodology

Within this chapter, the methodological framework was developed. It will explain why a mixed approach and exploratory design were chosen. The description of the setting and participants as well as the instruments used in the pre and post-test, the instruments and techniques used to collect qualitative data will be mentioned. Moreover, the description of the intervention will also be explained step by step.

#### 3.1. Research Approach

This research involves qualitative and quantitative data turning the research into a mixed research. This type of research is a process whereby the qualitative and quantitative elements are interlinked to produce a fuller account of the research problem (Glogowska, 2011, Zhang and Creswell, 2013). Implementing both qualitative and quantitative has value since each instrument to collect data will provide relevant evidence of the areas to work on and to guide conclusions.

On one hand, to compare students' anxiety and performance in the oral tests at the beginning and at the end of the intervention, two instruments to collect quantitative data will be used, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and the evaluation rubric of the Cambridge PET (English Preliminary Test). According to Williams (2021, p, 1), "Quantitative research produces objective data that can be clearly communicated through statistics and numbers". This means that this data will give clear results about whether the intervention impacted positively or did not have an impact on students' performance.

On the other hand, as this research links Learning and Psychology, two instruments to collect qualitative data will be used, a fanzine and a tracker. Also, it is imperative to understand students' behaviors in oral tests to provide them with specific self-regulation strategies but also to know how they perceive their process before and after the intervention. According to Riazi &

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Candlin (2014), “Qualitative methods can provide rich, contextual data about individual experiences, perceptions, and motivations, which are crucial in understanding psychological aspects of language learning”.

### **3.2. Research Design**

According to George (2023), “exploratory research is often used when the issue you’re studying is new or when the data collection process is challenging for some reason”, which aligns with the research since the aim is to investigate the influence of self-regulation strategies on oral test anxiety, a topic that has not been very explored whiting contexts of Colombian university students who are in the initial phases of foreign language learning.

This research is classified as exploratory and not as an action research due to the constrained time available for the implementation. For the same reason, the intervention is designed to be carried out only once.

This research is classified as exploratory rather than action research due to the constrained time available for the implementation. Consequently, the intervention is designed to be carried out only once.

The project followed a systematic exploratory process, beginning with the identification of the problem and the formulation of the hypothesis. The second phase involved diagnosing the group of the students (pre-test) using two recognized instruments. Based on the diagnosis the third phase focused on the creation and implementation of two workshops. The subsequent phase involved applying the post-test using the two instruments used in the second phase. Then, in the fifth phase analyzing data from the pre and post-test is analyzed and compared. Finally, the research concluded with the interpretation of the findings and the drawing of conclusions along with some suggestions. For further detail of each phase read the procedures.

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### **3.3. Setting and Participants**

This study took place at La Gran Colombia, a private university located in Bogotá, Colombia. The participants were 29 students from the course of Pre-intermediate English (second semester), they were studying in the morning shift from Monday to Friday, from 7 am to 9 am. According to our observation, the majority of them had average or expected speaking skills for their level, few of them demonstrated big inconveniences expressing orally, and fewer students had excellent speaking skills. Regarding the environment of the class, the teacher in charge claimed that sometimes some students are very talkative or distracted and others are very shy and do not participate voluntarily in class. Also, she mentioned that on some occasions students would laugh at other students' mistakes but in general they were a collaborative group. Finally, although all the students agreed to participate in this study and signed the consent letter, only 15 of them participated until the end.

### **3.4. Data Collection Instruments**

In order to accomplish each of the specific objectives the instruments implemented to collect the data are: a scale to measure the anxiety in students, an observation rubric to evaluate students' performance, a fanzine, and students' trackers. In the following paragraphs, each instrument will be explained and aligned with an objective.

#### ***3.4.1. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)***

In 1986, Horwitz and Cope defined language learning anxiety as a multifaceted set of self-perceptions, beliefs, emotions, and actions linked to the distinctive nature of language acquisition within an educational setting. They proposed that language learning anxiety can be divided into three primary forms or dimensions of performance-related apprehension: communication anxiety (Dimension A), test anxiety (Dimension B), and fear of negative

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evaluation (Dimension C). According to their perspective, these three anxiety types are integral to the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and collectively contribute to making language learning a formidable challenge for learners. As a result of this, Horwitz and her colleagues developed an assessment tool known as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). This instrument was constructed based on self-reports provided by students and aimed to measure the anxiety experienced by foreign language learners where a higher score on the FLCAS signified a greater level of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) (Pae & Misieng, 2012, p. 44).

Later in the same year, Horwitz and Cope (1986) changed the name of a dimension and divided it into two: these dimensions were called Confidence when using the language in and out of the classroom (Dimension C) and Negative Attitudes Towards the Language (Dimension D). Afterwards, other researchers named De la Morena Taboada, Sánchez Burón and Fernández (2011) introduced a fifth dimension by dividing the now C dimension into two (Confidence when using the language in the classroom and Confidence when using the language out of the classroom). It should be noted that the differentiation between the models proposed by these authors depends only on how the items are grouped and the naming of those groups, which is considered crucial for improving the accuracy of what is being evaluated.

In this way, although many studies use the three-dimensional model, in this study the four-dimensional division model was chosen because it is considered that this model groups the items and labels each dimension in a more specific and accurate way compared to the three-dimensions division. Additionally, it was considered that the distinction that the study of De la Morena Taboada, et al (2011) is not relevant to this investigation.

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Before explaining how this test is scored it is essential to know what each dimension refers to have a better comprehension of the test. Therefore, in the paragraphs that follow each dimension will be defined.

The Dimension A, with 13 items, refers to Communication Apprehension that, according to Bradford (2023), “is a type of anxiety brought on by communicating with others or the anticipation of communication with others. This anxiety is fueled by the fear of judgment from the people one communicates with”. Similarly, Adrianzén Segovia (2021) claims that this factor is associated with the students’ shyness in contexts in which they have to communicate. This means that the students feel frustrated when they do not understand the other person speaking in the target language or when they cannot communicate efficiently. This author also mentions that for Horwitz et al there are three situations in which this component was developed: public speaking, speaking with another person, and speaking in front of a group of people who are listening to the message (p.61).

The Dimension B, with 9 items, is related to Test Anxiety and the fear of failure of exams. According to Worde (as cited in Ortega Martinez, 2021) this type of apprehension towards exams appears because students self-impose high and unrealistic goals (in this case, master the foreign language perfectly) students push themselves too hard and worry that they will not be up to their own expectations (p. 42).

The Dimension C has 7 items related to the Confidence of students when using the language in and outside the classroom. As the name says, it has to do with how students feel and in which level of ease they are when using the language in the course itself and in different contexts.

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Finally, Dimension D, with 4 items, is named Negative attitudes towards learning the language. This factor looks forward to knowing if students like or dislike the language. This factor is important since it can influence students' engagement, persistence in learning the language, and even motivation. Students can gain these negative attitudes from previous bad experiences with the language, bad experiences with teachers, or frustration.

All these components are indispensable because all of them can contribute to knowing which dimensions of anxiety most significantly affect students the most. These components can, of course, be related to each other. Notably, in the findings of the study titled *Análisis De Las Propiedades Psicométricas Del FLCAS (Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale) Aplicado A Alumnos Españoles De Educación Secundaria* by De La Morena et al. (2011) it is assured that this scale is a reliable instrument to measure anxiety in the learning of languages (p. 131). This scale has played an important role in measuring students' language anxiety levels over the past years, and it will serve as a quantitative tool to diagnose students before the intervention and to give a higher understanding of the impact and results of the implementation of self-regulatory workshops at the end of this study.

As the dimensions have been already defined, the paragraphs that follow it will be explained how this test was modified and its purpose. The test structure and how it was scored. First, the test shortly was modified replacing the words "foreign language class" by "English class" and the items with their optional answers were translated to Spanish to ensure that students fully comprehended the material they were reading, and thus, avoid misunderstandings that led to non-sincere answers (see Appendix 2).

This test consists of 33 items with 5 possible answers from a Likert scale, each item was scored depending on the category it is set: category A or category B (see Table 1). In the

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category A statements, the answer “Strongly agree” is given 5 points and the answer “Strongly disagree” is given 1 point. On the contrary, in the category B statements, the answer “Strongly agree” is given 1 point and the answer “Strongly disagree” is given 5 points (see Table 2).

**Table 1**

*Classification of items*

<b>Category A</b>	<b>Category B</b>
1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33	2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, 32

*Note.* Author’s elaboration

**Table 2**

*Score of answers according to item classification*

<b>Likert Scale Answers</b>	<b>Category A items</b>	<b>Category B items</b>
Strongly agree	5	1
Agree	4	2
Neither agree nor disagree	3	3
Disagree	2	4
Strongly Disagree	1	5

*Note.* Author’s elaboration

Finally, in the following chart (Table 3), it will be shown the ranges established to measure the student’s anxiety in general and in each one of the dimensions. It is important to make clear that as all the dimensions have a different quantity of items they can not be scored under the same numerical figure.

**Table 3**

*Level of anxiety according to range of scores*

<b>Level of anxiety</b>	<b>Range of Anxiety in General</b>	<b>Range of Anxiety in Dimension A</b>	<b>Range of Anxiety in Dimension B</b>	<b>Range of Anxiety in Dimension C</b>	<b>Range of Anxiety in Dimension D</b>
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<b>Low</b>	33- 77	13-30	9-21	7-16	4-9
<b>Moderate</b>	78- 120	31-47	22-33	17-25	10-14
<b>High</b>	121-165	48-65	34-45	26-35	15-20

*Note.* Author's elaboration

### 3.4.2. Observation Rubric for Oral Activity

Observation is a process that allows not only to obtain data but also to enable researchers to describe specific phenomena (p.4) as Waxman, Tharp, and Hilberg (2004) assure. In the case of this research, it facilitated the comprehension of the results as it offered the possibility to mix qualitative and quantitative data which, in turn, provided a wider view of the phenomenon.

The artifacts collected during the observation of the pre- and post- oral production tests were the students' grades and comments on their performance. To obtain these artifacts, the observation was guided by a reliable and recognized speaking rubric from the Cambridge PET (Preliminary English Test) for A2 level. This rubric focuses on four areas: grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation and interactive communication. Each area was scored on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 indicated that the student needed to improve performance and 5 indicated an excellent performance. The sum of the scores obtained in each competence determined the overall performance score of the student (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Range of scores to determine students' oral performance*

<b>Ranges of Scores</b>	<b>Performance</b>
16-20	Excellent
10-15	Average
1-9	Needs to improve

*Note.* Authors' elaboration

Additionally, the rubric was slightly modified to fit the needs of this research by adding a box of additional comments, (see Appendix 3). These additional comments did not give a score

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but informed about students' demonstration of confidence, students reaction to their own mistakes, management of time when speaking and anxiety symptoms or patterns that students exhibited when they were being assessed.

### ***3.4.3. Fanzine***

A fanzine was a versatile tool for collecting qualitative data due to its ability to address a wide range of topics. Moreover, a fanzine offered students a creative way to express their ideas, thoughts, feelings, and experiences regarding anxiety and exams in a unique and meaningful way. This instrument helped students engage in self-exploration and reflection by writing about their encounters with anxiety and exams, providing valuable insights into their mental and emotional states. Additionally, a fanzine could serve as a tool to raise awareness about anxiety and exam-related issues within the university environment. As Lowndes (2016), fanzines not only serve as a medium for personal and community expression but also offer unique insights into the lived experiences and emotional landscapes of their creators.

## **3.5. Data Analysis Techniques**

### ***3.5.1. Paired samples T-test***

According to Gleichmann, N (2020) “A paired t-test (also known as a dependent or correlated t-test) is a statistical test that compares the averages/means and standard deviations of two related groups to determine if there is a significant difference between the two groups”. In this case, the paired T-test tool available in Excel was used to compare the results from both instruments (the FLCAS scores and the scores obtained from the rubric) for the same group of students who presented both the pre-test and the post test.

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### **3.5.2. Concurrent Triangulation**

Triangulation is especially important for this research because it addresses the need to find relationships between qualitative and quantitative data, making the phenomenon of oral test anxiety more comprehensible and providing more reliable findings.

### **3.6. Procedure**

Before starting, it is important to clarify that this research used two instruments for the pre and post-test: the Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and the speaking rubric from the Cambridge PET (Preliminary English Test). The use of these two instruments together not only allowed the comparison between pre and post test results in a solid way, but also allowed the triangulation of data, linking students' anxiety levels with their speaking performance.

In the following pages a detailed description of the steps taken to accomplish each objective will be provided. To begin with, in order to accomplish the objective number one, the first instrument employed was the FLCAS, which, as previously mentioned, was specially designed by Horwitz and Cope (1986) to evaluate the levels of anxiety that students experience in the context of learning foreign languages (see Appendix 2). This test was administered during the time of the class from the second -term exam and the students had eight to ten minutes to complete the test before the oral activity. It is important to mention that each student answered the test at the same time, however, they had to answer it individually to avoid the influence of other peers.

Then, the oral activity was observed and assessed using the speaking PET rubric. During this activity each student presented for one minute a detailed description of a specific garment or accessory of their choice (ranging from hats and scarves to sunglasses and handbags) and how

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students articulated their thoughts on narrating the features, functions, and personal connections associated with their items fluently and coherently. On occasions the teacher would ask students to pass the items a certain amount of times to keep students' attention and to make them talk about the other partner's item spontaneously and without preparation, e.g. rotate the item three times left, one time right.

Thirdly, after identifying the possible anxiety symptoms or patterns that the students had, the participants were divided into three groups as shown in Table 5 based on the results obtained from the F.L.C.A.S and observations made during the oral activity. Afterward, it was designed as an introduction to the future workshops, an activity in which the students would create step by step their own fanzine. In the fanzine they would answer eight questions that addressed different topics such as fear of making mistakes, fear of a negative evaluation, lack of confidence, etc, (see Table 6). This tool not only allowed students to express freely while exploring their thoughts and experiences related to anxiety in exams (see Appendix 4), but also opened a path to find the possible causes of the behaviors found, thus allowing the achievement of the second objective.

**Table 5**

### *Group organization*

<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Group 3</b>
The students that had a low score	The students that had an average score	The students that had good scores

*Note.* Authors' elaboration

**Table 6**

### *Fanzine questions*

<b>1</b>	Can you describe the emotions you typically experience when you face oral exams?
<b>2</b>	Can you mention specific elements of the oral exam process that trigger your anxiety?
<b>3</b>	How do these feelings impact your ability to communicate effectively during the

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	exam?
4	How do you monitor and control your emotions and behaviors during the exam process?
5	Have you ever discussed your feelings about oral exams with classmates or friends?
6	How do you think others' opinions impact your self-confidence?
7	How do you challenge negative self-perceptions or beliefs about your abilities?
8	Do you measure your progress in oral proficiency over time? How?

*Note.* Authors' elaboration

The next step was to accomplish the objective three. For this, and according to the pre-test and the fanzine results, two self-regulation workshops were created, designed, and focused on the development of strategies to manage test anxiety among Pre-Intermediate students during the third academic term. The first workshop provided participants with effective strategies to set self-consistent goals. Participants were guided to visualize their goals, ensuring they were personally significant and aligned with their values and interests. Bandura (1997) highlights that self-regulation involves setting goals and self-monitoring as crucial for maintaining motivation. Additionally, the workshop emphasized achieving objectives through the selection of effective actions, creating new habits, and maintaining motivation. In line with this, Clear (2019) explains in his book *Atomic Habits* that “a habit tracker serves as a visual reinforcement tool that tracks progress and reinforces new behaviors by making them observable and rewarding”; for that reason, participants were put into practice using an specific habit tracker format as shown in Figure 4, designed to visually track their progress and reinforce new habits. In this tool goals of different categories of habits including physical health, mental health, productivity, personal development, and social habits were allowed to support personal growth and well-being. This enabled researchers to have a better comprehension of the analysis of the final results, facilitating the evaluation of the effectiveness of the first self-regulation workshop. Besides, this tracker format integrates two important self-regulation strategies: goal setting and self-monitoring. Goal setting, especially short-term goal setting, is important for students as it helps

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them to have a realistic perception of their achievements; it can increase their motivation as they see how, with small goals, they can advance. Also, it can help them to be more conscious of what they are doing to improve in certain areas; in this case, to improve speaking skills. Self-monitoring is highly related to this strategy because when students set goals, in this case weekly, they own the freedom to have control of their learning, choosing how the resources and methods to learn and also to redirect their goals to achieve them.

**Figure 4**

*Tracker template*

The image shows a worksheet titled "MY FIRST TRACKER". At the top left is a box labeled "GOAL OF THE WEEK". Below it is a grid for tracking "NEW HABIT" with columns for days of the week (M, T, W, T, F, S, S) and multiple rows for different habits. To the right of the habit grid is a weekly calendar with checkboxes for each day from Monday to Sunday. Below the calendar is a section titled "MY WEEK OF EMOTIONS" featuring seven empty circles for recording emotions. At the bottom are two large boxes: "I'M PROUD TO ACHIEVE" and "I NEED TO IMPROVE".

*Note.* Authors' elaboration

Instead, the second workshop focused on the recognition of the students' own emotions during tests, cognitive and various emotional self-regulatory strategies. First, students were introduced to the concept of test anxiety since, although in the previous sessions symptoms and negative effects were mentioned, an explicit definition had not been provided yet. This concept was explained by using a video that showed how the human body reacts in stressful situations

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like exams and, one more time, some of the negative effects were mentioned. Then, the main ideas of the video were socialized with the students to ensure their understanding. Thirdly, it was mentioned that the first step to cope with test anxiety was to recognize how they were feeling and then two considered negative emotions commonly seen in academic contexts were described (frustration and extreme worry). Afterward, the concept of self-regulation was explained and a series of strategies were defined and practiced with the students (see Appendix 6).

The first ones are known as goal setting and self-monitoring which were used through the tracker mentioned in the previous paragraphs.

The second one is called self-explanation and according to Bisra, Liu & Nesbit, (2018) “Self-explanation is a process by which learners generate inferences about causal connections or conceptual relationships”. This cognitive strategy allows students to have a more effective study of a topic because they may realize that there is something they do not completely understand or new questions may arise and thus, they would look for solutions.

The third and fourth strategies presented and practiced had to do with physical relaxation techniques; the first one is called deep breathing or box breathing and the second one is named Progressive Muscle Relaxation (P.M.R). According to a literature review of 46 studies studying this technique made by Syazwina, Wan, Norashikin, Rui, Siti, Mohammad & Nor, & Nor, (2024), there is plenty of evidence that supports that PMR is efficient in reducing stress, anxiety, and depression among adults. They also mention in their findings, that when combined with other interventions, P.M.R becomes even more effective (p.362).

On the contrary, the fourth strategy is named guided visualization and it is an exercise that focuses on helping students control what they think before a test: sometimes students would create unrealistic scenarios in their minds in which they see themselves failing the exam and

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sometimes students would repeat in mind negative words. This technique can help students think more positively before the exam and thus avoid a predisposition to failure.

Finally, after the workshops were implemented, the same FLCAS and observation rubric were administered to the participants again, a few minutes before the third-term oral exam. It should be noticed that the format of the oral activity evaluated in the post-test was slightly different from the pre-test activity due to the teacher's anticipated plans. The post-test consisted of presenting a poster in groups about a chapter of a book read during the semester and narrating the story of that chapter. Unlike the pre-test activity, there was no time limit for this presentation. At the end of this research pre- and post-FLCAS scores, along with the scores obtained from the adapted rubric, were compared using the T-student test from Excel to determine if there were significant differences in students' anxiety levels and improvements on the speaking performance before and after the interventions.

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**4. Data Analysis****4.1. Pre-Test Results (Sample of 28 students)****4.1.1. FLCAS Results Analysis**

This test was answered via Google Forms moments prior to the tested activity. The results showed that 10,71% of the students have low Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), 60,71% of the students have moderate FLA and 28,71% of students present high levels of FLA. Also, the analysis of the results of each group of items revealed the following percentages of students' anxiety in each dimension.

**Table 7**

*Pre-test: Percentages of students' levels of anxiety in the different dimensions*

<b>Level of Anxiety</b>	<b>Dimension A</b>	<b>Dimension B</b>	<b>Dimension C</b>	<b>Dimension D</b>
<b>Low</b>	10,71%	10,71%	7,14%	42,86%
<b>Moderate</b>	46,43%	67,86%	60,71%	57,14%
<b>High</b>	42,86%	21,43%	32,14%	0%

*Note.* Authors' elaboration

These results indicate that the main dimension that affects students is factor A (communication apprehension), followed by dimension C (confidence when using the language in and out of the classroom), B (test anxiety), and finally, dimension D (negative attitudes towards learning the language). Also, it can be noticed that in all of the dimensions the level of anxiety that predominates the most is moderate anxiety. On the other hand, it is crucial to consider that while test anxiety was not the dimension with the biggest group of students with a high level of anxiety within the dimension itself. Dimension A gives a more comprehensive view of how students feel when speaking in English. This is highly relevant to the research, since it is focused on oral tests, and high levels of communicative apprehension mean fear of expressing

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orally. As a consequence, this fear negatively affects students' oral performance, this is confined by Perrault, E. K. (2017) "CA negatively correlates with communication quality, leading to less effective interactions (...) this can affect in the classroom but also could lead to bad performance in oral exams". For instance, in the following page it will be find some of the items from Communicative apprehension that reflect situations that students encounter not only in the English class but in their oral tests:

Item 2. "No me preocupo por cometer errores en la clase de Inglés."

In this item the most recurrent answer was "En desacuerdo" which shows that a significant group of students (48,3%) feel worried about making mistakes.

Item 12. "En la clase de Inglés puedo ponerme tan nervioso/a que llegué a olvidar algunas cosas que sé."

In this item the most predominant answer was "De acuerdo". This reveals that a significant group of students (42,9%) experiment forgetfulness which is part of cognitive and behavioral symptoms of Test Anxiety (Cherry, K. (2022)).

Item 31. "Tengo miedo de que los demás estudiantes se rían de mí cuando hablo en Inglés."

In this item the most common answer was "De acuerdo" which might indicate that 32,1% of students feel somehow fearful of peers' perception about them or peers' judgements. This might come from a lack of confidence in themselves using the language as revealed in some items from dimension C.

Item 33. "Me pongo nervioso/a cuando la profesora de Inglés me hace preguntas que no he preparado con anterioridad"

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In this item the most recurrent answer was one more time “De acuerdo” which shows that a group of students (35,7%) have negative sensations when unexpected questions, dialogues or speaking situations present in the class and they do not have prepared what they will say.

Moreover, in dimension B, the most important for this research, there were found interesting results in some items:

Item 8 “Normalmente me siento cómodo/a durante los exámenes en mi clase de Inglés”.

In this statement 46,4% of students answered “Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo” and 21,4% answered “De acuerdo” which means that more than half of the students do not feel nor comfortable or uncomfortable in the exams and less than half of students feel uncomfortable in the tests.

Item 20. “Puedo sentir mi corazón palpar cuando me van a llamar en la clase de Inglés.”

67,9% of students answered “Totalmente de acuerdo” and “De acuerdo” which means that most of them might suffer from one of the main symptoms of test anxiety.

Another factor relevant to this study is the dimension C (Confidence when using the language in and out of the classroom) because if students do not feel confident enough when using the language, in this case when expressing orally, the anxiety might increase. Besides, De la Morena Taboada et al. (2011) claim that the ease with which students use a foreign language is an indicator of how well they have assimilated the new code, but this naturalness is often hindered by the fear of making mistakes and not being accepted communicatively by the intended audience (p,124). This establishes a relation with the other dimension so that if students do not feel comfortable nor confident using the language it is probable that they avoid the situations in which they have to use it, this includes avoiding participating in the class and generating a communication apprehension in the class and even in the oral tests.

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Bellow it will be shown some of the items that most called our attention within this factor:

Item 1. “Nunca me siento muy seguro/a de mí mismo/a cuando hablo en mi clase de Inglés.”

In this statement a total of 58,6% of students answered “Totalmente de acuerdo” and “de acuerdo“. This confirms what was said before, students are not confident with themselves when using the language.

Item 23. “Siempre tengo la sensación de que los demás estudiantes hablan el Inglés mejor que yo.”

In this item a total of 71,4% of students agreed with the statement, this reveals, one more time, poor self confidence in the majority of the students.

Finally, in dimension D, the results of the students reveal low scores which implies that none of them have high negative attitudes towards learning the language. All of the students are interested in learning the language.

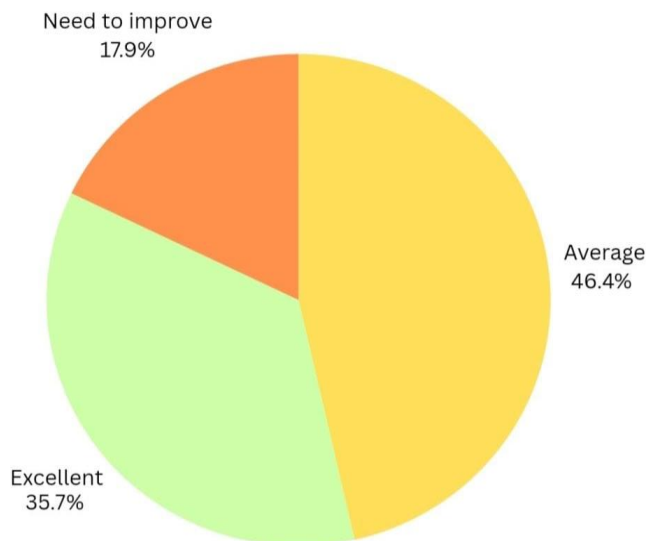
### ***4.1.2. Observation Rubric Results Analysis***

According to Figure 5, a significant number of students had a good or excellent performance. However, almost half of the students had an average performance and less than half of the students had big difficulties while completing the task. This means that the Pre-intermediate English course participating in this research is a diverse course in terms of levels of speaking skills, but also it is understood that most of the students still need to improve a lot in more than one competence.

### **Figure 5**

*Student's performance in pre-test oral activity*

## SELF-REGULATION STRATEGIES AND ORAL TEST ANXIETY



*Note.* Authors' elaboration

Additionally, it was found that the students that had a high global score in the FLCAS test usually had regular to bad performance in the evaluated activity.

Regarding the section of additional comments, it was found that some students, mostly those who had bad scores, finished prematurely due to nervousness. This nervousness and anxiety behaviors were evidenced when students hesitated too much and had long silences, nervous laughs, looked for clarification and help in other partners and also had an excessive use of fillers such as: “am, em”, “and, and” while moving from one side to another.

Furthermore, according to Moradiyousefabadi and Ghafournia (2023) “(...) self-confidence is positively correlated with various aspects of English language proficiency, including speaking fluency, accuracy, and confidence. Learners who have high levels of self-confidence tend to have better pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar”. This might explain why in the observation the students who had good scores were noticeably more confident than the students with average and bad scores.

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In addition, it was noticed that time pressure during the oral exam plays an important role in this kind of exam as it may make students rush their responses or struggle to organize their thoughts and, as a consequence, affect fluency and in general the understatement of their speech.

Overall, the analysis underscores the complex interplay between linguistic proficiency, communication skills, and psychological factors such as confidence and anxiety. The analysis of this data suggested that there is an inverse correlation between students' oral exam scores and the dimensions of FLCAS; the less anxious students are, the better their performance is.

### **4.2. Fanzine Results Analysis**

As outlined in the procedures, students were asked a series of questions (see Table 6) to gauge their emotional responses, identify specific triggers, and explore the impact of anxiety on their performance. The questions addressed many topics, including the fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, and lack of confidence. Only 26 responses from 28 students were analyzed to understand the impact of anxiety on their performance and self-perception. However, there were some challenges in this process due to the format of the fanzine as the answers were hand-written by the students and were sometimes barely legible (see Appendix 4).

Based on the answers found in the fanzine it was evident that students reported experiencing negative feelings. The following were the most frequently mentioned words that students provided in the question 1 when asked to describe how they feel when facing oral exams:

- “Nervous, anxiety, stress”
- “Anxiety, nervous”
- “Scared”
- “Timid and afraid”
- “I try to feel confident but I get anxiety and I feel really nervous”

They were also asked to write in question 2 which elements of the oral exams caused those feelings. This question was highly valuable since it is directly related with the second

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objective of this study and also provided information about students' own perceptions of what could be the factors that triggered their oral test anxiety.

Among the most repeated answers it can be found that the students manifest discomfort for others' gaze when they are performing orally, especially peers gaze as shown below.

- “That a lot of people look at me”
- “The teacher and my partners”
- “The public, when I made mistakes”
- “When my partners end before I end my exam or when the teacher stop in front of my seat [sic]”

Although it is normal to feel nervous before speaking in front of others, this discomfort might stem from the communication apprehension or low confidence found in the results from the sample of the 28 students on the FLCAS scale. The following answers to questions 3 and 6 confirm what was previously said.

- “It affects emotionally because I don't feel good enough and I feel shy”
- “I feel inferior and incapable”
- “I feel center of attention, I feel strange, I don't like it”
- “Little things make me feel worse”
- “I feel sad, because we have different learning processes”

Taking this into account, the answers to question 4, which referred to how students monitor and control their emotions and behaviors, showed the following results.

- “Breath and keep calm”
- “Thinking about something else”
- “Doing a pause”
- “With a pen in my hands or looking the wall”

The answers indicate limited strategies for managing anxiety during oral exams. Only a few students mentioned specific techniques such as a deep breathing or distraction to manage their emotions. The lack of diverse coping strategies suggest that students may not be well prepared to handle test anxiety, and underscores the importance of providing students with more tools and techniques to manage their anxiety, build confidence and improve their performance.

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### 4.3. Tracker Results Analysis

This analysis focuses on the tracker of the students who participated in the first workshop aimed at learning and implementing strategies for setting self-consistent short-term goals, and understanding the impact of emotions on self-regulation. The habit tracker format aimed to help students track their progress across various domains, including physical health, mental health, productivity, personal development, social habits and English learning.

However, lack of engagement and autonomy is evidenced as, from 28 students, only 11 delivered the tracker (see Appendix 5). Additionally, although the majority of students who did submit the tracker made more than 10 statements on average, they faced significant difficulties in setting achievable goals. The phrases below are some of the goals made by students:

- “Eating healthy”
- “Practice my speaking”
- “Look up the pronunciation of some words in English”
- “Finish almost my homework [sic]”
- “Do my homework on time”
- “Read books”

In these statements it could be seen that, despite of insisting on avoiding creating too general or non-specific goals, students persisted to do. For instance, the statement “Read books” could have improved and become more achievable if the student had chosen one book or if he/she had mentioned the title of the chapter of a book.

Still, students reported a variety of positive outcomes, such as adopting healthier eating habits, developing new habits for learning English, and socializing with others. This can be seen not only in the boxes under the days initials, but also in the “I am proud to achieve section”:

- “I’m proud to achieve to develop new skills for learning English [sic]”
- “Studying every day to have good grades in my midterms”
- “Eating healthy (apple, fish, lettuce, carrot, etc)”
- “Read my book favorite again [sic]”
- “Go for a walk with my friends and have time for myself, also take care of myself”

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Moreover, in the “I need to improve” section, the students identified several areas where they perceived a need to improve, these areas include: emotional well-being, language skills, punctuality, discipline, confidence and organizational skills. The identification of those areas for improvement suggest that the workshop was beneficial as they became aware of challenges that need to be addressed. Also, the specific mention of skills such as listening and speaking in English indicates that students are aware of their language learning needs too, but, as mentioned before, they need to specify with which resources they will use to improve and how. Below it will be found some of the students' comments in which they expressed the need for improvement:

- “Be happier than I was these 7 days”
- “I should read more books”
- “I need more listening but is very complex”
- “I need to improve my punctuality”
- “My discipline”
- “I need to get more confidence when I am speaking and practice more”
- “My organization and time management”

### 4.4. Final Results Analysis and Comparison

In the posttest only 15 students participated. Therefore, in order to ensure an accurate comparison between the pre-test and the post test, only the data from the students who were present during both phases were taken into account.

The Table 8 below displays the percentages of the students FLCAS test in the pre-test, while the Table 9 shows the percentages of the students FLCAS test in the post-test.

**Table 8**

*Pre-test: Percentages of students' levels of anxiety in the different dimensions (15 students)*

Level of Anxiety	Dimension A	Dimension B	Dimension C	Dimension D
<b>Low</b>	6.6%	13,3%	6,7%	46.6%
<b>Moderate</b>	33,4%	66.7%	46.6%	53.4%
<b>High</b>	60%	20%	46.6%	0%

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*Note.* Authors' elaboration

**Table 9**

*Post-test: Percentages of students' levels of anxiety in the different dimensions (15 students)*

<b>Level of Anxiety</b>	<b>Dimension A</b>	<b>Dimension B</b>	<b>Dimension C</b>	<b>Dimension D</b>
<b>Low</b>	26.7%	26,7%	20%	46.6%
<b>Moderate</b>	53,3%	53,3%	53,3%	53.4%
<b>High</b>	20%	20%	26,7%	0%

*Note.* Authors' elaboration

At first glance, there appears to be a change among the percentages between the pretest and the post test of the anxiety scale. However, to determine if these differences are statistically significant, a T-test from Excel was conducted. The test revealed that overall (considering the sum of all the dimensions and comparing these pre and post-test values), there is a significant difference or improvement, as indicated by the p-value of 0.07 obtained, which is less than the significance level that is represented with the Greek letter  $\alpha$  ( $p\text{-value} = 0,007 < \alpha = 0.05$ ).

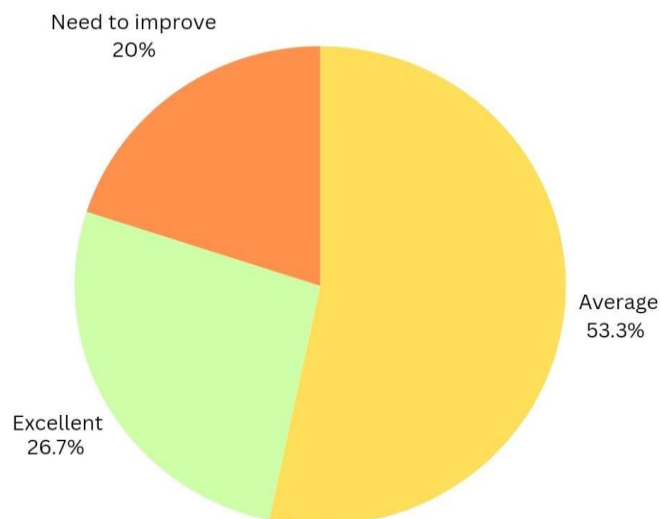
Regarding each individual dimension, the T-test revealed that in Dimension A (oral communication apprehension) obtained a p-value of 0.003 ( $p\text{-value} = 0,007 < \alpha 0.05$ ), which means that there was a change, more precisely, there was a significant reduction of students with high levels of this anxiety. In Dimension B (Test Anxiety) the p-value was 0.11, ( $p\text{-value} = 0,11 > \alpha 0.05$ ), this indicates that there is no significant change or reduction of students feeling less anxious in exams. In factor C (confidence using the language) the value revealed that there was a statistical difference as well ( $p\text{-value} = 0,005 = \alpha 0.05$ ) this means that students might have become more confident when using the language than in the pre- test. Finally, in the Dimension D (Negative attitudes towards the language learning), the results show that there was not any meaningful change ( $p\text{-value} = 0,33 > \alpha 0.05$ ); this is not concerning since from the beginning

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students did not manifest high levels of rejection to the language. Additionally, the students' performances scores based on the rubric criteria, are also shown below:

**Figure 6**

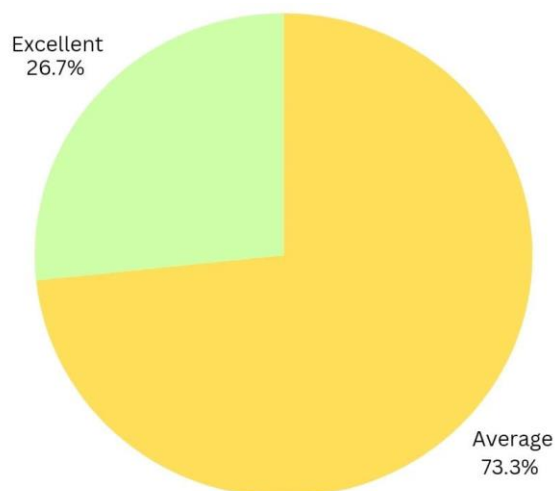
*Student's performance in pre-test oral activity (15 students)*



*Note.* Authors' elaboration

**Figure 7**

*Student's performance in post-test oral activity (15 students)*



*Note.* Authors' elaboration

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These graphs show that the group of students with the highest scores remained consistent, while the group of the students with the lowest scores improved to join the average scores, indicating overall improvement. This is further confirmed by the T-student test results ( $p\text{-value} = 0,04 < \alpha 0.05$ ).

It is also worth noticing that in the rubric's comments section, there was a significant improvement in students' confidence during the oral activity. Although there were persisting issues, such as confusion between present and past simple tenses and some mispronunciations, it is important to consider that although the students had more mistakes than in the pretest activity, they were also speaking for more than one minute. Furthermore, it also has to be mentioned that, unlike the pre-test speaking activity evaluated, this time students relied less on support from the teacher or peers to and exhibited fewer instances of long silences or extreme hesitation. Finally, when making mistakes, students' immediate response was usually self-correction but on occasions they would mix Spanish with English.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. Summary of key findings

The findings highlight that; indeed, test anxiety was identified in pre-intermediate students from La Gran Colombia University. The FLCAS results from the sample of the 28 students showed that 21,45% of the students had high levels of test anxiety, 67,86% had moderate test anxiety and 10,71% of students had low levels of this anxiety. This means that more than half of the students had a moderated level of test anxiety, nearly a quarter of the sample experienced high anxiety and only a small group of students exhibited low levels of test anxiety. The FLCAS also revealed anxiety levels on other dimensions related to test anxiety in oral exams:

- **Communication apprehension:** Almost half of students presented high levels of anxiety (42,86%), almost the other half of students had moderate levels (46,43%) and 10,71% of them had low levels of anxiety.
- **Confidence when using the language in and out of the classroom:** The results found 32,14% of students with high levels of anxiety, 60,71% with moderate levels and 7,14% with low levels of anxiety.
- **Negative attitude towards the language:** The percentages obtained from high to low levels of anxiety were: 0%, 57,14% and 42,86% respectively

High levels of test anxiety combined with high levels of anxiety in the other three dimensions, result in various symptoms that negatively affect students' performance when presenting an oral test.

In addition, an inverse correlation was found between the FLACS test and the rubric of observation results. According to these results, students who scored high in the FLCAS generally

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had regular to poor performance in the oral exam and displayed signs of nervous laughter, low confidence and extreme hesitation when speaking. In contrast, students with lower scores in the FLCAS demonstrated more confidence when speaking and better performance. This suggested an inverse relationship between students psychological and emotional factors and their performance in oral exams.

Nevertheless, although these first results gave the signal to proceed with the creation of the workshops, only used the data from the 15 students that participated in the pre-test and post-test phases. The data revealed that in test anxiety 20% of the students had high levels of test anxiety, 66,7% had moderate test anxiety and 13,3% of students had low levels of this anxiety. In the other dimensions, the percentages obtained were the following:

- **Communication apprehension:** More than half of students presented high levels of anxiety (60%), a significant group of students had moderate levels (33,4%) and 6,6% of them had low levels of anxiety.
- **Confidence when using the language in and out of the classroom:** The results found that 46,6% of students had high and moderate levels of anxiety and 6,7% of students had low levels of anxiety.
- **Negative attitude towards the language:** The percentages obtained from high to low levels of anxiety were: 0%, 53,4% and 46,6% respectively

It is worth to notice that in both the initial sample of 28 students and the final sample (the 15 students that completed the two phases), the dimensions with highest percentages of high level of anxiety were communication apprehension, followed by confidence when using the language in and out of the classroom, test anxiety and finally negative attitudes towards the language.

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Later on, qualitative information from question 2 of the fanzine provided valuable insights directly related to the second objective of this study, which aimed to identify factors that trigger oral test anxiety among students. The most frequently mentioned factor was the discomfort caused by being observed by others, particularly peers, during oral exams. Students expressed that being observed by many people, including their teacher and classmates, significantly contributed to raising their anxiety. This discomfort is consistent with the communication apprehension and low confidence identified in the pre-test results of the FLCAS and it was reinforced in the answers from the questions 3 and 6 where the students expressed feelings related to inadequacy and inferiority compared to others.

Despite the overall improvement in students' oral exam scores and a reduction in general language anxiety, the T-test revealed that there was no significant change in Negative Attitudes Towards Language Learning or in Test Anxiety, the latter being the most relevant dimension for this study (NATLL:  $p\text{-value} = 0.33 > \alpha 0.05$ ; TA:  $p\text{-value} = 0.11 > \alpha 0.05$ ). However, significant improvements were observed in other dimensions: oral communication apprehension decreased ( $p\text{-value} = 0.003 < \alpha 0.05$ ), and students' confidence in using the language increased ( $p\text{-value} = 0.005 < \alpha 0.05$ ).

These findings suggest that the implementation of workshops with self-regulation strategies did not significantly impact test anxiety. However, the results related to oral production are still relevant, as this research focuses on oral exams. The workshops appeared to enhance students' confidence in using the language and improved their ability to cope with situations requiring oral English skills. This conclusion is supported by the improvements in oral communication apprehension and the T-test results from the pre- and post-test rubric

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comparison, as well as by the observed decrease in students' reliance on teacher and peer support, and the reduction in long silences during the speaking activities.

This research demonstrates some satisfactory results and improvements in students' oral skills despite the limited time for implementing the strategies. Data from the tracker, a tool that combined the use of goal setting strategy and self-monitoring, showed that many students lacked autonomy and engagement as only nine of them completed this activity during the week.

However, these nine students demonstrated to achieve some goals in various areas including healthy habits, English learning and socialization. These achievements suggest that although the workshop was not as effective as expected due to students' difficulties in setting complete and realistic goals, it helped students to become more aware of their needs, monitor their progress, manage their time more efficiently and stay motivated by recognizing their small achievements.

### **5.2. Implications**

To reduce oral test anxiety in students, teachers should start teaching and offering students these self-regulation strategies: goal setting, self-monitoring, teaching studying techniques and what to do when facing stressful situations such as oral exams. This will let students know they can find support in their teacher. Also, the teacher must ensure a safe and friendly environment so students do not feel constantly judged or too uncomfortable in the classroom.

Furthermore, teachers should be aware of how they are perceived by students as some students might feel pressured or even intimidated by how teachers approach or provide feedback.

Moreover, it is essential for teachers to vary the oral testing formats so that students learn to perform in different situations and also to allow them to use the strategies learned. For

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instance, before an oral test the teacher can lead a five-minutes exercise using Progressive Muscle Relaxation, deep breathing, guided relaxation or a combination of some of them.

### **5.3. Suggestions for further research**

Although the study provides information on the impact of test anxiety on the performance of pre-intermediate students, there are several aspects that were not fully explored and could be addressed in future research.

First, the study was limited by the short duration of the workshop's interventions, so extending the study period will allow for an evaluation of the long-term effectiveness of self-regulation strategies.

Additionally, future research should include a more diverse population, such as students of different ages (children, teenagers, adults) or students of different English proficiency levels. These investigations could provide a better understanding of which strategies work best for each group and how test anxiety varies across different populations and contexts. A gender distinction could also be made to discover how test anxiety levels and responses to self-regulation strategies vary between men and women.

It would also be relevant to apply the interventions to other subjects or language skills, such as writing or reading comprehension, to explore whether anxiety could be reduced or performance improved in these areas.

Secondly, although the qualitative data provided in the research is insightful, it is limited. In the case of the habit tracker, greater follow-up and feedback should be provided, ensuring greater efficacy in the research results. Similarly, it is suggested to implement more in-depth qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, so that more coping mechanisms that were not captured in the survey can be revealed.

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Finally, it is evident that the way teachers provide feedback can affect students' anxiety, but this aspect was not explored in depth. Future research should analyze the types of feedback that teachers give to their students and whether these contribute to the increase or decrease of anxiety, as well as how teachers can implement strategies to support students affected by anxiety

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