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Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety in Emergency Remote Instruction

Abstract

Although language anxiety is the most widely studied emotion in second language acquisition, the extent to which emergency remote teaching (ERT) provokes anxiety is still insufficiently understood. The present research fills this gap by analyzing variables affecting anxiety in the new mode of instruction, while also exploring apprehension-relieving pedagogical approaches. This qualitative study was conducted among 218 university students and data were obtained by an online questionnaire and a focus group interview. Additionally, an online questionnaire was used to find out how teachers adapted their approaches to ensure student wellbeing in ERT. The findings reveal several factors affecting anxiety levels as well as pedagogical approaches that students find effective for anxiety reduction. On the whole, the study extends language anxiety research by looking closely at the variables affecting FLCA increase and decrease in a new, insufficiently explored mode of instruction.

Keywords: COVID-19, foreign language classroom anxiety, language learning emotions, emergency remote teaching, tertiary education, synchronous online instruction

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), defined as "the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language" (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 27), was recognized by Horwitz et al. in 1986 and has been acknowledged ever since. Previously, anxious learners had not always been understood by instructors. Skipping class or seeking "refuge in the last row in an effort to avoid the humiliation or embarrassment of being called on to speak" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 130), apprehensive learners were frequently regarded as being unmotivated or as having a bad attitude. Thanks to the recognition of FLCA, instructors now understand that language learning can be accompanied by negative emotions, and that affected learners should be identified, supported, and treated with sensitivity (Horwitz et al., 1986). The

substitution of online learning for physical classroom learning, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, thus raises the following questions: To what extent do students experience anxiety in emergency remote teaching (ERT)? What are the FLCA sources in ERT? How do instructors reduce FLCA in ERT?

Literature Review

The concept of FLCA first entered foreign and second language acquisition research with the seminal study by Horwitz et al. (1986). Extremely anxious language learners displayed psycho-physiological manifestations (Horwitz et al., 1986), while Young (1991) had also mentioned "avoiding activities in class, coming unprepared to class, acting indifferent, cutting class, putting off taking the foreign language until the last year, crouching in the last row, and avoiding having to speak in the foreign language in class" (p. 430).

Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three performance anxieties related to FLCA: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. They observed that learners who were challenged by speaking to an audience found it harder still when using the limited FL resources at their disposal, especially when they were being evaluated. As Horwitz (2017) clarified, while the three performance anxieties go some way to explain the nature of language anxiety, this specific anxiety represents more than the sum of its parts. Research indicates a variety of FLCA triggers, such as relationships between learners, the relationship between learners and their teacher, competition, and adverse comparison with peers (Horwitz, 2017). Anxiety can also be caused by the method of instruction or teaching style (Budzińska, 2015). While language anxiety can turn learning into an unpleasant experience, the crucial point about language anxiety is that it leads to suboptimal achievement (MacIntyre, 2017). Therefore, as Horwitz (2017) highlights, the goal of language anxiety research is "to make language learning more comfortable for vulnerable learners" (p. 44). Recent studies of emotions in SLA have emphasized the beneficial role of enjoyment in SLA (Botes et al., 2021; Dewaele et al., 2018; Jin & Zhang, 2021). As Dewaele et al. (2018) suggest, "teachers should strive to boost FLE rather than worry too much about students' FLCA" (p. 678).

Although anxiety in foreign and second language acquisition has been researched extensively, relatively few studies have examined anxiety in the planned online environment (Coryell & Clark, 2009; Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Pichette, 2009). It was the recent outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the global transfer to online education that urged a number of scholars (e.g., Alemany-Arrebola et al., 2020; Fraschini & Tao, 2021; Kaisar & Chowdhury,

2020; Maican & Cocoradă, 2020; Resnik & Dewaele, 2021; Resnik et al., 2022) to look into learner emotions experienced during their new, suddenly introduced method of instruction, labeled as ERT (Hodges et al., 2020).

Maican and Cocoradă (2021), who investigated enjoyment and FLCA among Romanian FL university students during the pandemic, observed mixed feelings towards the new learning environment, which is consistent with Gregersen's (2020) comment that "language tasks are not unanimously enjoyed or universally anxiety provoking" (p. 67). Russell (2020) pointed out that online students could experience anxiety both as a result of learning a language and as a result of using new instructional technologies or platforms, which Kaisar and Chowdhury (2020) referred to as "technophobia" (p. 135). According to the recent Resnik et al.'s research (2022), exploring differences in online and face-to-face learners' FLCA before and during the pandemic, the use of technology was the most frequently reported apprehension source in ERT. The scholars also found that the main ERT anxiety sources differed from those inherent in face-to-face instruction. Other reported features of anxiety during ERT arose from participants' physical isolation from their peers (Sun & Zhang, 2021) and intrusion by other members of the household, including domestic pets (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Maican & Cocoradă, 2021).

Instructors, who were already suffering from increased anxiety attributable to the pandemic crisis (Mercer, 2020), suddenly faced the challenge of teaching in a new medium without experience or adequate training (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Bao, 2020; Gao & Zhang, 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2020). This may have led to lower-quality instruction (Derakhshan et al., 2021) and, consequently, may have aggravated students' anxiety about their progress or the effectiveness of their studies (Maican & Cocoradă, 2021; Resnik et al., 2022). Interestingly, according to Jelińska and Paradowski's findings (2021a), instructors who taught synchronously in the higher education sector coped well with adopting digital technology.

The hardships and uncertainties of the prevailing pandemic induced an increased level of general anxiety on teachers as well as students (Alemany-Arrebola et al., 2020). Additionally, emergency procedures introduced in order to facilitate remote learning, which increase students' workload, may also contribute to the anxiety and depression observed in the online learning environment (Commodari & La Rosa, 2020; Fawaz & Samaha, 2020; Jelińska & Paradowski, 2021b; Resnik et al., 2022).

Despite all these potential anxiety sources, some aspects of ERT may alleviate student apprehension. In Kaiser and Chowdhury's (2020) study, most respondents felt more secure in the virtual environment, as they were not exposed to the risk of losing face with their peers. Furthermore, not having to worry about appearance or classroom etiquette allowed others to feel physically relaxed. According to Resnik and Dewaele's (2021) findings, anonymity

and protection from public criticism in the online environment also contribute to lower anxiety levels. Moreover, the scholars demonstrated the prevalence of enjoyment over anxiety as well as a decrease in both anxiety and enjoyment in ERT classes. A drop in FLCA was linked, however, to students speaking the foreign language less in ERT classes than in face-to-face education. This decreased interaction was caused both by more teacher-centered instruction (Pawlak et al., 2022) and increased task evasion due to limited class management (Gao & Zhang, 2020).

In order to support learners struggling with the novel, imposed upon them (Russell, 2020) instruction mode, teachers had to adjust their instruction (Jelińska & Paradowski, 2021b). Nevertheless, pedagogical approaches employed in order to help anxious learners to cope with the suddenly introduced online instruction mode remain unexplored.

So far, research focusing on FLCA in ERT has been insufficient. Furthermore, as Resnik and Dewaele (2021) pointed out, ERT research would benefit from including interviews "to capture the complexity and nuances of learners' unprecedented experiences" (p. 23). The present study uses narratives as well as focus group interviews to capture such nuances and thus extends language anxiety research. Furthermore, the present study investigates pedagogical approaches aiming to enhance student emotional comfort during ERT, which has not yet been considered by existing research.

Research Questions

Based on the above-mentioned literature, the following research questions were posed:
1. To what extent do students experience anxiety in ERT?
2. What are the FLCA sources in ERT?
3. How do instructors reduce FLCA in ERT?

Material and Methods

Participants and Context

The study was conducted at a technical university language center in Poland, where students are required to take an FL course in addition to their major

subject. The sample consisted of 218 students and 11 teachers. The vast majority of students ($N = 212$) were aged between 20 and 23 years. The participants were mostly Polish ($N = 206$), with five Ukrainians and two Belarusians. There were 148 males and 70 females. One hundred and sixty-nine of the respondents were learners of English, while 40 studied German, eight Italian, and one French. Advancement levels ranged from Pre-Intermediate to Advanced.

At the onset of the pandemic, face-to-face classes at the institution were replaced with synchronous online instruction on Microsoft Teams. This study was conducted in June 2020, three months after the introduction of ERT.

Instruments and Procedure

Two anonymous Google Forms online questionnaires (one for students and one for instructors) and a focus group interview were used. All teachers working for the institution were contacted by the author by email and asked to participate in the research. They were informed about the study's purpose and assured anonymity. Links to the questionnaires were included in the email. Online consent was obtained individually at the beginning of each questionnaire.

The student questionnaire (Q) was administered during class by teachers who agreed to take part in the research. It consisted of eight questions (see Appendix A). The questions were in English and Polish, and participants could answer them in either language. The author translated the answers given in Polish into English before including them in the result section. The questionnaire was followed up with a focus-group meeting (FG) with volunteers organized as a video conference on Microsoft Teams. At the end of the questionnaire, there was an invitation to take part in a subsequent focus group meeting. Thirteen students accepted the invitation by providing their email addresses. They were then contacted by the author and a meeting was organized as a video conference on Microsoft Teams. The participants agreed that the conversation could be recorded and used for the purpose of this study. They were assured that the interviews would remain confidential and that their real names would be concealed. The meeting generated more details on the data gathered by the questionnaire. It lasted 76 minutes. Participants had the choice of the meeting to be conducted in Polish or English, and they preferred the latter. The questions posed are listed in Appendix B.

The teacher questionnaire consisted of two questions (listed in Appendix C) investigating whether instructors believed ERT induced greater anxiety than face-to-face education and whether they took any measures to reduce FLCA. The total data corpus is 41,774 words. Participants had the choice of the meeting to be conducted in Polish or in English and they preferred English.

Analysis

Data analysis involved transcribing the interviews using Otter.ai, compiling them with the narratives from the questionnaire, manual coding and inductive data analysis. A grounded theory approach was applied (Charmaz, 2006). According to grounded theory, data collected should be analyzed for repeated themes, which are then tagged with codes. Codes are subsequently grouped into categories that can give rise to new theories. The transcripts were scrutinized by the author and an external researcher with a view of pinpointing anxiety sources and factors responsible for anxiety reduction self-reported by the respondents, as well as anxiety-reducing pedagogical approaches. At this stage, annotations were made to record any salient thoughts. The frequency of each reported anxiety source was calculated using Excel. Subsequently, categories were identified, and the data were analyzed again, assigning units of analysis to categories, that is, coding. Each data sample was analyzed in depth, subjecting it to multiple waves of coding and categorization, until the point of saturation was achieved. The data were analyzed by the two researchers separately. Any disagreements regarding interpretation and categorization were discussed and resolved. The inter-coder agreement reached 95%, which is considered acceptable (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Results

Findings are presented below, in conjunction with the research questions they relate to.

Results for Research Question 1: To What Extent Do Students Experience Anxiety in ERT?

The answer that ERT learning induced greater anxiety than face-to-face learning was mentioned as frequently as the answer that this type of language class was more relaxing. Many participants felt the same degree of anxiety in ERT as they did in face-to-face settings.

The most frequent explanation for feeling less anxious in ERT was anonymity. One student commented that physical signs of anxiety, such as blushing, are not visible when the camera is switched off:

I feel less stressed during my online language class because others can't see me when I am blushing. (Q)

Some respondents reported that it was less stressful to make a mistake in the company of other people who were heard but not seen:

> *During online courses there's much less stress for the students because you are not directly responsible if you say something not right because during stationary courses if you say something not right, everybody is going to look at you or you may get bad reputation for, you know, saying something wrong and on online classes it's much less impactful to you because we don't see each other. (FG)*

> *During my online language class, I am less anxious than in the classroom because there are just voices, and I don't feel afraid to make a mistake. (Q)*

The familiar, home environment provided comfort to some learners.

> *Online classes make me a little less anxious because I am in the place where I feel safe. (Q)*

Additionally, some participants felt more relaxed at home as they could consult a dictionary discreetly with their camera switched off.

> *I feel more comfortable sitting in my own room, where I know, if needed, I can, get a dictionary or open the book on certain pages (usually I don't, but my mental comfort increases and I'm not stressed so much, which also helps me come up with ideas and think faster during classes). (FG)*

Several participants commented that the absence of eye contact helped them concentrate and put them at ease.

> *It's definitely less stressful for me, partially because an eye contact is distracting. (Q)*

> *Online classes are less stressful because one does not have to look directly at the teacher. (Q)*

> *I'm more stressful in class because the other students are looking at me. (Q)*

Some respondents found it easier to concentrate in the online setting, since there was only one speaker at a time, with other voices silenced. This additionally facilitated listening comprehension.

> *Online learning is less stressful because classroom environment is louder. (Q)*

> *Online classes stress me less because I can focus better on listening. (Q)*

There were also some comments that studying without the company of others was less anxiety-provoking than face-to-face learning. Some students felt more confident speaking to the computer than to a physical person:

> *Well, I actually like much more learning in my home, in this environment. Speaking—I find it much easier through the camera, I'm slightly bit of an introvert, so this is also very helpful for me because I feel slightly bit uncomfortable when there is a lot of people around, yeah I think this is the main reason, I am a lonely learner, I am a slightly bit a loner, but not in a bad way, I like to be one in my room, for me it was good, ERT actually encouraged me to speak more than during physical classes, it helped me actually. (FG)*

Several respondents found ERT less anxiety-provoking because avoidance is easier to effect in an online environment than it is in a physical classroom.

> *If you want to avoid participation, all you have to do is pretend your microphone doesn't work. (Q)*

> *Online classes give me opportunity to put myself on mute and actually I do not have to pay attention all the time. (Q)*

Results for Research Question 2: What Are the FLCA Sources in ERT?

The following causes of FLCA in ERT are derived from the data. They have been grouped under similar themes and ranked (in descending order) from most to least frequently mentioned.

Speaking online:
- Feeling that everybody is focusing on the speaker;
- Having to use a microphone;
- Not seeing other students.

Technological challenges:
- Experiencing unreliable Internet connections;
- Suffering from inadequate sound quality;
- Experiencing difficulty taking a test in an online format.

Online test anxiety.

Unnatural setting:
- Not seeing other students, lacking eye contact or non-verbal communication;

- Feeling that the classes seem unnatural;
- Lacking live contact or normal human interaction;
- Not being able to see other students' reactions;
- Having to use a camera.

Unsatisfactory instruction:

- Experiencing greater difficulty understanding teachers' explanations;
- Having inadequate contact with the instructor;
- Feeling a lack of learning, that classes are being used only for checking homework;
- Sensing a teacher's inability to see and appreciate effort;
- Finding less predictability in online classes;
- Getting few contributions from other students;

Fear of negative evaluation.

Lack of peer support.

The home environment as a classroom:

- Feeling embarrassed to speak a foreign language in front of one's family;
- Worrying about distracting household noises;
- Being unsettled by the lack of boundaries between home and university;

Fatigue and other issues related to student life during the pandemic.

Speaking Online. Speaking was shown to be the primary cause of FLCA in ERT, mainly because participants felt they were the center of attention:

> I'm more anxious during online classes because then I know everybody is listening to me when I speak. During normal classes, I can feel less watched. (Q)

The background noise typical of a physical classroom was absent, so the fear of being judged was more intense. Participants were self-conscious when communicating through a microphone because they had the impression of being scrutinized by others:

> I never volunteer to speak. I feel stressed because of other students' muted microphones and the fact that everybody hears clearly what I am saying. (Q)

Respondents clearly indicated that being called to speak without preparation caused the most apprehension. They also reported difficulties experienced when divided into pairs or groups, and the fear that their partner would be unavailable or unwilling to respond.

Technological Challenges. Technology-related apprehension was mainly attributable to the quality of the Internet connection. Several participants were concerned about the sound quality since it led to misunderstandings:

I was most stressed when the professor couldn't understand me and when I couldn't understand the professor. (I can barely understand him so good sound quality is necessary). (Q)

They also worried that they would not adequately be heard, or that they would not hear properly themselves:

I feel stressed because I don't know if my voice is loud enough. (Q)

Moreover, learners reported interruptions in connectivity and the associated anxiety experienced when trying to understand a task the rest of the group had begun. One participant mentioned the embarrassment he felt when he realized he had been speaking into a muted microphone. Participants also reported that they had been stressed when their cameras or microphones switched on unexpectedly and broadcast unwanted sounds or images. Stress related to the unreliability of technology was also mentioned.

Online Test Anxiety. Testing was a frequently mentioned anxiety cause. Many learners worried more about taking their final test online than they would about taking it in a physical classroom environment. Primarily, they were anxious because they had not experienced online testing before:

I am more worried about the online form of the final test; so many things can go wrong. I don't know how it works and that makes me feel stressed. (Q)

Some respondents were apprehensive about losing their Internet connection during the final test and failing as a result. Learners were also worried about the time limit (the test was automatically deactivated after a set amount of time) and concerned that after ERT they could "not be prepared as well as after regular studies." Moreover, participants felt uneasy about the requirement to speak to a camera in oral tests.

Unnatural Setting. Another significant reason many respondents found ERT more anxiety-provoking than face-to-face learning was that it felt unnatural. They referred to the new mode of instruction as "strange," devoid of "normal human interaction," physical contact, and body language. They found it stressful to study without seeing other students and their reactions:

I get confused when I'm supposed to talk to other people I can't see. This makes me stressed. In the classroom I feel more confident. (Q)

I am more anxious during my online language class because it is something different and I am not used to this. (Q)

Additionally, participants remarked that not being able to see other students' reactions made online speaking more anxiety provoking:

The fact that you don't see another [sic] people means that you can't really know how they reacted to what you've said. (Q)

I often choose to stay silent during my language class because I can't judge whether other students are laughing at me when they have their microphones muted and cameras switched off. (FG)

While some teachers did require students to use the camera on their devices, results unfortunately demonstrate that respondents found this to be a major cause of anxiety. Several learners regarded the requirement to appear on camera as the most stressful aspect of online education. Some respondents admitted their unwillingness to reveal their private homes. Several learners mentioned they would not like to be seen wearing casual clothes that would not be appropriate in the school environment. Feeling self-conscious about one's appearance was also reported:

In my opinion the most stressful thing about online learning is using the camera to show my face. I am not always looking good especially now. (Q)

I'm always worried that my teacher will want me to have the camera turned on, and I will have messy hair :) but jokes aside this really is stressful (like the camera thing, not hair). (FG)

However, one participant did comment that making cameras obligatory, while stressful and initially difficult, would benefit learners in the long run, since being able to see other speakers' facial expressions and body language would facilitate communication in a foreign language.

Unsatisfactory Instruction. Some participants felt anxious because of the way Internet-based language learning was delivered. They thought online instruction was generally substandard and did not engage students sufficiently.

I am more anxious because we only check homework in classes. It feels like we don't learn anything new. I would change our classes so that we

> *learn or explain new topics and then do homework. Our teacher doesn't present us with new topics. (FG)*

Some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the lesson pace.

> *I am an ambitious student as for English courses and I like having challenge, having regular tasks to do and during online classes the problem is that the courses are at a much slower pace than on stationary courses and so that we do much less in more time, and this is inefficient. (FG)*

Participants also complained that the lack of physical contact with the educator made classes difficult to follow:

> *We had to work in groups, and I didn't know what I was supposed to talk about. (FG)*

Consequently, participants were apprehensive that they might lose the progress they had made so far.

Fear of Negative Evaluation. Many learners worried more about making mistakes and about being negatively evaluated online than in the physical classroom. The main reason for this was the lack of the background noise, which allowed others to hear their speech more clearly and focus on it more critically (see section Speaking Online).

> *I feel slightly more worried because other classmates need to be completely silent during online lessons and a quiet environment seems to make your mistakes more noticeable. (FG)*

Participants admitted to feeling greater embarrassment when the instructor corrected their mistakes online, as other students seemed to pay more attention to their comments. One respondent noted that online correction felt more personal, as it seemed that the teacher was making an example of one particular student.

> *In the classroom we don't feel evaluated. When we say something wrong, the teacher can say it correctly and the whole class repeats it, but during online classes the teacher seems to speak to this one person. (FG)*

There was a comment that errors made online caused more anxiety since they were "saved," although this only referred to mistakes made in the chatbox or on the interactive board. One participant pointed out that mistakes seem more

pronounced when the body language is absent, and one is unable to display their physical reactions to mistakes they make.

> When we are in the classroom, my embarrassment and my reaction to mistakes is visible, which reduces their scale. But when I am heard only, mistakes are more visible. (FG)

Lack of Peer Support. Several participants felt more secure in a physical classroom, where they could ask their peers for help when they were finding it difficult to express themselves, for example when they were searching for words or struggling to complete a task. Additionally, they relied on peer support when they did not understand the teacher's instructions, or when they got distracted and needed someone to explain the task at hand. In the digital learning environment students found themselves alone and unable to ask for help discreetly, without losing face. Thus, the need to be wholly self-reliant added up to their anxiety.

> Online classes can be more stressful. I sometime lose the plot and there is no one nearby to tell me what to do. (Q)

> I felt more comfortable in the classroom. I think it's because in a normal classroom someone can help me when I answer. (Q)

The Home Environment as a Classroom. When educational institutions switched to online learning, students' private homes suddenly became "classrooms," which increased learner apprehension. One respondent found it challenging to sustain his motivation when the boundary between home and university was blurred.

> Over my entire life, I've got used to the fact that home is for home stuff and school is for learning, so now the two worlds have collided and it's extra difficult for me to force myself to do something. (FG)

Several students felt uneasy speaking an FL in front of family members.

> I find it embarrassing to speak English to my computer in the presence of my family members, even if I am alone in my room and the door is closed. (Q)

Household noise and distractions from cohabitants were also reported as sources of FLCA.

I am more stressed when studying online because when I am speaking, my family members behaving in a noisy way may be heard. (Q)

I live alone but sometimes my parents or grandparents are visiting so I don't really know when they are visiting, so they can be there during the class and they are quite noisy I would say, so there is a lot of distraction that makes us not to focus on our lessons. (FG)

Fatigue and Other Issues Related to Student Life during the Pandemic. In addition to becoming familiar with a new form of study, participants were under other pressures. One finding was that online learning caused greater fatigue than classroom-based instruction.

Most of the times I am tired but stress doesn't play a huge role. (Q)

I'm more tired of online class. (Q)

I wouldn't say I had a much different emotion than I would have with normal face to face classes, but I sometimes would feel a little bit tired, and the classes would be so long and long. (FG)

Another source of tension was the challenge of studying technical subjects online, which added to their workload and thus increased their overall anxiety.

I can't fully concentrate on language bearing in mind that I already have 5 hours of painful remote laboratories. (FG)

Participants repeatedly underscored the amount of coursework required by his major subject and pointed out that foreign language assignments contributed to his heavy workload.

Sometimes I had to finish my projects for the same day that English class was happening and I was up until like 5 or 6 am and I woke up at 12 because we had lessons at 12 and I thought: "No, I cannot go through this, it's too difficult!" (FG)

Furthermore, respondents suffered from stress resulting from having to do additional household duties that arose during the pandemic.

Online learning is more anxiety provoking because I am looking after my younger brother, which is a major distraction. (Q)

Others mentioned screen fatigue.

> *It's pretty hard to concentrate on the computer while sitting on the computer like for 10 hours. (Q)*

Results for Research Question 4: How Do Instructors Reduce FLCA in ERT?

Most teacher participants claimed they tried to reduce students' apprehension during online classes, showing an awareness that learners were adapting to a new medium of instruction. Pedagogical approaches aimed at alleviating oral FLCA that appeared in teacher narratives include:
- Allowing extra time for thinking;
- Using a flipped classroom approach;
- Dividing learners into pairs or groups for speaking;
- Using the think-pair-share strategy;
- Arranging speaking assessment individually instead of in front of the group;
- Enabling screen-shared presentations;
- Using picture dictionaries and other visual aids;
- Engaging in small talk;
- Creating a friendly atmosphere;
- Giving encouragement;
- Allowing students to leave their cameras off.

For the most part instructors implemented these techniques intuitively, but one respondent reported that their choice of pedagogical approach was based on asking learners about their preferences.

Student narratives were mostly consistent with those of the teachers. Interestingly, learners mentioned several stress-alleviating techniques that were not reported by teachers. This may suggest that teachers used those techniques in a natural way, without a conscious effort to reduce oral FLCA. Anxiety-alleviating pedagogical approaches that appeared in student narratives include:
- Teacher manner;
- No pressure to use cameras;
- Similarity of instruction;
- Teacher's camera on;
- Soft error correction;
- Small talk;
- Personalisation;
- Individual approach;
- Appealing instruction.

Teacher Manner. Students valued teachers who were kind, supportive, warm, and cheerful, but also patient, understanding, and non-judgmental.

> *My teacher has a magical aura to feel calm [sic] and not judging us. (Q)*

> *My teacher is very calm and friendly, and it helps a lot. She is always happy to explain the problem, she is still smiling and is very positive. (Q)*

Since learners were under a lot of pressure from other subjects, they additionally praised educators who did not criticize them for not doing homework. Additionally, learners appreciated using humor and laughter.

> *My teacher laughs with us, tells stories and creates a really good atmosphere. I think that helps everyone feel comfortable. (Q)*

> *My teacher is very funny and outgoing, she makes us all laugh. (Q)*

Students also mentioned not being forced to answer questions, particularly without preparation.

> *Everybody can contribute when they want. Nobody is called on to answer the question. (Q)*

Praise and encouragement to speak, albeit with mistakes, were also considered helpful.

No Pressure to Use Cameras. Participants reported feeling less anxious when allowed to work without cameras. (see section Unnatural Setting).

> *I switch my camera off because it helps me to be more confident when I speak. (Q)*

> *We don't need to turn our cameras on, and I think it helps people to speak more. (Q)*

Similarity of Instruction. Making online classes synchronous and, consequently, similar to face-to-face learning was a critical step that helped many learners adapt to ERT. Consequently, the switch was smooth and learners were reassured that their classes would continue in the similar manner. Break-out rooms helped to preserve social interactions among learners.

Lessons run as in our previous classes, except that they are now online. This makes me feel less anxious. (Q)

Online classes were similar to face-to-face ones, we also had group speaking in break-out rooms, it was slightly easier because we didn't have to spend time getting into the other desks, the teacher would just make rooms and we would just chat with each other, so that's fine. The fact that classes were similar helped a lot. It did encourage some people who didn't speak a lot or sometimes they wouldn't speak ever and I think that addressed social needs in online classroom. (FG)

Teacher's Camera On. Instructors preserved the natural character of online classes by keeping their cameras switched on.

My teacher switches her camera on and it makes me reassured because I can see her facial expressions and thanks to that I can feel like she is in the same room as us. (FG)

Additionally, teachers' cameras switched on facilitated understanding and communication thanks to the educator's facial expressions and body language. Learners found it comforting and easier to communicate when they could see the instructor react to what they were saying.

Thanks to the camera I can see the teacher's emotions, for example a smile when we give correct answers. (Q)

Soft Error Correction. A sensitive approach to mistakes seemed to alleviate fear of negative evaluation. Participants welcomed lack of criticism, guidance toward self-correction, explanations, and repetition of rules. This was particularly relevant in the ERT context, which made error correction seem more personal (see section Online Test Anxiety).

There is no pressure if anybody makes a mistake. What is more, the teacher tries to explain the rules once again. (Q)

My teacher's tone of voice is so nice when she corrects my pronunciation that it does not feel like pointing out a mistake, but genuinely wanting to help. (Q)

Small Talk. Small talk featured in both student and teacher narratives as a pedagogical tool to diminishing online language anxiety. Learners found it particularly beneficial at the beginning of a class. They felt comforted when

the teacher asked them how they were feeling, discussed the weather, or told a personal anecdote.

We always do some small talk to feel more comfortable at the start of the lesson. (Q)

We chat in a natural way, so it does not feel like a lesson but pleasure. (Q)

Personalization. Personalization seemed particularly effective in reducing FLCA. Students felt relaxed when asked about their lives during lockdown. They happily shared information about their weekend plans, their university assignments, or personal matters.

Yes, our teacher tries to make us more relaxed, for example we talk about how our life looks during the pandemic. (Q)

They welcomed the opportunity to show household pets to the class, using their cameras. This sharing of personal space made the virtual classroom more human.

She is convincing other students to show their pets and it's great. She is the most cheerful teacher at this sad, sad university. (Q)

Individual Approach. Participants valued teachers who addressed individual needs, for example, by giving more time to finish an exercise, offering help, or adjusting tasks to suit learners' abilities.

The teacher decreases our stress level by offering help when someone is struggling with an exercise. (Q)

Respondents were also appreciative when an instructor who observed signs of heightened anxiety allowed learners to relax, instead of exerting pressure. They acknowledged that recording a presentation for the instructor was less stressful than making it live in front of other students. Additionally, thoughtful selection of students of mixed abilities for break-out rooms was reported as a stress-reducing technique.

My teacher knew that online learning is something new for us and he understood that there are differences between online and classroom learning, and he made adjustments to make those classes better. For example, when there were students who didn't want to talk about certain exercises, he made smaller groups and those groups I think he made with knowledge

about our differences because there was always a group in which there were students who couldn't speak fluently or cannot communicate fluently and students who were better and they encouraged him or her to speak, they engaged other people, so those groups were pretty thought through I'd say. Those groups were made specially to improve skills of some students and to make other students comfortable, when someone wasn't comfortable speaking. (FG)

Appealing Instruction. Participants reported reduced anxiety when they were absorbed by varied lessons, visual aids, stimulating topics, exercises, or supplementary materials such as films, pictures or games.

The teacher makes me feel comfortable because lessons are varied. There are language games, films, reading. (Q)

My teacher tries to make the atmosphere more relaxing by preparing different exercises about interesting topics. (Q)

Clear explanations were also identified as a factor in helping learners feel at ease.

I don't feel anxious because everything is always well explained, and we get satisfying answers to our questions. (Q)

Some respondents spoke in favor of the "flipped classroom," admitting they felt more relaxed when they received the topic of the next lesson in advance. It allowed them to review material and to prepare mentally for lessons.

Discussion

The purpose of the first research question was to find out to what extent students experience anxiety during ERT. The main finding of the study was that participants reported increased and decreased levels of FLCA when faced with ERT. This is consistent with Maican and Cocoradă's (2021) observation that ERT provoked mixed emotions towards the new learning environment. Crucially, there was a group of learners that felt anonymous and thus more comfortable speaking once their camera was switched off, which corroborates Resnik and Dewaele's (2021) observations. Additionally, online education appeared to be more relaxing owing to the familiarity of the home environment

(Kaisar & Chowdhury, 2020), the removal of classroom background noise, the lack of physical presence, and the ease of avoiding tasks.

The second research question focused on the FLCA sources in ERT. There seems to be some overlap between FLCA and FLCA in ERT. The three physical classroom anxieties described by Horwitz et al. (1986) (i.e., communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety) apply additionally to ERT, but they seem to exhibit a modified profile when they are observed online.

Frustration with the method of instruction (Budzińska, 2015; Maican & Cocoradă, 2021) is another source of anxiety common to both online learning and face-to-face instruction. Emergency remote teaching, a product of the sudden transition to online learning, made some learners anxious about their progress (Maican & Cocoradă, 2021). However, only a small number of participants reported anxiety attributable to the quality of teaching, confirming Jelińska and Paradowski's (2021a) finding that instructors who taught synchronously in the higher education sector coped well with the adoption of digital technology.

The remaining FLCA triggers identified by this study, which involve technological challenges (Resnik et al., 2022), a lack of physical presence (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021), isolation (Sun & Zhang, 2021, and the home environment as a place of instruction (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Maican & Cocoradă, 2021), are exclusive to the ERT. This concurs with Resnik et al.'s (2022) findings that the nature of anxiety arising from ERT is specific to that environment. It seems that these anxiety sources should also be relevant in computer assisted language learning.

It should be noted that the technological challenges reported were a result of weak Internet connections and unreliable equipment (Maican & Cocoradă, 2020; Resnik et al., 2022), rather than "technophobia" (Kaisar & Chowdhury, 2020) or using the instructional platform itself (Russell, 2020). This is probably because the participants—students at a technical university—were already familiar with a range of digital technologies.

In the present study, loneliness and social isolation were manifested in the loss of peer support and the need to be fully self-reliant. As expected, respondents were further stressed by challenges related to the lockdown, such as screen fatigue, heavier workload (Commodari & La Rosa, 2020), and distraction by co-habitants who were also forced to spend time at home (Maican & Cocoradă, 2021). These anxiety sources are characteristic to the COVID-19 period and are not likely to occur during planned online courses.

The third research question focused on pedagogical approaches reducing language anxiety. Jelińska and Paradowski (2021b) observed that "a humanistic approach and a pedagogy of compassion […], while always crucial, gains particular importance in difficult times like these" (p. 9). As these results testify, instructors who took part in the study also did a lot to alleviate their learners' apprehension. This is quite remarkable given that educators had to adjust to

online delivery of courses overnight, putting an incredible strain on them, on top of increased levels of general anxiety attributable to the pandemic crisis (Mercer, 2020). Instructors' efforts and dedication were clearly recognized by learners participating in the study (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021).

Respondents cited a wide range of anxiety-reducing pedagogical approaches employed by their teachers. Teacher manner seemed to be one of the most frequently mentioned stress-alleviating aspects. The reason may be the perception of reduced distance between learner and teacher when communicating on a digital platform. In online education, the teacher is right in front of students on their screen. Personalization was also highlighted as a pedagogical approach that could alleviate student apprehension in ERT. Learners appreciated this approach as it showed the instructor's sincere, human interest in them, in contrast with a detached, impersonal style where the teacher functions as a knowledge-transmitting robot. This approach is particularly relevant in the light of Resnik and Dewaele's (2021) finding that "disembodied classes have less emotional resonance" (p. 1). Furthermore, respondents found that highly engaging instruction alleviated language anxiety, which is entirely consistent with the claim by Dewaele et al. (2018) that teachers should focus on increasing student FLE rather than reduce their FLCA.

Since language anxiety affects online learners as well as face-to-face learners, online instructors should take measures to lessen their apprehension. Accordingly, anxious online students will benefit from pedagogical approaches directed at them, such as those described in the present study. Here it is important to recall that the starting point when dealing with FLCA in the online learning environment is for the instructor to become aware that a problem exists, just as it is with face-to-face FLCA. It is then necessary to identify and assist anxious learners, who may mistakenly appear to be arrogant, lazy, unmotivated, or uninterested (Horwitz et al., 1986). In the virtual environment there will be learners who fail to log on and there will be those who use problems with their connection or equipment as excuses to avoid speaking.

ERT has altered the way languages are taught. Many language teaching institutions have started running synchronous online courses alongside traditional face-to-face ones as the demand for them has grown. This study was undertaken during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research could demonstrate how far this study was influenced by the rushed transition to online teaching in 2020, and whether FLCA sources during the post-COVID online language education remain the same.

The present study has some limitations. Firstly, the fact that students' comments on anxiety increase or decrease were self-reported involves a possible lack of objectivity. Secondly, the study did not find the exact proportion of learners whose anxiety dropped or stayed the same during the transfer to ERT. Future research could further explore the change in anxiety levels as a re-

sult of the shift to online language education. Thirdly, the effect of particular pedagogical approaches has not been empirically explored, as this was not the purpose of this study. Future research could investigate the stress-alleviating effect of particular approaches identified by the present exploration.

Conclusion

The present study has examined the anxiety experienced by synchronous online language learners forced to study remotely due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. This type of anxiety seems to be specific to the online learning environment, and not just the combination of language anxiety with the apprehension inherent in using educational technologies. The findings demonstrate that while ERT contributed to lessening anxiety in some learners, other respondents reported increased apprehension compared with face-to-face learning. The study extends language anxiety research by closely inspecting the variables affecting FLCA increase and decrease in a new, insufficiently explored mode of instruction. The findings capture some "nuances of learners' unprecedented experiences" (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021, p. 23) that have not been found before. Furthermore, the anxiety-reducing pedagogical approaches perceived by respondents as effective are relevant to online education in general and can be employed globally by others to promote wellbeing of language learners.

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Student Questionnaire

1. Are you more anxious during your online language class than your regular class in the classroom? Why?

2. Are you more worried about making a mistake during your online foreign language (FL) class than during your regular class in the classroom? Why?

3. Are you more worried about your pronunciation during your online class than during your regular class in the classroom? Why?

4. Are you more anxious about your final test after studying online? Why?

5. Which aspects of online learning did you find anxiety-provoking?

6. Which online activities make you feel anxious? Why? Would you prefer to avoid them?

7. Does the teacher do anything to make you feel comfortable during your online classes?

8. Have you ever felt stressed because of technical issues?

Focus Group Questions

1. Are you anxious during your online language class? What are the symptoms?

2. Do you feel the same during your classes in the classroom?

3. Would you benefit more from your classes if you were not anxious?

4. Do you participate in an active way despite your anxiety? Why?

5. If you were to continue studying a foreign language online, how would you change your classes to make you feel better?

6. What influences your FLCA in ERT?

Teacher Questionnaire

1. Do you think that an online foreign language class is more anxiety-provoking than face-to-face learning?

2. Do you do anything to reduce your students' anxiety during your online class? If so, what do you do?

Katarzyna Budzińska

Angst im Fremdsprachenunterricht in Emergency Remote Instruction

Zusammenfassung

Obwohl Sprechangst die am gründlichsten untersuchte Emotion bei dem Zweitspracherwerb ist, ist noch immer unzureichend bekannt, inwieweit Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) zur Auslösung von Angst führt. Die vorliegende Studie füllt diese Lücke, indem sie Variablen analysiert, die einen Einfluss auf Angsterfahrung in der neuen Unterrichtsform haben, und dabei auch angstlösende pädagogische Ansätze erforscht. Die qualitative Studie wurde unter 218 Universitätsstudenten durchgeführt. Die Daten wurden mittels eines Online-Fragebogens bzw. eines Fokusgruppeninterviews erhoben. Zusätzlich wurde ein Online-Fragebogen verwendet, um herauszufinden, wie die Lehrkräfte ihre Lehrmethoden anpassen, um das Wohlbefinden der Studierenden in ERT zu gewährleisten. Die Ergebnisse weisen auf mehrere Faktoren hin, die das Angstniveau beeinflussen, sowie auf pädagogische Ansätze, die sich nach Meinung der Studierenden als wirksam für Abbau von Angst erwiesen. Insgesamt erweitert die Studie die Sprechangstforschung, indem sie die Variablen, welche die Zunahme und Abnahme von Angst (FLCA) in einer neuen, unzureichend erforschten Unterrichtsform beeinflussen, genauer betrachtet.

Schlüsselwörter: COVID-19, Angst im Fremdsprachenunterricht, Emotionen beim Sprachenlernen, Emergency Remote Teaching, tertiäre Bildung, synchroner Online-Unterricht