

TEACHER EDUCATORS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN FACE-TO-FACE AND ONLINE MODES

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Abstract. The internationalisation of universities and the ensuing policies mandating English as a medium of instruction made European universities impose corresponding requirements demanding a certain level of English language proficiency from their academic staff. Similarly, university-based teacher educators became subject to specific foreign language demands. This research focuses on university-based teacher educators who have been actively taking part in enhancing their academic English. The COVID-19 pandemic made for a prompt shift from face-to-face to online learning, providing for a comparison between the two learning environments. Since affective factors, including learning anxiety, may impact the success of language acquisition, the study addresses foreign language anxiety experienced by teacher educators when acquiring English for Academic Purposes in different learning modes. The research was conducted as a survey with the data obtained through administering the adapted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale to 80 respondents from the 7 universities working in teacher education, furthered by 4 online semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal overall low levels of anxiety, with a small increase in communication apprehension. Although there is no conclusive evidence about the decrease in anxiety in remote studies, the interview results are clearly demonstrative of the possibility of combining face-to-face and online learning modes.

Key words: English for Academic Purposes, English medium instruction, face-to-face, foreign language anxiety, online, university-based teacher educators

INTRODUCTION

With a vision for 'a Europe in which learning, studying and doing research would not be hampered by borders' (European Commission, 2017: 11), mobility and internationalisation turned into beacons of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The enormous growth in English-taught programmes at European universities (Wächter and Maiworm, 2008; Wächter and Maiworm, 2014; Macaro et al., 2018) raised several problems related to English medium instruction (EMI),

that is, the use of English for teaching academic subjects in places where the majority of the population speaks other languages than English. Thus, EMI programmes, mobility, and the governing ‘publish or perish’ principle made the English language proficiency indispensable for work in academia.

The possibility of significant financial and public returns provides a powerful incentive for the post-industrial knowledge society to invest in higher education (HE) (OECD, 2017a; OECD, 2017b; OECD, 2018). To promote the EHEA’s sustainable development through increasing its HE quality, internationalisation and labour market relevance, the European Council has been allocating significant funds to help national governments with the professional development of their academic personnel. After addressing urgent needs in digitalisation, the supporting programmes often focus on bridging the linguistic gap, offering English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses for HE staff. In Latvia, this has been realised within an EU-funded project under the specific objective No. 8.2.2 of the Operational Programme Growth and Employment: ‘To strengthen academic staff of higher education institutions in strategic specialisation areas’ (Finanšu ministrija [Ministry of Finance], 2021).

Among the academic staff, those who prepare, mentor and support aspiring and practicing teachers, or teacher educators (TEs), are an undeniably special group with direct influence on the whole system of national education (EC, 2013; UNESCO, 2014; EC, 2019; OECD, 2019). Implementing the EU’s strategic decisions and maintaining the quality of the teaching workforce, TEs are inevitably under the pressure of public expectations (EC, 2018). The growing body of research on TEs’ professional development has been focusing on their professional trajectories (Guberman et al., 2021), the doubt and uncertainty resulting from the tension between institutional expectations to engage in both high-quality teaching and research (Czerniawski, Guberman and MacPhail, 2017; MacPhail et al., 2019), as well as typical obstacles such as high work load and lack of time and motivation (e.g., Shagrir, 2017). With research on the linguistic skills of academic staff in the context of EMI being in its prime (see, e.g., Kalnbērziņa, 2017; Carrió-Pastor, 2020; Dimova, Kling and Drljača Margić (eds.), 2023), there has been no systematic study of TEs’ language proficiency, even though it has stopped being mere functional utility or even an exclusive concern of their home universities (Bicjutko and Goba, 2020). Although in Latvia continuing professional development is mandatory for all university personnel (Cabinet of Ministers, 1995), 160 academic hours of professional development programmes do not mention the enhancement of language proficiency, though they allow for reporting international mobility as well as participation in conferences (Cabinet of Ministers, 2018: ch. III, para. 16). Thus, the research on the enhancement of TEs’ English proficiency is topical, and for a clearer picture, both systemic level and individual perspectives should be taken into consideration.

The success of language acquisition is a multifaceted phenomenon, with foreign language anxiety (FLA) being among the affective factors potentially correlating with learners’ performance. Despite nearly four decades of researching FLA,

studies have usually focused on formal education and the FLA levels of children and young adults (see MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991; MacIntyre, 1999; Horwitz, 2001; Dewaele, 2007; Horwitz, 2010; Lu and Liu, 2011, etc.). In the university context, foreign language learning anxiety has been researched for supporting staff (Tappoon, 2019), and there has been research on teachers' foreign language anxiety experienced by non-native teachers of English (e.g., Horwitz, 1996; Kim, S.-Y. and Kim, J.-H, 2004; Suzuki and Roger, 2014; Machida, 2019; Liu and Wu, 2021). Being a very specific, hardly homogenous, and highly reflexive group of learners, TEs may add a different dimension to the study of the phenomenon. Finally, the experience of rapid transfer from the traditional face-to-face ground to the uncharted terrain of online studies due to the COVID-19 pandemic offered a research opportunity for comparing two modes of mastering EAP in terms of related FLA.

Thus, the study attempts to elicit data on the FLA experienced by TEs of HE institutions in Latvia while enhancing their English language proficiency within their work-based continuing professional development. The research aims at comparing the levels of language-skill-specific anxiety and its variation in face-to-face and online modes with the following research questions put forward: What are the levels of FLA experienced by university-based TEs in the EAP course? What are the trends in response to the mode of conducting the course for EAP enhancement of TEs from the FLA perspective?

Answering these questions makes it possible to define the benefits and drawbacks of EAP acquisition in different environments from the FLA perspective and give tentative recommendations for conducting future EAP programmes for university-based TEs.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND ITS MEASUREMENT

With a view to the current need for English proficiency in general and in academia specifically, university personnel must have been under pressure, which may have been reflected in their FLA levels while enhancing EAP at their workplace. Language anxiety is a complex psychological construct, and, as 'the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language' (MacIntyre 1999: 27), it is clearly an affective factor in foreign language acquisition, impacting cognitive functioning and memory, as well as causing other detrimental effects on learning.

The research on FLA as a specific type of anxiety was backed by understanding anxiety more generally and informed by the three approaches to its study, namely, the trait, state, and situation-specific perspectives (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991). Whereas trait anxiety is a stable predisposition to experience anxiety across situations and time, state anxiety is a temporary reaction to an event. The third type, situation-specific anxiety, is triggered by a specific set of stimuli and can be seen as trait anxiety in a well-defined context (*ibid.*), with speaking in a class and taking an examination being common situations in the context of education.

Having distinguished FLA as triggered by learning a new language, E. K. Horwitz, M. B. Horwitz and Cope (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). This standardised quantitative tool for measuring an individual's response to specific stimuli related to the context of language learning consists of 33 statements. The 24 positively worded and the 9 negatively worded items are designed to make the respondent reflect on a certain language learning situation and rate their experience on a 1 to 5 Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree). Total scale scores range from 33 to 165, with higher scores indicating higher levels of anxiety. With significant part-whole correlations, the total scale aims at assessing communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation related to language anxiety.

Overall, the FLCAS yields reliable scores on negative language learning experience (Tran, 2012), provides for developing recommendations and, despite 'a plethora of studies throughout the [nearly four decades of] looking at this affective factor through all types of lenses including: psychology, psycholinguistics, testing, and education' (Brennan, 2014: 65), remains the most frequently used and adapted instrument. Hence the choice of the FLCAS as a tool for this study, where measuring and comparing FLA levels in face-to-face and online foreign language classrooms may help determine a more conducive environment for the special group of TEs as well as design ways to improve their learning process.

METHODOLOGY

1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research was conducted as a survey, and the data were collected with the use of quantitative and qualitative methods, including a questionnaire and an open-ended interview. The main instrument used in the study was the 33-item FLCAS (Horwitz, E. K. et al., 1986), which was translated into the state language using the back translation technique and adapted to the specific context of TEs' English language enhancement as part of their professional development. The resulting instrument was pilot-tested by 7 participants, which led to minor changes in the wording of several questions.

The questionnaire was expanded by a demographic section containing questions about workplace, gender, age, mode of conducting the attended courses (face-to-face, online or both) and their level, namely, B1, B2, C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale, or 'other'. The final question concerned the level of course completion at the time of the survey, i.e., whether the respondent had already completed the course, continued attending it, had temporarily postponed or interrupted their attendance, with the possibility to comment on their choices. As teacher education is a comprehensive, dynamic and inherently interdisciplinary field, no question specifying the respondents'

type of involvement (e.g., by subject or level) was asked. The demographic section was deliberately kept to the minimum in view of the respondents' lack of time. The questionnaire ended with an invitation to comment on their English language learning experiences and to participate in further research on their language acquisition. The final draft of the questionnaire was provided with an introduction containing a note on anonymity and confidentiality, thus guaranteeing the informed consent of the research participants. The complete questionnaire was posted online using Google Forms in March 2021. Then, the link, accompanied by a letter, was sent via WhatsApp and email to the contacts in the biggest HE institutions in Latvia providing programmes in teacher education. Further distribution of the questionnaire was conducted using the snowball sampling method.

After obtaining data from the questionnaires, 4 participants were chosen and invited for an interview. The main criterion was their experience of the transition from a face-to-face to an online environment while attending their English language course. Reflecting on their EAP acquisition, the interviewees would be competent to assess the differences between the two learning modes in general and in terms of FLA levels in particular. Before the interview, the candidates received a letter of explanation with a consent form to sign. The semi-structured interview consisted of 13 open questions, starting with the interviewee's involvement in teacher education and particulars of the attended course organisation, and then focusing on anxiety and nervousness experienced in the EAP classroom. The interviewees were asked to reflect on the causes, effects, and coping strategies for FLA, as well as to make recommendations for improving the process of EAP acquisition and English proficiency enhancement as part of their professional development. The interviews were conducted after a considerable amount of time had passed since the completion of the questionnaire, namely, in the period between December 2021 and March 2022. The time space allowed for the experience to 'sink in' and for the interviewees to reflect on it.

The TEs' answers to the questions in the FLCAS were analysed with the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet programme to obtain the mean, mode, median, and standard deviations (SD). Subsequently, the researchers fully transcribed the respondents' answers to the semi-structured interviews and, to reveal patterns in the statements made by the interviewees, conducted a 'key word analysis', as described by Nunan (1992: 146). Cross-referencing the data obtained in the analysis served for triangulation of the results and allowed to draw certain conclusions as well as offer recommendations to elaborate professional development courses for enhancing TEs' English proficiency in the future.

2 RESEARCH SAMPLE

After 7 respondents piloted the FLCAS, in total 73 members of the academic staff from the 7 HE institutions in Latvia providing programmes related to the development of teacher proficiency and competence, aka teacher education programmes, filled in the questionnaire (see Figure 1). Among them, 15 were male

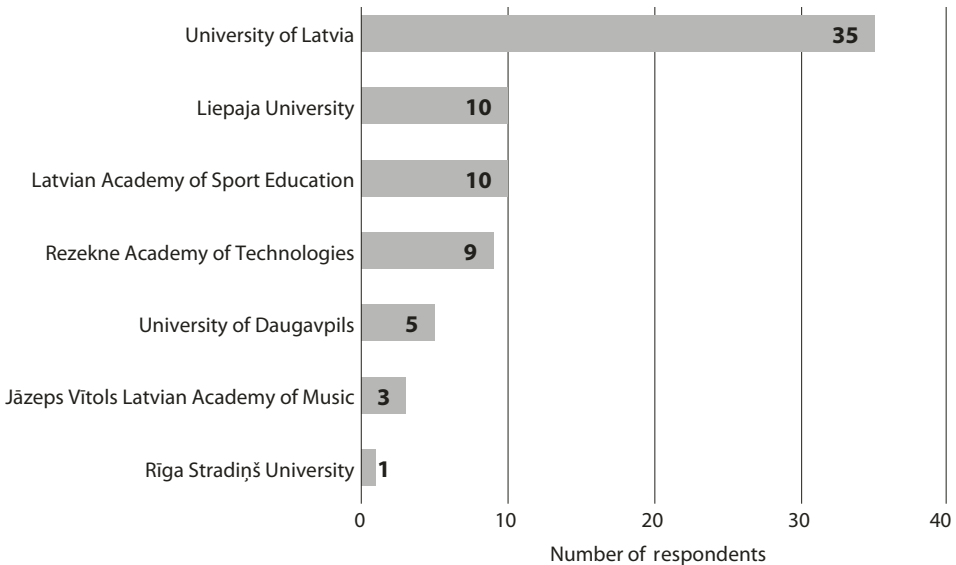


Figure 1 Research participants per higher education institution (N = 73)

and 58 were female, which is representative of the general situation in education in Latvia, though the male/female ratio in HE, and particularly in sciences, is less skewed (MoES, 2020; LIAA, 2022).

Concerning the age of the respondents, the most representative group of the TEs (31 respondents) were in their fifties, whereas the second biggest group (23 respondents) were in their forties. The rest of the research population consisted of 17 people above 60 years old, 7 respondents in their thirties and only 2 less than 30 years old. The distribution corresponds to the general trend of ageing professorship in Latvia in general and in teacher education in particular (OECD, 2016; MoES, 2020).

The enhancement of TEs' English proficiency in the framework of the EU initiatives in question started in a regular face-to-face mode in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic hit Latvia in 2020, and it led to the rapid transition to delivering all the studies online, thus providing the groundwork for changing the mode of the ongoing EAP courses. The following years were marked by a mixed environment in view of the changes in the epidemiological situation as well as the choices made by a particular group. Thus, among the respondents, 27 people attended regular classes, 50 experienced the mixed mode of conducting their course, and only 3 participants were exposed to the fully online environment, with 2 of them still attending their studies at the time of completing the questionnaire.

Overall, the respondents can be seen as highly motivated to enhance their EAP proficiency, as, at the time, only 1 participant interrupted his studies and 2 had postponed their attendance for a while. As concerns the termination, the respondent

regretted the necessity to take such a decision ('even though the teacher was very good'), whereas one postponement was caused by a sick leave, and the second one was due to the shift from face-to-face to online mode both at work and for the EAP course: 'Working remotely requires much more energy. [...] There is no desire or physical energy to spend extra hours on the computer'. Still, the decision is temporary, as there is an expressed 'desire to continue learning English'.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1 QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

The questionnaire provided rich data on TEs' FLA that could be analysed in relation to external and internal factors. First, the reliability coefficient of the modified FLCAS was assessed. Measured by Cronbach's alpha, it demonstrated an internal consistency of 0.96, which is rather high in absolute terms and higher than the alpha coefficient of 0.93 demonstrated by the original scale (Horwitz, E. K. et al., 1986). Except for question redundancy, there may be other explanations, which will be examined later in the discussion of question wording and the responses to the open question.

As demonstrated by the results, the overall FLA experienced by TEs when studying EAP as part of their continuing professional development is not high (see Table 1). Low levels of FLA had already been registered for academic and research staff in higher education institutions in Latvia, with inconclusive evidence on the differences between FLA in face-to-face and online environments (Bicjutko and Odiņa, 2021). As E. K. Horwitz (2008: 235) explained, learners 'with averages around 3 should be considered slightly anxious, while [those] with averages below 3 are probably not very anxious'. Only respondents who score 4 and above can be recognised as seriously anxious. Thus, only 9, or about one eighth, of the 73 research respondents demonstrated an average above 3, with the highest being 3.8. The results are in line with the results of the previous research linking anxiety to different learner variables such as age, level of education, and the number of spoken languages, with more educated learners scoring lower on FLA (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2014).

With the mean close to the median, the dataset has a nearly symmetrical distribution. The average scores by type of anxiety do not differ much, with the test anxiety average being particularly close to the overall (2.41 and 2.42, respectively). While the TEs seem to be the least afraid of negative evaluation, scoring 2.26 on average, communicative apprehension, or 'a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people' (Horwitz, E. K. et al., 1986: 127) is the most strongly expressed category of anxiety, with a score of 2.53, respectively. Still, its average is below 3, which puts it within the borders of a moderate reaction.

Considering the questions that scored the highest, '1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class' is the leader, with

Table 1 TEs' FLA scores

	Number of questions	MIN	MAX	MEAN	MEDIAN	SD	Average score
Overall	33	33	142	79.71	77	24.85	2.42
Communicative Apprehension	11	11	49	27.81	27.5	9.35	2.53
Test Anxiety	15	15	66	36.07	34	11.79	2.41
Fear of Negative Evaluation	7	7	28	15.83	16	4.9	2.26

Table 2 FLCAS items with the highest/lowest means

HIGHEST SCORES				LOWEST SCORES			
Item No.	SUM	MEAN	SD	Item No.	SUM	MEAN	SD
1	219	3.17	1.33	4	133	1.90	1.12
11	216	3.1	1.1	20	133	1.90	1.07
8	214	3.06	1.30	3	128	1.83	1.06
14	208	3.0	1.2	19	111	1.6	0.9
2	209	2.99	1.28	31	91	1.32	0.65

a mean of 3.17. This and one more item (question no. 14) from the top five belong to the group of statements correlating with communicative apprehension. It is of note that the following four high scorers are negative or reversed questions, namely, '11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes' (MEAN = 3.1), '8. I'm usually at ease during tests in my English class' (MEAN = 3.06), '14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers' (MEAN = 3), and '2. I don't worry about making mistakes in language class' (MEAN = 2.99) (see Table 2). The negative phrasing of statements may prompt a more sincere response and therefore lead to an acknowledgement of higher rates of anxiety.

On the other end of the spectrum are the statements '4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language' and '20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class', both with a mean of 1.9. Closing the list are the statements '3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class' (MEAN = 1.83), '19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make' (MEAN = 1.6), and the lowest scoring '31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language' (MEAN = 1.32). Thus, the extreme means differ by 37 per cent, which is a significant amount. It is worth noting, however, that the wording of the lower-scoring items is conspicuous in its exaggerated nature, and their translation has raised multiple debates between the researchers.

The items in the target language cause a stronger impression, particularly the choice of verbs (e.g., in statement no. 4: 'Tas mani biedē/-ēja' [It frightens me]; in statement no. 20: 'mana sirds dauzās/-ījās' [my heart is pounding]; in statement no. 3: 'Es trīcu/-ēju' [I tremble]; and in statements no. 19 and 31: 'Es baidos/-ījos' [I am afraid]), and as such, the statements may seem culturally unacceptable for the respondents. Logically, some perceived the scale as 'negatively biased', which may have raised the wish to prove the opposite: 'To be honest, the questions in this questionnaire seemed quite strange [...] I think that nobody, at least in our group, had problems with nervousness, fear of speaking, stress, because the atmosphere was very positive, understanding and fun'. Furthermore, the proof of controversial reactions to the wording may be that the biggest difference between mean and median for the 33 items occurs for statements 3 and 19 (0.83 and 0.6, respectively).

The (over-)emotional language may also be the reason for the high Cronbach alpha, as the TEs, both lecturers and researchers themselves, must have immediately grasped the intention of the questionnaire and may have automatically created a better image of themselves to save face. Several disparaging comments left at the end support such an interpretation, with participants being quite critical of the statements' clarity ('The formulation of the questionnaire questions is too messy. One gets the feeling that some questions in the questionnaire aim at making the respondent lose their vigilance') or the repetitiveness of the whole instrument. The later trait, however, is also mentioned in combination with the perceived aimlessness and wrong focus of the questionnaire: 'The questions of this questionnaire do not seem logical and are repetitive [...] what do emotions have to do with the content and quality of the courses, which, in my opinion, are much more important questions regarding these courses?'. According to one of the respondents, the data cannot be considered valid as the questions are 'about feelings and not about content and reasons'. Such an opinion testifies to the fact that despite the explicit mention of the FLCAS and its purpose in the introduction, some respondents had formed their expectations guided by the questionnaire title, namely, *Questionnaire on Experience of Improving English*.

Overall, the resulted dataset does not show any statistically significant correlation between the respondents' sex, age, English proficiency, and form of study and their overall FLA levels and anxiety by group (see Table 3).

Although the sample is not large and the scores may be skewed by several outliers, some observations are worth sharing. As in previous studies (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2014), more proficient and older respondents demonstrated lower levels of anxiety, as evidenced by the negative correlation (see Table 3), except that age positively correlates with communicative apprehension. The latter fact could be easily explained by the rapidly growing presence of English in all spheres of life and, consequently, bigger exposure and communicative experience (and presumably lesser anxiety when communicating in English) for each following generation. However, the obtained data do not allow for strong claims and require further research.

Table 3 Correlation between respondents' sex, age, form and level of studies and FLA levels

	Sex	Age	Form of Studies	English Level	Communicative Apprehension	Test Anxiety	Fear of Negative Evaluation	Overall
Sex	1							
Age	-0,008	1						
Form of Studies	-0,168	0,003	1					
Level	-0,256	0,002	0,099	1				
Communicative Apprehension	0,000	-0,153	0,286	-0,193	1			
Test Anxiety	0,231	0,028	-0,088	-0,396	-0,043	1		
Fear of Negative Evaluation	0,146	-0,096	0,003	-0,250	-0,058	0,860	1	
Overall	0,265	-0,141	-0,190	-0,332	-0,005	0,885	0,814	1

Table 4 FLCA levels demonstrated by female and male respondents

FLCA	FEMALE			MALES		
	MEAN	MEDIAN	SD	MEAN	MEDIAN	SD
Communicative Apprehension	29.02	29	9.77	23.57	24.5	6.21
Test Anxiety	37.07	34	12.35	32.50	33.5	9.16
Fear of Negative Evaluation	16.49	16	5.04	13.29	14	3.60
Overall	82.58	78	26.02	69.36	72	17.37

Despite the correlation between sex and FLA levels being not statistically significant, overall, females tend to demonstrate higher levels of anxiety (see Table 3). It is also noticeable that the male FLA distribution appears to be slightly negatively skewed, with the means being consistently smaller than the corresponding medians, whereas the female FLA distribution shows the opposite trend. The skew is perceptibly bigger for the test anxiety of the female respondents (MEAN = 37.07; MEDIAN = 34), and for them, the data on all types of FLA are more dispersed than for their male counterparts (cf. SDs in Table 4).

Concerning FLA in different learning environments, the learners in face-to-face and mixed-form courses experienced lower levels of FLCA than the ones in fully online courses (see Table 5). As there were 3 respondents who had attended

or were still attending their EAP course fully online at the time of the survey, the data cannot be considered representative, and neither may be the average with an overall FLCA mean of 81 (as against 82.38 for the face-to-face mode and 77.93 for the mixed one) demonstrative. Furthermore, the respondents with purely online experience were enrolled in their course in the middle of the pandemic, which was an emotionally taxing time '[i]f only because of technical problems' in the beginning. However, the fact that the respondents demonstrated lower levels of anxiety in the mixed environment is worth noticing.

With the means close to the corresponding medians, the distribution appears to be normal for both face-to-face and mixed modes, with test anxiety being most strongly positively skewed. Additionally, the mix of environments provided for slightly lower dispersion, as evident when comparing the standard deviations in Table 5.

The comments given by the respondents indirectly confirm the quantitative findings. The bias against online classes is evident, with a marked preference for in-person classes as they took place 'before the emergency', and '[t]he effectiveness of the Zoom sessions is [perceived as] lower than if they were held face-to-face', which might be due to multiple technical problems in the transitional period. One respondent is adamant that 'English classes should not be held online, [as] it is impossible to concentrate'. Other comments are less categorical, conceding that even if 'online classes are not the same as face-to-face classes, [they] also help you to remember things and to refresh your vocabulary, as well as to recall various grammar and vocabulary "tricks"'.

Attendees of both traditional and mixed-format courses admit some anxiety, but 'mostly only in the first few lessons, when the people were unfamiliar, the teacher unknown and the environment unfamiliar'. Irrespective of mode, it is the atmosphere in a group that is most important, and when 'the group members are familiar, stress and fear are reduced'; in a collegial atmosphere, 'these courses are definitely not stress-inducing'. Whereas 'the perpetual lack of time' is the most

Table 5 FLCA by mode of experience

FLCA	FACE-TO-FACE			MIXED			ONLINE		
	MEAN	MEDIAN	SD	MEAN	MEDIAN	SD	MEAN	MEDIAN	SD
Communi- cative Appre- hension	29.31	29.00	10.87	26.73	26.00	8.60	29.67	30.00	0.58
Test Anxiety	36.08	33.00	14.15	36.05	34.00	10.62	36.33	34.00	25.90
Fear of Negative Evaluation	17.00	16.00	5.75	15.15	15.00	4.33	15.00	13.00	3.46
Overall	82.38	78.00	29.96	77.93	75.00	22.17	81.00	77.00	9.64

often mentioned stress-inducing factor, the professionalism of the instructors is a part of the recipe for an anxiety-free learning environment. However, the balance may be easily destroyed, as it happened with one of the respondents during the oral proficiency assessment in the online final exam, when ‘[e]verything suddenly turned upside down’. This account is interesting for its detailing of anxiety: ‘The scenarios of my school days were fully activated— anxiety, reluctance to look stupid, unfamiliar tasks and the unusual type of examination only added to it. I hadn’t experienced anything like that in terms of anxiety since my school days.’ The examination mode may not have been so distressing (if at all) if it were not for the ‘unfamiliar tasks and the unusual type of examination’, as well as the high stakes of the assessment results.

Thus, although the results are far from conclusive, they point to the positive trend in receiving the mixed mode of studies and allow for the formulation of the questions in need of clarification in the interview.

2 INTERVIEW DATA

The interviews served to elicit a range of anxieties experienced by TEs attending the EAP course in the framework of their on-site continuing professional development and, first of all, personal anxieties, such as ‘low self-esteem’, ‘endangered self-concept and competitiveness’, ‘shyness and lack of confidence’ in the context of foreign language learning. The range of social anxieties such as ‘fear of negative evaluation’, ‘fear of making mistakes and embarrassment’ and ‘fear of sounding “dumb” and being laughed at’ were expressed to a lesser extent. Obviously, being experienced TEs themselves, they often felt not allowed to make mistakes, though a positive environment in the classroom allowed them to overcome the initial discomfort and biased attitude towards themselves.

The interviewees’ strong beliefs about learning in general and language learning in particular often hinder EAP acquisition, leading to set views on their cognitive abilities, excessive caution, and high expectations both for themselves and for the English courses. FLA related to ‘the necessity to demonstrate C1 level’, ‘the sword of Damocles’ of high-stakes testing ahead, only aggravated the situation and was strongly marked in the interviews.

Further probing into the causes of the experienced FLA provided the answer to the research question about the online format being more accommodating of learners’ needs. Given appropriate technological and methodological solutions, several benefits of enhancing EAP online were repeatedly mentioned, namely:

- lesser threat to the positive face

The respondents acknowledged that there was ‘no need [for] introduction[s] and [making a] positive impression’, as well as a lesser need to work on one’s social image in the online mode overall; they were ‘feeling safer behind the screen’ because of ‘less visibility’. ‘The freedom of switching off the camera’ and using technology as an excuse reappeared in two interviews.

- 'better time management'

The online course is seen as less time-consuming, as it allows participants to save time on commuting and could be more 'easily adjusted to the busy schedule[s]' of TEs and the demands of their private lives. Its accessibility did not seem to be particularly threatened by technical problems, as often marked in previous studies. Further, 'comfort' and 'convenience' were two key words that reappeared in all interviews.

- 'more productive'

Online foreign language acquisition is conducive to on-task behaviour and is more productive timewise. The flexibility of multimedia (the possibility to incorporate new ways to learn with videos, audio, interactive grammar correction tools, automation, chat boards, mobile, instant messaging in WhatsApp, webcams, the Moodle platform, etc.) increases participants' retention rates, and asynchronicity (incl. lesson recordings) allows for revision and learning at one's own pace. Being autonomous learners, TEs highly appreciated a 'customised learning experience instead of the fixed curriculum approach'.

On the downside, the respondents mentioned 'the need [for] new teaching methods' and, particularly, for 'structured group interaction', as well as 'some practicing time' to answer demands of digitalisation. The latter one may not be an issue three years after the end of the pandemic and the afterwave of digital practice.

CONCLUSIONS

The research on the levels of FLA experienced by TEs enhancing their EAP in the framework of their continuing professional development in different modes demonstrated overall low levels of anxiety with a slight increase in communicative apprehension. The variation within different gender and age cohorts is slight but predictable in view of the previous research. What is most important is that the study allowed a comparison of the levels of FLA in face-to-face, mixed, and online modes and clarified the benefits and drawbacks of different environments for foreign language acquisition from the perspective of FLA. Although there is no conclusive evidence about purely online courses, some conclusions and recommendations could be made.

Thus, the studied group of university-based TEs values the online mode for its accessibility and convenience. They appreciate the asynchronous options and the flexibility of multimedia on offer, both features supporting a customised learning experience, TEs' autonomy, and the self-directed nature of their learning. The multimedia experience and multitude of new software may become overwhelming for language learners, but insufficiently developed methodology could be discussed with the instructors, thus establishing a community of practice and enriching both parties to the learning process. New, customised EAP

approaches for TEs are to be developed further, and it is better done as a communal effort of both language and education professionals.

Concerning the FLCAS as a tool, it needs further adaptation for adult audiences, and FLA in the online mode should be further examined with the possible elimination of stress factors such as the pandemic and others. The focus on different age groups and the comparison of their FLA levels may add a new dimension to EAP acquisition theory. Finally, in view of TEs' expanding participation in EMI and Erasmus exchanges, research on their teacher FLA would be appropriate, as it might add to recommendations on TEs' continuing professional development.

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