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Developments in SLA and L2 Research on Psychological and Emotional Factors: A bird's-eye view

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This special issue of *Journal of Language and Education* is devoted to psychological and emotional aspects that saturate a language learning – and a language teaching – endeavour. Learning a second or a foreign language (L2) is one of those human activities that, besides drawing upon a person's cognitive resources, involves a multitude of psychological and emotional factors. For this reason, language learning as an activity and process has attracted a considerable interest from psychologists, applied linguists and language educators.

While it is not possible to pinpoint exactly when this interest first appeared, psychology of language learning as a topic of scholarly inquiry dates back to the early decades of the 20th century. Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) was among pioneer scholars who provided deeper understanding of a complex nexus of cognitive, psychological and effective processes embedded in children's language learning endeavours, be it the learning of the mother tongue or second language. Nevertheless, as Vygotsky's argumentations in K *voprosu o mnogoyazichii v detskom vozraste* (*'The question of multilingual children'*, 1935) and *Myshlenie i rech* (*'Thinking and speech'*, 1934) attest, the cognitive – rather than the affective -- processes was the primary interest of his fellow psychologists working in Russia and abroad in the first quarter of the 20th century.

Eventually, social psychological perspectives on learning an additional language became prominent. Of a particular interest to the researchers were attitudes that language learners hold toward target language communities and target language itself. Seth Arsenian was the first psychology scholar to propose existence of a relationship between language learners' attitudes toward the other language community and achievement in learning the target language (Gardner, 1988). Notably, Arsenian's review of contemporary studies in second language acquisition (SLA) identified "the social psychology of language and bilingualism" as one of the research topics that received a considerable attention from scholars (Arsenian, 1945, cited in Gardner 1985, p.2). Among the questions that greatly stimulated this interest were: Does communicating with another language community promote understanding and warmth? Can people learn a new language successfully if they do not like the community that speaks this language? Are sociable individuals more successful language learners?(Gardner, 1985).

In other words, in the mid-20th century the process of learning an additional language was recognized as a social psychological phenomenon. This was a major shift from viewing the learning of a new language as a purely cognitive activity where emotional, volitional and affective factors played only a minor role. The boundaries of SLA/L2 research greatly expanded as a result of a growing awareness of the role that various social factors and prevailing attitudes play in language learners' views of target language communities and in determining a successful outcome of their language learning efforts. So it was only a matter of time that language learners' individual differences began receiving increasing attention in research studies. Many of such studies were driven by a search for answers to an overarching question: Why some individuals become fluent speakers of one or more foreign languages while others remain monolingual? (Gardner, 1985).

An important milestone in research on language learners' individual differences occurred in the year 1959, when Robert Gardner, who was at that time a PhD student in psychology in McGill University, and his thesis supervisor Wallace E. Lambert published a highly influential article "*Motivational variables in second-language acquisition*". The researchers explicitly operationalized attitudes that Canadian English-speaking learners of French were holding toward the target language community as a motivational construct. They named this construct 'integrative orientation'. As Gardner and Lambert found, the students with positive attitudes toward

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the target language community were more motivated and more successful language learners. The pioneering research by Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972) led to an upsurge in scholarly inquiries on motivation to learn an additional language (L2 motivation). In 1985, Gardner's book *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation* was published and the socio-educational model of second language acquisition proposed by him was formalized.

Issues and problems concerning L2 motivation and its ebbs and flows retain the great fascination for applied linguistics researchers and language educators. As Mercer, Ryan and Williams (2012) noted, studies on L2 motivation dominate the SLA/L2 research on individual differences. At the time of writing this editorial, a Google Scholar search of 'L2 motivation' has returned 933,000 results. Some of the articles included in this special issue of *JLE* will add to this ever growing number.

Nowadays, a variety of perspectives on L2 motivation can be found in this flourishing area of applied linguistics research on language learner psychology. Among the recent most notable theoretical developments are the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) framework proposed by Zoltán Dörnyei (2009) and Ema Ushioda's (2009) 'person-in-context relational view' on L2 motivation. Dörnyei's L2MSS draws on the theory of possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986) and the self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) while Ushioda's person-in-context perspective was influenced, among the multiplicity of socially rooted frameworks, by Vygotskian socio-cultural theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006 cited in Ushioda, 2009). While rooted in different epistemological perspectives, these two theoretical approaches zoom our attention on individual language learner with his or her own aspirations, self-vision and goals.

The emphasis on a real and concrete language learners' agency and identity and the incorporation of a complex ever-shifting system of social relationships in defining and studying an individual learner's motivation in Ushioda's (2009) framework promotes qualitative methodologies. This marks a departure from the post-positivist L2 motivation research that has for several decades dominated the field. This principled attention to a concrete person rather than some abstract language learner has encouraged and enabled the appearance of other conceptual frameworks that focus on a particular and granular, rather than an abstracted and averaged, view of L2 motivation. Among more recent developments in this research vector is the Directed Motivational Currents (DMC) conceptual framework proposed by Zoltán Dörnyei, Christine Muir and Zana Ibrahim (2014). The framework draws some inspiration from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (1980) highly influential concept of 'flow'. In this special issue, Ismail Xodabande and Esmat Babaii employed the DMC framework to explore motivational ebbs and flows experienced by an Iranian university student in his mobile assisted self-directed endeavour to learn German. The article has also highlighted the importance of being able to learn autonomously and to find ways to maintain passion and interest for learning a foreign language. Noting that the concept of learner autonomy has been linked to L2 motivation and higher academic achievements Lilia Raitskaya, Natalia Mekeko and Elena Golubovskaya conducted a systematic review of literature on learner autonomy. The authors explored the range and scope of such studies with the aim to distinguish the most influential publications on this psychological construct between the years 2011 and 2020.

To reflect a reality that psychological functions do not exist in isolation but form a complex systemic nexus with each other, explorations of emotions and affect have always been implicitly embedded in studies on psychological processes involved in language learning. However, the earliest principled investigations into emotion and affect in the language classroom were published only in the 1970s (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). These studies were mostly concerned with the feeling of anxiety that students experienced in the L2 classroom. A strong impetus to this research direction was given when Elaine Horwitz and colleagues' (1986) published their *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale*. The research interest of SLA/L2 scholars in anxiety in the L2 classroom has not subsided over the following decades. At the time of writing this editorial piece, a Google Scholar search of keywords "'anxiety AND 'second language learning' yielded 45,200 results. "

This special issue will add up to the growing number of L2 studies on anxiety. Specifically, the two experimental studies by Meihua Liu and Shin Yi Chew and Yanqiu Chen, respectively, assessed levels of Chinese EFL learners' English language anxiety. The researchers also examined the role of technology use in reducing this feeling and enhancing the students' confidence to communicate in English. In recent years, L2 researchers have become increasingly aware of the presence of another ubiquitous negative emotion in the L2 classroom – boredom. Studies on boredom are still scarce in the field of SLA. This special issue contributes to filling this

gap. It includes a study by Mariusz Kruk who examined Polish EFL learners' ebbs and flows of boredom during classroom reading sessions. The author also assessed changes in the students' experience of boredom during the class time. In another study Muhammad Waleed Shehzad Khaled Besher Albesher, Sumaira Sarfraz and Shazma Razzaq examined boredom in the English language classroom in the context of Saudi Arabia. The author assessed the effects of boredom on various aspects of listening comprehension and performance.

With studies of anxiety dominating the SLA/L2 research agenda on emotion and affect for several decades, it was only a matter of time for research community to realize the need for a more encompassing vantage point on psychology of language learning – and teaching. In 2014, Peter MacIntyre and Sarah Mercer published their influential article *Introducing positive psychology to SLA*. This publication raised the awareness among the L2 research community that adopting a positive psychology perspective would enrich our understanding of language learners' – and their teachers' – emotional labours. This would also open up vistas for exploring a greater multitude of language learning and language teaching experiences. Acknowledging the importance and relevance of this call, this special issue includes a study by Nada Alqarni, who assessed levels of well-being, besides perceptions of stress, among English language educators in a university in Saudi Arabia. In the article by Elena Tikhonova, Marina Kosycheva and Galina Efremova the authors shift the focus to Russian educational context in their exploration of adaptation challenges faced by international students.

While general, social and educational psychology remain important feeder disciplines for SLA/L2 research, it could be argued that psychology of/for language learning is taking shape as a distinct field of scholarly inquiry. Mercer, Ryan and Williams (2012) identified a wide scope of research topics in this area which relate to "the mental experiences, processes, thoughts, feelings, motives, and behaviours of individuals involved in language learning" (p. 2). In this special issue, George Teoh Boon Sai explored emotional intelligence and its role in the process of learning English among Malaysian university students. The author also presented a case study of emotional tribulations and challenges encountered by a female student who had to combine her studies in a distance learning program with taking care of her large family. In a similar way that a language learning journey is filled with emotional experiences, the professional life of language educators is saturated with a wide range of emotions. In this special issue, Agnieszka Kałdonek-Crnjaković and Zrinka Fišer examined how Croatian English language educators positioned their students with dyslexia; the researchers also explored the roles the teachers assumed when working with this group of students.

Several authors in this special issue focus on L2 teachers' and learners' self-reported perceptions of various aspects pertaining to L2 education practice and learning. Abderrahim Mamad and Tibor Vígh share their study of Moroccan high school EFL teachers' perceptions and practices regarding traditional and alternative methods of assessment. Wallace Matthew explored levels of metacognition among Japanese EFL learners and the role of metacognition in the students' English listening performance. With questionnaires serving as the main tool for collecting data in studies on psychological and emotional aspects, SLA/L2 researchers continue contributing their efforts toward developing appropriate for the field instruments to measure language learners' – and their teachers' – beliefs, perceptions and attitudes. Considering major impacts that the fully online teaching and learning mode during the COVID-19 pandemic had produced on students and their teachers worldwide, Marco Cancino and Daniel Avila took up the task to explore Spanish-speaking EFL learners' perceptions of the fully online language learning environments. An article by María-Elena Gómez-Parra, Irina Golubeva and Roberto Espejo Mohedano reports on the process of constructing and validating a questionnaire to measure perceptions of intercultural practices among bilingual secondary schools students in several European countries.

To conclude, this special issue offers a mosaic of scholarly studies on psychological and emotional factors involved in learning and teaching an additional language. These studies have been done in diverse geographical and educational context and they adopted a variety of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches. It is hoped that the research endeavours included in this special issue of *Journal of Language and Education* will contribute to a better understanding of psychological and emotional components which, while remaining hidden from the view, saturate language learners' and their teachers' educational experiences and professional practice.

This editorial piece aimed to locate the contents of this special issue within a wide and flourishing field of SLA/L2 research on psychology of language learning and teaching. Hence, it was only possible to give a broad brush stroke overview of the main developments in this academic area. Many exciting research directions remain

open for the future scholarly explorations. Drawing upon intellectual heritage left to us by Lev Vygotsky that was mentioned in the beginning of this editorial piece seems a particularly promising course of action. Vygotskian concepts of 'word meaning' (*znachenie slova*) and 'sense' (*smysl*) as well as '*perezhivanie*' are currently being re-discovered by SLA/L2 researchers and language educators (Lantolf and Swain, 2019; Mok, 2015; Nikitina, 2020; Veresov, 2016). There is yet a wealth of discoveries to be made.

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Well-being and the Perception of Stress among EFL University Teachers in Saudi Arabia

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Research on language teachers' psychology has been shown to play a central role in the quality of teaching and student achievement. However, there is little empirical evidence to investigate the relationship between perception of stress, types of stressors, and well-being among foreign language teachers at university levels, particularly in monolingual contexts. The present study seeks to investigate the impact of stress, the number and type of stressors (i.e., chronic and stressful life events), and demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, and the length of teaching experience) on university-level EFL teachers' levels of well-being. The data were collected through an online survey of 53 university-level EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia. A Pearson correlation was carried out to investigate the relationship between EFL teachers' well-being, their perception of stress, and number of stressors. A multiple regression analysis was also run to examine if EFL teachers' levels of stress, number and types of stressors, and demographic variables can predict their psychological well-being. The quantitative findings demonstrated a significant negative relationship between well-being and levels of stress. The findings also showed a significant positive relationship between the EFL teachers' well-being and their good physical health. The results of the multiple regression indicated that high levels of well-being were predicted by low levels of stress and good physical health. This study, moreover, suggested an advantage for females in terms of psychological well-being among foreign language teachers. The findings also demonstrated that a stressful life with a heavy workload and financial concerns can negatively impact language teachers' well-being. These findings highlight the importance of considering issues related to teachers' psychological well-being. In line with these findings, several pedagogical implications were offered.

Keywords: well-being, stress, stressors, foreign language teachers, psychology of language teaching, university language teachers in Saudi Arabia

Introduction

Although positive psychology (PP) previously focused mainly on topics related to the human experience and requirements for maintaining good health, it is a relatively new and less explored area of second language acquisition (SLA) studies. Various types of emotions and affective states emerge for both learners and teachers in language classrooms (Horwitz, 2017). Research has focused on various aspects of language learners' emotions, with the most prevalent being learners' motivation (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015) and anxiety (Dewaele & Mercer, 2018). However, research on the psychology of language teachers remains "disproportionately less prevalent" (Gkonou et al., 2020, p. 3; Swain, 2013; Xu, 2018).

Research on foreign language teachers is crucial, as they are "the guides for FL learners, and without their guidance, many learners would stumble in the dark" (Dewaele, 2020, p. 269). Mercer (2018) insisted that understanding teachers' psychology is necessary "because their psychologies and professional well-being have been shown to be connected to the quality of their teaching as well as student performance" (p. 508). Teachers with positive states of mind tend to enjoy their jobs and exhibit more creativity and enhanced teaching skills (Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018). Mercer et al. (2016) stressed that "successful language learning depends to a large degree on teachers and, as such, for all concerned, we must make their professional well-being a priority" (p. 224). Despite this interest, teachers' well-being remains poorly understood.

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Gkonou et al. (2020) summarised the main emotional problems that language teachers may experience, with the most common ones being "teacher stress, burnout and attrition" (p. 11). Gkonou et al. (2020) argued that these emotional experiences must be investigated in order to improve teachers' emotional competence, which will positively influence their psychological well-being and the effectiveness of their classroom teaching practices. The latter, in turn, will improve their students' academic performance.

Generally speaking, teaching is "an emotion-laden process" (Gkonou et al., 2020, p. 1; Chen, 2016; Day & Lee, 2011; Hargreaves, 2001; Maslach, 1993), as it requires affective interaction between teachers and students in the learning environment in order to achieve expected learning and teaching outcomes (Agudo, 2018; Chen, 2016; Day & Lee, 2001; Hargreaves, 2001). Early literature argued that teaching is a difficult occupation and that teachers are at risk of experiencing high levels of stress (Travers & Cooper, 1997). Kyriacou (2001) defined stress as a response syndrome of negative feelings that emerge due to increased pressure and a lack of coping strategies. The concept of stress has been studied from social perspectives, such as the occurrence of illnesses as a response to the social environment that an individual is exposed to (Cohen al., 2019). Foreign language teachers in particular may be exposed to extra pressure and stress due to the challenges of helping language learners master new linguistic skills (Shah et al., 2013). However, little attention has been paid to language teachers' emotional well-being and the influence of teachers' stress and well-being on in-class practices.

Gkonou et al. (2020) called for more research on language teacher psychology. This study aimed to contribute to this area of research. The present study sought to explore the effects that levels and perception of stress have on English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' health and well-being, focusing on the type of stressors experienced by English language teachers in Saudi Arabia. This type of foreign language teaching and learning context may cause higher psychological pressure for teachers due to learners' low levels of language proficiency and motivation (Shah et al., 2013). To date, no studies have attempted to understand the well-being, stress, and stressors of foreign language teachers in Saudi universities. This study contributes to raising awareness of the importance of understanding the psychology of language teaching and the stressors faced by foreign language university teachers in Saudi Arabia.

Literature Review

Language Teacher Psychology

A considerable body of research exists on language teacher psychology, particularly focusing on cognition (Borg, 2003), identity (De Costa & Norton, 2017; Norton, 2000), motivation (Dörnyei, 2005), and self-efficacy (King, 2016; White, 2016). Recently, research inspired by positive psychology (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2016) produced a range of studies on the professional lives of teachers (Day & Gu, 2014; Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017), including the role of teachers' emotional and social intelligences in learning processes (Elias & Arnold, 2006) and in teacher well-being (Day & Gu, 2009; Gkonou & Mercer, 2017).

As Williams et al. (2016) argued, foreign language teachers' beliefs, personality traits, sense of self, emotions, confidence, and relationships with other peers impact their behaviours and interactions in the classroom. Williams et al. (2016) stated that, "Nobody becomes who they are in a vacuum, separate and distinct from cultural and contextual influences" (p. 93) and that teachers' behaviour, which is influenced by internal and external factors, likely impacts their learners' performance in the language learning process. A multitude of environmental factors impact both language learners' and teachers' psychological states, such as the time of day, the weather, and other classes taking place before, during, and after the language classes (Williams et al., 2016).

Furthermore, teaching processes are influenced by teachers' personal views of teaching practices, methods, and activities used in the classroom, their interactions with their learners, and their expectations of their learners, which are influenced by teachers' understanding of psychological processes involved in learning (Williams et al., 2016). As such, language teachers require psychological awareness, as it helps them "to feel better equipped to teach with empathy and sensitivity to the needs, drives, and emotions of their learners" (Williams et al., 2016, p. 17).

Positive psychology generally aims to "help people live happier, more fulfilling lives by focusing on what goes well in life" (MacIntyre et al., 2019, p. 28). Positive psychology focuses on factors that contribute to helping teachers and learners enjoy teaching and learning experiences and maintain high levels of well-being (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; MacIntyre et al., 2019). However, Oxford (2020) recently argued that "contributions to teachers' emotional well-being come not only from pleasant emotions but also from painful ones" (p. 263). This paper focuses on understanding English language teachers' sense of well-being, considering the effects of their perception of stress and identifying the types of stressors they may experience.

Perception of Well-being

One of the reasons that people engage in teaching or learning languages is related to emotional well-being (MacIntyre et al., 2019). Well-being here is defined as the "empowering product" that "can facilitate not only personal transformations but also societal transformations" (p. 266). Seligman's (2002, 2011) well-being theory focused on positive emotions that broaden individuals' personal opportunities and develop their skills and competencies (Fredrickson, 2004; Seligman, 2011). According to Seligman (2011), the purpose of the well-being theory was "to increase flourishing by increasing positive emotions, engagement, meaning, positive relationships and accomplishment" (p. 12). For Seligman (2011), well-being is a construct of certain elements, namely, positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA). *Positive emotions* include pleasure, warmth, and comfort. *Engagement* refers to being in a state of flow (i.e., being absorbed in whatever one is doing). *Positive relationships* are those relationships that "give meaning and purpose to life" (Seligman, 2011, p. 17). *Meaning* indicates having a purpose in life that goes beyond one's self. *Accomplishment*, refers to feeling competent at achieving one's goals (Seligman, 2011).

One of the primary elements of well-being is meaning. Teachers who feel that their lives, particularly in their jobs, are meaningful, can invest their energies in achieving valuable goals, which contributes to their overall well-being (Chan, 2013; Falout & Murphey, 2018). Falout and Murphey (2018) demonstrated how language teachers actively make their jobs more meaningful through a process of job crafting, which involves changing tasks, relationships, and roles associated with work. They argued that teachers can exert control over their well-being in order to cope with the challenges of the profession. Therefore, coping with professional challenges appears to be related to emotional will-being.

Social factors have been found to impact teachers' psychological well-being. For instance, studies have found that positive social support from colleagues and supervisors in the workplace can help teachers manage their well-being and experience positive emotions (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018; Le Cornu, 2013; Weiland, 2021). Moreover, cross-cultural differences, such as situations where teachers' own culture clashes with the culture of their workplace, can add extra pressure and may impact teachers' well-being. Dodge et al. (2012) argued that adapting more flexibly to a new culture may help teachers "reconstruct their identities and expectations in ways that affected their well-being positively" (p. 10). In addition, educational, social, and ideological variations between teachers' heritage and contextual cultural norms must be considered when investigating teachers' well-being (Dodge et al., 2012).

Well-being and Psychological Factors

Apart from social and cultural factors, individual psychological traits can contribute to determining teachers' well-being, positive emotions, and degree of classroom enjoyment. Studies have reported that high levels of self-efficacy, optimism, self-esteem, and resilience positively influence teachers' well-being (Dodge et al., 2012; MacIntyre et al., 2019; Mercer et al., 2016). Furthermore, having a positive outlook with a sense of gratitude, being optimistic, and experiencing more positive emotions help teachers achieve higher levels of well-being, build healthier relationships in the workplace, and cope with stress (Dodge et al., 2012; Jin et al., 2021). Dewaele et al. (2019) found that language teachers who remain positive and encourage students positively impact students' academic performance in language learning classrooms.

Dewaele and Mercer (2018) found that language teachers with high emotional intelligence reported more positive attitudes toward their students. In addition, they argued that more teaching experience boosted teachers' emotional intelligence and led to positive emotions and enjoyment in the classrooms. Similarly, Dewaele (2020) found that teachers with high emotional intelligence, particularly in terms of well-being,

emotionality, self-control, and sociability, tended to report high levels of motivation in language classrooms. As such, positive emotions and well-being seemed to determine the quality of language teaching and learning. Teachers' well-being, therefore, is necessary for quality teaching instruction and improving students' academic and learning success (Hiver, 2015).

Hiver (2016) investigated novice second language teachers and concluded that the main reason for leaving the profession during the first year was the "experience of compounding futility and hopelessness that failed to reverse itself" (p.188). On the other hand, for those novice teachers who believed that hope can be regained, "developing the capacity to generate goals and produce pathways to those goals mitigated feelings of alienation and powerless, and allowed them to establish a sense of control over life events" (p.188) is critical. Moreover, their goals allowed them "to establish a sense of control over life events" (p.188). Hiver (2016) suggested that open interactions among situational factors may lead to emergent outcomes associated with the mechanisms of hope and hardiness, provide novice second language teachers with a positive sense of meaning in life, and allow them to anticipate flows in their profession.

As such, investigations into teachers' well-being can help determine how they can effectively achieve their teaching goals. Extant studies suggest that teachers' well-being strongly affects the ways they behave, how they engage with their learners in the classroom, and their willingness to persevere in the face of difficulties (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; MacIntyre et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2016). Crucially, their perceptions of their feelings and well-being lie at the core of their ability to regulate their emotions, monitor and evaluate their own behaviours, and select appropriate teaching strategies. Extant literature indicates that the perception of well-being is a crucial tool for language teachers (Day & Gu, 2014; Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). However, there remains a gap in our understanding of the impact of negative psychological factors, such as stress, on teachers' emotions and well-being.

Perception of Stress and Stressors

Several studies have found that challenges faced by foreign language teachers in language classrooms, such as large class size, high expectations from language learners, learners' low language proficiency, lack of appropriate teaching and learning materials, and lack of socio-cultural and contextual knowledge, were likely to cause stress and result in low expectations, negatively impacting foreign language teachers' performance (Hall, 2017; Peng, 2007; Shah et al., 2013; Yu, 2001). Occupational stress is a significant factor influencing teachers' well-being (Jepson & Forrest, 2006). Long-term occupational stress can lead to a psychological state called job burnout (Jepson & Forrest, 2006). Burnout is caused by the gap between high expectations of successful professional performance and reality, resulting in "emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment" (Maslach, 1993, pp. 20–21). High levels of stress can lead to physiological or psychosomatic symptoms (Cohen et al., 2019) and mental illnesses (Yaribeygi et al., 2017).

Prolonged stress amongst teachers may lead to chronic illness and burnout and, consequently, may negatively influence job satisfaction (Reilly et al., 2014). Stressors may stem from work-related aspects, such as initiative overload, a target-driven culture, students' behaviour, and high expectations (Brown et al., 2002), and negative environmental and occupational factor, such as role conflicts (Mérida-López et al., 2017), disagreements with colleagues (Wolgast & Fischer, 2017), heavy workloads or long working hours (van Dick & Wagner, 2001; Werang, 2018), inconsistent workloads over the academic year (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017), and evaluation apprehension (Randall, 2019).

Although teachers may be exposed to similar stressors, their reactions vary, as they may be influenced by individual differences, such as cross-cultural differences, personality traits, gender, age, and teaching experience (Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999; Jepson & Forrest, 2006; Travers & Cooper, 1997). For instance, novice teachers were found to have higher levels of stress than their more experiences colleagues (Herman et al., 2018). Some studies showed that women may be at a higher risk of experiencing stress, particularly in terms of heavy workloads and long working hours, than men (Sak, 2018; van Dick & Wagner, 2001), while others found no gender differences regarding stress levels (Evers et al., 2002; Jepson & Forrest, 2006). Jepson and Forrest (2006) showed that teachers with substantial teaching experience were more adept at using coping skills to deal with stress and concluded that occupational stressors have a negative influence on those teachers who "strive for high levels of achievement" (p. 193). In addition, social factors, such as peer support, tend to

impact foreign language teachers' stress. Acheson et al. (2016) found that teachers appreciated peer support more than administrative support and that a lack of emotional and social support and encouragement from peers regarding achievements may lead to higher levels of stress, causing job burnout.

There is a growing body of literature on the relationship between stress and psychological factors, such as self-efficacy, among foreign language teachers in various educational contexts (Mede, 2009; Vaezi & Fallah, 2011). However, the relationship between well-being and the perception of stress as well as stressors among foreign language teachers in Saudi Arabia have not been investigated in depth. This paper sought to address this issue.

English Language Teaching in Saudi Arabia

English language classrooms in Saudi Arabian universities include learning materials and participants with different language histories, and cultural and psychological backgrounds (Al-Seghayer, 2014). Language learners' psychological characteristics have been investigated widely in Saudi Arabian contexts (Javid et al., 2012; Moskovsky & Alrabai, 2009; Moskovsky et al., 2016). Furthermore, some studies have found that language teachers working in Saudi Arabia face a number of challenges (Al-Seghayer, 2014; Rehman & Alhaisoni, 2013; Shah et al., 2013). For instance, English language teachers may "feel unequipped to handle uncertain pedagogical and socio-cultural issues which crop up during the teaching and learning process" (Shah et al., 2013, p. 105). Shah et al. (2013) identified three factors influencing English language teaching in Saudi Arabia: (1) social, cultural, and religious sensitivities (e.g., the conservative and religious nature of Saudi society), (2) English language learners' lack of motivation, low language proficiency, and negative attitudes towards English language learning, and (3) unfavourable institutional policies and procedures (e.g., inconsistent attendance policies). English language teachers, especially non-Arabs, often do not discuss any cultural and religious topics with their students "to avoid frustration and drastic consequences" (Shah et al., 2013, p. 107), causing cross-cultural misunderstandings among English language teachers and their students and potentially adding to emotional stressors.

"Teaching involves understanding the dynamics and relationships within the classroom and the rules and behaviours specific to a particular setting" (Shah et al., 2013, p. 107). Thus, one of the stressors that non-Arabic (English) language teachers might experience stems from difficulties in understanding Saudi language learners' culture. In this case, English language teachers may need to develop cultural awareness and increase contextual knowledge, which may improve their psychological states.

Al-Seghayer (2014) highlighted four English language teaching constraints in Saudi contexts: learners' beliefs and expectations regarding learning English; preparation programmes and teaching methods that may not provide adequate training for the pre-service teachers; curricula that include limited time for instruction, limited resources for learning materials, and constraints concerning teaching and learning standards; and the excessive centralisation of administration (e.g., an identical syllabus with guidelines given to English language teachers at each grade level by the Ministry of Education). These constraints may add extra complexity to language teaching, particularly in a monolingual Arabic country, such as Saudi Arabia.

Therefore, English language teachers face a lot of challenges, particularly due to the nature of the Saudi Arabian educational context and linguistic environment, where language learners' English proficiency is considerably low (Mehmood, 2019). Consequently, English language teachers in most Arab countries in general and Saudi Arabia in particular require a variety of teaching methods due to the learners' low proficiency levels and a lack of motivation (Rehman & Alhaisoni, 2013). Mehmood (2019) maintained that English language teachers receive a major shock regarding their students' low language proficiency levels. In most cases, motivating the learners to improve their language proficiency is challenging for the teachers, creating additional psychological pressure. It can be hypothesised that English language educators are under more pressure and stress than other teachers, which may negatively impact their emotional well-being and their mental and physical health. This raises many questions regarding the correlation between English language teachers' well-being, perception of stress, and number and types of stressors.

There remain several gaps in the current research on the psychology of language teachers in Saudi Arabia. In order to address these gaps, the present study aimed to examine the impact of stress, the number of stressors,

and demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, and length of teaching experience) on English language university teachers' well-being in Saudi Arabia.

The following research questions were posed:

RQ1: What is the relationship between English language teachers' well-being and their perception of stress, the number of stressors, and their demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, and years of teaching experience)?

RQ2: What are the levels of English language teachers' perception of stress and the most frequent stressor(s)?

RQ3: Is there a correlation between English language teachers' perception of stress and their stressors?

Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional design using an online questionnaire distributed to the participants.

Participants

A total of 53 (N = 53) English language teachers (19 men and 34 women) working as instructors at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 25 to 56 years old (M = 34.27, SD = 5.9). Of the participants, 24 were Saudi, while 29 were of other nationalities: 12 Arabs but non-Saudis, six Indians, five Bangladeshis, three Pakistanis, two Canadians, and one American. Their years of teaching experience ranged from one year to 33 years (M = 12.58, SD = 7.2). The majority (43.4%) had a PhD, while 41.5% had a master's degree.

All of the participants worked as instructors in the English department, where English was taught as a foreign language. The students in the department were placed in different classes and levels (level 1 to level 8), taking English courses for a maximum of 24 hours per week. The English language courses varied from basic language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar) to more advanced courses in Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, English Literature, and Arabic–English translation.

Instruments

This study used a questionnaire that was distributed online. It consisted of four parts:

Part 1: *Teacher's demographic information* consisted of questions to gather information on each teacher's demographic information (i.e., age, gender, occupation, nationality, and years spent teaching English).

Part 2: *PERMA-Profiler measure* (Butler & Kern, 2014) consisted of 23 items based on nine factors: positive feelings (3 items), engagement (3 items), relations (3 items), meaning (3 items), accomplishment (3 items), negative emotion (3 items), physical health (3 items), happiness (1 item), and loneliness (1 item). A composite score for well-being was derived by averaging the standardised scores for the first five factors of the PERMA-Profiler measure: positive feelings, engagement, relations, meaning, and accomplishment. The other variables were measured as individual factors in relation to other variables in the study. The composite variable parallels the perception of well-being (Butler & Kern, 2014).

Part 3: *Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983)* consisted of 10 items to measure participants' current levels of experienced stress. It measured to what extent participants found their lives to be unpredictable, uncontrollable, or overloaded. The 10 items enquired about participants' feelings and thoughts over the last month. Each item was accompanied by a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from *never* (1) to *very often* (5). A composite score for stress levels was derived by averaging the standardised scores for the 10 items in the scale. The composite variable paralleled the perception of stress (Cohen et al., 1983). A high score on this scale indicated a high level of stress.

Part 4: S*tressors* consisted of a multiple-choice question about the participants' most frequent stressor(s). The participants could choose one or more of the 17 items that represented the stressor(s) they may suffer from. The stressors were classified into two types:a) chronic stressors (insufficient income, heavy workloads, long

working hours, and a lack of job security); and b) stressful life/work events (changes in employment, conflicts at work, a lack of peer support, inadequate supervision, an over-emphasis on results, work performance, having the same daily routine and work-life balance, and physical or health problems). Most of the chronic stressors were adapted from Jones et al. (2001, pp. 26–27). Most of the stressful life events were adapted from Jones et al. (2001, pp. 21–24) and Holmes and Rahe's (1967, p. 213) social readjustment rating scale.

Procedures

The study was carried out during the Autumn term of the 2019–2020 academic year. The recruitment of the participants was performed through a snowball sampling technique, which is a form of non-probability sampling (Rooney & Ness Evans, 2018). Using this technique, the participants were asked to forward the online survey to their colleagues and friends who were English language teachers at King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia. One of the advantages of an online questionnaire is that it allowed for the collection of large amounts of data from participants with various backgrounds in a period of short time (Dörnyei, 2007).

The online survey was conducted in English and took about 15 minutes to complete. Instructions were given at the beginning of the survey, and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured to encourage honest responses. Participation was voluntary. The research design and questionnaire received ethical approval from the ethics board at the author's research institution.

Data Preparation and Analysis

Prior to the statistical analysis, the data were statistically analysed for reliability. Cronbach's alpha for the PERMA-Profiler scale was good ($\alpha = .91$). The reliability estimate for the Perceived Stress Scale was also good ($\alpha = .89$). The normality test was performed using the Shapiro-Wilk test because the sample size was small. Based on the Shapiro-Wilk test results, the data were normally distributed (PERMA-Profiler scale: 0.974, $p = .30$; Perceived Stress Scale: 0.965, $p = .11$); therefore, parametric tests could be used for the data analyses. All statistical calculations in this research were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, ver. 21). In order to examine the impact of the independent variables (the perception of stress, negative emotions, health, the number of stressors, gender, age, and teaching experience) on the main dependent variable (the perception of well-being), the quantitative data were analysed statistically using the multiple regression analysis. Pearson correlational tests were used to examine the relationships between the variables. To compare the perception of well-being between male and female English language teachers, a *t*-test was carried out.

Results

The data were analysed using multiple regression analysis to predict English language teachers' levels of well-being (PERMA) based on a number of predictors (perception of stress, negative emotion, health, and the number of stressors)[1]. Because the perception of stress was one of the variables of interest in terms of predicting well-being, it was entered into the first block of predictors. The second block contained the other variables (negative emotions, health, and the number of stressors). The third block contained the participants' personal variables (age, gender and teaching experience).

English Language Teachers' Well-Being

The regression analysis produced a sample multiple correlation coefficient of .80, indicating that approximately 64.7% of the total variance in the levels of well-being could be explained by the predictor variables, $F(7, 52) = 11.77$, $p < .001$. In the first block, the perception of stress was significant ($p < .001$), explaining 39% of the total variance (see Table 1). In the second block, the effect of health was strongly significant, $\beta = 0.51$, $p < .001$. In the third block, the perception of stress, health and gender were significant, all with $p < .01$. In particular, the levels of well-being were negatively predicted by the perception of stress and positively predicted by good physical

[1] Borg and Gall (1989) suggested that a minimum sample size of 30 can be used for testing correlation. This sample size can also be used for parameter estimates in regression analysis (Raykov & Widaman, 2009). Although the sample size of this study is not large, it still meets the minimum requirement. In addition, to avoid a meaningless solution, the number of predictors in the regression analysis was minimised.

health and gender, *βs* = -0.34 and 0.42, respectively, and *p* < 01. However, age, years of teaching experience, and the number of stressors were not significant.

Further Pearson correlational analyses showed that the total score of the PERMA was negatively and significantly correlated with the perception of stress (*r* = -0.63, *p* < .0001), negative emotions (*r* = -0.41, *p* < .001), and the number of stressors (*r* = -.034, *p* < .01). However, it was positively and significantly correlated with the good physical health (*r* = 0.71, *p* < .0001).

Table 1

Regression model for well-being (PERMA-Profiler) (N = 53 EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia)

	Model	***B***	***Std. E***	***β***
1	(Constant)	10.96	0.57	
	Perception of Stress	-1.19	0.20	-0.63***
2	(Constant)	6.07	1.32	
	Perception of Stress	-0.51	0.27	-0.27
	Negative emotions	0.03	0.09	0.04
	Health	0.41	0.10	0.51***
	Number of stressors	-0.08	0.08	-0.10
3	(Constant)	5.64	1.32	
	Perception of Stress	-0.65	0.25	-0.34**
	Negative emotions	-0.03	0.08	-0.05
	Health	0.34	0.09	0.42***
	Number of stressors	-.006	0.07	-0.008
	Age	-0.03	0.19	-0.02
	Gender	0.83	0.28	0.29**
	Teaching experience	0.01	0.02	0.09

Note: $R^2 = 0.63$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.39$, F Change = 33.84*** for Model 1.
$R^2 = 0.74$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.55$, F Change = 5.79** for Model 2.
$R^2 = 0.80$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.64$, F Change = 3.74*** for Model 3.
(*p < .05.**p < .01. ***p < .001).

Well-Being and Gender

A *t*-test indicated a slightly significant difference between women (*M* = 8.04, *SD* = 1.1) and men (*M* = 7.16, *SD* = 1.6) in their levels of well-being, with the former reaching higher levels of well-being than the latter (*t* (53) = -2.24, *p* ≤ .02).

English Language Teachers' PERMA-Profiler

As the graph below indicates, the participants reported the highest scores in two dimensions of PERMA: the *meaning* factor (*SD* = 1.49) and the *accomplishment* factor (*SD* = 1.47). Overall, the participants scored highly in all PERMA factors and had a mean score of 7.73 (*SD* = 1.36) on the PERMA scale (see Figure 1).

English Language Teachers' Perception of Stress and Frequent Stressor(s)

Overall, the participants reported low levels of stress perception, with a mean score of 2.7 (*SD* = .72). Their perception of stress was positively and significantly correlated with the number of stressors (*r* = .397, *p* < .003), with those who reported higher levels of stress appearing to have a larger number of stressors. An additional correlation analysis showed a positive and moderate correlation between the perception of stress and stressful work events (*r* = .315, *p* = .02).

Participants' perception of stress was also negatively and significantly correlated with the *health* factor of the PERMA-Profiler (*r* = -.654, *p* < .0001), with those suffering from high levels of stress seeming to have more physical and health problems than those with low levels of stress (see Figure 2).

Figure 1

Mean scores of the PERMA -Profiler for EFL teachers (N = 53)

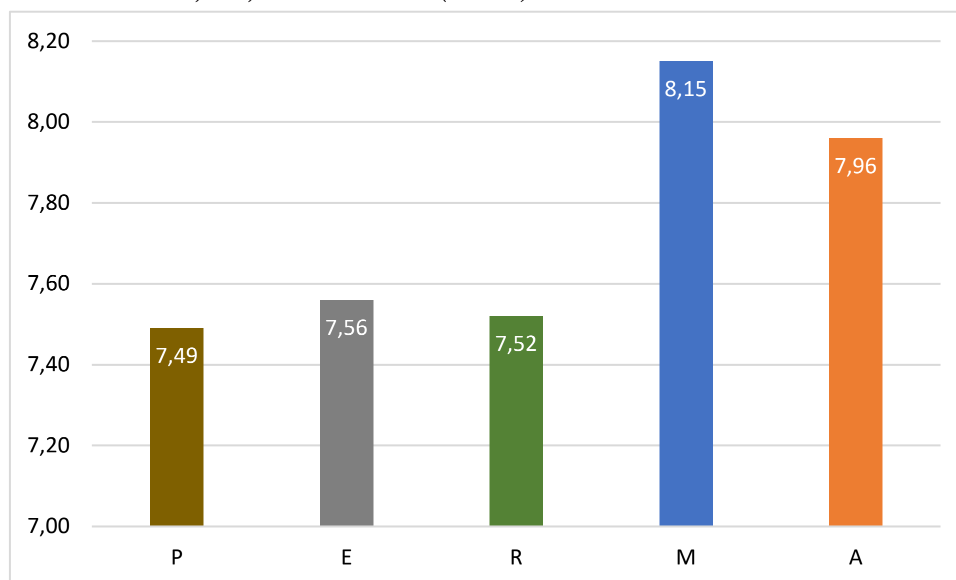
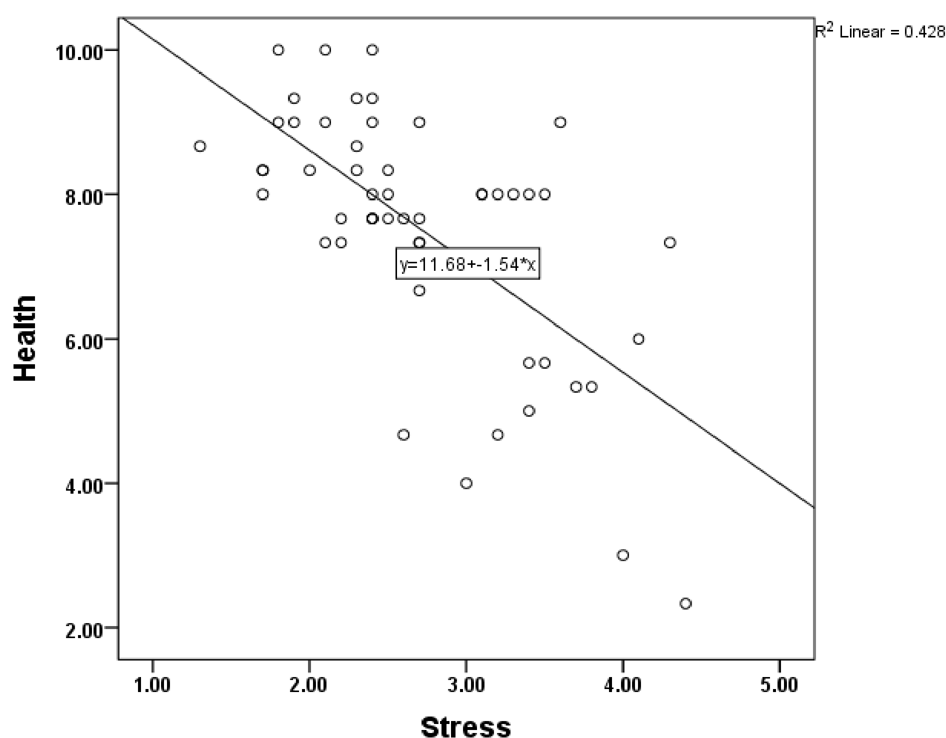


Figure 2

Correlation between the factors Health and the Perception of Stress among the participants (N = 53)



It can be observed from the table below (Table 2) that heavy workload is the most frequent stressor (52.8%), followed by the difficulty maintaining work-life balance (26.4%). However, the participants who chose these two stressors reported high levels of well-being and moderate levels of stress perception. It can be noticed that those participants who had physical or health problems as their main stressors reported high levels of stress. The same case was found with the participants who had financial stressors. These types of stressors seem to have a statistical relationship with the levels of stress perception.

Table 2

Frequency and percentages of stressors and mean scores and standard deviations of the PERMA-Profiler and Perception of Stress based on the type of stressors

Stressors	*Frequency (N = 53)*	*Percent (%)*	*PERMA (SD)*	*STRESS (SD)*
Financial stressors	10	18.9	6.87 (1.92)	3.07 (.80)
Heavy workload	28	52.8	7.6 (1.51)	2.7 (.69)
Long working hours	8	15.1	7.56 (1.23)	2.97 (.77)
Change in employment	2	3.9	7.93 (.09)	3.7 (.84)
Lack of job security	11	20.8	7.35 (1.96)	2.85 (.80)
Administration	3	5.7	7.42 (1.10)	2.96 (.46)
Inadequate supervision at work	4	7.5	8.25 (.79)	2.77 (.56)
Lack of progression opportunities	8	15.1	6.58 (1.67)	3.13 (.88)
Over emphasis on results	12	22.6	7.72 (1.30)	2.98 (.86)
Work performance	1	1.9	8.93 (0)	2.10 (0)
Same daily routine	5	9.4	7.57 (1.09)	2.88 (1.13)
Conflict at work	7	13.2	7.46 (1.26)	3.08 (.67)
Disagreement with colleagues	2	3.8	4.86 (2.07)	3.75 (.35)
Lack of peer support	5	9.4	7.46 (1.27)	2.8 (.59)
Poor cultural background	1	1.9	6.86 (0)	3.7 (0)
Work-life balance	14	26.4	7.38 (.92)	2.83 (.74)
Physical/health problems	9	17	7.28 (2.02)	3.14 (.70)

Discussion

One of the central aims of this study was to examine the relationship between English language teachers' well-being and variables such as the perception of stress, the number of stressors, and the demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, and years of teaching experience). The quantitative findings demonstrated that the selected predictors were significant in terms of predicting emotional well-being among English language teachers. In other words, high levels of well-being were predicted by low levels of stress and good physical health.

The perception of stress explained a further 39% of the variance, meaning that it was one of many psychological and environmental variables that may impact well-being scores. The findings indicated a significant impact of stress on English language teachers' well-being, supporting previous studies that showed the negative effects of stress on various psychological aspects (Acheson & Nelson, 2020; De Costa et al., 2020; Hall, 2017). These findings constituted the main contribution of this study. The findings indicated that extra pressure and occupational stress put on English language teachers in the Saudi Arabian context may lead to low levels of well-being. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that the relationship between the variables of stress and well-being was not a causal one.

One of the notable findings from this study was the significant and negative impact of the number of stressors on the English language teachers' well-being. The findings suggest that those English language teachers who suffer from many stressors, such as financial and chronic stressors and stressful life events, demonstrate lower levels of well-being compared to their peers who experience a smaller number of stressors. Among the demographic variables, only gender indicated a significant difference between English language teachers, with women scoring higher on the PERMA scale than men. This result does not align with earlier studies that did not find any significant differences between men and women regarding engagement in emotional labour (Acheson & Nelson, 2020; Jepson & Forrest, 2006). There was also no significant impact of gender on the levels of stress or number of stressors found in this study. On the other hand, several previous studies reported gender differences in terms of job burnout and levels of stress (van Dick & Wagner, 2001) among foreign language teachers, with women reporting negative effects of these psychological problems.

The present study contributes to this field by adding the possibility of gender differences to positive psychological aspects, such as well-being. It can be assumed that female foreign language teachers might possess skills and certain cognitive strategies to manage their well-being (Talbot & Mercer, 2018). This sheds light on the importance of adapting cognitive strategies and skills related to well-being management and developing other skills to cope with stressful life or work events, particularly in the field of education and language teaching training.

In addition, the findings revealed a significant positive relationship between the perception of well-being and general health, indicating a positive impact of emotional well-being on English language teachers' physical health. In other words, the findings suggested that English language teachers with higher levels of well-being have better physical health. This was in line with previous studies on the importance of maintaining well-being among teachers for good physical and mental health as well as effective teaching performance (Hiver, 2015).

Furthermore, it was expected that due to the challenges reported by previous studies on English language teachers in Saudi Arabia (Al-Seghayer, 2014; Rehman & Alhaisoni, 2013; Shah et al., 2013), the participants may have high levels of stress. However, the findings showed that most participants reported low levels of stress. This may be attributed to the participants' years of experience, as most of them had been in their jobs for more than 12 years. It supports other studies that suggest that substantial teaching experience leads to adapting coping skills to overcome job stress and negative feelings generated from teaching foreign language learners (Jepson & Forrest, 2006).

This study shed light on some of the chronic stressors and stressful life and work events experienced by university English language teachers in Saudi Arabia. The most frequent stressor was the heavy workload, in line with the findings of previous studies (van Dick & Wagner, 2001; Werang, 2018). Heavy workloads and long working hours may lead to high levels of stress and impact English language teachers' job motivation. It should be noted that the average working hours in Saudi universities range from 20 to 40 hours per week. English language teachers may also have other responsibilities, such as preparing teaching materials and academic and management duties. Other frequent stressors reported by the participants were difficulty maintaining a work-life balance and an over-emphasis on work performance. Among these chronic stressors, financial stressors seemed to generate high levels of stress and result in low levels of well-being. Poor physical health was also found to be related to low levels of well-being and high levels of stress perception. These occupational and personal stressors were likely to influence teachers' long-term performance and achievement (Jepson & Forrest, 2006).

These findings suggested that strategies to cope with such stressors should be a core concern of teachers and educational stakeholders. Educational programmes that incorporate elements of affective training to help foreign language teachers face various emotional and professional difficulties should be introduced. For instance, educational programmes that may target teachers' emotional and social skills should be included in the educational systems. Indeed, language teachers may need to develop their stress-management strategies during their professional training. Furthermore, educational programmes should provide opportunities for language teachers to take professional and emotional well-being courses. Those courses should focus on bringing present awareness to an individual's well-being. They may help teachers develop their ability to regulate emotions and stress levels. In addition, there should be training courses that are designed to improve workplace climate through enhanced peer-to-peer relationships. Furthermore, there should be courses that train language teachers on how to deal with various work-related stressors such as peer conflict and heavy workloads.

While a significant impact was found in terms of the English language teachers' well-being, the findings of this study were restricted to a small number of participants. Thus, the findings should not be generalised to other English language university teachers in Saudi Arabia or to those in other language teaching contexts. Future studies on this topic may target foreign language teachers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. More studies in particular are needed to analyse practicing teachers' experiences in the classroom in relation to their levels of well-being. In addition, most of the findings in the present study were based on correlational analyses. Therefore, the results need to be interpreted with caution since it is not possible to assume any causal relationships between the variables.

Conclusion

This study investigated the perception of well-being and stress of 53 university English language teachers in Saudi Arabia. This paper focused on the impact of psychological aspects of stress, the number and types of stressors, and the demographic variables related to well-being among English language teachers. This study identified the negative impact of stress and positive impact of good physical health as well as the positive effect of experiencing few stressors. However, future research is required on other cultural, organisational, and personal factors that may affect foreign language teachers' emotional well-being, particularly in monolingual contexts where foreign language learners generally benefit from scant authentic practice.

The findings highlighted the complexity of understanding how foreign language teachers perceive stress and emotional well-being, which in turn may determine the productivity and effectiveness of their language teaching. Given the increasing numbers of chronic and stressful life events, the findings may offer some insight into the type and impact of these stressors on teachers' well-being and stress. Foreign language teachers' well-being is a central issue that contributes to the quality of language teaching and student achievement. This study indicated that future research should adopt more holistic approaches to explore positive and negative psychological aspects that foreign language teachers may experience in the language teaching process. Further qualitative studies could explore the challenges and psychological obstacles that may impact teaching foreign languages in monolingual contexts.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared

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Switching to Fully Online EFL Learning Environments: An exploratory study on learners' perceptions

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One aspect of online classes that has recently experienced a paradigm shift is fully online language environments (FOLEs) – that is, learning settings where 100% of the content of the class is being delivered online. The SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) outbreak in 2020 called for the use of fully online teaching in schools and universities in many countries due to confinement measures. Accordingly, schools have made extraordinary efforts towards implementing home-based schooling and delivered online courses to their students during the pandemic. In many universities, online platforms such as Blackboard Collaborate are being used to fulfil the need to keep up with the requirements of academic programmes. However, research findings addressing specific FOLE platforms are scarce, with even fewer studies focusing on learners' engagement perceptions in those settings. Therefore, the purpose of this mixed-methods exploratory study was to delve into aspects involved in engagement, such as participation, group work, instructional materials, and learning strategies, regarded as key factors influencing the success of FOLEs. Thus, a FOLE questionnaire was administered to 54 EFL university learners, which was followed by semi-structured interviews conducted with seven participants. Our analysis drew from FOLE engagement research (Sun, 2014) and the community of inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Garrison et al., 2000). The main findings revealed that the poor interactions with peers and the lack of peer rapport negatively influenced the social presence of students (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007), that the instructor can use teaching presence to increase student awareness of the relevance of the online environment and overcome adaptation issues (Kebritchi et al., 2017), and that teaching presence can help increase cognitive presence and facilitate effective interactions with the content. Implications for pedagogy were put forward as part of a FOLE approach.

Keywords**:** CALL, online language learning, learners' perceptions, engagement, community of inquiry

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, many universities have introduced online modalities in the courses they deliver. One aspect of online classes that has recently experienced a paradigm shift is fully online language environments (FOLEs) – that is, learning settings where 100% of the content of the class is being delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2013). This area represents "a distinct field of education that has its own unique and inherent characteristics, significantly different from campus-based education or blended learning" (Wang & Chen, 2009, p. 4). The SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) outbreak in 2020 has called for the use of fully online teaching in schools and universities in many countries due to confinement measures. Accordingly, schools have made extraordinary efforts towards implementing home-based schooling and delivering online courses to their students during the pandemic (Wang et al., 2020). Indeed, the COVID-19 health crisis has placed online learning in the spotlight of educational systems around the world, and the need to understand its effects and its effectiveness has gained relevance accordingly. The pandemic has established differences regarding planned online learning and emergency remote teaching (ERT). Planned online learning involves a well-designed approach to the creation of virtual learning experiences that emerge from careful planning prior to the offering of the course (Schultz & DeMers, 2020). Hodges et al. (2020) refer to ERT as a temporary change in the way that instruction is delivered due to unforeseen circumstances or crises that requires switching from the previous mode of delivery (i.e., face-to-face) to a fully online environment. They go on to state that the primary goal for

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ERT approaches is to provide this temporary platform where students can receive instruction despite a current crisis, rather than establishing a strong educational foothold from which learning will be delivered in the future. Schultz and DeMers (2020) warn that the hasty implementation of online platforms for reengineered courses does not help to reduce the perceived shortcomings of online teaching when compared to face-to face delivery. Thus, the creation of an effective learning community that is based on improving the quality of interactions between student and content, student and student, and student and instructor, can produce better learning outcomes in online environments (Bernard et al., 2009).

The effectiveness of community for online learning has also been assessed under perspectives that focus on a community of inquiry (CoI; Garrison et al., 2000; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007), a framework that addresses the complexities of online learning and highlights the sense of an online community. Garrison et al., (2000) first identified three essential elements for the delivery of a successful online class: social, teaching, and cognitive presence. Social presence refers to "the ability of participants to identify with the community (e.g., course of study), communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop interpersonal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities" (Garrison, 2009, p. 352). Social presence can help create group cohesiveness and effectiveness, which have been found to correlate with learning achievement (Hwang & Arbaugh, 2006) and satisfaction with the delivery medium (Arbaugh & Benbunan-Fich, 2006). Social presence is a necessary variable in the development of cognitive presence, as students who develop social bonds are more intellectually engaged (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). Cognitive presence is defined by Garrison et al. (2000) as "the extent to which the participants in any particular configuration of a community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication" (p. 89). Effective cognitive presence involves defining a problem, seeking relevant information, integrating ideas, and testing solutions (Garrison et al., 2010). Finally, teaching presence is defined by Anderson et al. (2001) as 'the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes' (p. 5). Teaching presence mediates the quality of the interaction being created by the students' social presence. The mere interaction of a learner with other learners or with the content will not ensure effective online learning (Garrison et al., 2000; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). The teacher is the expert who can design attainable parameters for the tasks, facilitate the understanding of learners, and finally instruct them to complete the tasks (Anderson et al., 2001). The community of inquiry framework has been widely used to explore online course effectiveness and has been linked to student satisfaction, engagement, and learning outcomes (Caskurlu et al., 2021; Richardson et al., 2017).

Regarding the background of the study, FOLE courses have been growing and gaining a prominent place in tertiary education systems (Allen & Seaman, 2018), and in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Bañados, 2013). FOLEs have played a relevant role in educational settings, helping educational institutions to reach more learners during the COVID-19 restrictions faced by countries around the world. In many universities, online platforms such as Blackboard Collaborate are used to fulfil the need to keep up with the requirements of academic programmes. However, research addressing specific fully online language learning in platforms such as Zoom or Blackboard Collaborate are scarce, with even fewer studies focusing on learners' engagement perceptions in those settings (Kebritchi et al., 2017; Sun, 2014). FOLEs are gaining relevance in EFL settings such as Chile, where English is extensively used for businesses, education, and technological purposes (Nickerson, 2010). As English is a global language that allows people to share their ideas with a wider population (Crystal, 2006), learning English becomes essential for securing better opportunities in a globalised world. Chile is among the countries that have been making efforts to encourage EFL learning (Author & Díaz, 2020), which has allowed the country to reach a moderate EFL proficiency level and be ranked 37 out of 100 countries as assessed by the EF English Proficiency Index (2020)[1]. These results make it relevant to explore the attitudes of learners in terms of the difficulties they perceive in fully online EFL learning environments that have been prompted by ERT. Attitudinal components in this respect have been found to be closely associated with learner satisfaction, and consequently with learner achievement (Hodges et al., 2020; Şahin Kızıl, 2020). Therefore, the purpose of this mixed-methods exploratory study was to investigate aspects involved in engagement, such as participation, group work, instructional materials, and learning strategies (Sun, 2014) that are regarded as key factors influencing the success of FOLEs. It must be noted that FOLEs were discussed and analysed as part of an ERT approach. This perspective highlighted the attitudinal differences between the previous mode of

[1] EF Education First (2020). *EF English Proficiency Index*. https://www.ef.com/wwen/epi/

delivery to which students were exposed (face-to-face) and the current one (FOLE), as well as the difficulties faced by these students in this learning environment. The main research question for the present study is:

What are university EFL learners' perceptions of their engagement towards aspects of their FOLE lessons?

This research question will be tackled from a quantitative perspective (by means of a quantitative questionnaire) and from a qualitative perspective (by means of semi-structured interviews).

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Over the last 15 years, studies have evidenced the rise of the use of online platforms for educational purposes, where regular lessons are adapted in order for students to receive education online. Beatty (2013) defined computer assisted language learning (CALL) as "any process in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language" (p. 7). CALL approaches share features with computer mediated communication (CMC), which was first defined by Herring (1996, p.1) as "communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of a computer." This definition implies that although CMC tools are not specifically intended for learning, they have the potential to do so. Indeed, at the turn of the century, researchers were already arguing that CMC would change socialisation paradigms (Posmes & Spears, 1998; Thurlow et al., 2004). Furthermore, Yao and Ling (2020) conclude that CMC's impact on human communication forces scholars to rethink human communication at every level.

CALL is embedded in distance education, which occurs when the teaching is being delivered at the same time but from a different place (synchronous distance learning) or at a different time and at a different place (asynchronous distance learning; Dahlstrom-Hakki et al., 2020; Simonson et al, 2019). Allen and Seaman (2013) stated that out of the four types of learning modalities that exist – namely, traditional learning, web-facilitated learning, blended learning, and online learning – three of them make use of distance learning. The authors make use of a body of research based on national reports tracking online education in the United States to differentiate the modalities, which are characterised depending on the proportion of the content that is being delivered online: web-facilitated learning has 1-29% of the content being delivered online; blended learning has 30-79% of the content being delivered online; and online learning has 80-100% of the content being delivered online. Pedagogical adjustments must be made to traditional learning for learners to benefit from distance education tools more efficiently (Hampel & de los Arcos, 2013). Additionally, teachers must reflect on the necessary skills needed to teach a distance education course. In fact, Hampel and Stickler (2005) argued that teacher training addressing technical skills, and pedagogical adaptations for online teaching must be introduced by institutions that offer courses based on distance education. Similarly, Murphy (2015) stated that instructors must transform their teaching skills in order to deliver a more structured, non-threatening, and inclusive online teaching experience.

The implementation of CALL is not unidimensional, as there are a variety of ways it can be implemented. Beatty (2013) identifies approaches to CALL that can include games, digital media, World Wide Web resources, and major social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter. A number of studies have been carried out to measure the effects of CALL on language courses. For example, Marzban (2011) reported positive outcomes for the inclusion of CALL in EFL language courses by students who took an EFL reading comprehension instructional course using CALL technologies. These learners outperformed students who were taught the course through a face-to-face modality. Furthermore, teachers regarded the use of CALL in their classes as a highly valued alternative in terms of the functions that it provides to deliver the class (Mei et al., 2018).

Learning Management System (LMSs)

The platforms in which CALL takes place are known as learning management systems (LMSs), which have become prominent in many educational institutions. An LMS is defined as "the infrastructure that delivers and manages instructional content, identifies and assesses individual and organizational learning or training goals, tracks the progress towards meeting those goals, and collects and presents data for supervising the learning process of an organization as a whole" (Watson & Watson, 2007; p. 28). Examples of LMSs include Moodle, Edmodo, and Blackboard Collaborate. These platforms can be differentiated in terms of their limitations, efficiency, and overall ideal performance (Cavus, 2013). According to Pella (2014), LMSs are mostly used in higher education, as universities seek to carry out classes and courses through online means. Cavus (2013) also states that the features that an LMS should possess to be considered as such are pedagogical outcomes, a

learning environment, instructor and administrator tools, course and curriculum design, and technical specifications. Pella (2014) states that LMSs are typically implemented through synchronous communication and additional online programs whereby the instructor or teacher is the expert who delivers the course to the students. Recent studies report that students acknowledge the benefits of LMSs and are willing to enrol in courses that promote them (Raza et al., 2021).

Learner Engagement

The concept of engagement has attracted growing interest among educational researchers and has been tackled from different perspectives. According to Axelson and Flick (2010), student engagement refers to "how involved or interested students appear to be, and how connected they are to their classes…" (p. 38). Other approaches have underscored the sense of belonging of a student in a learning community, the amount of active and collaborative learning, the involvement in the activities, and the meaningful interactions with teachers (Coates, 2007). Frederick et al. (2004) see engagement as a way to ameliorate school issues such as low levels of academic achievement or high dropout rates in urban areas. They discuss the multifaceted nature of engagement by addressing three main aspects: behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Behavioural engagement is linked to the idea of participation, which is defined by Frederick et al. as the level of involvement in academic activities, a crucial factor in achieving positive academic outcomes. Emotional engagement refers to positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, or the educational environment, which can influence the willingness to perform a task. Finally, cognitive engagement draws on the idea of investment, i.e., the mental effort spent to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills.

Studies have suggested that student engagement directly affects learning outcomes (Carini, et al., 2006). Other authors such as Klem and Connell (2004) refer to the advantages of having engaged students, as this increases academic performance and prompts students to persist and allocate attention to their learning. As Pascarella (2001) argued, successful educational settings are often part of institutions that are concerned with students' academic and social engagement. More recently, Kahu and Nelson (2018) provided a framework on the relationship between student engagement and student success, identifying three main factors affecting the relationship: the interaction between students and institutions; psychosocial constructs such as emotion, well-being, self-efficacy, and belonging; and the demographic characteristics of the students.

Engagement in Fully Online Learning Environments (FOLEs)

Engagement in FOLEs has been researched in several learning settings. Low retention rates of students in online courses (Perna et al., 2014) highlight the need to focus on ways in which to secure online attendance for lectures and offline interaction with materials. Although the use of online communication platforms such as Zoom has increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Dhawan, 2020), Malaysian learners seem to display negative views towards continuing their studies in FOLEs (Chung et al., 2020). In the United States and Canada, student engagement has been measured by means of the national survey of student engagement (NSSE). This survey provides benchmarks on various aspects of student engagement such as the level of academic challenge, active or collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. An online component was included in 2007 that acknowledged the prevalence of online learning environments (Chen et al. 2010; Meyer, 2014). Student engagement in online learning settings poses new issues for instructional designers, who require more empirical research to advance knowledge in this area (Czerkawski & Lyman, 2016). With a focus on web-based learning technology, Chen et al., (2010) administered the NSSE to 17,819 respondents, and reported a positive relationship between the technologies employed in a course and levels of engagement in terms of interaction, collaborative group work, and reflective learning. Czerkawski and Lyman (2016) acknowledged the role of the instructor, the instructional designer, and instructional design in the literature and created an e-learning engagement framework focused on interaction, collaboration, facilitation, and feedback. This approach includes four phases – instructional needs, instructional objectives, learning environments, and summative assessment – that are meant to work as a procedural framework for instructors to add effective practices that increase student engagement. Focusing on the online collaborative discussion posts of 49 students enrolling in an online educational psychology course, Raković et al. (2020) identified attributes of the posts that prompted high levels of engagement in a Canvas online discussion forum. The authors found that specific rhetorical moves such as asking questions, requesting justification, and making a claim prompted the highest number of responses, which is in line with previous findings (Nandi et al., 2012), and highlights the role of instructors and learners in the promotion of constructive online discussion settings that result in learning achievement. Facilitating discourse is a feature of adequate

teaching presence that can be increased by raising questions, making observations, steering the discussion, and engaging inactive learners (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007).

Engagement and FOLEs in EFL Studies

Regarding EFL studies exploring engagement in fully online learning environments (FOLEs), Yen et al. (2015) conducted research on enhancing students' writing and speaking skills using Facebook (asynchronous online discussions) and Skype (synchronous online discussions) as learning tools. The participants were 42 students from a business college in Taiwan who were enrolled in an EFL conversation course. They were asked to sit a proficiency test to assess writing and speaking levels, to engage in online conversational role-playing activities through Skype, and to participate in Facebook group discussions over a period of 11 weeks. The findings suggested that using computer-based technologies contributed to increasing the participants' EFL learning skills and that engagement increased as anxiety levels were reduced through such activities.

The varied nature of the components of engagement calls for the need to include several aspects of L2 engagement in online settings. Thus, Sun (2014) investigated the difficulties that 46 EFL learners faced when adapting to fully online learning environments. Sun identified four main aspects that could impact engagement in online L2 settings: participation, group work, learning strategies, and instructional materials. With respect to participation and group work, these are relevant to increasing online engagement, as CMC learning "does not automatically ensure the successfulness of the integration of CMC into language education" (Nguyen, 2011, p. 1414). Learners may feel disconnected from their peers and from the language learning setting, which can engender negative attitudes towards online learning (Nor et al., 2012). Regarding learning strategies, the literature has shown that online communication can prompt students to acquire new skills that support learning (Sun, 2011) and generate self-regulation strategies mediated by technology (McLoughlin & Lee, 2010). These strategies can have an effect on online EFL learning and switch the focus of learners from a large class setting to a more personalized, self-regulated learning environment (Sun, 2011). Finally, instructional materials play an important role in the teaching and learning process as they can enhance the level of participation and the strategic approach to the online setting (Sun, 2014). Through a mixed-methods design, Sun (2014) identified six main difficulties that were related to: (1) programme and study schedule, (2) finding time to work with classmates, (3) organizing collaborative work, (4) maintaining engagement with the class, (5) nurturing self-motivation, and (6) socialising. These inter-related aspects were mainly informed by two major sets of difficulties: interaction and collaboration and learning strategies, which suggests that engagement is a construct that cannot be measured without looking into the factors that hinder or facilitate its presence.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study applied a mixed-methods design to explore the perceptions of adult EFL learners, which allowed the researchers to tackle those perceptions from a triangulated perspective. First, a Likert-scale questionnaire was used to gather 54 learners' perceptions of FOLEs and their engagement. Then, seven participants with relevant response profiles were interviewed to further explore their responses on the questionnaire. Based on the research question posited, the main objective of the study was to explore the perceptions that these learners hold in relation to the aspects identified by Sun (2014) as influencing engagement, such as online participation, group work, instructional materials, and learning styles.

Participants and Context

The 54 EFL university learners who participated in the present study were selected by means of purposeful sampling, as it was necessary to choose participants that were knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, these participants were chosen because they were EFL learners taking part in an FOLE EFL course at the university level via Blackboard Collaborate for the first time. The participants were majoring in geology and civil engineering and were native speakers of Spanish attending an EFL course that has an objective of achieving a B2 level (CEFR framework). An Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was used to assess the participants' proficiency level, which showed a mean score of 24 (lower B2 CEFR level). The FOLE course was delivered in emergency remote teaching (ERT) circumstances in 2020, so students had to switch from face-to-face EFL lessons to the FOLE by means of Blackboard Collaborate. This platform is a

learning management system (LMS) that is used for web-conferencing and allows instructors to create virtual classrooms to interact with their students in real time. Blackboard Collaborate has been implemented in educational settings to connect students and teachers in a simulated online classroom. Some of its features include screen sharing, virtual hand raising, on-screen chat, and document sharing. In order to use Blackboard Collaborate, both teacher and students need computer access and a stable internet connection. This online tool has been extensively used in online university courses, which have reported its positive impact on performance (Moonsamy & Govender, 2018) and engagement (Wdowik, 2014). The use of this platform within the selected FOLE included synchronous and asynchronous online learning activities.

Instruments and Materials

FOLE Questionnaire

The quantitative part of the study was based on the Likert-scale section of the instrument designed by Sun (2014) to explore students' perceptions of online learning (Appendix 1). This questionnaire contains 19 five-point scale items that tap into aspects of participation, group work, instructional material, and learning styles in FOLEs, and range from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5). Sun reports good internal consistency for the four components in the instrument (Participation, Group work, Learning styles, and Instructional materials). An example of an item in the Participation component is "*There was not enough opportunity for peer interaction. I found it more difficult to participate and engage in an online class than a traditional classroom.*" To prevent L2 proficiency from interfering with the understanding of the statements, they were translated into the participants' L1 (Spanish).

Semi-structured Interview

Sun's (2014) qualitative section of the survey included 13 open-ended questions about aspects of FOLEs to be answered in written form. However, we surmised that a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews would produce richer accounts of learners' perceptions, as these types of questions provide a wider range of freedom for participants to report on their views (Dunn, 2005), which becomes crucial when they discuss aspects of engagement. The interview protocol was modelled considering the answers given by the students in the FOLE questionnaire and included follow-up questions that sought to deepen our understanding of the participants' perceptions and attitudes towards FOLEs.

Procedures

Pilot Study of the FOLE Questionnaire

Since data collection was carried out online for both instruments, a Google Forms link to the FOLE questionnaire was created, and Zoom was used to conduct the interviews. A pilot version of the FOLE questionnaire was completed by ten students not taking part in the study. The document included a section for feedback on the structure of the questions, the clarity, and the length of the instrument. The feedback obtained was used to modify the wording of certain statements for comprehension, and to set a completion time for the questionnaire (15 minutes). Overall, the pilot study participants found the FOLE questionnaire clear and easy to understand, and no major issues with it were reported.

Data Collection and Analysis

Before collecting data, consent was secured with an email outlining information about the study and the type of participation required. Then, we administered the FOLE questionnaire by means of a Google Forms link. Participants were given a week to return the completed questionnaires and were asked to provide an email address for potential participation in the semi-structured interviews. The second stage for data collection involved conducting the interviews with seven participants selected from the 54 participants who completed the FOLE questionnaire. The questions included in the interview protocol focused on exploring reasons and explanations for their previous responses (e.g., In your opinion, was it necessary to have group work and collaboration in the classroom? Why?). These interviews were conducted in the participants' L1 and lasted 30-40 minutes. As for data analysis, the research question in the study was discussed with both quantitative (descriptive statistics) and qualitative (interview data) approaches. While the former seeks to find general tendencies in the data (Dornyei, 2007), the latter employs qualitative content analysis, which organises the meaning of qualitative data in a systematic way (Schreier, 2012). Once the interviews were transcribed, a

codification process was carried out (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), identifying relevant codes and broad themes emerging from the analysis that served to label and hierarchically categorise the data.

Results and Discussion

Quantitative Results and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 below presents data from the FOLE questionnaire on all the components assessed, based on the first section of Sun's (2014) instrument. Following Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995), mean scores of 1.0 - 2.4 were regarded as displaying a low level of agreement with the component; mean scores of 2.5 - 3.4 portrayed a medium level of agreement; finally, mean scores of 3.5 - 5.0 illustrated a high level of agreement. As can be seen in the table, the total mean score of the survey (*M* = 3.51; *SD* = .44) suggests that these participants had an overall positive attitude towards the FOLE, and that the online participation component prevented the total score from being higher.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for FOLE quantitative questionnaire data

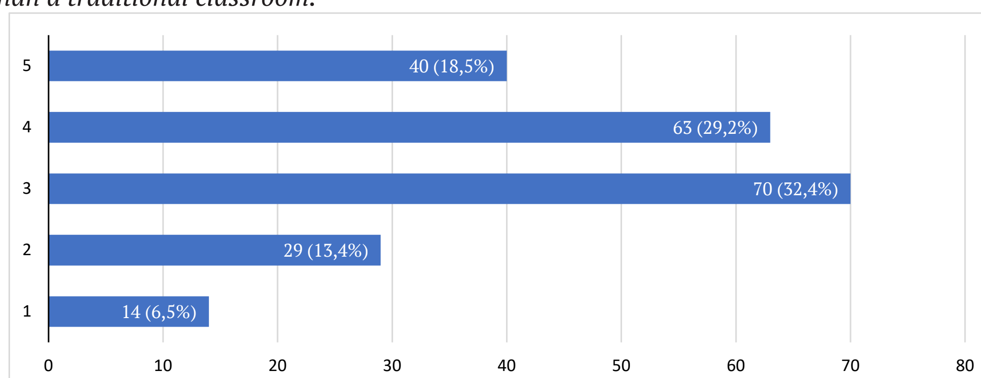
	N	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Mean*	*Std. Dev.*
Online participation	54	1.00	5.00	2.61	.93
Collaborative group work	54	2.00	5.00	3.79	.72
Instructional materials	54	2.83	5.00	4.05	.67
Learning strategies and styles	54	1.80	4.80	3.37	.71
Total scores	**54**	**2.58**	**4.47**	**3.51**	**.44**

Online participation

The results show that students regarded online participation as the most lacking out of the four components assessed (*M* = 2.61; *SD*= .93). The participants' answers suggest that their perceptions of online participation were not overtly positive in their classes. Figure 1 below illustrates this trend for an item in this component.

Figure 1

Frequency values for answers to Item 1 (Online participation)
There was not enough opportunity for peer interaction. I found it more difficult to participate and engage in an online class than a traditional classroom.



Note. Likert-scale ranges from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5).

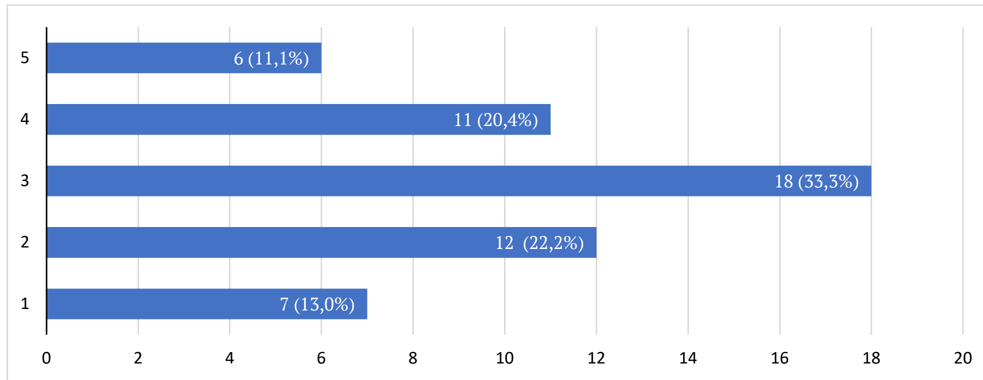
Learning Strategies and Styles

Regarding perceptions of learning strategies and styles in FOLE, students' responses (*M* = 3.37; *SD* = .71) displayed higher scores when compared to online participation but still implied learner neutrality towards self-

directed and self-regulated processes that are relevant to FOLE. Figure 2 below depicts the response trend for learning styles.

Figure 2

Frequency values for answers to Item 18 (Learning strategies and styles)
My preferences, needs, social life, technology choices, etc. were better served by online learning.



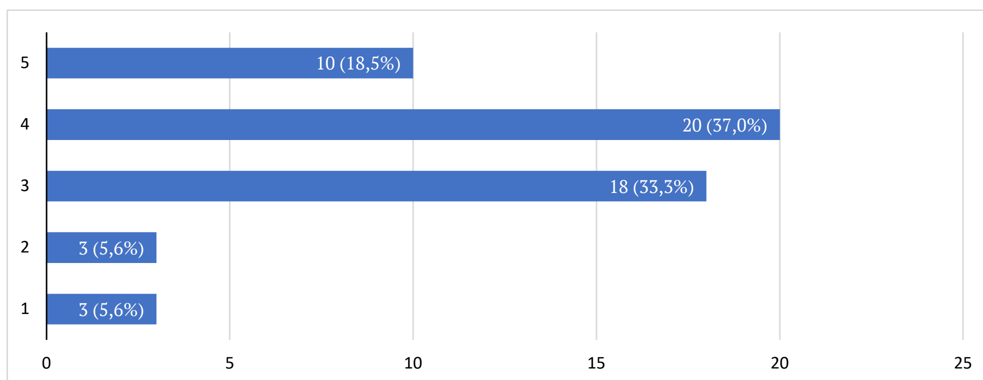
Note. Likert-scale ranges from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5).

Group Work

Students regarded collaborative group work as a positive aspect of their online learning process (M = 3.79; SD = .72), over Online participation and Learning styles. Figure 3 below illustrates that responses for item 5 were mainly in agreement with group work activities. Interestingly, the positive attitudes towards group work did not reflect the views towards online participation.

Figure 3

Frequency values for answers to Item 5 (Collaborative group work)
I liked the group work we had to do in the online lessons.



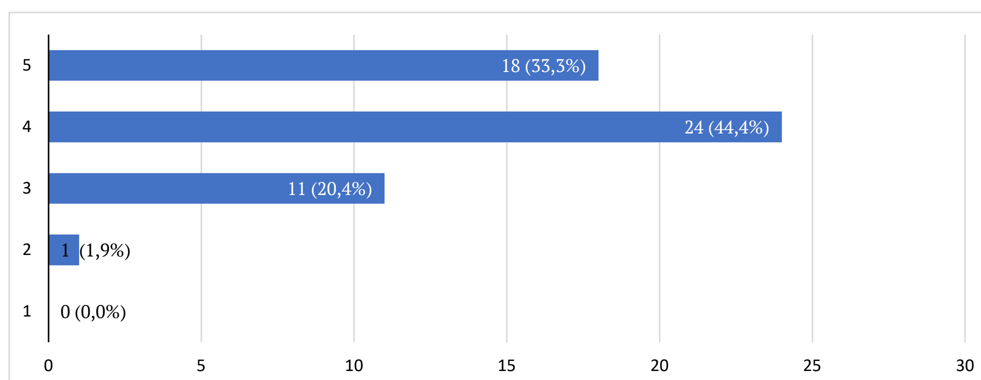
Note. Likert-scale ranges from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5).

Instructional Materials

Finally, the data revealed that the most highly regarded component for these students was Instructional materials (M = 4.05; SD=.67). Figure 4 displays results for item 11.

Figure 4

Sample of frequency values for answers to Item 11 (Instructional materials)
Authentic learning materials should sometimes be used in the online lessons.



Note. Likert-scale ranges from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5).

Quantitative Discussion: What Are University EFL Learners' Perceptions of their Engagement Towards Aspects of their FOLE Lessons?

The quantitative data showed that the main perceptions of learners are salient in terms of their attitudes towards online participation, which is evidenced by the low-moderate means displayed in the component. These attitudes are in line with Sampurna et al., (2018), who reported lower levels of participation from students in non-formal language teaching settings using online platforms such as Facebook and chat tools. The characteristics of the learning setting (a learning support course not attached to an educational institution) may have increased the lack of involvement found in that study. In line with this, Sun (2014) reported that students were only able to interact in small groups in online contexts. While her students stated that they did interact in online settings, their interaction was typically limited to collaboration with one partner, and that further instances for interaction were hindered by the lack of initial rapport with students they did not know. We wanted to explore the reasons behind our findings in terms of online participation, so we pursued this component further in the semi-structured interviews to address the adaptation issues faced by students in this new online learning environment. The fact that online participation is perceived as the weakest aspect by the participants in our study learners is concerning, as the quantity and quality of student participation in online courses is directly related to academic performance (Duncan et al., 2012). With respect to perceptions of learning strategies and styles in FOLEs, results showed higher scores when compared to online participation but still implied learner neutrality towards self-directed and self-regulated processes. Such processes are crucial to nurturing successful learning environments, as teacher guidance may not be enough on its own (Sun, 2014). The higher means reported for the group work component are similar to the positive perceptions reported by Zhu (2012), who found that students were satisfied with collaborative work and aware of its relevance in the learning process. Finally, the positive reactions towards content materials highlight the level of appreciation for engaging materials that are designed by teachers but consider learner feedback in their creation. Furthermore, if students are exposed to materials that are meaningful for them – i.e., materials that prompt self-regulation and collaboration – they will become more engaged with the course (Kebritchi et al., 2017). These two aspects (instructional materials and group work) represent the two highest means found in the present study, which shows how these learners' perceptions of the FOLE course are influenced by the quality of the content in the classes.

Qualitative Findings and Discussion

Participants' Profiles

As was stated before, seven participants were selected from the total sample (n=54) of participants completing the FOLE questionnaire. The selection of the participants was based on their mean scores in specific components. For example, participant 1 was interviewed because his positive views on instructional materials

(IM), and his rather low score on online participation (OP). These types of participants were regarded as relevant for interviewing because we wanted to explore their reasons behind their negative perceptions, and how they would interact across such components. We also included participants with medium levels of agreement towards a given component when a difference with other components was established in their profile (e.g., participant 3). Seven participants with distinct profiles were identified with this process and were asked to participate in the interviews. Table 2 below shows a general profile description of the participants.

Table 2

Interview participants' profiles

Participants	*Program*	*Gender*	*Profile*
Participant 1	Civil engineering	Male	High IM (M=4.83) Low OP (M=2.25)
Participant 2	Civil engineering	Male	High GW (M=4.75) Medium OP (M=2.50)
Participant 3	Geology	Male	Medium LS (M=3.40) Low OP/GW (M=2.25)
Participant 4	Civil engineering	Male	High GW (M=3.75) Low OP (M=2.25)
Participant 5	Geology	Female	High GW/IM (M=4.50) Low OP (M=1.00)
Participant 6	Geology	Male	Medium IM (M=3.33) Low LS (M=2.00)
Participant 7	Geology	Male	High GW (M=4.50) Medium OP (M=2.75)

Note. GW = Group work IM = Instructional materials OP = Online participation LS = Learning styles

Main Themes

Analysis of the interviews yielded several themes that were associated with the four components in Sun's (2014) FOLE questionnaire. However, the first two components (namely, Online participation and Group work) were found to overlap strongly in the responses provided by participants, who attributed similar meanings to both. Therefore, the two components were merged into one. The analysis of the interviews provided below will refer to the themes impacting three main components: Online participation, Learning strategies and styles, and Instructional materials.

Online Participation: Interactions among Peers and Peer Rapport. The themes that emerged in this category are related to the interactions between students that can benefit or hinder learners' perceptions of FOLE classes, and the quality of the rapport with specific students. For example, participant 5 (High GW/IM, Low OP) manifested difficulties interacting with peers as a main reason for giving low ratings to the Online participation component:

> I think (the class) is unsatisfactory because I compare it with face-to-face classes, and it is not the same. Interaction among coursemates is not the same because it is limited to chat and to have a group work by the end of the class that is just two or three people.

This learner seemed frustrated with FOLE lessons because it was difficult for her to establish meaningful communication with her peers. This lack of social interactions among students is a factor that impinges upon a successful educational experience (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005). Student-student interactions can be a source for cognitive presence and a driver of motivation (Bernard et al., 2009) and can encourage critical thinking and prompt students to reflect on learning (Mills et al., 2016). This can be illustrated by participant 3's (Medium LS, Low OP/GW) dissatisfaction with the lack of peer interaction instances, as they prevented him from receiving peer feedback, which in turn may affect his motivation to learn:

> Another difference that I have noticed is that in (face-to-face) classes I can sometimes approach the classmate that is next to me and ask him/her: "Hey, what was that again?" and you could immediately understand. In an online modality, no, you can't do that.

In line with this, students referred to the quality of the interactions obtained when they do not know their peers taking part in the FOLE lesson:

> Participant 2 (High GW, Medium OP): "For example, suddenly you had to do group work with new people that you didn't know, for example, people from other cities. These EFL lessons include students from all the campuses, and I even had colleagues from other programmes."

> Participant 6 (Medium IM/Low LS): "You don't know anybody, and you don't know how the other person will react if you ask him/her something or if you say to him/her: 'Let's do this.'"

These students reported their reluctancy to interact with unknown classmates from different departments in their EFL FOLE lessons because they felt that the lack of rapport with such students leads to poor collaborative work. Indeed, adequately sharing task objectives can help develop useful learning skills and a better understanding of the content (Brindley et al., 2009). The interaction issues identified are closely related to Sun's (2014) findings, which showed that students reported limited opportunities for socialisation and interaction. Opportunities for collaboration among peers are crucial in the design of effective online learning environments (Czerkawski & Lyman, 2016). Moreover, encouraging students to increase online contact with each other is a predominant variable when predicting learning outcomes (Lundberg & Sheridan, 2015), as it allows for the nurturing of a social presence in the online community that can in turn improve socio-emotional outcomes in the course (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). It is challenging for students to develop the trust in their course mates that can lead to a sense of 'online camaraderie' (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007), but skilled instructors can facilitate these interactions by means of the FOLE platforms being used. It would seem that for these students, the lack of social presence is preventing them from achieving a more complete cognitive presence, as they would in face-to-face learning. The extracts underscore the importance of the affective function in establishing social presence and, perhaps more importantly, illustrate the opportunity for the instructor to increase teaching presence and create a non-threatening learning environment that help develops language skills (Murphy, 2015).

Learning Strategies: Adaptation to External Issues, Adaptation to Class Schedules, Self-regulated Strategies. With respect to learning strategies and styles, we identified three closely related themes: Adaptation to external issues, Adaptation to class schedules, and Self-regulated strategies. Participants perceived that awareness of their particular learning styles is relevant for learning and entails the nurturing of a self-regulated process that enhances academic achievement outcomes (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010). Regarding adaptation to external issues influencing the FOLE experience, participant 6 (Medium IM/Low LS) referred to them in relation to his performance in the class:

> The most complex thing is to be able to pay attention in an EFL class because (my) internet connection is not that good, and few students have good internet.

What this participant expresses evidences the potential logistic issues that are involved in setting up an online environment. Further evidence of the existence of external issues is related to fatigue due to prolonged Blackboard sessions, as participant 7 (High GW, Medium OP) reports:

> I think I need glasses that reduce eyestrain, and I do not wear glasses at all. I spend too much time in front of a screen, and most of the time I feel that my eyes are tired.

These types of external factors are regarded as secondary compared to factors directly related to the class experience (Liu et al., 2010). However, such factors may gain more relevance in EFL contexts that lack a set of guidelines to organise the way in which lessons are delivered. Participant 1 (High IM, Low OP) reported an adaptation issue in relation to his class schedule:

> The classes are delivered back-to-back sometimes, and lunch breaks are very short. Sometimes I have lunch very late, and it is about mental fatigue, more than anything, spending all day in front of a screen.

Participant 1 seems to be affected by mental fatigue, which renders him unable to overcome the difficulties caused by the new organization of his online schedule. This is not uncommon in students, as Chen et al. (2008)

found that some participants did not hold positive views on the temporal and spatial flexibility that online courses can provide. Another extract focusing on the scheduled time of the classes was provided by participant 4 (High GW, Low OP):

> It is difficult to adapt to the schedules because going to face-to-face classes is different from attending classes through a computer. Over time, it becomes easier. You get used to it.

The comment made by participant 4 reveals that the adaptation process may improve once the participant becomes more familiar with the new learning environment. This is in agreement with a case study investigation conducted by Ayebi-Arthur (2017), who concluded that students eventually become more resilient after engaging and re-engaging with online learning. It can be argued that increased awareness towards effective learning strategies can help learners navigate the adaptation process:

> Participant 3 (Medium LS, Low OP/GW): "The class was all self-taught, so in the end I focused on my own actions to study, but I was always guided by what (the teacher) told me in class; otherwise, it wouldn't have made sense."

Participant 5 (High GW/IM, Low OP): "Well, I think that a good part of online learning is that we have the lessons recorded, so if there is something that I did not understand, I can go and listen to it over and over. Or if they upload material (to the platform), I can go and check it while I watch the class [...] In face-to-face classes, if you could not attend classes you would just lose the content of the class, and you would keep your questions to yourself."

These students stated a preference for a self-regulated learning process where they expect and accept the guidance from the teacher, who is seen as the expert who can create constructive online learning settings (Nandi et al., 2012), but can also implement activities that increase self-directed learning (Lambert & Fisher, 2013). Although online learning environments represent challenging activities for learners who are adapting to them (Kebritchi et al., 2017; Luyt, 2013), learners can benefit from teacher guidance together with a self-regulated approach to the online classroom. Increased awareness of the relevance of the FOLE for language learning is strongly connected to self-regulation processes (Baran et al., 2011; Kebritchi et al., 2017), and student-instructor interaction can create and nurture such processes, while at the same time providing emotional and motivational support (Bernard et al., 2009). In addition, adequate teacher guidance can also increase students' levels of awareness and satisfaction with the course (Lee et al., 2011).

Instructional Materials: Class Planning, Content, Online Platform Instruction. Since perceptions towards instructional materials was the highest rated component on the FOLE questionnaire, participants reported mainly positive perceptions towards it, focusing on three main themes: Class planning, Content, and Online platform instruction. Participant 7 (High GW, Medium OP) pointed out a good FOLE experience by means of class planning:

> I find that the method used by the teacher is very good because she gives us examples. I mean, she talks about some examples and then she gives us some activities. Then, she tells us that anyone can write on the interactive board.

This participant feels that the class planning performed by the teacher fulfils his expected learning objectives. This was a common theme among the participants, as most of them reported that a well-planned class fostered their motivation towards online learning. The appropriate introduction of self-learning skills by the teacher as described by participant 7 allows teachers to help learners develop self-regulated strategies in online courses (Baran et al., 2011). The disposition of the instructor towards increasing participation in students is essential for helping students feel they are part of an online classroom experience (Comas-Quinn, 2011). Satisfaction with the content of the class organised by the teacher was also reported by participants 4 and 5, who expressed satisfaction with the content of the class:

> Participant 4 (High GW, Low OP): "The teacher is always trying to search for material that talks about what we study since I share my English course with geology and metallurgical engineering."
>
> Participant 5 (High GW/IM, Low OP): "I like the material that this teacher gives and how she conducts the classes that focus mainly on geology topics, which is what we study. She is constantly asking what deficiencies we have, or what is right or what is wrong (in the class), so as a class group we tell her about the material (that they would like to see in the class) and she finds it for us."

These extracts represent the general perception that students have about the materials used in the FOLE lessons, which rely heavily on the quality of the content and its meaningfulness. Content that is relatable to some aspect of learners' lives and considers their needs during online courses can be more relevant and thus prompt further engagement (Chametzky, 2014; Mills et al., 2016). The students also recognised the teacher's efforts to include feedback in her online classes, which increases engagement with class planning, and nurtures the cognitive presence of the students as they go from an information-seeking state to a resolution stage in a community of inquiry. Participant 5 also refers to the immediacy of the feedback, which is a crucial feature in online environments (Mills et al., 2016) and a reflection of the expertise of the instructor regarding both the content and the pedagogy (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007).

Some participants held negative perceptions towards the instructions provided to use the online platform. Participants 3 and 6 displayed negative views towards the instruction process before accessing the online platform:

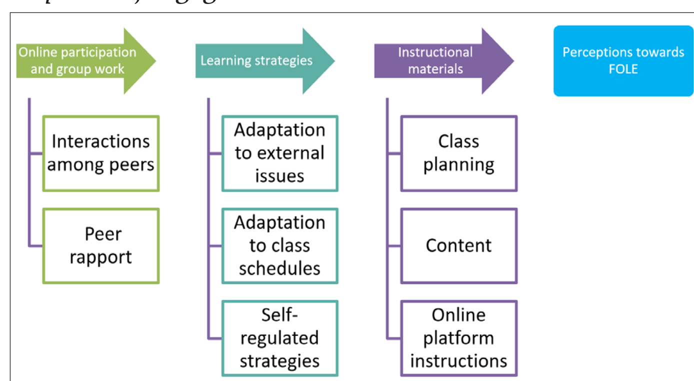
> Participant 3 (Medium LS, Low OP): "I think that there was a lack of delivered instructions about Blackboard because we were still learning how to use it as we started the course. Suddenly, there were notifications on my screen, and I had no idea how to access them."
>
> Participant 6 (Medium IM/Low LS): "They (the university) told us that we have to get on the Blackboard platform and there are all your courses, and you will have your classes (there). So, at the beginning (I was) like: "Where do I get in the class?", or: "Where do I raise my hand?", and: "How do I turn on my microphone?"

The issues presented in these extracts suggest that teachers need to take into account their learners' levels of awareness of Blackboard and other technologies, along with their ability to understand and use them (Hussein, 2016). Instructional materials will be effective only if learners' awareness of how to access them and take advantage of them is improved. Students demand online environments that allow them to be in control by means of flexible technological tools (Tabor, 2007). To achieve this, the interactions between the students and the content must include accurate and complete information in relation to the learning activities, the assignments required, and any supporting materials (Siragusa et. al., 2007). In addition, some level of technical competence is required from students so that they can apply creativity and achieve a 'sense of puzzlement', that is, a desire for further inquiry and information exchange (Murphy, 2015). This relevance of the delivery aspect of instructional materials and its matching with the online learning skills of students has also been underscored by Delen et al. (2014), who argued that including supplemental functions for instructions in online environments with specific user needs in mind will enhance learning. Providing personal insights regarding the structure of the course and guidelines to use the medium more effectively are desirable activities for instructors to help tackle learner-content interaction issues (Caskurlu et al., 2021; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007).

Overall, the qualitative aspect of the research question posed in the present study provided more specific insights into these learners' perceptions and attitudes towards FOLEs. Aspects of online participation and group work, learning strategies, and instructional materials were found to influence the participants' experiences when taking part in a FOLE EFL course. Figure 5 below presents a summary of the exploratory findings reported in the qualitative section and how they influenced these learners' perceptions towards engagement with the course.

Figure 5

Aspects influencing FOLE perceptions of engagement



Conclusion

The present exploratory case study sought to understand the perceptions and difficulties faced by Chilean EFL university students when facing a fully online learning environment. The main findings revealed that students were not satisfied with the online EFL course in terms of the participation levels they expected. Semi-structured interviews evidenced that the poor interactions with peers and lack of peer rapport negatively influenced their social presence. Reported perceptions towards external issues, the class schedule, and self-regulated strategies used by learners suggest that the adaptation process can impinge upon the online classroom experience, and that the instructor can use teaching presence to motivate learners to become more aware of the relevance of the online environment and overcome those adaptation issues. Finally, the use of instructional materials was the highest rated component in the FOLE questionnaire. The interviews revealed that students focused on three main aspects to discuss the materials: Class planning, Content, and Online platform instruction. These aspects highlight the importance of the delivery of the instructions to achieve task goals in FOLEs, and the value of increasing teaching presence to help develop cognitive presence in these learners.

It must be noted that this study is exploratory in nature, and it focused on a specific learning context (namely, Chilean adult EFL learners who were required to attend FOLE classes in 2020). The unexpected nature of the changes to the modality of the classes delivered prevented the researchers from reaching a larger number of participants for both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study. Furthermore, the participants were exposed to one semester of FOLE classes before data collection, which may not represent an exhaustive account of more well-formed perceptions towards FOLEs. The inclusion of more participants with specific profiles for the interviews could have provided more data to confirm the findings presented here. Future studies will need to consider a larger sample in diverse learning settings to establish comparisons across learning contexts.

Implications for Pedagogy

In educational environments that have been influenced by COVID-19 restrictions, the way in which lessons were being delivered changed in 2020. Online platforms have forced teachers and learners to adapt to the new circumstances. This study provided an overview of some of the aspects that were affected by these new circumstances, which can prompt teachers to consider learners' opinions when creating and delivering FOLE EFL lessons and materials. The relevance of effective instructional materials highlights the need for meaningful materials that are clearly explained under the guidance of the FOLE teacher. In addition, the results obtained in this study evidenced a need for training prior to the use of online platforms for academic purposes. This information is important for teachers when engaging in online lessons since instruction addressing the correct use of the platform is essential for them to know what to expect as they teach, and for learners to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. The need to include teacher training that focuses on technical skills and online pedagogical adaptations in institutions that offer courses based on distance education (Hampel & Stickler, 2005) gains even more relevance in the online learning settings researched in the present study. Being aware of the perceptions towards the issues reported by FOLE students can only improve the approach to EFL in online learning settings and can allow teachers to focus on acquiring new tools and strategies that can foster online learner engagement.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared

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APPENDIX

Adapted AND TRANSLATED statements based on Sun's (2014) FOLEs questionnaire

Participación (Preguntas 1-4)
Participation (Questions 1–4)

(1) ***No hubo suficientes oportunidades para la interacción entre pares. Me resultó más difícil participar en una clase en línea que en un aula tradicional.*** (There was not enough opportunity for peer interaction. I found it more difficult to participate and engage in an online class than a traditional classroom).

(2) ***En lugar de interactuar con muchas personas en una clase (interacciones multidimensionales), mis interacciones con mis compañeros a menudo se limitaban a un pequeño grupo de estudiantes de la clase***. (Instead of interacting with many people in a class (multidimensional interactions), my interactions with classmates were often limited to a small group of classmates).

(3) ***Aprendí en un grupo pequeño en lugar de en una clase grande. Por ejemplo, solo practiqué con un grupo de compañeros de clase, ya que solo conocía un pequeño porcentaje de compañeros de lo que lo hubiera hecho en el aula tradicional.*** (I learnt in a small group rather than in a big class, e.g., I only practiced with a handful of classmates as I knew fewer classmates than I would have done in the traditional classroom setting).

(4) ***El Profesor necesitaba mucho trabajo para fomentar la construcción de una comunidad de aprendizaje en línea.*** (Much work was needed by the teacher to foster the building of an online learning community).

Trabajo en grupo. (preguntas de la 5-8)
Group work (Questions 5–8)

(5) ***Me gustó el trabajo grupal que tuvimos que hacer en las clases en línea.*** (I liked the group work we had to do).

(6) ***El trabajo grupal y el tipo de proyecto son partes importantes en el aprendizaje en línea.*** (Group work and project-type work are important parts in online learning).

(7) ***Se debe fomentar la cooperación y colaboración de los alumnos en el aprendizaje en línea.*** (Learner cooperation and collaboration should be encouraged in online learning).

(*8)* ***Debía haber más discusiones grupales sobre asuntos relacionados con el estudio entre los estudiantes y los profesores.*** (There needed to be more group discussions on study-related matters amongst class members and with the teachers.)

Material instructivo. (Preguntas de la 9-14)
Instructional material (Questions 9–14)

Las siguientes seis declaraciones a continuación (preguntas de la 9-14) representan las aspiraciones e ideales sobre cómo debería ser generalmente el material de instrucción en línea. En relación con su experiencia usando plataformas en línea para aprender el idioma, ¿qué tan de acuerdo está con las siguientes declaraciones? (The next six statements below (Question 9–14), rather than specifically refer to the online Chinese paper(s) you did at AUT, they represent the aspirations and ideals as to how online instructional material should be generally. Looking back in your experience, how much do you agree with these statements?)

(9) ***La instrucción de aprendizaje de idiomas en línea debe basarse en tareas en lugar de aprender de memoria.*** (Online language learning instruction should be task-based rather than rote learning).

(10) ***El material de aprendizaje de idiomas en línea debería ayudar a desarrollar habilidades de pensamiento crítico y resolución de problemas de la vida real.*** (Online language learning material should help develop real-life problem solving and critical thinking skills).

(11) ***A veces se deben usar materiales de aprendizaje auténticos.*** (Authentic learning materials should sometimes be used).

(12) ***Se deben alentar las iniciativas de los alumnos en lugar de que todo lo prepare y organice el profesor. Por ejemplo, teniendo algunas actividades de aprendizaje sugeridos por los alumnos.*** (Learner

initiatives should be encouraged rather than everything prepared and spoon-fed by the teacher, e.g., having some topics of learning suggested by learners).

(13) ***Se debe alentar a los estudiantes a que construyan en conjunto con el profesor los recursos de la clase y el entorno de aprendizaje, y que creen en conjunto con el educador nuevos aprendizajes y conocimientos.*** (Learners should be encouraged to co-construct class resources and the learning environment, and co-create new learning and knowledge).

(14) ***Se debe alentar la creatividad del alumno.*** (Learner creativity should be encouraged).

Estilos de aprendizaje (preguntas desde la 15-19)
Learning strategies (Questions 15–19)

(15) ***Sin una sala de clases y la presencia de un profesor, descubrí que el aprendizaje en línea es más autodirigido y autorregulado.*** (Without a classroom and the presence of a teacher, I found online learning to be more self-directed and self-regulated).

(16) ***El aprendizaje en línea es individualizado o personalizado. Permite flexibilidad, fomenta la autodirección y la elección. Por ejemplo, no siempre seguí las instrucciones del profesor o pude reorganizar el material de aprendizaje, o elegir mis propias herramientas en línea, y configurar el entorno de aprendizaje para que se adaptara mejor a mi objetivos y necesidades de aprendizaje.*** (Online learning is individualized or personalized learning. It allows flexibility, encourages self-direction and choice, e.g., I did not always just follow the teacher's instructions, or I was able to re-arrange learning material, or choose my own online tools, and configure the learning environment to best suit my learning goals and needs).

(17) ***Creo que otros miembros de la clase también formaron sus propios entornos personales de aprendizaje.*** (I believe other class members formed their own personal learning environments too).

(18) ***El aprendizaje en línea sirvió de mejor forma a mis preferencias, necesidades, vida social, opciones tecnológicas, etc.*** (My preferences, needs, social life, technology choices, etc. were better served by online learning).

(19) ***Sentí que tenía control sobre el proceso de aprendizaje.*** (I felt that I had control over the learning process).

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Speaking Performance and Anxiety Levels of Chinese EFL Learners in Face-to-Face and Synchronous Voice-based Chat

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In recent, mobile technology is experiencing a highly development, it is necessary to explore whether it holds the potential to boost EFL learners' language acquisition based on its instant messaging apps in synchronous voice chat (SVC) mode. With a focus on Chinese EFL learners, this study aimed to compare their speaking performance in SVC and face-to-face (F2F) chat modes. It also explored the relationship between learners' speaking performance and anxiety levels in these two chat modes which allow real-time communication. In this mixed methods study, WeChat instant messaging was used as the platform for SVC. Forty students from a public university in China participated in 4 chat sessions in SVC and F2F chat modes over 4 weeks. Quantitative data were collected through the oral scores of the participants' performance in the chat sessions and anxiety questionnaires. Then, qualitative data were obtained from a focus group interview. The findings revealed a significant difference in learners' speaking performance in SVC and F2F chat. Students' speaking performance outperformed in SVC chat compared to F2F chat. This could be linked to students' anxiety levels which were slightly higher in F2F chat. Despite that, most of the students preferred F2F chat to SVC chat due to the practicality of F2F chat.[1]

Keywords: speaking performance, foreign language anxiety, synchronous voice chat mobile learning

Introduction

Speaking is regarded as a social act which is crucial for people to communicate, exchange information, and build, as well as maintain longitudinal relationships with others. Thus, a good mastery of speaking skill would benefit learners' social engagement and academic achievement (Arung, 2016; Oruç & Demirci, 2020). In the context of language learning and teaching, speaking is identified as the most challenging and complex skill compared to listening, reading, and writing skills (Rao, 2018). This is because speaking involves observation, complex meaning construction, and preparation of an utterance at the same time. This process requires learners to decide the content and the time and place of communication while taking into account the interlocutor's diverse cultural and social backgrounds (Burns, 2019; Burns & Seidlhofer, 2002). Therefore, many learners often experience foreign-language anxiety (FLA), especially when the language used is not their first language and they are required to speak it in front of a group of people (Misqam & Saidalvi, 2019).

In China, a majority of EFL learners regardless of age, proficiency levels or language background experience anxiety when they speak English. In Liu and Jackson's (2008) Foreign Language Anxiety survey among Chinese undergraduate students, more than one-third of the participants stated that they felt anxious in their language classroom and more than half were scared of public speaking. Another study by Landström (2015) also found that a majority of Chinese senior high school students suffered from language anxiety. In his study, the students felt most anxious when they had to speak English when their language teachers were present in the classroom. Due to anxiety, most learners often chose to stay silent and refused to participate in oral activities during language classes. This unwillingness to speak and tendency to keep silent further impeded their language development.

[1] Dissertation information. The experiment data, data analysis and research instruments in this article are part of one of the author's master dissertation: Chen, Y. (2018). Speaking performance and anxiety levels of Chinese EFL learners in face-to-face and synchronous voice-based chat. [Unpublished master's dissertation]. Universiti Malaya.

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To make matters worse, Chinese EFL learners predominantly learn English in a context where the target language is seldom used, and the English classes are mainly teacher-centred and exam-oriented (Yang, Gamble & Tang, 2012; Wang, 2014). This has caused speaking skill to be overlooked and the learners' speaking ability is relatively incompetent even though they have undertaken long-term English training. The lack of language interaction and oral practice in the classroom might have caused Chinese EFL students to have lower self-confidence and higher anxiety towards speaking. In fact, a large number of Chinese students experience FLA in their language learning process, especially when they have to speak in front of a group of people. Woodrow (2006) even found Chinese learners to be more anxious than any other Asian students when conversing.

Based on the above-mentioned problems in speaking and learning environment, it is crucial to create a secure and comfortable environment for language learners to alleviate their English-speaking anxiety and practise spoken communication with confidence. As mobile technology becomes increasingly popular, this study investigates the potential of one of the main features of mobile applications, synchronous voice-based chat (SVC), in offering a conducive environment for language learners to practise and enhance their English speaking skills.

According to Jasim and Abuseileek (2015), SVC is defined as a type of chat system that allows people to communicate with others in real time using online voice messages. Some popular phone applications that allow SVC include WhatsApp, Telegram and WeChat. In China, WeChat has become the dominant multi-media platform for mobile-mediated communication (Gao et al., 2019; Qu et al., 2015; Wu, 2015). Therefore, it might provide a new way for learners to communicate in English using the multiple modes of text messaging, voice messaging, and moment sharing.

Even though several studies have explored learners' performance of vocabulary acquisition, repair moves and experience in the computer-mediated SVC environment, the quantity of published research on speaking anxiety in SVC chat mode is still meager (Bueno, 2013; Bueno, 2011; Jepson, 2005). Additionally, very few research has investigated the use of the WeChat instant messaging application tool and its effectiveness in improving speaking performance and lowering speaking anxiety within the Chinese context. Thus, there is a great need for more studies to explore the potential use of WeChat especially in developing Chinese EFL learners' speaking performance.

To better understand the affordances of SVC in terms of its impact on Chinese learners' anxiety level and speaking performance, its use in the WeChat application platform is compared to face-to-face (F2F). The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. To what extent do learners' speaking performances in face-to-face chat differ from synchronous voice chat experiences?
2. To what extent do learners' anxiety levels in face-to-face chat differ from synchronous voice chat experiences?
3. What is the relationship between learners' speaking performance and their anxiety levels in both face-to-face and synchronous voice chat?

Literature Review

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

Anxiety is one of the most influential factors that affect a learner's language development (Aydin, 2018). In 1986, Horwitz and Cope defined foreign language anxiety (FLA) as a distinct and complex form of anxiety which caused learners to have fear and negative emotional feelings when they are learning a language in a classroom setting. Similarly, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) described FLA as the anxiousness and nervousness experienced by learners when using a target language which they are not competent yet. From the above mentioned definitions, FLA can be also categorized under situation-specific anxiety (Aydin, 2008; Horwitz, 2001).

Anxiety may facilitate or hinder the language learning process (Aydin, 2018). To date, research findings generally show that anxiety negatively impacts foreign language learning process (Aydin, 2018; Ellis, 2012). As

explained by MacIntyre (1995, p.96), 'nervous students are focused on both the task at hand and their reactions to it…[they] will not learn as quickly as relaxed students'.

This is in accordance with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis (1985) which proposed that learning could only occur when a learner's affective filter is not blocking the process. People with low motivation, low self-confidence, and/or high anxiety levels tend to have higher affective filters, which hinders input and acquisition (Ellis, 2013). In this regard, his main tenets are:

- A raised affective filter can block input from reaching Language Acquisition Device (LAD).
- A lowered affective filter allows the learning input to "strike deeper" and the second language to be acquired.
- The affective filter is responsible for individual variation in second language acquisition,which means it is a variable that affects second language acquisition.

Based on Krashen's affective filter hypothesis (1985), anxiety can act as a barrier or "mental block" which hinders comprehensible input and language development. In consistence with the affective filter hypothesis, past studies in general have posited a negative relationship between anxiety and learning achievement (Cakici, 2016; Salehi & Marefar, 2014; Teimouri, Goetze & Plonsky, 2019). However, there are also studies such as Pichette (2009) and Zheng and Cheng (2018) which claimed that there was no relationship between anxiety and language achievement. In view of the inconsistent findings and a lack of attention paid to the use of technology (Aydin, 2018), there is a need for this study to explore how foreign language anxiety affects EFL learners' language performance in different settings, specifically the traditional face-to-face environment and technology-mediated environment which affords SVC. In this study, the learners' FLA in these different chat modes is explored with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis (1985) functioning as the theoretical basis.

Synchronous Voice-Based Chat (SVC)

SVC is believed to resemble face-to-face (F2F) communication more closely than text chat as it involves learners articulating their words rather than typing them out (Jung, 2018). In addition, SVC allows learners to have oral interactions in real-time. Participants could share ideas, answer messages, and relay other information in SVC (Sukrutrit, 2018). However, the response time in SVC could be slightly slower than F2F since it is mediated by internet connection and relayed with minimal time lag (Sukrutrit, 2018).

There are a few studies which have compared learners' performance in these similar but different chat modes like F2F, text chat and SVC. For instance, Jepson (2005) compared learners' repair moves in text and voice chat sessions. He found that participating learners in an SVC environment generated a higher number of pronunciation-related repair moves in their oral interactions. This study thus predicted the potential usefulness of SVC in improving learners' speaking performance, specifically in pronunciation. However, there is a need for empirical data to confirm the speaking achievements.

Baralt and Gurzynski-Weiss (2011) also explored learners' performance in different settings. Specifically, they examined learners' level of anxiety in F2F and synchronous text-based chat modes and found learners to be more anxious in F2F communication. This could be due to learners' need to respond quickly and the fear of making mistakes in front of others. In contrast, learners were found to be less anxious in text-based chat as they have more time to prepare their answers and need not face the people they are communicating with. Interestingly, compared to face-to-face communication, anxiety was not significantly lower in the CMC setting where learners engaged in synchronous text-based chat. One of the plausible reasons could be the small number of participants (25 participants) involved in this study.

Andújar-Vaca and Cruz-Martínez (2017) recruited 80 participants in their study and allowed them to choose among synchronous or asynchronous, text-based or voice-based communication methods on the WhatsApp platform. Learners' speaking performance was assessed according to Hughes' (2003) general proficiency speaking scale. Significant improvements in speaking proficiency were found among students who were in synchronous text-chat and voice-chat groups. The findings of this study suggests that synchronous chat may be more effective than asynchronous chat in improving learners' speaking skills. Unfortunately, it is unclear whether synchronous text chat or voice chat is more effective in enhancing learners' speaking performance.

To find out if synchronous text chat or voice chat is more advantageous, Ehsan et al. (2021) and Satar and Özdener (2008) have conducted experiments to assess the impact of chat settings on learners' speaking proficiency as well as levels of anxiety. The findings showed that students' speaking proficiency increased in both chat groups. However, learners' anxiety levels were lower in the text chat group. This result could be because text chat, while similar to spoken language, does not require the use of articulators. For this reason, their assessment of speaking performance through a comparison of non-vocal text chat and voice chat might not be convincing. A study which compares learners' anxiety level and speaking performance in face-to-face and SVC may reveal a better understanding of learners' speaking performance in different chat environments.

It is also worthy to note that York, Shibata Tokutake and Nakayama (2021) have recently compared the impact of voice chat, video chat and virtual reality (VR) chat on thirty Japanese students' FLA. All these three modes were able to reduce participants' FLA but the differences were not statistically significant.On the other hand, Bueno (2011) and Kim (2017) found learners to show positive attitudes towards SVC. These learners did not only experience lower level of anxiety and stress but also showed statistically significant improvement in their speaking tests. This positive findings about SVC prompts the current study to further investigate the potential of synchronous voice chat by comparing it to face-to-face communication.

Overall, studies have found advantages in using synchronous voice-based communication to improve learners' oral performance such as learners' pronunciation-related repair moves (Jepson, 2005), speaking proficiency (Andújar-Vaca & Cruz-Martínez, 2017, Bueno, 2011; Eshan et al., 2021; Kim, 2017; Satar & Özdener, 2008), speaking fluency and vocabulary acquisition (Jaramillo Chérrez, 2007). However, there are studies that have not found significant improvement in learners' speaking ability (e.g., Baralt & Gurzynski-Weiss, 2011; Bueno, 2011; Seferoglu, 2007). As for the differences of learners' anxiety levels in SVC, text chat and face-to-face chat, the results are inconsistent (Baralt & Gurzynski-Weiss, 2011; Bueno, 2011; Eshan et al., 2021; Kim, 2017).

For these reasons, more studies are needed to explore the relationship between anxiety and language performance in different environments. The present study aims to fill the gap in current literature by examining EFL learners' speaking performances in relation to aspects such as pronunciation, grammar, and fluency within the context of China by comparing the use of SVC in WeChat application with F2F communication. Since anxiety levels may affect learners' speaking performance, the present study also looked into Chinese EFL learners' anxiety while they practise their speaking skills in F2F and SVC conditions.

Methodology

Research Design

This study applied a mixed-methods approach. As Creswell and Guetterman (2019) suggest, a mixed-method study allows researchers to answer questions in depth and present a more comprehensive research result. Thus, it can provide a better understanding of the problems compared to either a quantitative or qualitative method.

In this study, an explanatory sequential design was employed. Based on this design, quantitative data were first collected from a quasi-experiment which involved participants interacting in both face-to-face and SVC environments as well as two anxiety questionnaires which elicited learners' anxiety levels in different chat conditions. Then, qualitative data were gathered from a focus group interview to provide supporting details (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Participants

To select the participants, a background survey was administered to the first-year students from the School of Foreign Languages at a public university in China. In using the background survey, 40 first-year students who were familiar with WeChat and possessed intermediate level of English language proficiency were selected to participate in this study. All the participants (female = 39, male = 1) were Chinese native speakers majoring in English and their age ranged from 19 to 21 years old.All these 40 students were randomly grouped into Group 1 and Group 2. These matched-samples groups (Group 1 and Group 2) experienced both chat conditions (F2F vs SVC) alternately according to the schedule in Table 1 (see *Procedure*).

Research Instruments

Background Survey

According to Mackey and Gass (2015), a background survey is widely used in educational research in order to match the participants to the research focus. In this study, a background survey was administered to select participants with similar characteristics.

The background survey of this study consisted of three parts. Part one elicited participants' basic demographic information such as name, age, gender, and email address. Part two contained questions about participants' English language ability (overall scores of both their entrance and oral exams) while part three asked learners about their usage frequency of WeChat.

Based on the learners' response in the background survey, the researcher selected 40 students whose English was at the Intermediate Level (a score between 90 and 120 out of 150 based on their university entrance exam), and who consistently used WeChat on a frequent, daily basis.

Oral Tasks and Scales

Because both decision-making and problem-solving tasks have been identified as ideal triggers to elicit learners' oral communication (Tam, 2009), the present study selected two decision-making tasks, (Task A, Task B); and two problem-solving tasks, (Task C, Task D). The oral tasks were adapted from studies by Tam (2009) and Chérrez (2007).

Task A and Task B were similar in their scope of asking participants to plan two different kinds of tours according to the given criteria, using dyad discussion. In Tasks C and D, participants had to explain their understanding of the background causes and possible solutions to two current social issues, (unemployment and the leftover or unmarried women phenomenon). The topics were chosen because they were of interest to students and were widely discussed in Chinese society. In this way, it was ensured that all participants would have prior knowledge about the assigned questions.

Hughe's (2003) oral assessment scale was used in this study. Based on the marking guideline, the participants' speaking performances were determined by totaling the points from five categories (grammar, fluency, pronunciation, organization, and vocabulary). The possible scores in each category ranged from 6 to 36.

Anxiety Questionnaires

In order to identify the differences between learners' anxiety levels in F2F and SVC settings, anxiety questionnaires from Satar and Özdener's (2008) study were adapted. Each questionnaire contained 7 questions dealing with students' anxious feelings in F2F and SVC chat environments, respectively. Questionnaire 1 was for F2F chat while Questionnaire 2 was for those involved in SVC.

In order to match the questionnaires with the current research focus and context, the researcher changed the phrase "text chat" of Satar and Özdener's (2008) questionnaire to "face-to-face chat;" and "Foreign language" to "English." Some questions that had less relevance to students' anxiety and speaking were not used in this study. The researcher also modified the 3-point Likert scale to a 5-point Likert scale to increase response accuracy and provide participants more options to present their opinions. Since each questionnaire consisted of seven questions regarding learners' anxiety, the scores ranged from 7 to 35, according to the five Likert-point scale.

To ensure that the modified SVC and F2F anxiety questionnaires were suitable and reliable, a pilot study was conducted on 6 first-year students from the same university who shared the similar characteristics as the participants of this research (intermediate level of language proficiency, frequent users of WeChat, 19 to 20 years old). The Cronbach's alpha value for the adapted SVC anxiety questionnaire was $\alpha = 0.75$, and the adapted F2F anxiety questionnaire was $\alpha = 0.8$.

Procedure

Before the experiment, a briefing session was held to explain the experiment and to distribute consent forms and background surveys to the first-year EFL university students. Based on the background survey, 40 participants who possessed similar pre-identified characteristics (intermediate level of English language proficiency, frequent users of WeChat, similar age group) were selected to participate in this study. These selected participants were randomly divided into two matched-samples groups; Group 1 and Group 2. Each group consisted of 20 participants as the language lab that was used to record F2F chat could only accommodate a maximum of 20 students at one time. The schedule of the oral tasks is as follows:

Table 1

Schedule for Oral Tasks

Session	*Chat mode*	*Group*	*Oral Tasks*
1	F2F	Group 1	task A - break - task C
2	SVC	Group 2	task A - break- task C
3	SVC	Group 1	task B - break- task D
4	F2F	Group 2	task B - break - task D

In sessions 1 and 3, Group 1 finished two F2F tasks and two SVC tasks consecutively. In sessions 2 and 4, Group 2 finished the two SVC oral tasks and then the two F2F tasks.

In F2F setting, the participants sat in separate areas provided by the faculty at the lab. This prevented external interruptions. For the SVC dyads, each pair created a WeChat group with the researcher who was not their instructor, so that she could help to coordinate the chat activities. The participants then held their chats within their own WeChat group, and voice messages were automatically stored in their mobile phones. No limitations were placed on where they could be during the SVC chat, except that the environment needed to be quiet enough for a clear recording.

Since decision-making and problem-solving tasks have been identified as ideal triggers to elicit learners' oral communication (Jaramillo Chérrez, 2007; Tam, 2009), the present study selected two decision-making tasks (Task A and Task B) and two problem-solving tasks (Task C and Task D) as speaking activities. Task A and Task B required participants to plan two different kinds of tours according to the given criteria. On the other hand, participants had to explain their understanding of the current social issues and find possible solutions in Tasks C and D. All these tasks were adapted from studies by Tam (2009) and Jaramillo Chérrez (2007).

The researcher handed out the task sheets to the participants five minutes before the start of the activity. This was done so that they could read the instructions and be prepared. Then, each pair was given 15 minutes to complete an oral task, either face-to-face or SVC. After each task, the participants would then take a 15-minute break and continue with a different oral task but still within the same interactional setting. Before the end of each session, participants were required to answer an anxiety questionnaire.

Participants' speaking performances under the F2F and SVC conditions were assessed by two experienced colleagues. One of them is a lecturer with more than 30 years of teaching and evaluation experience in the field of advanced oral English for Chinese EFL learners. The other assessor is an EFL teacher with more than ten years of overseas teaching experience. The participants' oral scores were marked in using Hughe's (2003) oral assessment scale. The scorings of these two experts showed an inter-rater reliability of 0.9, which indicated their consistencies and similarities in marking.

Lastly, after the 4-week experiment, a focus group interview was conducted among five willing participants to gain further insight into the participants' experience of anxiety in both the F2F and SVC environments. The participants (3 from group 1, 2 from group 2) shared their opinions and feelings about going through the oral tasks within the two different chat conditions. The interview was conducted in Mandarin, the participants' mother tongue. The video transcript of this interview was then translated into English and the translation was

checked for accuracy by an experienced and qualified English lecturer. The English translation was then utilized for the qualitative analysis.

Data Analysis

To find out the differences of learners' speaking performance in F2F and SCV, the participants' speaking performances were firstly determined by totaling the points from the five parameters (pronunciation, grammar, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). Then, the researcher performed a paired-samples t-test using SPSS version 25 software to determine whether there was a significant difference between learners' speaking performance when they were involved in F2F and SVC chat conditions. In this study, the Kolmogorov-Smirnova statistic indicated a normal distribution of the data collected from participants' speaking performance in SVC chat (Sig. = .143) and F2F chat (Sig. = .200*). The speaking anxiety levels were also normally distributed in SVC chat (Sig. = .075) and F2F chat (Sig. =.200*).The normality test indicated a normal distribution for the data collected from learners' speaking and anxiety levels. Thus, the parametric statistics (the paired-samples t-test) was used in this study.

The participants' anxiety levels were generated from the anxiety questionnaires concerning their emotions in F2F and SVC conditions. Since each questionnaire consisted of seven questions regarding learners' anxiety, the scores ranged from 7 to 35, according to the five Likert-point scale. A higher score indicates a higher level of anxiety. A paired-samples t-test was run to check whether there was a significant difference in learners' anxiety levels between the two chat modes (F2F and SVC).

After that, a Pearson Correlation Test was conducted on the participants' oral scores and anxiety score to understand the relationship between learners' speaking performance and anxiety levels in F2F and SVC mode.

To gain insights into learners' speaking performance and anxiety level in different chat conditions, the data gathered from the focus group interview was analysed using open coding strategies. Relevant themes from the interview transcripts were identified and coded.

Results and Discussions

Learners' Speaking Performance in Face-to-face Chat and Synchronous Voice Chat

To answer the first research question of whether learners' speaking performance in F2F chat differ from SVC chat, a paired-samples T-test was performed. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Differences of Learners' Speaking Performance in F2F and SVC

		Paired Differences						
			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
	Chat mode	***Mean decrease***	***Lower***	***Upper***	***t***	***df***	***Sig. (2-tailed)***	***Eta Squared***
Pronunciation	SVC F2F	.575	.315	.835	4.473	39	.000	.35
Grammar	SVC F2F	.575	.385	.765	6.119	39	.000	.49
Vocabulary	SVC F2F	.675	.420	.930	5.356	39	.000	.42
Fluency	SVC F2F	.825	.555	1.095	6.183	39	.000	.50
Comprehension	SVC F2F	1.550	1.300	1.800	12.523	39	.000	.80
Overall scores	SVC F2F	3.425	2.649	4.20	18.924	39	.000	.90

According to Table 2, there was a statistically significant difference between the learners' oral performance in SVC and F2F chat in each assessed component, (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension).

In the participants' pronunciation performance, there was a statistically significant difference in the pronunciation scores of participants who engaged in SVC chat (M=3.78, SD=.77) and F2F chat (M=3.20, SD=.91), t (39) = 4.473, *p*<. 0005 (two-tailed). The participants achieved higher pronunciation scores in SVC than in F2F chat. The mean decrease in overall scores was .575 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .315 to .835. The eta squared statistic (.35) indicated a large effect size. This finding is in congruence with Jepson (2005) who found learners to have better pronunciation in SVC than in F2F chat.

Looking at the participants' performance in grammar, there was a statistically significant difference in learners' grammar scores when they took part in SVC chat (M=4.08, SD=.53) and F2F chat (M=3.5, SD=.56), t (39) = 6.119, *p*<.0005 (two-tailed). The participants achieved higher grammar scores in SVC than in F2F chat. The mean decrease in overall scores was .575 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .385 to .765. The eta squared statistic (.49) indicated a large effect size. As explained by Participant No. 39 in the following extract, learners' scores in grammar and pronunciation could be better in SVC as they have the time to pay attention to these aspects.

> In SVC, my attention could be placed too much on grammar and pronunciations.
>
> (Participant No. 39)

Apart from pronunciation and grammar, the participants' vocabulary performance also showed a statistically significant difference when they participated in SVC chat (M=3.80, SD=.61) and F2F chat (M=3.13, SD=.77), t (39) = 5.356, p<.0005 (two-tailed). Similar to Chérrez (2007), the participants in this study achieved higher vocabulary scores in SVC than in F2F chat. The mean decrease in overall scores was .675 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .420 to .930. The eta squared statistic (.42) indicated a large effect size. SVC may be more beneficial in allowing learners to explore new vocabularies as expressed by Participant 39 in the interview session:

> While I think SVC would be more helpful. F2F conversations merely depend on the extent of our vocabulary. If we don't have enough words to say in face to face, the conversations cannot continue. In contrast, SVC would be a driving force for us to explore some new words, materials while chatting. Therefore, our knowledge can be expanded in SVC.
>
> (Participant No. 39)

When it comes to the participants' speaking fluency, there was also a statistically significant difference in the fluency scores of SVC chat (M=4.28, SD=.56) and F2F chat (M=3.45, SD=.78), t (39) = 6.183, p<.0005 (two-tailed). In line with Chérrez (2007), the participants were found to achieve higher fluency scores in SVC than in F2F chat. The mean decrease in overall scores was .825 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .555 to 1.095. The eta squared statistic (.50) indicated a large effect size. The following excerpts from Participants 12 and 27 further illuminates the challenges faced by learners in face-to-face chat which may have in turn affected their fluency scores.

> I think the challenges in F2F would be the reaction time and vocabulary problems.
>
> (Participant No. 12)

> In F2F, limited vocabulary affects our speaking performance as our expressions could not go in-depth.
>
> (Participant No. 27)

In SVC chat (M=5.00, SD=.00) and F2F chat (M=3.45, SD=.78), t (39) = 12.523, *p*<.0005 (two-tailed), the participants' comprehension scores also showed a statistically significant difference. The participants' achieved higher comprehension scores in SVC than in F2F chat. The mean decrease in overall scores was 1.55 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 1.30 to 1.80. The eta squared statistic (η^2 =.80) indicated a large effect size.

In conclusion, there was a statistically significant difference in the overall scores of SVC chat (M=20.93, SD=1.62) to F2F chat (M=17.5, SD=2.65), t (39) = 18.924, *p<.0005* (two-tailed). In other words, the participants'

achieved higher scores of speaking in SVC than in F2F chat. The mean decrease in overall scores was 3.425 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 2.649 to 4.20. The eta squared statistic (.90) indicated a large effect size.

Overall, the findings showed that learners' speaking performance in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension was better in SVC than in F2F chat. One of the reasons could be that SVC chat requires learners to speak with greater accuracy than F2F chats where speakers can rely on other cues for mutual comprehension (Andújar-Vaca & Cruz-Martínez, 2017). However, it is interesting to find that the participants in this study still prefer F2F chat, even though they have better performance in all the 5 parameters of speaking in SVC chat. This could be due to learners' individual differences such as their personality, preferred learning styles and strategies (Chew & Ng, 2021).

Learners' Anxiety Levels in Face-to-face chat and Synchronous Voice Chat

To find out learners' anxiety levels in SVC and F2F chat, a paired-samples T-test was performed. The results are shown below in Table 3.

Table 3

Difference of Leaners' Anxiety levels in F2F and SVC

		Paired Differences					
			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
	Chat mode	*Mean decrease*	*Lower*	*Upper*	*t*	*df*	*Sig. (2-tailed)*
Anxiety levels	SVC F2F	-3.37	-4.904	-1.846	- 4.465	39	.000

According to Table 3, there was a statistically significant difference in learners' anxiety level in SVC chat (M=18.70, SD=4.858) and F2F chat (M=22.08, SD=5.322), t (39) = -4.465, $p<.0005$ (two-tailed). The eta squared statistic (.33) indicated a large effect size. This indicates that the participants were less anxious in synchronous voice-based chat. There are a few reasons why participants felt less anxious in SVC. The reasons shared by the interview respondents are as follows:

> In using SVC, I had a short time to check for proper words and prepare quickly. This made me feel safe.
>
> (Participant No. 11)

> SVC chat made me feel less anxious in speaking as I didn't feel there was a rush to finish the speaking tasks.
>
> (Participant No. 40)

In line with Kim (2017), the Chinese EFL learners were less anxious in SVC as they could be more prepared in the online setting and they were less worried about making mistakes since they could not see others' reactions. In addition, the learners could cancel their voice messages that were not good enough and try again. This increased their confidence in the oral tasks.

Details of participants' response to the items in anxiety questionnaires are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Findings from Anxiety Questionnaire (N=40)

Item	*Chat Mode*	*SD %*	*D %*	*NAD %*	*A %*	*SA %*
1. The fact that we were completing the activities using F2F / SVC chat caused communication problems.	F2F	2.5	35	25	37.5	0
	SVC	7.5	45	37.5	10	0
2. The fact that we were completing the activities using F2F / SVC chat made it difficult to think before I said something	F2F	7.5	27.5	22.5	37.5	5
	SVC	10	57.5	20	10	2.5
3. Because we were completing the activities using F2F/ SVC chat, I was worried about my pronunciation.	F2F	2.5	17.5	20	37.5	22.5
	SVC	10	37.5	17.5	27.5	7.5
4. It frightened me when I didn't understand what my partner was saying by F2F/ SVC chat.	F2F	17.5	17.5	22	37.5	2.5
	SVC	10	20	17.5	45	7.5
5. Even if I was well prepared for speaking tasks in foreign class, I felt anxious about having F2F / SVC chat with my partner.	F2F	12.5	32.5	12.5	35.5	7.5
	SVC	12.5	60	12.5	15	0
6. I feared to pronounce words incorrectly when I had F2F / SVC chat with my partner.	F2F	10	17.5	20	47.5	5
	SVC	12.5	25	25	27.5	10
7. I felt nervous when I couldn't express myself in English in front of my partner by F2F / SVC.	F2F	7.5	12.5	20	30	30
	SVC	7.5	22.5	35	22.5	12.5

Note. SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; NAD = Neither Agree nor Disagree; A = Agree; SA= Strongly Agree

With reference to item 1, 37.5% of participants responded that F2F chat caused communication problems. However, only 10% of them faced the same problems in SVC chat.

Referring to item 2, more participants (67.5%) stated that they had no difficulty in thinking before talking in SVC chat. For items 3 and 6, more participants were worried about their pronunciation in F2F chat (60%) than in SVC (35%). They feared wrong pronunciation in F2F chat (52.5%) more than in SVC chat (37.5%).

In contrast, findings from questionnaire item 4 show that 52.5% felt frightened of not understanding their partners in SVC chat, compared to 39.5% of the participants in F2F chat. This could be due to technological concerns about faulty connections and poor sound quality when using SVC. In addition, face-to-face communication could facilitate better understanding compared to SVC since it provides non-verbal cues such as body language and facial expressions, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> *We had many other ways to help us express meaning that are only available when speaking F2F… Even though we might not express ourselves with proper words, I could also understand my partner through her facial expressions and body languages.*
>
> *(Participant No. 39)*

Nonetheless, the participants generally showed a preference for SVC chat. As shown in items 5 and 7, only 15% of the students felt anxious in SVC when they were prepared, compared to the 35.5% in F2F chat. Likewise, a higher percentage of participants felt nervous about expressing themselves in F2F chat (60%) than in SVC (34.5%). This scenario is exemplified by Participant 11 in the following excerpt.

> *I felt a bit nervous in F2F as I could not express myself accurately in the short time. Also, I felt upset that my speaking sometimes was not understandable for my partner.*
>
> *(Participant No. 11)*

All in all, there were higher percentages of participants who felt more anxious in F2F chat than in SVC. This was because the face-to-face setting made them more worried of not being able to express themselves clearly and pronounce their words accurately. This finding is in line with the study of Ellis (2012) who found that learners tend to be more bothered by their pronunciation and were more afraid of getting negative comments from others in face-to-face interactions. It is also interesting to note that the feeling of anxiety did not only occur in F2F communication but also in SVC as the participants in this study mentioned that they were apprehensive about being misunderstood since the facial expressions and body languages were missing in SVC.

The Relationship between Learners' Speaking Performance and their Anxiety Levels in Face-to-face and Synchronous Voice Chat

Pearson Correlation Coefficient was conducted to investigate the relationship between learners' speaking performances and their anxiety levels in different chat conditions. The results are shown in Table 5 and Table 6.

Table 5

Correlations between Speaking Performance and Anxiety Levels in F2F Chat

		Total oral scores of F2F chat	***Total anxiety scores of F2F chat***
Total oral scores of F2F chat	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-.428**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006
	N	40	40
Total anxiety scores of F2F chat	Pearson Correlation	-.428**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	
	N	40	40

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 5, a medium negative correlation was found between the two variables, r= -*.428***, n= 40, *p*< .0005. This means that higher levels of anxiety were associated with lower scores of speaking performance in the F2F chat.

Table 6

Correlations between Speaking Performance and Anxiety Levels in SVC

		Total oral scores of SVC	***Total anxiety scores of SVC***
Total oral scores of SVC	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.498
	N	40	40
Total anxiety scores of SVC	Pearson Correlation	-.110	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.498	
	N	40	40

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 presents the correlations found between the students' speaking performances and anxiety levels in the SVC chat mode.In this case, there was only a small negative correlation between the two variables, r =-.110, n=40, *p*<.0005. While a higher level of anxiety was associated with lower scores of speaking performance in SVC chat, the strength of the negative correlation was small (r=-.110). Since the negative correlation was stronger in F2F chat, (r = -.428) than in SVC chat, (r = -.110), the F2F chat environment might have a stronger influence than SVC chat environment.

In sum, there was a negative correlation between the learners' levels of anxiety and their speaking performance in both F2F and SVC conditions. The participants attributed their lower levels of anxiety during SVC chat to them feeling more comfortable and having less concern about making mistakes. This finding is in line with Karakis (2020) and Teimouri, Goetze and Plonsky (2019) who found a negative and close relationship between anxiety levels and learning achievement. However, it differed from Zheng and Cheng (2018) as they did not find FLA to significantly affect language performance. Based on the affective filter hypothesis, a lower affective filter enables better learning achievement (Ellis, 2012; Krashen, 1981).

This is also in accord with Gregersen's (2003) observation that anxious students made more errors in their performance.

Conclusion

This study found that chat environment played a crucial role in learners' performance. Specifically, SVC environment is found beneficial in reducing Chinese EFL learners' speaking anxiety and improving their speaking performance. This is because students felt relatively comfortable, relaxed and less anxious in performing a dialogue. They did not feel the pressure to give immediate feedback, and this released them from fears that hinder vocabulary production and fluency. Therefore, it would be helpful for language instructors and users to utilize SVC communication mode both inside and outside the classroom, rather than simply depending on F2F interactions in the classroom.

It should be noted that the sample size of this study is relatively small and the participants are mainly females. Therefore, future studies could involve more participants and recruit an equal number of male and female participants. It would also be interesting to explore the effects of different types of groups on learners' speaking performances and anxiety levels in both F2F and SVC platforms. For example, future research could carry out large group discussions or include chats between EFL students and native English speakers.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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Appendix

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. In your opinion, which chat modes (F2F, SVC) is more helpful for your speakingperformance?
2. What are the speaking challenges that you faced in F2F and SVC chat respectively?
3. How did you feel about your speaking experience in F2F chat?
4. How did you feel about your speaking experience in SVC chat?
5. In which chat modes did you feel less anxious of speaking English?

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Gómez-Parra, M.-E., Golubeva, I., & Espejo Mohedano, R. (2021). Design and Validation of a Questionnaire for the Measurement of Students' Perceptions of Intercultural Practices within Bilingual Secondary Schools in the European Context. *Journal of Language and Education, 7*(3), 58-75. https://doi.org/10.17323/jle.2021.11516

Design and Validation of a Questionnaire for the Measurement of Students' Perceptions of Intercultural Practices within Bilingual Secondary Schools in the European Context

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Bilingual education (BE) is widely recognised as a complex phenomenon, which constitutes a priority for key educational institutions and organisations. However, further research is needed to uproot common beliefs such as that bilingual students can easily interact with two or more cultures. The literature affirms that BE students need specific school training to improve intercultural competence. The main aim of this study is to describe the design and validation of a questionnaire to measure students' perceptions of intercultural practices at bilingual schools. The validity of content and comprehension was carried out through the Delphi method, for which three methodological phases were established. The reliability of the scale (internal consistency) was measured through the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Factorial analysis was used to check the validity of the construct. The psychometric parameters of the scale were obtained from a pilot sample of 40 students, and later from a sample of 213 students from bilingual secondary schools in several European countries (i.e., The Netherlands, Hungary, Germany, France, England, Spain, and Poland, among others). As a major conclusion, we can state that this questionnaire can be used as a tool for two research goals: (1) the identification of good intercultural school practices in BE, and (2) the development of relevant guidelines for the incorporation of intercultural education into BE.

***Keywords*:** bilingual education, classroom research, intercultural practices, Delphi method, research methodology

Introduction

The main goal of this research is to design a questionnaire to measure students' perceptions of intercultural practices within bilingual secondary schools. Therefore, the main objectives set to accomplish this goal are: (1) to establish the validity of the content of this questionnaire through consensus and agreement from an international panel of experts by applying the Delphi method; (2) to confirm the validity of comprehension by delivering this questionnaire among a pilot sample of 40 secondary education international students; and (3) to analyse the validity and reliability of the questionnaire with a final sample of 213 students from several European countries (i.e., The Netherlands, Hungary, Germany, France, England, Spain and Poland, among others). These countries share similar language education conceptions endorsed by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*[1], so their language policies foster plurilingual and pluricultural competences in the educational curriculum of their citizens.

We will discuss herein the theoretical foundations and main procedural steps towards the building, pilotage, and validation of a questionnaire to measure students' perceived secondary education intercultural school practices. The language of the distributed questionnaire was English (see Appendix).

[1] Council of Europe. (2018). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. A Companion Volume with New Descriptors. https://cutt.ly/AjxoVFh.

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This study is contextualised on the intrinsic relationship between language and culture, which is widely accepted among educators who work in bilingual and intercultural contexts (Byram, 2012). As Porto (2013, p. 158) states, "language-and-culture (conceptualized as 'intercultural education') can and should become part of *all* educators' practices, irrespective of the disciplines they teach".

Bilingual education stands at the heart of international educational policies due to the array of benefits that it can convey: cognitive (Bialystok, 2001; Castro, Ayankoya, & Kasprzak, 2011; Christoffels et al., 2015; Genesee, 1987; Jessner, 2008); socio-cultural (Romanowski, 2018); linguistic (Cazden, Snow, & Heise-Baigorria, 1990); and neurolinguistic (the Brainglot project[2], n.d.; Rodríguez-Pujadas, Sanjuán, Fuentes, Ventura-Campos, Barrós-Loscertales, & Ávila, 2014); not to mention the improvement in job-access opportunities for bilingual employees (Callahan & Gándara, 2016; Schluessel, 2007; Tsung, 2009).

Gómez-Parra (2021) defines bilingual education as:

> [...] a broad term that designates the approaches, methodologies, processes, materials, and actors (we cannot forget that the educational community is an actor as a whole) that aim to form bilingual speakers, capable of accessing and mastering a complex linguistic and cultural code that is, at the very least, binary (that is, where elements appear that these speakers can formalise in at least two different codes but that form the same semantic construct). (Gómez-Parra, 2021, p. 37. Translation by the authors from the original in Spanish).

The success of a bilingual programme lies, among other factors, in the interdependence between language and culture. As Brisk (1999, p. 2) declared: "A successful bilingual program develops students' language and literacy proficiency, leads them in successful academic achievement, and nurtures sociocultural integration". Evidence suggests that, at present, the situation of intercultural learning post-secondary is variable, with excellent examples of good practices (e.g., including those facilitated by the Erasmus study abroad programme) but also some limited momentum in others. Teaching should be made effective enough to integrate languages and culture, an idea which has been developing since the growth of content-based instruction at the end of the 20th century (Short, 1994). Thus, acknowledging that the students' second language (L2) communicative competence is being measured on a regular basis by both the school (e.g., L2 exams) and relevant international institutions (i.e., millions of international language certificate exams – e.g., IELTS or TOEFL – are issued yearly by specialised institutions such as Cambridge University,[3] the British Council,[4] Trinity College,[5] or Oxford University,[6] among others), it is important to measure to what extent the most relevant worldwide educational institution (the school) is successfully accomplishing one of its important tasks: the effective implementation of intercultural practices in secondary education (Santos Rego & Moledo, 2005). Education and training can help students develop their intercultural sensitivity (Straffon, 2003). In this same sense, Senge (2010, p. 148) stated: "If you believe that the shifts ahead will be cultural, not just technical, the potential role of education looms large".

Hence, the development of this assessment instrument aims at covering the gap identified between the level of L2 communicative competence (usually assessed) and the level of interculture (rarely assessed), supported by the review of the literature, which on the one hand identifies the underdevelopment of the intercultural axis within bilingual education (Griva & Kasvikis 2014; Méndez-García, 2012, among others), and, on the other hand, underlines the relevant role of bilingual education in the 21st century (Senge, 2010).

The Rationale of the Research Problem

There are some studies that analyse bilingual education from students' perspectives (e.g., Ramírez-Verdugo, & Gerena, 2020), but to our best knowledge, none offers an instrument that could assess students' perceptions.

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[2] The Brainglot Project. (n.d.). http://brainglot.upf.edu

[3] Cambridge University. (n.d.). *Cambridge Assessment.* https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/

[4] British Council. (n.d.). *British Council and Assessment.* https://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/projects/assessment-literacy/introducing-language-assessment-0

[5] Trinity College London. (n.d.). *GESE Graded Examinations in English*. https://www.trinitycollege.com/qualifications/english-language/GESE

[6] Oxford University Press. (n.d.). *Oxford Test of English.* https://elt.oup.com/feature/global/oxford_test_of_english/?cc=es&selLanguage=en

The main rationale that supports the building of a questionnaire to assess students' perceptions of intercultural practices within bilingual secondary schools can be explained as follows:

(a) The literature confirms that bilingual education is prioritised by international institutions and organisms, such as UNESCO[7], the Council of Europe[8], and national European Ministries of Education (e.g., Hernández & Halbach, 2012).

Fishman (1989, p. 447) states: "If this view is to be developed then, bilingual education must justify itself philosophically as education", which was reformulated by Paulston (1992, p. 80) as "unless we try in some way to account for the socio-historical, cultural, and economic–political factors which lead to certain forms of bilingual education, we will never understand the consequences of that education". Bilingualism is defined by Hamers and Blanc (2000, p. 6) as "the state of a linguistic community in which two languages are in contact with the result that two codes can be used in the same interaction and that a number of individuals are bilingual". Nevertheless, bilingualism is not automatically equated to biculturalism (Grosjean, 2008; 2010), and to being intercultural (Byram, 2002, 2008, 2021; Byram & Golubeva, 2020), which poses a relevant question: Is the system educating the next generation of bilingual students as intercultural youngsters?

(b) From early childhood to higher education, bilingual education in Europe is mostly backed up by the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach (Coyle, 2008), where languages and content are equally fostered. Culture is one of the four axes of this approach (4Cs: Content, Cognition, Communication, and Culture) (Coyle, 2008, pp. 103–104), although its implementation should be improved at the classroom level (Gómez-Parra, 2020).

(c) European secondary education youngsters constitute a big population whose selection has been considered appropriate due to the importance of measuring intercultural school practices for cohorts of students where migration flows are increasing[9].

(d) Lastly, to build a specific instrument (a questionnaire) for this population can help researchers obtain different sets of data to be compared and provide interesting insights on the way intercultural education is implemented across the European secondary schools' curricula.

Theoretical Background

Bilingual Education and CLIL

Bilingual education is the most prevalent approach in the world, with CLIL becoming the all-pervading European acronym for bilingual education. As Cenoz (2014, p. 243) puts it:

> The term Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) was launched in Europe in the 1990s by a group of experts from different backgrounds, including educational administrators, researchers, and practitioners (Marsh 2002). Since then, the European Commission and the Council of Europe have funded many initiatives in support of CLIL because it responded to a need in Europe for enhancing second-language (L2) education and bilingualism.

CLIL has played a leading role in the bilingual education programmes across the European school system since the term was coined by the European Commission in 1994 (Cenoz, 2015; Eurydice, 2006; Marsh, 2002; Roquet & Pérez-Vidal, 2015). CLIL has become an 'umbrella term' (Haataja, 2007) covering more than a dozen educational approaches, to describe the one where learning a subject (content) is done through the medium of a foreign language. This approach seeks to integrate four main pillars that are summarised by Coyle (2005) in the '4Cs paradigm' (Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture). Nevertheless, the implementation of the intercultural axis of CLIL (Coyle, 2009) is not considered a big success nowadays (Gómez-Parra, 2020) and

[7] UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). (2003). Education in a multilingual world. UNESCO Education Position Paper. UNESCO. https://cutt.ly/8jxoxcE.

[8] Council of Europe. (2003). Bilingual education: Some policy issues. Council of Europe – Language Policy Division.

[9] OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). (2014). Migration policy debates. https://cutt.ly/HjxonTo.

the literature claims the need to establish a paradigm where culture stands at the core of bilingual education (Gómez-Parra, 2016).

Bilingual and Intercultural Education (BIE)

A plethora of researchers have confirmed the importance of bilingual and intercultural education (BIE) (Gómez-Parra, 2016; Méndez-García, 2012; Pérez-Cañado, 2012; Ramos-García, 2011). Moreover, the international community has acknowledged the benefits of the implementation of BIE, and suggests *placing intercultural competence at the core* of CLIL or bilingual lessons. UNESCO[10] defines the three principles of its position as follows:

(a) UNESCO supports mother tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers.

(b) UNESCO supports bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies.

(c) UNESCO supports language as an essential component of intercultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights.

The goals that UNESCO identifies for bilingual education are deeply intertwined with those of intercultural education[11], where the terms 'culture', 'quality', 'social', 'learner', 'education', 'knowledge', 'respect', and 'understanding' can be found and constitute the basis of the six principles altogether:

> Principle I. Intercultural education respects the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all.
>
> *Principle II.* Intercultural education provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society.
>
> *Principle III.* Intercultural education provides all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding, and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural, and religious groups and nations.

These principles echo Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which consists of five components that Byram calls '*savoirs'*: (1) *les savoirs* (i.e., knowledge), (2) *savoir* être (i.e., attitudes of relativizing the self and valuing others), (3) *savoir comprendre* (i.e., skills of interpreting and relating), (4) *savoir apprendre/faire* (i.e., skills of discovering and interacting), and (5) *savoir s'engager* (i.e., critical cultural awareness) (Byram 1997, pp. 50–53). The central component of this model – *critical cultural awareness* – emphasises that learning languages for real communication should be a process of meaningful interaction: "learners need not just knowledge and skill in the grammar of a language but also the ability to use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways" (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002, p. 4).

Although at the theoretical level it is not questioned that IC is an inseparable aspect of foreign language teaching (including bilingual education and CLIL), its classroom implementation needs improvement (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006). UNESCO[12] presented an operational plan on how to promote intercultural competences through clarifying, teaching, enacting, and supporting them. This document emphasises the idea that "the practice of interculturalism must become part of the fabric of daily social life." (UNESCO, 2013, p. 32).

In 1997, Hallett developed a model for acquiring IC in bilingual education. This model consists of three elements: (1) aspects of students' own culture; (2) aspects of the target language culture; and (3) intercultural aspects, which cover global phenomena (Hallett, 1997, p. 2). Hallett's model of the *Bilingual Triangle* is also applicable to the CLIL approach. Both the role of interculture and the enhancement of intercultural competence

[10] UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). (2003). Education in a multilingual world. UNESCO Education Position Paper. UNESCO. https://cutt.ly/8jxoxcE.

[11] UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). (2006). UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education. UNESCO. https://cutt.ly/xjxok1G.

[12] UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). (2013). Intercultural Competences. UNESCO. https://cutt.ly/9jxojMN.

among students enrolled in bilingual programmes (Dziedziewicz, Gajda, & Karwowski, 2014; Ponciano & Shabazian, 2012), as well as the importance of the teacher in the whole process (Gándara & Escamilla, 2017; Gedik Bal & Savas, 2020; Johannessen, Thorsos, & Dickinson, 2016; Reljić, Ferring, & Martin, 2015; Tabatadze, 2015, among others) are well developed in the literature.

The theoretical assumptions that stem from the analysis of the literature, and which stand as the basis for the construction of our questionnaire, can be summarised as follows:

- Language and culture are closely related (Kramsch, 2011);
- A level of good knowledge about the first culture improves intercultural communicative practices (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2013);
- Learning second languages improves intercultural communicative practices (Moeller & Nugent, 2014);
- Being bilingual does not necessary mean being intercultural (Byram, 2002);
- Intercultural practices should be improved at classroom level (Gómez-Parra, 2020).

The research problem this paper addresses is to measure students' perceptions of intercultural practices within European bilingual secondary schools because, following the analysis of the literature (Gómez-Parra, 2020), bilingual programmes in Europe do not efficiently implement intercultural practices in their curricula. This study is contextualised on the European continent, across the countries where this questionnaire was launched.

Methodology

Procedure

The first procedural step was to design and build the first version of the questionnaire, once the lack of appropriate questionnaires to cope with our objectives in the existing literature was established. This questionnaire was designed to contribute to the existing literature by measuring secondary students' awareness and perceptions towards intercultural communicative practices, as well as the real intercultural practices carried out in secondary school contexts. The content was established according to the theoretical assumptions derived from the literature review.

The initial questionnaire was divided into five sections (blocks) that measure the different areas in which intercultural competence has been analysed in the literature: knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness, plus a fifth block to measure intercultural school practices. Our research group classified questions into their corresponding sections (1-5), according to the content and the area they would measure. A final set of 51 questions was agreed upon and distributed into blocks, each of which contained a different number of items that initially ranged between six (in block 3) and 13 (in block 5). The scale designed for this purpose was a 4-point Likert scale for all questions, where the answers draw a continuum: 1 – Strongly Disagree (SD); 2 – Disagree (D); 3 – Agree (A); and 4 – Strongly Agree (SA).

Additionally, the format of the questionnaire was discussed within our research group; the main purpose of the design was to facilitate the process of reading and answering by the pilot group. For this, the five sections were clearly separated, and the two Likert scales were differentiated by colour. The anonymity of the respondents was respected. In addition, and with the aim of carrying out subsequent descriptive techniques, the instrument also includes some basic data on the surveyed population, such as age, gender, school course, and country of origin.

The validity of the questionnaire was defined according to these two parameters: (a) validity of the content (following the technique of the experts); and (b) comprehension validity (set by a pilot study, which allowed us to know whether respondents had understood all of the questions).

Experts, then, assessed the questionnaire by attaching a value within a 4-point Likert scale for each of the 51 items, and by evaluating the comprehension of these and the formulation of the questions (written in English, Spanish, and Hungarian). Regarding the degree of pertinence, experts assessed to which degree (within a 4-point Likert scale) the items were relevant for each of the five sections (blocks) where they had been initially

included. The group of experts included all items that experts had valued as 4; modified those valued as 3; and discarded those valued as 2 or 1.

The comprehension validity of the questionnaire was established through a pilot study where 40 secondary education students participated. The procedure was first to identify the appropriate bilingual schools and then an official permission for access was sent to the school principals. Next, our research group agreed on the age of the pilot target groups. As secondary education is not uniformly established for students of the same age across Europe, respondents of the pilot group would be between 14 and 16 years old. Finally, the questionnaire was delivered among the 40 students in two secondary education schools in Hungary and Spain.

Secondly, once the results of the pilot sample were analysed, the questionnaire was distributed in several European countries among a new sample of 213 bilingual secondary school students of the same characteristics. With this new data collection, the questionnaire was considered to be validated (with a decrease in items and blocks) to measure 'students' perceptions of intercultural practices within bilingual secondary schools in the European context'.

The Delphi Process (Phase 1) and Participants

As the literature shows (e.g., Hsu & Sandford, 2007), the Delphi technique is one of the most widely used and accepted methods for collecting responses from experts in a particular field of study in order "to achieve a convergence of opinion on a specific real-world issue" (2007, p. 1). This technique was considered appropriate as it is well suited for consensus-building (ibid.). In contrast to other research methods, Delphi offers interesting advantages. For instance, during the series of rounds, the selected participants get the opportunity to reassess and refine their initial judgments about the subject matter based on the feedback from other panellists (ibid.), which was very important to the present study.

The identification of an appropriate panel of experts who adequately and purposefully assess the validity of instruments is one of the most important steps in the Delphi method (Hung, Altschuld, & Lee, 2007; Landeta, 2006). Two differentiated groups were established in order to apply this questionnaire: the research group (i.e., scholars carrying out the research), and the panel of experts (i.e., the Delphi group). The features that describe their appropriateness are:

(a) Expertise on the key areas of this research: intercultural education; bilingual education and statistical analysis;
(b) Strong knowledge on the Delphi method;
(c) An outstanding level of communication in at least two languages.

The panel of experts was selected among international specialists who met the following characteristics: (a) expertise on, at least, one of the key areas of the research (see above); (b) high level of awareness on the research problem; (c) professional experience in secondary schools; (d) full proficiency in several languages. Thus, 12 experts were identified and selected from the international arena (e.g., University of Manchester –UK–, University of Oldenburg –Germany–, University of Granada –Spain–, Marmara University –Turkey–, the Polytechnic Institute of Lisbon –Portugal–, and Lower Silesia University –Poland–, among others), taking into consideration the professional contacts of the research group. Our research group is made of three university professors, whose areas of expertise are linguistics, bilingual education, intercultural education, and statistics.

Three methodological phases (preliminary, exploratory, and final) were established and the assessment template for the panel of experts was designed. In the preliminary phase, our research group stated the research problem, according to which the panel of experts was selected. Once the experts accepted the invitation to serve on the Delphi panel, our research group took the responsibility to track their reports of assessment, interpret results from research, and supervise the whole process to adjust specific points when and where necessary. During the exploratory phase, a questionnaire was designed, first, as an experimental version, and then, after the construction process following all necessary steps, as the final one (see Appendix). To develop this procedure, the first experimental version was sent (electronically) to the panel of experts with the template for assessment and an introductory letter explaining the rationale and the theoretical background of the research together with the detailed instructions regarding the two Likert scales to be used, and the criteria against which the questionnaire was to be validated: clarity, pertinence, adequacy (quantitative), and comments

(qualitative). The instrument for validation was clearly divided into the five blocks following the structure of the questionnaire and was arranged according to: (a) a 5-point Likert scale for most questions, where experts could assess their pertinence and/or validity; and (b) a section for comments by the experts (from which qualitative data could be collected). After the first round, following suggestions made by the experts, our research group carried out all necessary amendments. This was followed by the second round of the Delphi test. The experts were given 10 days to return their assessments to the research team, after which we modified and finalised the questionnaire based on the feedback of the Delphi panellists. In total, the process of design of the research instrument (i.e., the questionnaire) was carried out within a period of 13 months. As the result of this Delphi process, there was a reduction from the initial 51 questions to 21 and from five blocks to four. The questions initially included in the 'knowledge' block were considered to be already included in the remaining four.

Description of the Sample for Phase 2 of the Validation Process

The samples were divided into two groups, the first corresponding to the pilot study and the second targeted to validate the final questionnaire. The pilot sample was composed of 40 students from bilingual secondary schools in Spain (25%) and Hungary (75%), and the questionnaire was distributed in February 2017. The second sample of our study was collected between the months of May and June 2017 through a purposefully designed online questionnaire. The sample was composed of 213 students from bilingual secondary schools in several European countries: Hungary (21.6%), The Netherlands (20.2%), Spain (14.6%), Germany (9.9%), Poland (9.9%), France (8.9%), England (1.4%) and others (13.5%). The individuals were selected through a non-probabilistic convenience sampling by applying a snowball technique, using the research group's contacts in the countries where the questionnaire was administered.

The distribution of the final sample of the 213 students surveyed was balanced according to the sex of participants: male (48.4%) and female (51.6%).

Finally, Table 1 presents the distribution of students surveyed according to their age. Regarding age, the category 'other' refers to those students with ages close to 14 (or who had recently become 17).

Table 1

Sample distribution by age

Age	14	15	16	Other
% Participation	18.3	41.8	25.8	14.1

As explained above, our research group decided to survey a convenience sample. The sample size was determined by means of the classic recommendation of having a minimum of 10 sample elements for each of the items that make up the instrument to be validated or the number of items appropriate to convey factorial analysis (Hair, Anderson, Tahtham, & Black, 1999).

Results

The analysis of the quantitative data was carried out by using IBM SPSS Statistics v. 22, whereas the analysis of the qualitative data was done through content analysis.

Results from Statistical Analysis

Internal consistency was used in both cases (with both the pilot and final sample) to check the reliability of the scale, and it was measured through Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1990), which expresses the degree to which items measure one common and unique variable. In this research, it is defined as 'the intercultural practices in bilingual secondary schools'. Additionally, and through a structured procedure in stages, such Cronbach's alpha was used to delete those items which diminished the internal global consistency coefficient. The process is considered complete when either the scale does not improve or when it keeps the level of internal consistency

by erasing a random element (Levy-Magin & Varela-Mallou, 2003). We also used total item correlations to refine the number of final items (Cozby, 2005). The Delphi method was used (see above) to check the validity of the content. Finally, to check the validity of the construct, a confirmatory factorial analysis was used for the final sample.

In brief, the data from 213 respondents were collected and pre-processed to detect missing data, inconsistent data, and outliers. Our research team: (a) carried out a previous descriptive study, (b) measured internal consistency through Cronbach's alpha coefficient, (c) checked content validity using the Delphi method, and (d) checked instrument validity by means of a confirmatory factor analysis.

Pilot Study (Phase 2)

Considering the values obtained from the pilot sample and by applying the techniques mentioned above, the final scale consisted of 21 items with internal consistency of a Cronbach's alpha of 0.881, a value classified as very good (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

On the other hand, if one instrument measures several variables, that is, if it has individual sub-instruments or sub-scales, the recommendation is to arrange specific reliability tests for each one (Brown, 1980). Thus, the five initial blocks were reduced to four with Cronbach's values of 0.726, 0.687, 0.743, and 0.674 respectively, ranges which the literature values between 0.60 and 0.70 as 'sufficient' (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Additionally, George and Mallery[13] suggested a tiered approach consisting of the following: "⩾ 0.9 – Excellent, ⩾ 0.8 – Good, ⩾ 0.7 – Acceptable, ⩾ 0.6 – Questionable, ⩾ 0.5 – Poor, and ⩽ 0.5 – Unacceptable".

The average score of the total scale was 73.081 (standard deviation of 7.166). Taking into account that the minimum score was 21 and the maximum was 84, we can say that the surveyed students perceive that they strongly observe intercultural practices (as 81.08% of surveyed students have a final score higher than the average). This was also evidenced by the average points of each item: the total average was 3.48 (which is a very high score considering that the minimum is 1 and the maximum is 4). 38.1% of the questions showed a final score higher than 3.48, and 100% were higher than 2.5 (mean for a 1-4 point Likert scale). These results can be considered 'excellent' due to an initial lack of variability of the answers, a fact that can be inferred by the low value of the variation coefficient (= 0.098).

These facts led us to increase the Likert scale range from 1-4 to 1-6, thus extending the variability for the answers. In situations where low total score variability is achieved with a small number of categories, reliability can be improved through an increase in the number of categories employed (Masters, 1974). In this sense it was agreed to extend the final measure scale to a 6-point Likert scale.

To summarise, the final instrument was made of 21 items measured by a 1-6 Likert scale (Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Somewhat Disagree (SWD), Somewhat Agree (SWA), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA)), divided into four sections corresponding to Attitudes, Skills, Awareness, and Intercultural Practices.

At this point, the instrument built by our research team provided sufficient evidence to let us think that it could constitute a suitable tool to measure the degree of implementation of intercultural practices in bilingual secondary schools as perceived by the students, with a reliability degree of 88.1%. The instrument also included a second 1-6 Likert scale with three items which measured the degree of proficiency of second languages (No, Barely /A1; Not very good /A2; Reasonably good /B1; Good /B2; and Very good /C1), together with some basic data on the surveyed population, such as age, gender, school course, and country of origin.

Final Analysis (Phase 3)

[13] George, D. & Mallery, P. (2003). *SPSS for Windows step by step: A simple guide and reference. 11.0 update* (4th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.

The final analysis of the data, although the values obtained on the scales are acceptable, led us to carry out a final action for the validation of the construct by means of a confirmatory factor analysis. This confirmatory factorial analysis made it possible to identify three factors corresponding to the groups of questions for the items detailed in Table 4. As can be seen, two additional items were removed because their factor saturations did not fit with any multidimensional factor. The analysis is relevant according to the values of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Barlett's sphericity tests (Bartlett, 1950) (Table 2).

Table 2

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Barlett's tests

KMO measure of sampling adequacy		0.938
Barlett's sphericity tests	**Approx. Chi-square**	2400.767
	df	171
	Sig.	0.000

Source: Own elaboration.

The three factors found explain 63.032% of the variability inherent in the data, so it can be said that with this final classification we have a good representation of the total information. The percentage of the variance explained by these factors can be seen at Table 3.

Table 3

Percentage of the variance explained by the three factors

Component	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	**% of Variance**	**Cumulative %**
1	4.522	23.802	23.802
2	3.960	20.843	44.645
3	3.494	18.387	63.032
Extraction method: principal component analysis.			

Source: Own elaboration.

The corresponding factorial load matrix (rotated), where low values have been eliminated, is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Rotated component matrix with low factorial loads eliminated

	Component		
	1	**2**	**3**
I can describe interactions of my culture with another culture (e.g., regarding clothing, appearance, music, food, among others).	0.488	0.390	0.309
If necessary, I adapt my behaviour to an intercultural encounter when I interact with foreign peers.	0.674		
I show interest in new cultural behaviours.	0.654		
I take on various roles to adapt to different cultural situations.	0.750		
I respect the right of those students who come from a different culture to have their own (cultural and religious) values.	0.700	0.377	
I am able to use strategies (e.g., observation or seeking for support) to adapt successfully to a second culture.	0.704		0.318
I am able to use communicative strategies to facilitate interactions with foreign peers.	0.724		
I am able to solve cross-cultural issues if they arise during interactions.	0.769		0.324
I am aware of the fact that language influences culture.		0.749	

	Component		
	1	2	3
I am aware of the reactions (both positive and negative) of others towards my cultural values.		0.762	0.340
I am aware of my own intercultural development.		0.729	
Teachers promote interactions with foreign peers in the classroom.		0.356	0.679
Grouping is generally arranged by including members of diverse nationalities within the same group.			0.808
Cooperative learning is a common approach for activities.	0.453	0.395	0.513
Communication among peers is conveyed through our common mother tongue.		0.388	0.506
Communication among peers is conveyed through my peer's language.			0.657
I am aware of being myself a culturally conditioned person.		0.795	0.326
Teachers promote the learning of another culture in the classroom by arousing questions on food, weather, language, customs, etc.			0.737
I am aware of the number of foreign peers in my classroom.		0.722	

Note. Source: Own elaboration. Extraction method: main component analysis. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalisation.

As shown in Table 4, the first factor (8 items) is associated with the concept of 'skills'; the second factor (5 items) is associated with 'awareness', and, finally, the third factor (6 items) is related to 'communication practices'. In this way, the 19 original items were reduced into three factors that represent three blocks to measure 'students' perceived intercultural practices within bilingual secondary schools'.

The Cronbach's alpha value of the full scale was 0.935 and the value of each sub-scale is shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Reliability statistics

Skills		Awareness		Communication Practices	
Cronbach's alpha	Number	Cronbach's alpha	Number	Cronbach's alpha	Number
0.902	9	0.897	6	0.799	4

Note. Source: Own elaboration.

All sub-scales showed excellent reliability. Results showed that the final questionnaire was made up of 19 items that measured the items under study. In addition, this new instrument was sent once again to the group of experts who finally reached consensus in the validation process.

Therefore, considering the analysis of data from the final sample, we can state that the instrument used has a high reliability, as determined by the Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.935 (being 1 its maximum value). Thus, we can measure the degree of attitude towards intercultural practices for each participant in the survey. For this purpose, a new variable that agglutinates this attitude was considered, and we could find a score for it through a new normalised variable (maximum value of 1, considering the maximum score of the scale) called 'attitude' (Table 6).

Table 6

Descriptive statistics for 'attitude'

	Number	Min.	Max.	Mean	Standard Deviation
Attitude	213	0.167	1.000	0.748	0.153

Note. Source: Own elaboration.

Thus, the average value for attitude was 0.748, which is considered very high as the maximum value is 1. Considering that the standard deviation is small, it can be concluded that most participants showed high scores, where 57.3% of the students analysed obtained scores higher than the third quartile of the 'attitude' variable, 36.2% between the second and third quartiles, and only 6.6% of the participants scored below the median.

Discussion

The main aim of this research was to design and pilot an instrument (i.e., a questionnaire) for measuring intercultural practices within bilingual secondary education. Given that the issue of the assessment of intercultural competence is one of the most problematic topics within the field of intercultural education, especially in the context of language classrooms (e.g., Borghetti, 2017; Sercu, 2010) and that there are different approaches to assessing intercultural (communicative) competence (Byram, 2021; Council of Europe[14]; OECD[15]; UNESCO[16], among others), we acknowledge that our aim was quite ambitious and that further research is needed to identify which (and if) intercultural practices in BE classrooms are perceived as effective by students. We also acknowledge that practices in conflict-ridden contexts can be very different and that an absolute recipe is not possible. However, we took on this challenge based on the idea that offering such instruments can be beneficial not only for improving intercultural practices in the context of bilingual secondary schools, but for raising awareness and understanding of the importance of intercultural education as an integral part of bilingual education.

The tool herein developed, piloted, and validated can be used for the following goals: (1) the identification of good intercultural school practices in bilingual education, and (2) the development of relevant guidelines to implement intercultural education within bilingual education. The results of our questionnaire show that the metric values obtained through different validity and confirmatory tests are valid and can measure the items for which they were initially designed. Our results show a high level of reliability in terms of internal consistency and reliability, which facilitates their delivery among the targeted population: international bilingual secondary education students. These metric results complement the validity of the results from content tests. Therefore, we can state that our questionnaire has good psychometric quality, according to the statistical tests applied.

The researchers of this paper have identified a gap in the literature, to which the main goal of this study has been addressed: to design a questionnaire to measure students' perceptions of intercultural practices within bilingual secondary schools. The success of bilingual programmes is (to a great extent) linked to the implementation of successful intercultural practices and the development of intercultural awareness, which has been identified as one key factor (Gómez-Parra, Huertas-Abril, & Espejo-Mohedano, 2021). This study, thus, can contribute to the fields of both bilingual and intercultural education, where the measurement of the perceptions of bilingual students can guide stakeholders to improve (or reinforce) pedagogical and in-classroom practices.

Conclusion

As earlier discussed, bilingual education is a priority for most international educational institutions and organisations. Research has demonstrated that the intercultural axis within CLIL is being neither extensively nor appropriately put into practice (Méndez-García, 2012). Additionally, further research shows that bilingual (specifically CLIL) teachers need to be trained in a systemic way on how to implement intercultural education (Figueredo-Canosa, Ortiz-Jiménez, Sánchez-Romero, & Berlanga, 2020; Lallana & Salamanca, 2020; Uzum, Akayoglu, & Yazan, 2020), so the use of this questionnaire can help accomplish this goal.

Our future plan is to expand this research project by involving language teacher trainers and their graduate students from Spain (the University of Córdoba and the Delegation of Education in Córdoba); Germany (Carl

[14] Council of Europe. (2008). White paper on intercultural dialogue: Living together as equals in dignity. Council of Europe.
[15] OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development).(2017). Global Competence Framework. https://cutt.ly/sjxobhL.
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von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg and the University of Bremen); Poland (University of Lower Silesia); Hungary (TEE: the Hungarian section of the European Association of Teachers); and the USA (Texas Women's University), who are participating in the TEACUP project[17]. The purpose of this collaboration is to develop practical recommendations for intercultural pedagogy in bilingual (and CLIL) education settings and to design educational modules for pre- and in-service language teachers. Finally, we plan to carry out a crossmatch between both sets of results and knowing about the intercultural practices that these students perceive depending on their self-reported intercultural competence.

Limitations and Solutions

The design of a questionnaire, unquestionably, holds several limitations that can reduce the scope to which it can be applied by researchers. The rationale behind the decision of using a single quantitative instrument lies in the fact that it was necessary to facilitate the answering procedure to the target population (14 to 16-year-old secondary education students, whohave probably never been faced with these types of questions before) in order to get as objective data as possible.

Another limitation refers to the administration of the questionnaire, as the age and cognitive level of the target population can lead to statistical biases in the final results (Vivo, Sarič, Muñoz, McCoy, López-Peña, & Bautista-Arredondo, 2013). Soubelet and Salthouse (2011) affirmed that youngsters (whose ages are varied) show different perceptions of what is socially acceptable; this fact can lead to statistical biases related to the psychological development stage of each individual. Therefore, this fact can impact the validity and consistency of their answers to a questionnaire that is sensitive to this trait. On the other hand, Steinberg and Monahan (2007) suggested that the influence of what is perceived as socially desirable reaches its highest peak between ages 10 and 14, whereas the period ranging from 14 to 16 is when higher social resistance is expressed. The instrument herein has been specifically designed to measure the perceived intercultural practices of bilingual secondary education students between 14 and 16 years of age, so special attention should be paid to this fact. Moreover, the presence of an interviewer or an expert guide can improve the quality of the responses. Some other studies have affirmed that their presence can arouse some variance in the answers ranging between 5% and 10% (although this value can increase up to 40% for very sensitive questions according to Tourangeau & Yan, 2007).

Therefore, following the suggestions by the panel of experts on the design of our instrument (regarding the clarity, pertinence, context, and adequacy of the questions for secondary education students) and considering that it is 'a short questionnaire', self-administration of the instrument is recommended, thus avoiding the interviewer effect (as was carried out in the piloting of this study).

In addition, the present questionnaire does not seek any related information from key stakeholders such as school managers, classroom teachers, or parents (which will be the goal of a complementary questionnaire that is under construction at the moment of writing this paper by the same research team). This fact sets limitations regarding what can be reasonably claimed from these results. Thus, we hope to be scientifically rigorous in stating what can legitimately be claimed from this analysis: Students' perceptions of intercultural practices within bilingual secondary schools in the European context.

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[17] https://teacup-project.eu/site/).

Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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Appendix

Questionnaire for the Measurement of Intercultural Practices within Bilingual Secondary Schools

Dear student,

This questionnaire has been purposefully designed to analyse and measure intercultural practices within bilingual secondary schools. Therefore, we are neutrally seeking to find out if these practices occur and, if so, to what extent. This study is being conducted by a research team from the University of Córdoba (Spain) and the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (Baltimore, USA). Please, do not write your name on this questionnaire. Your responses will be anonymous and will never be linked to you personally. Your participation is entirely voluntary. If there are items you do not feel comfortable answering, please skip them.

Thank you for your cooperation.

This is the description of the Likert scale that we have used:

Likert Scale (A)		Likert Scale (B)	
1.	Strongly Disagree (SD)	a.No	
2.	Disagree (D)	b.	Barely / A1
3.	Somewhat Disagree (SWD)	c.	Not very good / A2
4.	Somewhat Agree (SWA)	d.	Reasonably good / B1
5.	Agree (A)	e.	Good / B2
6.	Strongly Agree (SA)	f.	Very good / C1

We thank you for your participation and we ask you to answer sincerely to the questions.

Name of the school: ______________________________

Country of origin: ______________________________

Course:____

Gender:Male ☐Female ☐

Age:

	1 SD	2 D	3 SWD	4 SWA	5 A	6 SA
1. I can describe interactions of my culture with another culture (e.g., regarding clothing, appearance, music, food, among others).						
2. If necessary, I adapt my behaviour to an intercultural encounter when I interact with foreign peers.						
3. I show interest in new cultural behaviours.						
4. I take on various roles to adapt to different cultural situations.						
5. I respect the rights of those students who come from a different culture to have their own (cultural and religious) values.						
6. I am able to use strategies (e.g., observation or seeking for support) to adapt successfully to a second culture.						
7. I am able to use communicative strategies to facilitate interactions with foreign peers.						
8. I am able to solve cross-cultural issues if they arise during interactions.						

	1 SD	2 D	3 SWD	4 SWA	5 A	6 SA
9. I am aware of the number of foreign peers in my classroom.						
10. I am aware of being myself a culturally conditioned person.						
11. I am aware of the fact that language and culture mutually influence each other.						
12. I am aware of the reactions (both positive and negative) of others towards my cultural values.						
13. I am aware of my own intercultural development.						
14. Teachers promote interactions with foreign peers in the classroom.						
15. Grouping is generally arranged by including members of diverse nationalities within the same group.						
16. Cooperative learning is a common approach for activities.						
17. Communication among peers is conveyed through our common mother tongue.						
18. Communication among peers is conveyed through my peer's language.						
19. Teachers promote the learning of another culture in the classroom by arousing questions on food, weather, language, customs, etc.						

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Teacher Positioning and Students with Dyslexia: Voices of Croatian EFL teachers

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How students with dyslexia are positioned by their language teachers and what roles teachers assume when working with this group of students have rarely been investigated. In this study, using positioning theory as a theoretical framework and collecting data by means of an in-depth semi-structured interview and lesson observations, which were subsequently coded, we enquired about the positioning of 10 in-service Croatian primary and secondary school teachers. We wanted to know how teacher participants positioned students with dyslexia and how they positioned themselves towards this group of students. The analysis revealed that participants expressed positive attitudes, whereas their positioning was diverse. Participants positioned themselves as caring teachers and teachers of all learners. By recognising various learner needs, they created an inclusive learning environment by adapting teaching approaches and providing accommodations. However, this caring resulted in emotion labour, with both emotional costs and rewards. These results imply that teaching students with dyslexia may be challenging, and we hope that discussing teacher positioning in this context can help educators better understand teacher agency when working with students with SpLDs.

Keywords: dyslexia, language teachers, teacher agency, teaching-as-caring, emotion labour, positioning theory

Introduction

Positioning theory allows for describing processes of "conversations of speech and action that are labile, contestable and ephemeral" (Harré & Moghaddam, 2015, p. 229). It has been used as a theoretical framework in education and applied linguistics research in the past decade (Kayi-Aydar & Miller, 2018), yet, it is still recent and limited in its applications (Kayi-Aydar, 2019). With the growing focus on the teacher (Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018), investigating teacher positioning is important because students' engagement in the class and the content of the lesson may depend on it. Through teacher positioning, students will see how they fit in the classroom (Hazari et al., 2015).

Positioning can be approached from two perspectives. The first one is intentional self-positioning, that is "reflexive positioning in which one positions oneself", viewing the world from a specific position, which further guides how individuals act and what roles they choose to play in a given context (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 48). It is displayed in the individual's different discursive practices, which reflect one's "thoughts, feelings, intentions, plans" (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 5). Teachers can either position themselves as teachers for students with various needs or as teachers who focus on regular students, and the position they have chosen will guide their interactive approaches with students (Yoon, 2008). However, using positioning as an analytical tool helps researchers and teachers identify learning opportunities that are crucial for second language students (Kayi-Aydar, 2014).

The other perspective is interactive positioning, "in which what one person says positions another" (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 48). However, one's utterances, actions, and thoughts have "a variety of meaning depending on who is using it, where, and for what" (Harré & Moghaddam, 2015, p. 230). Thus, interactive positioning may be

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implicitly or explicitly precarious because of its potential negative effect (Sabat, 2003). In the classroom setting, teachers can assume numerous clustered positions (Soreide, 2006), and the teaching approaches they adopt position their students, either intentionally or unintentionally, in a more positive or more negative light (Yoon, 2008). For example, in Reeves' study (2009), the teacher participant regarded himself as a teacher of all students; yet, he refused to provide accommodations for students new to English to facilitate language learning. Foreign language teachers in Gkonou and Miller's study (2019) recognised their students' disruptive and problematic behaviour, not as something adverse, but as a sign of anxiety. They responded by employing anxiety-mitigating learning and teaching strategies and providing a range of adjustments and accommodations.

From the poststructural perspective, individuals' discourses and actions are shaped by their different selves, and positioning is used to gauge dynamic and complex aspects of the self (Kayi-Aydar, 2015). Naturally, therefore, teacher positioning is also closely linked to teacher agency, which "aims to describe teachers' efforts to make choices within a host of contexts" (White, 2018, p. 196); therefore, one influences the other (Kayi-Aydar, 2015). It is thus complex and dynamic. Since agency may be mediated by many contextual factors, such as social, interactional, cultural, and institutional (van Lier, 2008), actions taken by the teacher may or may not be possible to realise (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). In other words, the teacher exercises their agency more in one context but less in another one (Kayi-Aydar, 2015), and when their actions are constrained, a teacher may assume a reflexive position to deal with constraints (White, 2018).

However, reflexive teacher positioning is not independently constructed (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Gkonou and Miller (2019), for example, stress that teachers' narrative accounts cannot be easily predicted even when teachers are regarded as caring and responsible. Teachers' reflexive positioning will hinge on their personal past experiences and on the extent to which they are dependent on social norms, and how they construct themselves within these norms. Caring entails "attentiveness, trust, responsiveness to need, narrative nuance, and cultivating caring relations" (Held, 2006, p. 15). Since individuals are viewed as relational and interdependent, everyone involved should benefit equally (Held, 2006). According to Kumaravadivelu (2012), this relational approach to caring is most needed in today's language classroom because teachers regularly face difficult situations that stem from individual learner differences.

Caring, closely related to labour of emotions (Gkonou & Miller, 2019; Koster, 2011), is the management of one's emotions that occur in a workplace (Hochschild, 1983). Since it is present in everyday aspects of teaching (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Koster, 2011), teachers may incur many emotional costs. These costs are sometimes not easily noticeable, and thus stay unrecognised. Consequently, caring may be assumed as an innate part of teaching, and thus considered to be effortless (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006).

This labour allows teachers to develop their agency in light of ethical self-formation, that is ongoing efforts to become better teachers (Gkonou & Miller, 2019). However, from the poststructural perspective, as teacher emotions are shaped by personal, social, and political processes (Zembylas, 2002), this ethical self-formation may require teachers to control negative emotions and display only the positive ones that show caring (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006) to maintain their professional identity, which may be shaped by expectations of workplace rules (Benesch, 2012, 2018). Thus, caring is challenging because the social situations teachers need to function in are very complex (Collins & Ting, 2014). As Kumaravadivelu (2012, p. 66) explains it, teachers "are often confronted with a seemingly difficult choice between caring about their students and abiding by rules they are expected to enforce." Consequently, teachers may be expected to display only organisationally favoured emotions. This can be mentally tiring for them and lead to their self-estrangement, depersonalisation, and burnout (Acheson et al., 2016; King, 2015).

Drawing further on the poststructural perspective, emotions should not be divided into positive and negative categories because they are "potential sources of language-teacher agency" (Benesch, 2018, p. 61). As evidenced by some studies (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Miller & Gkonou, 2018), teachers, on the one hand, associate their teaching experience with frustration, anxiety, irritation, and disillusion; and on the other hand, they experience many positive emotions such as enthusiasm, happiness, caring, and satisfaction, which may serve as emotional rewards, provided their working conditions allow (Hargreaves, 2000). Therefore, Benesch (2020, p. 39) introduced the term "emotion labour" to emphasise "the relationship between emotions and power rather than qualifying the labor as emotional." Emotion labour may thus serve as a source of teacher activism (Benesch,

2020). The term "emotion labour" has been used by many authors in their recent works on language teachers' emotions (e.g. Acheson et al., 2016; Benesch, 2017; Miller & Gkonou, 2018).

Studies have showed that language teachers have been regarded as caring when they feel responsible for the success of all children (Kayi-Aydar, 2015), teach appropriate strategies that helped students reduce their language anxiety (Gkonou & Miller, 2019), motivate students to learn (Chernobilsky et al., 2015) and respond to their various cultural and social needs (Yoon, 2008). Thus, teaching-as-caring (Miller & Gkonou, 2018) considers the student as a whole; the teacher responds to their students' academic and social needs in an inclusive classroom, where all children feel accepted, take risks comfortably while learning, and find common ground to work as a group while accepting individual differences (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). However, responding to others' needs is never costless. It may be challenging to manage teacher anxiety that is caused by working conditions (Gkonou & Miller, 2019), or when it results from feelings of failure and a lack of agentic position, as not all students' needs can be met in a large class (Kayi-Aydar, 2015).

Caring about the academic and social needs of those with SpLDs, such as dyslexia, can be demanding. Reading and writing difficulties that feature dyslexia may make learning an additional language more challenging. Consequently, learners with dyslexia frequently experience failure in language learning (Kormos, 2017; Nijakowska, 2010). These difficulties and limited successes cause a higher level of language anxiety (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2008; Sparks & Ganschow, 1991) and lower motivation for learning languages (Kormos & Csizér, 2010) among learners with dyslexia. These affective factors may also be exacerbated by negative teacher attitudes and the use of inadequate teaching methods (Kormos et al., 2009).

The literature suggests that those who work with students with dyslexia should assume the position of a supportive and caring teacher. A teacher needs to recognise each student's learning potential (Nijakowska, 2010) by considering their strengths and weaknesses (Kormos & Smith, 2012). They need to employ appropriate teaching approaches and accommodations (Nijakowska, 2010) and use motivational teaching strategies (Kormos et al., 2009). But to do so appropriately, teachers need to have a good understanding of the nature of learning difficulties and how they affect additional language learning (Kormos & Kontra, 2008).

Research exploring teacher positioning in the context of dyslexia and other SpLDs is scarce. It rarely draws on the poststructural perspective by showing the dynamism of the complexity of teacher agency referring to teaching-as-caring and emotion labour. A study by Kormos and Kontra (2008) is an example. The researchers found that teacher participants believed that learners with dyslexia could successfully learn a foreign language when appropriate teaching and motivational approaches are adopted. A teacher's caring attitude was reflected in their understanding of a student's individual cognitive profile and the reasons for their misbehaving and lack of confidence, as well as by providing additional help and adjusting their teaching methods, for example. Such teacher behaviour is "enlightened" (p. 209) and thus relates to ethical self-formation, where the teacher makes ongoing efforts to improve their teaching practice (Gkonou & Miller, 2019). In contrast, negative teacher behaviour is "uninformed" (p. 209) and stems from blame, exemption, and discipline.

Considering the importance of studying teacher psychology (Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018), the recent "affective turn" in the interdisciplinary field of second language studies (Prior, 2019, p. 516), and the current growing interest in exploring language teachers' emotions (Benesch, 2018), we believe that by examining how language teachers construct themselves when working with students with dyslexia, we will further our understanding about teacher concerns and self-efficacy beliefs.

Drawing on the methodology and findings of previous studies that examined language teacher reflections on constructs of self and others (Gkonou & Miller, 2019; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Trent, 2012), this study explored the positioning of Croatian EFL teachers. We were also interested in whether this positioning would show teaching-as-caring and emotion labour. The following questions were posed:

1. How do Croatian EFL teachers position students with dyslexia?
2. How do they position themselves towards this group of students?
3. How is teaching-as-caring revealed in their positioning?
4. To what extent does the teachers' caring attitudes involve emotion labour?

Since this is the first study that enquired about language teacher positioning of learners with dyslexia, we could not form any hypotheses for the first and second research questions. In contrast, regarding questions three and four, based on previous findings on teacher positioning, we presumed that the participants' positioning would reveal teacher-as-caring and emotion labour. The former may stem from caring for an individual-in-need and being responsible for their progress in learning, whereas the latter may be related to teacher self-efficacy and working conditions.

Methodology

Background Information

The present study was part of a research project that aimed at investigating Croatian EFL teachers' knowledge and practice in the context of teaching students with dyslexia. The participants in the project were eight primary and eight secondary school EFL teachers working in mainstream state-financed schools in four regions in Croatia. Some findings have been reported based on the data collected in lesson observations and a semi-structured interview (Kałdonek-Crnjaković & Fišer, 2017).

Participants

The participants in this study were four Croatian EFL primary and six secondary school teachers. They were selected from a pool of 16 teachers that participated in the project based on a preliminary screening of interview transcripts. Information about the participants is summarised in Table 1. The participants' names are pseudonyms; they are listed in the order of appearance in the findings section of this paper.

Table 1

Information about the participants

	Pseudonym	***Gender***	***Place of work***	***Work experience in years***
1	Petar	Male	Primary school (PS)	8
2	Iva	Female	PS	1
3	Slaven	Male	Secondary school (SS)	9
4	Mirna	Female	SS	18
5	Marta	Female	SS	14
6	Robert	Male	SS	3
7	Sylvia	Female	SS	8
8	Monika	Female	PS	5
9	Dinka	Female	PS	12
10	Renata	Female	SS	19

Data Collection and Analysis

The participants were interviewed using a five-part questionnaire with a range of open and closed questions and situational tasks. Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and were conducted in Croatian and English, depending on participants' preferences. The interview questions did not directly investigate teacher positioning. Teacher reflexive and interactive positioning was observed for ten project participants in the preliminary screening. Following the principles of the applied thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2012), we coded narrative accounts that showed how the participants positioned students with dyslexia and how they positioned themselves towards this group of students. Subsequently, we examined the selected narrative accounts to see whether teacher positioning revealed teaching-as-caring and emotion labour. The coding was performed in the following areas: (1) beliefs and opinions about students with dyslexia; (2) roles played and practices when teaching this group of students; (3) attitudes and practices that demonstrate caring when teaching students

with dyslexia; and (4) expressing emotions when teaching this group of students. We extended the area of the analysis with the second examination of the transcript because we had noticed that the reflexive positioning of some teacher participants referred to all students in the class. Therefore, the coding also included the context of the whole classroom (inclusive practices). However, the codes emerged within the same accounts illustrating relational positioning, which revealed teaching-as-caring and emotion labour. The following themes emerged as a result of the analysis: (1) students with dyslexia as successful learners and teachers as supporters of students' effort; and (2) students as anxious and disengaged learners and teachers as those responsible for students' well-being. These themes relate to the first two research questions that enquired about teacher positioning. The evidence for research questions three and four were provided when discussing the findings within these two themes.

Next, to triangulate the data, and on the assumption that teacher positioning is analysed not only through the lens of conversations but also actions (Harré & Moghaddam, 2015), including "physical cues" (Hazari et al., 2015, p. 743), we revisited the notes taken during the lesson observations. The notes from the lesson observations constituted a complementary source of data to the findings yielded from the interview transcripts.

Results

Theme 1: Students with Dyslexia as Successful Learners and Teacher Participants as Supporters of Students' Efforts

Many participants voiced their positive opinions about students with dyslexia and believed that they could learn a foreign language successfully, regardless of the difficulties they experienced, which could be alleviated with adequate support from the teacher. Petar said that students with dyslexia "can perform really well in English" and stressed that "You just need to adopt an individual approach. It's all about the right support." Iva added that students with dyslexia could master English to the level comparable to their peers: "I think students with dyslexia can do as well as the other students. They can master all four language skills. They will struggle sometimes, but it's not important. You just need to support them." Slaven said that dyslexia "is maybe a difficulty, and you can see that students with dyslexia struggle, for example with writing. But I think it's different language perception. They see things different, and you need to take it into account when you support the student." Mirna recognised the difficulty in writing but strength in speaking skills in her student with dyslexia: "He struggles with writing; that's for sure. Reading is not so bad, but he is pretty good at speaking. When we do speaking activities, he is good, he talks and works in groups. I think he can be proficient in English. When you provide the right support, students with dyslexia can be proficient in English."

Mirna also positioned her student with dyslexia as an engaged learner when she said that "he talks and works in groups." In a similar vein, Marta viewed her students with dyslexia are hard-working and motivated to learn English. She recognised her students' effort by providing them with additional help and learning resources. Marta's response also indicates that she needs to devote extra teaching time. Her supportive attitude reveals that she cares about the success of all her learners, regardless of their specific needs: "You can tell they [students with dyslexia] are motivated to learn English and do well in English lessons. They work hard at home. They ask me for additional resources to do at home. I do my best to help them improve in English. I give them additional tasks, reading. Sometimes, I stay after the lessons to explain what they didn't understand during the lesson."

We also observed this caring attitude when Slaven told us that he supported students' efforts by recognising their individual strengths: "I give positive points for good performance; what the student is good at. For example, one of my students with dyslexia was good at comparing English and Croatian literature and I gave him a point for that."

In these narrative accounts, students with dyslexia were positioned as individuals who have their strengths and weaknesses; and teachers, in their ethic of care, need to providing support accordingly, recognising the individual profile of each learner. Robert said that "not every student is the same", and thus it is important to understand the difficulties they experience in a specific context: "This is why you need to check what they

struggle with, for example, when they are doing different tasks." Yet, he also acknowledged that some teaching approaches might be inefficient, when he said, "Some things work, some don't."

Likewise, Sylvia talked about her continuous attempts to understand specific students' needs and how important it is for efficient support provisions. She enthusiastically commented on the approach she used when supporting her students with dyslexia in essay writing: "I always try to understand what specific problems they have and how I can help them. One of my students struggled with the structure of the essay, but I just explained it again on a one-to-one basis, and he started doing it correctly!"

The caring attitude of primary school teachers was revealed in their feelings of responsibility for enhancing students' motivation for learning English. They recognise effort, adjust teaching approaches, and provide accommodations for all students. Monika's aim is that her students with dyslexia develop a positive attitude towards English: "I use simple questions to motivate weaker students. I want them to answer the questions to show that they can say something in English. I don't want them to start hating English."

In contrast, Dinka involves all her students in classroom activities. She includes students with dyslexia even in the tasks that they may struggle with. She gave an example of spelling games and stressed that it was important to recognise an attempt: "This may not be by the rules, but I like to give a prize to pupils who guess the right spelling of the words. I reward them with an A grade, and then everyone tries to guess the right spelling of the word … I hear all kinds of attempts, but for me, it's important that my students take part in the lesson."

Petar told us about adjusting teaching materials and the importance of engaging parents. His attitude shows that supporting a student with dyslexia should go beyond the teaching process that happens in the classroom setting: "Teachers should see the student as an individual, use different resources depending on the students' needs, for example, eliminate busy pages for those with reading difficulties; parents should be included as well, for example, how they can support their child at home."

We gathered more evidence for these teachers' teaching-as-caring while observing their lessons. Slaven provided an additional explanation. Monika and Mirna differentiated questions and praised every attempt their students made. Dinka asked the class to spell the words they had learned in the previous lesson in their books then walked around the class and provided constructive feedback, whereas Petar stayed after his class and talked to the parent of his student with dyslexia, showing what materials had been covered in the class and commenting on the student's performance.

However, regarding accommodations, some participants believed that it was paramount to discuss their provision with students. Also, students with dyslexia should be given a choice as to whether to engage in classroom activities. Slaven provides "accommodations only if the student wants"; he thinks that "it's important because if you don't ask, the student can feel uncomfortable." Mirna, on the other hand, makes dictation optional in her class, and if the student decides to do so, she negotiates marking: "I don't force them to do dictation tasks if they don't wish. If they decide to write a dictation, I ask them if they are happy with the grade they got. If not, I don't write the grade down."

These narrative accounts show that students with dyslexia are seen as partners with whom the teacher should have an ongoing discussion about how and when specific needs should be accommodated. In contrast, the lack of such a partnership would show a careless teacher attitude.

Further on accommodations, some teacher participants stressed the importance of their purposefulness and beneficial effects. They talked about how certain accommodations might affect the student once they leave school. Mirna told us about her attitude on adjusting classroom activities. She thinks that focusing on listening and speaking may affect the performance of students with dyslexia on final school exams.

"I know that students with dyslexia should learn through listening and speaking, but in the real world, they need to read and write. I assess them orally when we do tasks in the classroom, but exams need to be done in writing, so I need to prepare them for that."

Robert also thinks about his students beyond the classroom. He said: "I don't print work for my students with dyslexia on colour paper because no one outside the classroom would do it for them. I need to prepare them for what awaits them when they leave school." He added that it was important to help students with dyslexia develop effective strategies: "I usually use the resources that are already available. I want that my students can manage authentic materials. They have to come up with a strategy, how to handle the material if it is too difficult for them. This is what they will need to do when they leave school."

Mirna's and Robert's attitudes may seem severe and uninvolved, but it actually shows caring about students' success in the future, beyond the scope of the language learning curriculum. These teacher participants feel that by restricting accommodations, they prepare their students for what awaits them once they finish school; when they need to function in a less protective environment.

When talking about providing accommodations and making adjustments for students with dyslexia such as printing recourses on tinted paper or enlarging font size, many participants stressed financial issues. These issues, as expressed by Iva, bring about barriers to effective teaching: "I know that for some of my students a text with larger font size or on tinted paper would be beneficial, but my school doesn't provide paper other than white. We have a copy machine and a printer here in the school, but we can't use them, like, you know, for everyday stuff; and they are often jammed. It is so frustrating! If I want to do additional copying, I would need to pay for it myself. And it's not right. It's really disappointing."

Iva's narrative account shows that a lack of appropriate resources in the workplace may cost the teacher emotionally as it can be a source of disappointment and frustration. Iva is aware of the accommodations her students with dyslexia need, but her agency is limited by external factors. She could overcome this obstacle; however, she seems unwilling to use her private funds.

Theme 2: Students as Anxious and Disengaged Learners and Teachers as Those Responsible for Students' Well-being

Participants also recognised anxiety among their students with dyslexia. Petar, for example, talked about the physical signs of stress his student with dyslexia experienced at school and how he tried to mitigate it: "I can tell that school is stressful for him. For example, he bites his nails, he is silent during lessons, rarely smiles. He's shy, he doesn't have many friends. I try not to put too much pressure on him, but try to involve him in what we do in the classroom. Sometimes it works, sometimes not."

Marta also positions her student with dyslexia as anxious. She talked about how worried he was about his performance at school due to the pressure at home, and how she felt about this situation: "There is a lot of pressure at home. He is worried all the time and asks me how he can improve his grades. Sometimes, it is too much. I tell him he shouldn't be worrying so much because his grades are good. But his parents want 5s [the highest grade] in every subject. I can't always give him 5; it would be unfair towards other students."

Petar's and Marta's caring attitudes reveal their positioning; they feel responsible for mitigating the stress their students experience. Petar, on the one hand, does not pressure the student; on the other hand, he tries to involve the student in the class activities. Marta tries to convince her student that his grades showed that he was doing well in English. However, Marta seems to be paying an emotional cost. On the one hand, she sympathises with the student and recognises his learning success; on the other hand, she feels the pressure of being responsible for the student's good grades. In response, to maintain her integrity as a teacher who treats all students equally, she states that marking depends on performance.

Other teacher participants positioned themselves as responsible for students' well-being by creating a positive, comfortable, and inclusive atmosphere in the classroom. Slaven ensures his students with dyslexia feel comfortable, and in this way increases the quality of their performance: "I make sure the student feels comfortable before starting speaking. It's important because if he or she doesn't feel comfortable, they will make many mistakes, for example, in pronunciation, or get stuck and will not say anything."

Petar recognises that his students with dyslexia may struggle, but at the same time makes sure that they feel comfortable and encouraged to participate in classroom work: "It is important that students with dyslexia feel

comfortable in the class. Even though they struggle with most of the things we do in the class, I try to encourage them to participate."

In the same vein, Renata believes that a positive atmosphere in the classroom will make the students more included and relaxed: "In general, the most important thing is that you create a positive atmosphere in the class so that the student doesn't feel excluded or stressed."

These inclusive practices were observed in the lesson these teachers taught. For example, Renata, having first praised good vocabulary use, encouraged her student with dyslexia to read her work aloud. Petar asked his student with dyslexia, who looked disengaged sitting in the back of the class, to come to the board and try to match the word with the picture once other students had volunteered to match other words with pictures. Petar also supported the student by directing him to the correct answer; he referred to the student's prior knowledge and the work other students had done. Petar commented on this situation in the interview by stressing the lack of voluntary participation in his student with dyslexia: "He [the student with dyslexia] needs to be asked. I mean, he won't raise his hand, come to the board on his own. I need to ask him to do so."

Disengagement among students with dyslexia can be regarded as laziness. When discussing participants' training needs, Marta, Renata, and Mirna said that many foreign language teachers had a negative attitude towards students with dyslexia and consider them 'lazy'. They suggested that future training should address such views by discussing what dyslexia is, how it affects learning, and how students with dyslexia can be helped:

Marta: "I would like to know more about what else I can do; how to help the student better so that teachers don't see them as lazy."

Renata: "Many of my colleagues think that students with dyslexia are lazy and they can't learn a foreign language. This is not right."

Mirna: "Also, it is important that all teachers know what dyslexia is and how it affects learning. A lot of teachers stigmatise dyslexics, call them lazy."

These teacher participants seem to engage in emotion labour. In light of ethical self-formation, they want to be able to provide more appropriate support to students with dyslexia. They also act as advocates for students with dyslexia. This shows their caring attitudes as they feel responsible for the fairer treatment of these students by other teachers.

On this occasion, Mirna, a secondary school teacher, also talked about her ten-year-old son, who is a learner with dyslexia. While she expresses sympathy for her son's language anxiety, she also appears disappointed and unsure when talking about approaches she uses to boost her son's confidence and when helping him revise lessons and do homework: "Now, he lacks motivation and this worries me. His grades could be better, and grades are important later when applying for a secondary school. I am trying to engage him in different activities when we revise lessons or do homework, but nothing seems to work. He is not lazy, but I think he's ashamed to use English; he is afraid of making mistakes. Sometimes I feel sorry for him. He compares himself with his mates in the class who are better at English, which is not right. I talk to him, but I think at this age, children don't want to listen to their parents. I'm trying to make him more confident, but I'm not sure if I'm doing it right. I need to know how to motivate him, how he can be more confident, how to teach him."

However, apart from expressing worries about her son's difficulties learning English, she also talked about hope in relation to her secondary school students' progress, attainment, and motivation for learning English: "When I look at my students with dyslexia, I believe one day he [Mirna's son] can learn English well. They are really good, especially speaking. They still struggle with learning English, but they make good progress. They are really motivated and want to work hard to get good grades. I believe I need to be patient."

Discussion

In the first research question, we enquired about the participants' interactive positioning of students with dyslexia. We found that the teacher participants expressed many positive opinions about this group of students. They positioned them as hard-working, motivated, engaged, and able to learn English successfully. Yet, some participants also recognised anxiety and disengagement in their students with dyslexia. Similar stances have been expressed in the literature in the field. Many aspects of language learning can be challenging for learners with dyslexia (Crombie, 1997; Nijakowska, 2010). In turn, they display higher foreign language anxiety (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2008; Sparks & Ganschow, 1991) and fewer positive motivational characteristics (Kormos & Csizér, 2010). However, the display of affective factors in learners with dyslexia may be dependent on the teacher's attitude and the learning setting (Kormos et al., 2009) as well as the intensity of learning difficulties and the age of the learner (Nijakowska, 2010). This effect of age was observed in our study. Secondary school students were viewed as eager to learn, whereas a lack of motivation and disengagement was reported in primary school students. For example, in Petar's primary school lesson, the student with dyslexia seemed unwilling to voluntarily participate in classroom activities, which Petar commented on during the interview. Mirna talked about her son, a primary school student, who 'now' lacks motivation for learning English because of his learning difficulties and possible mistakes he may make when using the language, and compared him with her motivated and engaged secondary school students with dyslexia.

Although such disengagement and avoidance among learners with dyslexia may appear as laziness to teachers (Nijakowska, 2010), many of the participants in this study explicitly disagreed with this view referring to positioning their students with dyslexia as hard-working, motivated, and engaged. In this way, and in reference to our second research question that enquired about reflexive positioning, the teacher participants positioned themselves as advocates of students with dyslexia. Marta and Mirna pointed out that students' disengagement may be due to teachers' lack of agentic position that stems from a lack of knowledge of how dyslexia affects learning a foreign language and of effective teaching strategies. This lack of knowledge among pre- and in-service teachers was found by many large-scale studies (e.g., Fišer, 2019; Nijakowska, 2014), which consequently results in teacher low self-perceived efficacy and preparedness (Fišer, 2019; Kormos & Nijakowska, 2017; Nijakowska et al., 2018).

Many participants recognised the importance of motivation for learning and engagement among their students with dyslexia. In their efforts to provide their students with dyslexia with appropriate support and create a comfortable and motivating learning environment, the participants opted for collaboration with their students. Hence, these teachers positioned themselves and positioned their students as partners; students were regarded as "relational" and "interdependent" individuals (Held, 2006, p. 46).

However, some teachers believed that their role regarding some types of support should be more leading for the sake of the student. By adopting such a stance, they resemble the attitude of the teacher in Reeve's study (2009), who believed that some accommodations might be disadvantageous for his students with limited English proficiency "because if they're really going to be part of this society, and they're really going to function in it" (Reeve, 2009, p. 38). Such an attitude may seem harsh, however, drawing on Kormos et al.'s study (2009), being strict and demanding was viewed by language learners with dyslexia as positive teacher characteristics; they were important for motivational teaching practices and the attribution of a supportive teacher.

In this way, the participants' behaviour appeared to be "enlightened" (Kormos & Kontra, 2008, p. 209). Also, drawing on Yoon's view (2008), the participants maximised their students' participation and learning by assuming responsibility and having a positive attitude when responding to students' various needs. Limiting the provision of accommodations and alterations to learning resources and teaching approaches may also be interpreted as teaching-as-caring, yet only when justified within a specific context and when each student's needs are fully considered.

The participants also positioned themselves as teachers of all learners. Many teacher participants showed "responsiveness to need" and "cultivating caring relations [...] for the benefit of all" (Held, 2006, p. 15); thus their practices may be deemed inclusive, like the participants' in Kayi-Aydar's (2015) and Yoon's studies (2008), for example. This is best exemplified by the response of Petar, who said that "teachers should see the student as an individual, (and) use different resources depending on the students' needs".

Assuming responsibility and caring for the well-being of students, however, incurred emotional costs for some teacher participants, confirming our presumption for the fourth research question. These costs seemed unnoticeable (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). This may be because the teacher participants experienced negative emotions when showing teaching-as-caring, when facing a dilemma, or when feeling the limitation of their agency. For example, Marta tried to balance the pressure from home and her student's worries against the ethical stance of treating all students fairly. Whereas Iva, similarly to teacher participants in Gkonou and Miller's study (2019), experienced emotion labour due to her working conditions. It is noteworthy that she recognised limitations to her agency in teaching-as-caring when working with students with dyslexia early in her teaching career. Consequently, her teacher immunity may potentially develop as "maladaptive" (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017, p. 405) and lead to burnout, which is experienced increasingly by language teachers worldwide (Gkonou & Miller, 2019).

Many teacher participants also showed concern about their limited knowledge of effective teaching approaches. In their pursuit of becoming better teachers (Gkonou & Miller, 2019), they want to provide students with dyslexia with more appropriate support. On the other hand, when an adopted strategy works, it leads to emotional rewards (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Miller & Gkonou, 2018). We observed this in Sylvia's enthusiastic comment on the effectiveness of the approach she used when teaching essay writing. This enthusiasm was also felt when Dinka, Marta, and Slaven talked about the learning efforts of their students with dyslexia and how they supported them.

In short, drawing on Benesch's recent view on emotion labour (2020), teacher participants' ambivalent emotions, when caring about their students' well-being and attempting to accommodate students' needs adequately in challenging working conditions, should not be regarded as a sign of "an inability to regulate one's emotions", but rather as "a signal of institutional inadequacy and therefore a springboard for activism" to ameliorate "unfair and unjust conditions" (Benesch, 2020, p. 37). Undoubtedly, these conditions may be alleviated by providing training opportunities that would help language teachers understand the effects of dyslexia on additional language learning and to learn about effective teaching approaches and accommodations that can be employed in a mainstream language classroom for students with dyslexia. As reported by Kormos and Nijakowska (2017), a high-quality training course on dyslexia and language teaching can help teachers alleviate their concerns, and develop more positive attitudes and higher self-confidence.

Conclusion

In this study, we aimed to investigate the positioning of Croatian primary and secondary language school teachers in the context of teaching EFL to students with dyslexia. We found that the teacher participants had a positive attitude towards learners with dyslexia. Their positioning showed teaching-as-caring, which supported our earlier assumptions. Most importantly, the participants' caring attitudes involved all learners, which shows that they are sensitive to various learner needs and willing to adapt their teaching approaches and provide adequate accommodations. Our hypothesis for the last research question was also confirmed because the participants' teaching-as-caring resulted in emotion labour, with both emotional costs and rewards, as indicated in the literature on the topic.

Although the findings presented in this paper reflect reflexive and interactive positioning by teachers, the topic has not been fully explored because the scope of the project within which the interviews were recorded did not explicitly seek to investigate teacher positioning, teaching-as-caring, and emotion labour. This may be considered a limitation of the present study. A study designed to directly investigate EFL teacher positioning in the context of teaching learners with dyslexia could provide more complex data, and consequently allow for more profound analysis. Therefore, the findings of the present study should be interpreted with caution. Potential differences among teacher participants related to cultural and educational diversity would also be worth investigating. Future research could also simultaneously explore diverse teaching settings, for example, one-to-one instruction and the mainstream classroom from the learner and teacher perspective considering their agency.

The indirect investigation of positioning, teaching-as-caring, and emotion labour is what distinguishes this study from other research that directly sought to explore these issues. This study showed that teachers need to

talk about their emotions related to teaching students with dyslexia. We hope that our results yielded from qualitative data have complemented previous research findings and added to the discussion on language teacher agency in the context of teaching students with dyslexia by showing what may affect it and what varied and complex emotions teachers may experience. Also, teaching-as-caring and teacher emotion labour in this paper indicate the importance of teacher emotional well-being. Teacher professional well-being is closely related to teacher ethical self-formation; therefore, it should be considered one of the current priorities in language teaching and learning.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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Investigating the Experience of Boredom During Reading Sessions in the Foreign Language Classroom

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Despite the fact that boredom appears to be one of the most commonly experienced emotions in school settings, this negative emotion remains vastly underappreciated in the field of SLA. This is the gap this article seeks to rectify by reporting the findings of a classroom-based study whose purpose was to investigate changes in the experience of boredom in the English language classroom during reading sessions. The sample consisted of 18 second-year students studying English at a Polish high school. The data were collected by means of session logs, observations and reading session plans. The gathered data were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings showed that the participants reported different levels of boredom over the course of single reading sessions and from one session to the next. Factors responsible for the detected variation in the levels of boredom were related, among other things, to inactivity, performance of too easy/difficult tasks, teacher's decisions regarding choice and use of language materials, the design of the reading sessions or individual characteristics of the learner.

Keywords: boredom, changes in the levels of boredom, reading, the English language classroom, learning a foreign language

Introduction

As indicated by Chapman (2013, p. 1), "boredom in the foreign language classroom is a topic about which much is assumed but little is known." Chapman claims that teachers of foreign languages frequently evade activities that might be perceived by their students as boring, despite the fact that they may have never tried to evaluate their students' views on this problem. For Chapman, the divisions that language teachers make between language exercises that are not boring and those that are, are mostly formed on teachers' own beliefs about what establishes 'good teaching' than on the opinions of real language learners.

Although boredom seems to be part and parcel of learning a foreign language in a classroom setting, few research projects have addressed the issue of boredom among adolescent EFL learners and attempted to investigate its nature. Thus, the study reported in the present paper, which is to some extent a follow-up on the research project carried out by Kruk (2016), tries to shed more light on the problem of boredom in the English language classroom and its dynamic character. The said study focused on several entire lessons in which students performed a combination of activities devoted to practicing different language skills. However, in order to better comprehend the construct of boredom and "to probe deeper to see how boredom is affected by different TL skills" (Pawlak, Zawodniak et al., 2020, p. 96), the present study zeroed in on changes in boredom level during practicing a particular language skill, that is, reading and performing follow-up tasks for reading texts. Thus, this research project aimed at investigating the dynamic character of boredom by tracing its fluctuations during a particular reading session and from one reading session to the next as well as uncovering reasons for such changes.

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Literature review

Boredom: Theoretical and Empirical Issues

According to Macklem (2015), boredom can be experienced as an absence of activity and as being disconnected from an interesting task. Bored individuals have "difficulty paying attention, difficulty concentrating, and effort is required to maintain focus on (and not become distracted from) what is going on in the environment" (Macklem, 2015, pp. 1-2). In addition, bored individuals experience disappointment, dissatisfaction, annoyance and/or apathy and they can easily be distracted or not motivated to do what they have planned (Danckert & Allman, 2005; Fisherl, 1993). Boredom negatively influences student motivation, self-regulated learning, the activation of cognitive resources and achievement (Goetz et al., 2006; Pekrun, 2006). It may contribute to truancy (Sommer, 1985) and drop-out rates (Tidwell, 1988). Boredom is frequently referred to as an affective state that can be characterized by unpleasant feelings, low physiological arousal and the absence of stimulation (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993). It is interesting to note that boredom is "one of the most commonly experienced emotions in many settings" (Pekrun et al., 2010, p. 531) including schools (Macklem, 2015). All in all, boredom may severely impede the learning process, including the process of learning a foreign/second language, and, as a result, make it both less efficient and enjoyable.

Vogel-Walcutt et al. (2012) divided the construct of boredom into *trait boredom* and *state boredom*. Trait, or boredom proneness, relates to an individual's propensity to experience feelings of boredom irrespective of settings or conditions. Subjects who are boredom prone appear to be less resistant to boredom provoking situations. Regarding state boredom, it "tends to be operationally defined as the subjective perception of negative affect, the objective assessment of low arousal, or a combination of the two" (Vogel-Walcutt et al., 2012, p. 477). As stated by Belton and Priyadharshini (2007), the development of ways that aim at state boredom and try to reduce it can become of significant value to teachers and may ultimately contribute to improved student performance. It has to be noted that a number of situational factors that increase susceptibility to state boredom in educational settings have been recognized. They involve, among other things, the perception of a task as meaningless, involvement in activities that are abstract and repetitive, excitement lacking, a shortage of appropriate resources, being underchallenged or overchallenged, an absence of impetus or flow, limited control over the process of learning and teachers' decisions (Acee et al., 2010; Hill & Perkins, 1985; Larson & Richards, 1991; Preckel et al., 2010; Vogel-Walcutt et al., 2012).

The literature identifies five more types of boredom (Goetz et al., 2014). They encompass: (1) *indifferent boredom* (i.e., students are relaxed, withdrawn, indifferent), (2) *calibrating boredom* (i.e., learners are uncertain, receptive to change/distraction), (3) *searching boredom* (i.e., students are restless and characterized by active pursuit of change/distraction), (4) *reactant boredom* (i.e., it is characteristic of students who are highly reactant, motivated to leave the situation for specific alternatives) and (5) *apathetic boredom* (i.e., characterized by extremely unpleasant feelings, students are unmotivated). It is interesting to note that reactant boredom is more intricately connected with learning while indifferent boredom is more linked with leisure time.

As this review of literature indicates, boredom is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Boredom is frequently portrayed as the feeling of being disengaged from performing an activity or simply as a type of engagement problem (Macklem, 2015). The complexity of boredom is revealed in the Multidimensional State Boredom Scale (Fahlman et al., 2013) in which disengagement is one of the factors intended to measure boredom. According to Pekrun et al. (2010), boredom cannot be understood as a tantamount to lack of interest since lack of interest can contribute to student boredom. Learners' lack of interest does not involve their willingness to participate in activities nor does it terminate incentives to escape them. It is the unpleasant state of boredom that stimulates students to avoid situations which incite it. Pekrun et al. (2010) view the construct in question as both an activating and deactivating emotion. In more specific terms, individuals may start to seek ways to sustain attention and/or cope with accumulated frustration if a boring task lasts longer than expected. Such a situation may lead to the growth in arousal levels. This demonstrates that in some cases boredom can have a motivational rather than discouraging impact on students (Gumora & Arsenio, 2002; Valiente et al., 2012).

L2 Research on Boredom

When it comes to empirical research into boredom in a foreign language classroom setting, only few studies investigated the issue in question. Some of them dealt with boredom indirectly (e.g., Jean & Simard, 2011; Kormos & Csizér, 2014; Peacock, 1997), whereas others had a sharper focus on this phenomenon (e.g., Chapman, 2013; Kruk, 2016; Li, 2021; Li et al., 2021; Nakamura et al., 2021). Since the present study examines fluctuations in boredom, the discussion will focus on the research projects which in their entirety explored changes in the experience of this negative emotion. Regarding the study conducted by Chapman (2013), it explored the beliefs about boredom held by 57 second-year learners of German and their three language teachers. The analysis of the data gathered by means of questionnaires and interviews over a four-week period revealed that the students' attitudes toward their teachers were more accurate predictors of boredom than classroom activities or their features. The researcher also examined the learners' bored behaviours and classified them into active and passive. The former included, for example, the revision of upcoming deadlines, and the latter, encompassed, for instance, daydreaming and talking with a peer. It should be noted, however, that the study suffered from some weaknesses. Among other things, they were related to the definition of boredom (i.e., boredom was considered to be analogous to disinterest), the analysis of activities and activity features (i.e., the relationship between experiences of boredom and repetitive as compared to novel activities was disregarded).

Kruk (2016) carried out a study which investigated changes in the levels of boredom experienced by a group of EFL students (*N* = 32). The study was conducted over a period of three weeks and it comprised eight English lessons. The quantitative and qualitative data analyses allowed the researcher to uncover changes in boredom levels. The reasons for these changes were both general (e.g., the participants' proneness to boredom) and situational (e.g., topics, grammar, the nature of language activities). In a following mixed-methods study, Zawodniak and Kruk (2018) focused on examining the reasons for boredom and changes in its intensity between boredom as experienced in learning the L2 (English) and the L3 (German or French) from a retrospective perspective. The analysis of the data gleaned from a questionnaire revealed fluctuations in boredom levels which were influenced by a host of external (e.g., teacher's involvement in lessons, teacher's attitudes towards students) and internal (e.g., students' expectations, students' language competences) factors. Pawlak, Kruk et al. (2020), in turn, investigated the patterns of boredom experienced in a single English class by five highly and six moderately bored students and whether those patterns were reflected in the individual subjects' trajectories of boredom. The study also sought factors impacting those trajectories. The analysis of the data collected by means of a number of research instruments (e.g., the Boredom in Practical English Language Classes Questionnaire, an in-class boredom questionnaire) revealed that the overall proneness to boredom in English classes was linked to the learners' patterns of boredom which displayed fluctuations in both groups. It has to be noted, however, that there were some differences between the two groups of learners, that is, the moderately bored students showed a gradual growth in the experience of boredom and the highly bored learners exhibited a steadily high level of this negative emotion during the class. The study also demonstrated that the individual trajectories in experiencing boredom frequently departed from the overall patterns and they were shaped by unpredictable constellations of individual and contextual factors. In a more recent study, Kruk et al. (2021) explored changes in the levels of boredom reported by a group of English majors (*N* =13) in four EFL classes as well as factors influencing such changes. The analysis of the data obtained from a background questionnaire, an in-class boredom questionnaire, a semi-structured interview and lesson plans revealed that although this aversive emotion was attributed to diverse constellations of factors, it was largely tracked to repetitiveness, monotony and predictability of what happened throughout a specific class.

To sum up, the studies described above offer evidence for changes in boredom levels and factors influencing them over time and to the best of the present author's knowledge some of them represent the only published studies which aimed to investigate changes in boredom levels. It should be noted, however, that none of them zooms in on a particular language skill (or a subsystem) and thus they run the risk of overlooking fluctuations in the levels of boredom and factors responsible for such changes in such a context. Thus, the present study attempts to fill this gap by examining changes in the levels of boredom and factors responsible for such variations during reading sessions in which the participants read texts and performed text-related activities.

Methodology

Background

The present study sought to identify changes in boredom levels on a minute-by-minute basis and to uncover factors responsible for such fluctuations. The study followed in the footsteps of researchers who tried to investigate the dynamics of motivation, language anxiety or willingness to communicate in naturally occurring classes (e.g., Kruk, 2018; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017; Pawlak et al., 2014; Waninge et al., 2014). In line with the earlier research projects, the present study was set in a real classroom, aimed at enhancing ecological validity (Peng, 2014) and thus increasing the relevance of the findings to practitioners.

This research project sought to investigate the changing character of boredom by tracking its fluctuations within a particular reading session as well as from one reading session to another. As such, it concentrated mainly on boredom intensity. In addition, the study explored reasons for such variations. For the purposes of this study, boredom was defined in terms of subjective disengagement, disinterest in and lack of enthusiasm for language tasks being performed. Specifically, this study sought to address the following research questions:

1. How do levels of boredom change over the course of a reading session?
2. How do levels of boredom change from one reading session to another?
3. What factors are responsible for changes in boredom intensity?

Participants

The learners who participated in this study were 18 second-year male students studying English at a Polish high school. More precisely, the subjects attended a vocational secondary school which also made it more popular for males. The analysis of a background questionnaire (for description of the tool see section Data collection instruments) revealed that the students had been learning English for 10.33 (*SD* = 2.22) years. Their proficiency level ranged from A2 to B1 (according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*) but most of them were rather weak in their command of the target language. This is evident in the fact that their average end-of-the-year grade was 2.56 (*SD* = .70) on a scale from 1 (fail) to 6 (excellent). In the subjects' own opinion, however, their level of advancement was slightly higher, as indicated by their self-assessment which amounted to 3.19 (*SD* = .73) on the same scale. It should also be noted that the learners had two English lessons per week.

Procedure

The study was carried out over the period of six weeks in the course of six reading sessions (RS) held within regularly scheduled English lessons. The group was taught by the present author who was also the subjects' regular English teacher. Each reading session lasted approximately 25 minutes and the remainder of each lesson (approximately 20 minutes) was devoted to other classroom activities (e.g., checking homework). All texts and activities used in each reading session were typical of materials used in Polish schools to practice reading comprehension and to prepare students for the *Matura* examination (i.e., a type of high school finals in Poland) in the English subject at the end of high school.

Figure 1 shows the texts and activities in the first three reading sessions. At the beginning of each reading session the teacher explained some words/phrases from the texts and the students wrote them down in their notebooks. Then, the learners were asked to read a text and perform relevant tasks. After that, the tasks were checked by the teacher who nominated several students to read the answers.

Figure 1

Texts and activities in reading sessions 1-3

Reading session 1	Reading session 2	Reading session 3
• a text about Robin Hood • task 1: a true-false exercise • task 2: determie the tense used in the selected sentences	• a text about pubs in Great Britain • task 1: a multiple-choice activity • task 2: write a short summary of the text in Polish	• a text about the Amish • task 1: match headings to paragraphs • task 2: determin the correct part of speech of ten selected words from the text

As for the next three reading sessions, each time the learners were requested to select a text and text-related tasks from a pool of language materials. It should be explained at this juncture that it was a common practice in English lessons to give the students who participated in this study sets of materials to choose from and thus the way the reading sessions were conducted was no exception. The materials included seven different texts and a selection of text-related tasks (e.g., true/false, matching headings to paragraphs, multiple-choice, translations of chosen words, phrases and sentences, paraphrasing, provision of synonyms/antonyms for given words, matching sentence endings, sentence completion). At the start of each reading session (i.e., after a selection of a text) each learner was provided with a list of words (and their explanations) from a specific text. Then the students were requested to read a text and do text-related activities of their own choice. The answers were then collected and checked by the teacher.

Data Collection Instruments

The data were collected by the following research instruments: a session log, observations and reading session plans, which will be described below.

The session log comprised three parts (see Appendix 1). The first part required the students to provide their name and state the date before the start of each reading session. The second part consisted of a *boredom grid* in which the students were requested to self-rate their level of boredom six times (i.e., every three minutes) on a scale ranging from 1 (minimum) to 7 (maximum) in response to a sound. The learners were requested to complete this part during each reading session. The internal consistency of this instrument was high ($\alpha = .81$). The last part of the session log asked the participants to briefly comment on each session, evaluate texts and activities as well as to complete an *evaluation scale*. The aim of the scale was to obtain information related to the evaluation of reading sessions by the students. The instrument included eight pairs of opposing items (e.g., dull-exciting, unsatisfying-satisfying). Each item was scored on a scale of 1 (minimum) to 7 (maximum). The scale was a modified version of the instrument used by Peacock (1997) and Pawlak (2012). The changes included the deletion/addition of some items and their layout. The learners were requested to complete the evaluation scale immediately after each reading session. The internal consistency of the tool was satisfactory ($\alpha = .69$).

As for the observations, they provided descriptions of the students' behaviours without unduly affecting the events in which the learners were engaged. Their behaviours were noted down by the researcher/teacher in real time. The reading session plans included detailed information related to reading sessions, their parts and tasks performed by the students.

The instruments were piloted with a group of high school students, not among the participants of the study. The modifications included the following: (1) wording the instruments in the participants' mother tongue (i.e., Polish) in order to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations and (2) changing the layout of the session log. It should also be noted that the learners gave their consent to take part in the study and they were informed that their participation in it would not affect their grades in any way.

Analysis

The numerical data were analyzed by descriptive statistics; mean (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*) values were reported. In addition, the levels of statistical significance were established by means of the nonparametric Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. This test was chosen due to the fact that some of the data obtained were not normally distributed. The effect size was computed on the basis of Rosenthal's (1994) formula and interpreted

as proposed by Plonsky and Oswald (2014). As for the qualitative analysis, it encompassed identification of items or themes included in the students' comments related to texts and activities (i.e., the last part of the session log), as well as in the observations. They were read recurrently in order to detect instances related to the experience of boredom. Notes and annotations were used to document observations. Such data were juxtaposed against reading session plans with reference to the texts, activities and phases of the sessions.

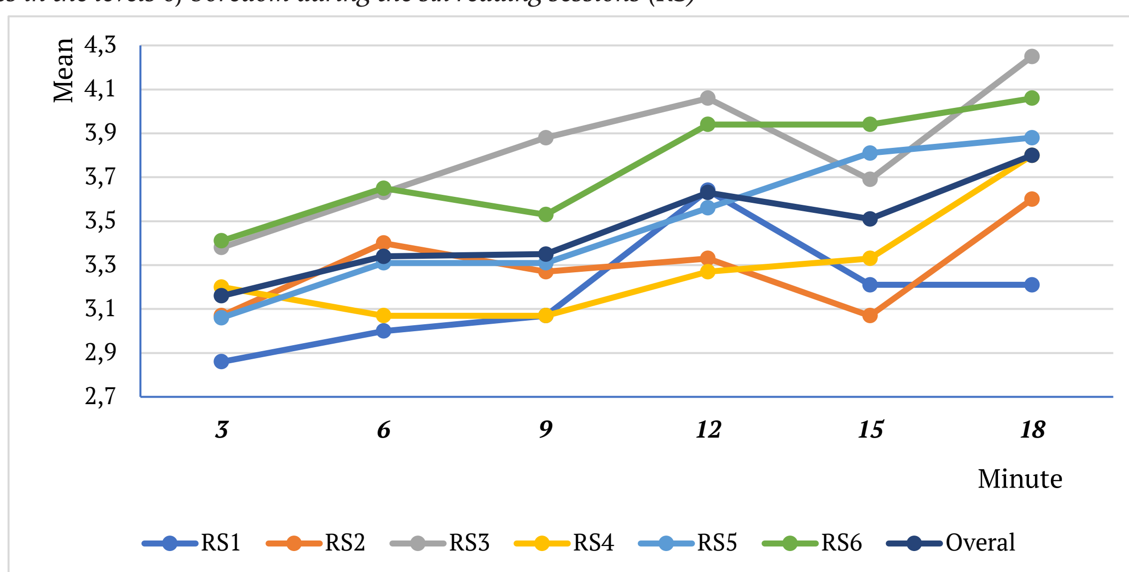
Results

Changes in the Levels of Boredom during Reading Sessions and Their Causes

The analysis of the data provided in the boredom grid showed that, overall, the students tended to experience less boredom at the beginning of the reading sessions and they demonstrated more boredom at the end of them (see Figure 2 and Appendix 2). A closer look reveals, however, that the experience of boredom during some of reading sessions (e.g., RS1 and RS3) differed from this general increasing trend and was subject to considerable variation. This is also evident in the values of the standard deviation which demonstrate that the participants varied in their assessment of boredom during the course of the study (see Appendix 2).

Figure 2

Changes in the levels of boredom during the six reading sessions (RS)



Although a general picture of the changes in boredom levels during the six reading sessions reported by the participants reveals a dynamic character of the construct in question, it fails to provide more detailed information concerning the changes which repeatedly occurred in each session. However, due to space limitations, a detailed description of only three randomly selected reading sessions (i.e., RS1, RS3 and RS5) will be offered here.

As can be seen from Figure 2 and Appendix 2, the students demonstrated relatively low (M = 3.17) but fluctuating level of boredom during the course of Reading session 1, since it oscillated between the mean of 2.86 and 3.64 (a difference of .78). The lowest levels of boredom were reported by the participants in the beginning of this session (minutes 3-6), when they started reading the text and in minute 9 (i.e., at the start of the true/false activity). Then a sudden increase in the level of boredom could be observed in minute 12 (i.e., at the end of the true/false activity), followed by a drop of 0.43 from minute 12 to 15, when the students were asked to determine the tense used in a few selected sentences from the text. The level of boredom remained unchanged till the end of the session (minutes 15 and 18).

The analysis of the data gleaned from students' comments revealed that most of the subjects perceived the text to be quite interesting; however, a few of them found it quite uninteresting and containing difficult words (e.g., "In my opinion the text was not interesting enough.", "The text was interesting but I didn't understand some words in it."[1]). Most of the students also liked the activities and considered them as interesting and easy to perform; however, few students regarded them as boring and monotonous (e.g., "The text was not bad at all but the exercises were a bit boring.", "The exercises were monotonous and quite boring."). Some learners became bored while waiting for their classmates to finish the activities (e.g., "I experienced boredom only while waiting for others to finish this exercise."). In addition, the analysis of the teacher's notes revealed that those who did the task earlier started to talk to each other or did nothing.

As indicated by the findings in Figure 2 and Appendix 2, there were some changes in the levels of boredom during Reading session 3. More precisely, there was a gradual increase in the level of self-reported boredom from minute 3 to minute 12 (a difference of .68) and a sudden drop in minute 15. This session ended with a sharp increase in the level of boredom (minute 18, $M = 4.25$). The differences in the levels of boredom between minutes 3-12 and 3-18 turned out to be statistically significant and represented small effect sizes ($Z = 2.653$, $p = .008$, $r = .47$ and $Z = 2.283$, $p = .022$, $r = .40$, respectively). When these variations are compared with the session plan, it turns out that the students experienced more boredom at the end of reading the text and at the end of each activity, that is, matching headings to paragraphs and determining the correct part of speech of ten selected words from the text. The analysis of the students' comments revealed that most of them regarded the text and the activities as interesting (e.g., "I liked the text I read today because I learned something new about a different culture and I learned some new, interesting and useful words."); however, for some learners the text and the activities were too easy and thus they considered this session as quite boring (e.g., "The text was interesting but very simple. The first and the second activity were also very simple. I didn't need so much time to do them all and this is why I got bored a bit."). The analysis of the teacher's notes showed that some participants finished reading the text and the follow-up activities earlier. It was observed that those students started to talk to each other, doodled in their notebooks or did nothing.

When it comes to Reading session 5, it involved a text and activities chosen by the subjects from a pool of language materials offered by the teacher. As demonstrated by the findings in Figure 2 and Appendix 2, overall, the learners reported a lower level of boredom throughout this session when compared with Reading session 3 ($M = 3.49$ and $M = 3.82$, respectively). It has to be noted, however, that there was a steady growth in the experience of boredom from the start till the end of this session. It is also interesting to observe that the students were less bored in the first half of the session (minutes 3 and 9), which was devoted to reading a selected text, than in its second half (minutes 12 and 18), in which the students continued reading the text and then started solving chosen activities. In addition, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test found a statistically significant difference between minutes 3-18 ($Z = 2.228$, $p = .026$, $r = .39$). The analysis of the data revealed that most of the students (75%) chose to read the text about pirates and only few learners (25%) decided to work with the text about the Bodiam Castle. The students selected these texts either because they were interested in the topic or wanted to read about something new. Additionally, most of the learners (81.25%) decided to do only one exercise. Relevant excerpts from the students' comments are as follows: "I selected this text because I could learn about something new. Besides, it seemed to be the most interesting.", "The exercise I did was one of the easiest." It was also observed that a few learners occasionally talked to each other throughout the session and a few others recurrently paused for a moment while doing their activities.

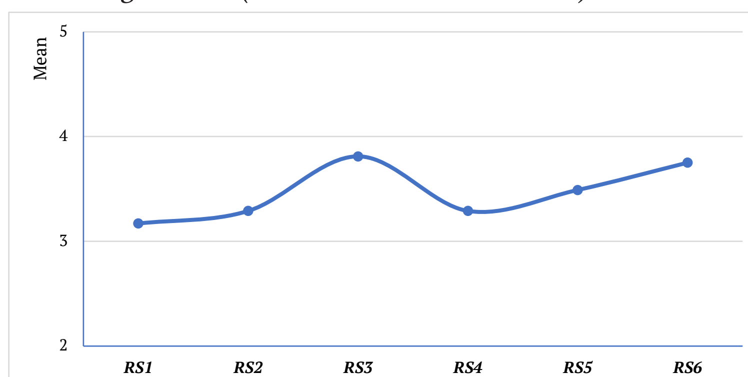
Changes in the Levels of Boredom from one Reading Session to Another

The changes in the experience of boredom from one session to the next were assessed on the basis of the overall mean of boredom grid and the participants' general assessment of sessions (i.e., evaluation scales). As can be seen from Figure 3, the students were the most bored with Reading session 3 and Reading session 6. However, the experience of boredom during sessions was moderate and oscillated between the values of 3.17 and 3.82 on a seven-point scale. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test found some statistically significant differences between different reading sessions: RS1- RS3 ($Z = 2.201$, $p = .028$, $r = .64$), RS1- RS5 ($Z = 1.992$, $p = .046$, $r = .58$), RS1- RS6 ($Z = 2.201$, $p = .028$, $r = .64$), RS2- RS3 ($Z = 2.201$, $p = .028$, $r = .64$), RS2- RS6 ($Z = 2.201$, $p = .028$, $r = .64$), RS3- RS4 ($Z = 2.201$, $p = .028$, $r = .64$), RS3- RS5 ($Z = 1.997$, $p = .046$, $r = .58$), RS4- RS6 ($Z = 2.201$, $p = .028$, $r = .64$) and RS5- RS6 ($Z = 2.201$, $p = .028$, $r = .64$).

[1] These and other excerpts are translations of the students' responses.

Figure 3

Students' evaluations of the reading sessions (based on the evaluation scale)

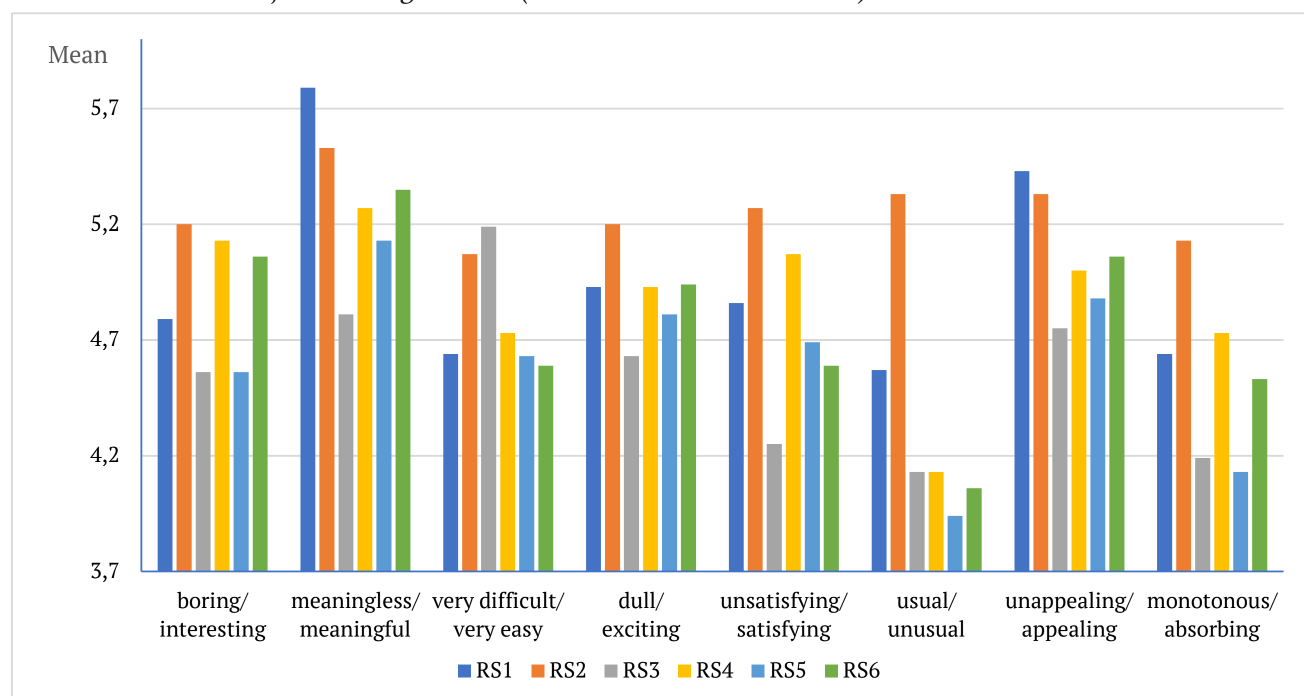


Overall Evaluation of the Reading Sessions

When it comes to the students' overall evaluation of the reading sessions, it was positive with all the overall mean scores surpassing 4.50 on a 1-7 scale (see Figure 4). In more specific terms, the learners' overall evaluation of the sessions oscillated between the values of 4.56 (RS3) and 5.26 (RS2). The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test found some statistically significant differences between different reading sessions: RS1- RS2 (Z = 2.103, p = .035, r = .53), RS1- RS5 (Z = 2.521, p = .012, r = .63), RS2- RS3 (Z = 2.380, p = .017, r = .60), RS2- RS4 (Z = 2.521, p = .012, r = .63), RS2- RS5 (Z = 2.521, p = .012, r = .63), RS2- RS6 (Z = 2.521, p = .012, r = .63), RS4- RS5 (Z = 2.524, p = .012, r = .63) and RS5- RS6 (Z = 2.100, p = .036, r = .53). In addition, the data show that, overall, the language learners judged the sessions as usual (M = 4.36) but mainly meaningful (M = 5.31); however, the values of the standard deviation indicate that the group varied in their evaluations of the sessions (for details see Appendix 3).

Figure 4

Students' evaluations of the reading sessions (based on the evaluation scale)



Discussion

Research questions 1 and 3 aimed to explore changes in the levels of boredom during the six reading sessions and to examine factors responsible for their fluctuations. On the whole, the learners were likely to experience less boredom at the start of the sessions and they tended to exhibit more boredom at the end of them. A closer inspection of the findings revealed, however, that the intensity of boredom throughout some of the sessions differed from this overall increasing pattern and showed that it tended to be less dynamic in the first half of the sessions. Although it could be proposed that the beginning of any new activity is predominantly stimulating for individuals, the analysis of the data demonstrated that the scope and amplitude of the changes could also be ascribed to a variety of factors. They include the attractiveness of texts, the level of difficulty, periods of inactivity and performance of too easy/difficult language activities.

These finding agree with earlier studies that concluded that the level of boredom may be susceptible to being underchallenged or overchallenged (Acee et al., 2010; Larson & Richards, 1991; Preckel et al., 2010) and prone to the teacher's decisions (Hill & Perkins, 1985) regarding, for example, the use of language materials in lessons. The findings provide interesting insights which not only confirm the outcomes of previous research projects (e.g., Chapman, 2013; Kruk, 2016), but also can be related to the issues presented in the literature section in this article. This is because the participants may have experienced calibrating and searching boredom (Goetz et al., 2014), particularly in the first three sessions. They may have engaged in off-task thoughts and they may have done more interesting things for them (e.g., talking to a classmate). It is also interesting to observe that the students regarded the selected activities to be very easy during Reading session 5 (also in Reading session 4 and Reading session 6). This finding can be the corollary of the fact that these language learners were allowed to choose texts for themselves from a variety of texts and select additional activities they wanted to perform. However, the steady increase in the levels of boredom in Reading session 5 and higher levels of boredom in the second half of Reading session 4 and Reading session 6 may be the result of time mismanagement and variety lacking. This is because most of the participants devoted too much time to reading and they decided to solve just one task. As a result, the reading part lasted too long and the performance of just one activity may have been perceived by them as monotonous. In addition, and in line with the earlier studies, it could be proposed that the activities the students chose to perform may have been too easy for them and thus they experienced boredom due to being underchallenged (Larson & Richards, 1991; Preckel et al., 2010; Vogel-Walcutt et al., 2012). It should also be noted that diversity in the values of the standard deviation indicate that the learners varied in their assessment of boredom during the six sessions. As some previous studies indicated, this can be related to individual characteristics of the students, such as individual's propensity to experience boredom (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986; Pekrun, 2006; Tulis & Fulmer, 2013; Vogel-Walcutt, et al., 2012) as well as to the fact that the group can be regarded as mixed-proficiency (Pawlak, 2012).

Research questions 2 and 3 focused on the levels of boredom from one session to the next and explored factors responsible for such alterations. Regarding the changes in the experience of boredom, the magnitude of the fluctuations was not very large. Nevertheless, the learners did perceive the sessions differently each time they were asked to evaluate them. For example, it was found that one session in particular was meaningful but dull and the other was usual but easy. Apart from the factors reported above (e.g., being underchallenged or overchallenged, teacher's decisions, time mismanagement), which might also account for the changes in the levels of boredom, these fluctuations may also be related to school subjects scheduled before the English lessons in question or students' weekly workload. In other words, demands of other teachers (e.g., the number of homework assignments, reviewing for tests) might have affected the students' perceptions. The latter factors might cause fatigue among the learners and limit their control over the process of learning, as noted by some researchers (Vogel-Walcutt et al., 2012). This, may ultimately have led to the increased feelings of boredom during some sessions. This explanation should, however, be treated with utmost caution due to the fact that no data on what had happened before or after the lessons were gathered.

All in all, when it comes to the nature of boredom (i.e., its changing character manifested in the fluctuations in the level of boredom observed during the reading sessions and from one session to the next), it makes the phenomenon in question comparable to the nature of motivation, foreign language anxiety and willingness to communicate. This is because the changing character of the latter constructs has been reported in a number of studies (e.g., Kruk, 2018; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015; Waninge et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the study offers some useful insights into the nature of boredom in the English language classroom and has ecological validity (cf. Hulstijn, 1997; Lightbown, 2000), it suffers from a number of limitations. They include the small sample size, a limited number of reading sessions, the self-rating procedure, and the fact that data were collected by the participants' regular teacher, which might have prevented them from voicing more critical opinions about the activities they performed. Undoubtedly, the reliability of the present study could have been improved by another pair of observing eyes. It should be noted, however, that similar methodology has been successfully used in other studies (e.g., Pawlak, 2012; Waninge et al., 2014) and it is problematic to find an alternative by means of which requisite real-time data could have been obtained. Future studies should attempt to address these methodological issues. They should include larger samples, a greater number of lessons and refined data collection instruments. Future studies should also involve students of different educational levels and levels of proficiency as well as learners of different foreign/second languages. In addition, future studies might want to investigate the nature of boredom in learning different L2 skills writing and subsystems (e.g., vocabulary, grammar).

Regardless of the limitations of the present study, it has some notable pedagogical implications. One of them relates to the fact that students should be involved in the process of planning parts of a lesson dedicated to reading by, for example, being asked to select reading materials obtained from authentic sources and concerning up-to-date topics. As Belton and Prihadharshini (2007) argue, mitigating boredom in educational settings requires the creation of an environment that promotes learner autonomy, stimulates and motivates students intrinsically. Next, reading texts should vary in style and format in order to avoid monotony and repetitiveness. Reading materials should be adjusted to language learners' proficiency level; however, they should pose a reasonable challenge. Finally, and most importantly perhaps, the teacher's awareness of and desire to combat boredom in the L2 classroom is crucial for creating a genuine and engaging learning environment. Thus, teachers should be aware of the fact that boredom constitutes an inseparable part of foreign/second language classroom environment. Even the most motivated students may suddenly lose their interest in a particular activity if it is too easy/difficult or similar to the one just done, and simply become bored. At the same time boredom is susceptible to change and some suggestions how to alleviate L2 learners' boredom have been given in this article. The implementation of these suggestions may result in language learners' perception of activities as less monotonous, less predictable or dull and may help to reduce the feelings of boredom among learners of foreign/second languages in school settings.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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Appendix 1

Session log.

Part I: Before the reading session

Please state your name .... Date ....

Part II: During the reading session

Please indicate your level of boredom every time you will hear a sound. Use a scale of 1 - 7. If you are very bored write 7 and if are not bored at all write 1.

	Minute 3	*Minute 6*	*Minute 9*	*Minute 12*	*Minute 15*	*Minute 18*
Level of boredom						

Part III: After the reading session

Now briefly comment on the text and activities:

Please mark your responses with an (x) in between one of the seven spaces which best represents your feelings of the text and activities.

boring							interesting
meaningless							meaningful
very difficult							very easy
dull							exciting
unsatisfying							satisfying
usual							unusual
unappealing							appealing
monotonous							absorbing

Appendix 2

The mean and standard deviation values during all reading sessions (RS)

RS	***min. 3***	***min. 6***	***min. 9***	***min. 12***	***min. 15***	***min. 18***	***Overall***
	Mean (SD)						
1	2.86 (0.86)	3.00 (1.18)	3.07 (1.27)	3.64 (1.55)	3.21 (1.42)	3.21 (1.42)	3.17 (0.27)
2	3.07 (1.28)	3.40 (1.12)	3.27 (1.16)	3.33 (1.40)	3.07 (1.28)	3.60 (1.35)	3.29 (0.20)
3	3.38 (1.15)	3.63 (1.26)	3.88 (1.36)	4.06 (1.00)	3.69 (1.20)	4.25 (1.57)	3.82 (0.31)
4	3.20 (1.47)	3.07 (1.22)	3.07 (1.16)	3.27 (1.03)	3.33 (1.59)	3.80 (1.93)	3.29 (0.27)
5	3.06 (1.44)	3.31 (1.45)	3.31 (1.30)	3.56 (1.41)	3.81 (1.42)	3.88 (1.50)	3.49 (0.32)
6	3.41 (1.77)	3.65 (1.54)	3.53 (1.50)	3.94 (1.56)	3.94 (1.43)	4.06 (1.75)	3.76 (0.26)
Overall	3.16 (0.21)	3.34 (0.27)	3.35 (0.31)	3.63 (0.32)	3.51 (0.35)	3.80 (0.36)	

Note: “min” refers to “minute”

Appendix 3

The mean and standard deviation values for the students' evaluation of the reading sessions (RS)

RS	*boring interesting*	*meaningless meaningful*	*very difficult very easy*	*dull exciting*	*unsatisfying satisfying*	*usual unusual*	*unappealing appealing*	*monotonous absorbing*	*Overall*
	Mean (SD)								
1	4.79	5.79	4.64	4.93	4.86	4.57	5.43	4.64	4.96
	(1.58)	(1.25)	(1.34)	(1.00)	(1.17)	(1.40)	(1.16)	(1.50)	(0.43)
2	5.20	5.53	5.07	5.20	5.27	5.33	5.33	5.13	5.26
	(1.74)	(1.13)	(1.16)	(1.26)	(1.44)	(1.50)	(1.45)	(1.41)	(0.14)
3	4.56	4.81	5.19	4.63	4.25	4.13	4.75	4.19	4.56
	(1.21)	(0.91)	(1.22)	(0.89)	(1.29)	(1.41)	(1.24)	(1.22)	(0.36)
4	5.13	5.27	4.73	4.93	5.07	4.13	5.00	4.73	4.87
	(1.06)	(1.28)	(1.03)	(0.80)	(1.16)	(1.92)	(1.13)	(0.88)	(0.35)
5	4.56	5.13	4.63	4.81	4.69	3.94	4.88	4.13	4.60
	(1.31)	(1.20)	(1.63)	(0.98)	(1.20)	(2.05)	(1.09)	(1.26)	(0.39)
6	5.06	5.35	4.59	4.94	4.59	4.06	5.06	4.53	4.77
	(1.60)	(1.17)	(1.00)	(1.34)	(1.28)	(1.39)	(1.25)	(1.59)	(0.41)
Total	**4.88**	**5.31**	**4.81**	**4.91**	**4.79**	**4.36**	**5.08**	**4.56**	
	(0.29)	**(0.34)**	**(0.26)**	**(0.19)**	**(0.36)**	**(0.52)**	**(0.26)**	**(0.37)**	

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Changes in and Effects of TED Talks on Postgraduate Students' English Speaking Performance and Speaking Anxiety

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This research study explored the changes in and effects of TED talks on Chinese postgraduate students' English speaking performance and speaking anxiety over a period of 10 weeks. In this research, TED talks were used as a learning mode to provide a quasi-realistic sociocultural context for speaking English. 166 students from the experimental group using TED talks and 156 in the conventional mode participated in the quasi-experiment. They made eight-minute oral presentations and answered the 12-item English Speaking Anxiety Scale prior to and after the experiment. Analyses of the data revealed three major findings: 1) both the experimental and control groups did significantly better in English speaking performance and became significantly less anxious about speaking English over the 10-week period, 2) the experimental group did significantly better in move structure and were significantly less anxious about speaking English than the control group at the end of the 10-week period, and 3) the learning modes had a significant effect on students' move structures of oral presentations but had no effect on their oral presentation performance and English speaking anxiety. These findings support the benefit of supplementing EFL (English as a foreign language) teaching and learning with TED talks and other similar virtual situated learning. Thus, the present study not only contributes to the current literature, which is short of studies on the effects of technology on SL/FL teaching and learning and the dynamic characteristic of the emotions associated with SL/FL learning, but also suggests that virtual situated learning like TED talks should be incorporated into SL/FL teaching and learning.

Keywords: TED talks, learning mode, English speaking performance, English speaking anxiety, change, effect

Introduction

The ability to speak a second/foreign language (SL/FL) has always been one of the four basic language skills and a basic competency desired by SL/FL learners (Astawa, Mantra, & Widiastuti, 2017). Since it involves instantaneous planning, conceptualization, organization, and articulation, it is rather challenging and thus anxiety-provoking for most SL/FL learners due to limited access and exposure to the language (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1995; Liu & Xiangming, 2019). It is more so for postgraduate students who need to share their research results via oral presentations, seminars, lectures, and conferences in oral English. Studies have revealed that authentic materials and adequate practice and exposure help enhance both speaking ability and confidence in speaking the target language (DeKeyser, 2007; Liu, 2018; Martinsen, 2011). With the development of technology in recent decades, more authentic materials are being made available to SL/FL learners who, assisted by computers, have more access and exposure to the SL/FL as well. One such example is TED talks, a series of formal virtual speeches on various topics that provide realistic sociocultural contexts for students to observe while ruminating on real speakers' speaking speed, paralanguage elements (e.g., pitch, stress, pauses, etc.), facial expressions (e.g., eye contact, smiling, etc.) and body language (e.g., gestures and moving around) as well as the organization of the speeches and use of arguments/details (Huang, Yang, Chiang, & Su, 2016; López-Carril, Añó, & González-Serrano, 2020). Students can then use the speeches as models and better their own oral presentations. This has led to more research on the effects of technology on students' learning of SLs/

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FLs and their emotions when using the target language (Kim, 2009; Melchor-Couto, 2017; Rahimi & Soleymani, 2015; Yang, 2017).

In spite of the growth of research in this area, the number of studies on the effects of technology on emotions and SL/FL learning outcomes is still inadequate considering the complexity of both technology and language learning (Aydın, 2018; Xiangming, Liu, & Zhang, 2020). Hence, the present research sought to examine the changes in and effects of TED talks on Chinese postgraduate EFL learners' English speaking performance and speaking anxiety, where TED talks were used as a learning mode to provide a quasi-realistic sociocultural context for English speaking. By examining the effects of technology on SL/FL teaching and learning and the dynamic characteristics of emotions associated with SL/FL learning, the present research is expected to enrich the current literature and suggest ways to incorporate virtual situated learning like TED talks into SL/FL teaching and learning.

Literature Review

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

As one of the four basic language skills, the ability to speak is the primary means to communicate with the community of the target language. As a world lingua franca, English has been learned by millions of people around the world with various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. High English speaking proficiency has often been desired by ESL/EFL (English as a SL/FL) learners to communicate with people with diverse language backgrounds in both their daily and academic lives. Nevertheless, it is not easy for most ESL/EFL learners to achieve high proficiency in spoken English. Public speaking itself is anxiety-provoking (Spielberger, 1972). Speaking in a SL/FL is even more anxiety-provoking for most learners due to various linguistic, cultural, psychological, educational, and personality factors (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 2017).

The role of affect in SL/FL learning and acquisition has long been observed and researched: Positive affect like motivation and enjoyment helps enhance learners' commitment in learning while negative affect like anxiety often leads to undesirable results (Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff, 2020; Chow, Chui, Lai, & Kwok, 2017; Chow, Chiu, & Wong, 2017; Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Horwitz et al., 1986; Gregersen, 2020; Liu, 2021). Foreign language anxiety (FLA), is defined in Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128), as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process." This definition assumes that FLA is situation-specific, dynamic, and highly related to language learning. To measure this anxiety and explore its correlation with SL/FL learning outcomes, a variety of instruments have been developed such as diaries, self-ratings, interviews, observations, and questionnaires (Bailey, 1983; Graesser, D'Mello, & Strain, 2014; Horwitz et al., 1986; Loderer, Pekrun, & Lester, 2018). For example, Bailey (1983) wrote diaries to document the anxiety she experienced during the process of learning French as a FL. Picard (2010) used technology-advanced sensors to detect learners' brain activities, heart rates, blood pressure, and eye movement to explore their physiological states. The 33-item Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) has been embraced by researchers to investigate SL/FL classroom anxiety and speaking anxiety (Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999; Huang, 2018; Liu, 2018; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Yan & Horwitz, 2008).

The use of these instruments has generated a plethora of empirical research in various SL/FL contexts on anxiety related to SL/FL listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Botes et al., 2020; Dewaele & Al Saraj, 2015; Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Horwitz, 2016; Liu, 2018, 2021; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Liu & Xiangming, 2019; Liu & Yuan, 2021; MacIntye, 2017; Serraj & Nordin, 2013; Shirvan & Taherian, 2021; Zhou, 2017). These studies have consistently shown that FLA is largely negatively correlated with SL/FL learning outcomes although it has sometimes been shown to be facilitating. The studies have also shown that speaking is the most anxiety-provoking activity, and that FLA interacts with the learning situation and changes as situations differ. For example, Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018) explored the effects of positive and negative effect on FL performance in 189 foreign language pupils in London and 152 Saudi EFL learners and users of English in Saudi Arabia. They found that positive affect had a stronger effect on FL performance. Dewaele and Al Saraj (2015) found that self-perceived proficiency was the strongest predictor of FLA and that participants who felt more proficient in oral English exhibited lower levels of FLA in English.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods used for anxiety research have shown that anxiety exists in almost every aspect of SL/FL learning and changes over time (Gregersen, 2020; Liu & Xiangming, 2019; Lu & Liu, 2015; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Speaking publicly in the target language has always been found to be particularly anxiety-provoking for many SL/FL students, even those who feel little stress in other aspects of language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986; Králová, 2016; Liu & Xiangming, 2019; MacIntyre & MacDonald, 1998). The speech of anxious students is often accompanied by blushing, trembling hands, pounding heart, and headache (Cohen & Norst, 1989). Anxious students are less active in language classes and even perform avoidance behaviors like skipping classes and postponing their homework (Argaman & Abu-Rabia, 2002; Ely, 1986). Nevertheless, as they have more access to the target language and begin to use it more, they are likely to become more confident and less anxious when speaking the language (Bailey, 1983; Gregersen, 2020; Liu & Xiangming, 2019; Shirvan & Taherian, 2021). Thus, what causes foreign language speaking anxiety and how to reduce or even eliminate it has also become a research topic in the area.

Anxiety Coping Strategies

Concurrently, a complex set of reasons has been identified as contributors to foreign language speaking anxiety, including the inability to pronounce strange sounds and words, lack of practice, limited vocabulary, low self-confidence, low language proficiency, unfamiliarity with the learning environment, past unsuccessful experiences, evaluation, improper beliefs, and peer pressure (Bailey, 1983; Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu, 2018; McCoy, 1979; Young, 1991). Consequently, how to reduce or alleviate FLA and improve speaking performance has increasingly become the concern of more researchers. Various cognitive (e.g., being prepared and cooperative learning), affective (e.g., building and enhancing self-confidence via encouragement and praise, and being empathetic), and behavioral (e.g., having more practice and access to speaking English) strategies have been proposed for instructors and learners to help handle FLA in and outside classrooms (Alrabai, 2015; Chow et al., 2017; Guo, Xu, & Liu, 2018; Horwitz et al., 1986; Lee, 2016; Liu & Huang, 2011; Liu, 2018, 2021; Liu & Xiangming, 2019). In spite of these suggestions, little research has been done on using specific strategies to reduce FLA in classrooms, which may be largely due to the lack of practicing environments. Moreover, traditional classroom activities seldom truly reflect real-world contexts and thus are not well equipped to respond to situated language learning. This, nevertheless, can be (well) compensated for with the integration of technology into SL/FL instruction, which creates (nearly) authentic use of the target language in virtual environments, increases practice and exposure to the target language, and enhance learners' self-confidence when using the language (Alcòn-Soler, 2015; Ataiefar & Sadighi, 2017; DeKeyser, 2007; Grant, Huang, & Pasfield-Neofitou, 2018; Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013; Hsiao, Lan, Kao, & Li, 2017; Lindgren, Tscholl, Wang, & Johnson, 2016; Moeller & Catalano, 2015; Stout, 2019).

For example, in Grant et al. (2018), chatting with anonymous identities in the virtual environment increased students' practice, reduced their FLA, engaged them more in the learning activities, and enhanced their language competence. Rahimi and Soleymani (2015) adopted an experimental design and explored the effect of using podcasts to practice listening skills on 50 intermediate EFL learners over the course of a semester. The results showed that listening to podcasts significantly reduced listening anxiety and enhanced listening capacity in the experimental group. Shams (2005) examined the use of computerized pronunciation practice as a tool for the reduction of foreign language anxiety via a pre-test/post-test comparison group design. Students in the experimental group practiced their pronunciation using the computer while students in the comparison group practiced with cassettes. ANOVA analyses revealed that the computer-aided practice significantly improved the quality of the experimental group's pronunciation but exerted no significant effect on decreases in anxiety. The researcher believed that this was because the students could set their own learning pace and control the learning activities when practicing on the computer. Xiangming et al. (2020) designed a 10-week longitudinal study to examine the effects of the Rain Classroom mobile learning app on 158 Chinese postgraduate students' English speaking anxiety and English performance. Statistical analyses of pre- and post-test data revealed a significant decrease in anxiety and improvement in English performance, especially speaking performance. This might be because the app not only provided the learners with more practice but a collaborative learning environment in which they could observe and assess their own learning as well as their peers'.

Research Questions

As reviewed above, foreign language speaking anxiety exists in many learners and consistently has a negative effect on their performance to varying degrees. Meanwhile, FLA is dynamic and interacts with various other factors. Thus, it is always worthwhile to research it using students with varying backgrounds in different SL/FL contexts. Along with research on foreign language speaking anxiety is research on how to handle it to improve students' confidence and proficiency in the target language. Although more research has been conducted on the use of technology in relation to language learning outcomes and anxiety, works like these are still scarce, meaning that both learning outcomes and FLA as well as other feelings associated with technology-assisted learning contexts need to be further researched. TED talks, as free virtual talks, are often used as educational resources to help students improve their speaking proficiency in the target language and presentation skills, but have not been researched sufficiently (Greenhow & Galvin, 2020; Hsiao et al., 2017; Taguchi, 2018). Therefore, the present study designed a quasi-experiment to explore the changes in and effects of TED talks on Chinese postgraduate students' English speaking performance and speaking anxiety over a period of 10 weeks.

TED, starting in 1984 as a conference where technology, entertainment, and design converged, is a nonprofit organization devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short and powerful virtual talks (18 minutes or less) and covers a wide range of topics, from science to business to global issues, in more than 100 languages (www.ted.com/about/our-organization). In this research, TED talks in English were used as a learning mode to provide a quasi-realistic sociocultural context for students to learn from, model, and develop their own English speeches. The research questions were:

1. How will students' English speaking performance and speaking anxiety change during the 10-week period?
2. What are the effects of TED talks on students' English speaking performance and speaking anxiety?

Methodology

Context

This study was conducted on first-year doctoral students of the Advanced English Speaking course instructed by two female teachers in their 30s with a similar educational background in a Chinese university in Beijing. The course aimed to improve postgraduate students' ability to present ideas and communicate with others in formal situations like lectures, seminars, and conferences. Hence, classroom teaching generally consisted of instruction and practice speaking English in various forms. Instruction mainly focused on the structure of a speech: How to state claims/ideas, how to support the claims/ideas, how to organize ideas in a speech, how to prepare a presentation for a conference/seminar, and how to ask and answer questions after a presentation. Understandably, instruction was often brief, followed by a variety of activities exercised in class, such as pair work, group discussion, and individual and group presentations on differing topics. Example topics included in the activities were progress on a project, communication with the supervisor, experiences with and feelings of participating in/presenting at a conference/seminar, women rights, and so on. Individual and group presentations also covered a variety of topics such as technology and privacy protection, wireless charging, cringe attacks, presidential elections in USA, autonomous driving, narrative design in museum exhibitions, and so on. In addition to questions and answers, the instructors commented on each individual/group presentation in terms of its strengths and weaknesses.

When the present research was conducted, each of the two teachers taught four sections (each class had about 40 students) of the same course. According to the results of the English placement test taken upon entering the university, these students were intermediate to advanced learners of English at a similar English proficiency level. In order to increase students' exposure to real English speaking scenarios and practice of English speaking, especially English speeches in formal situations, the instructors used TED talks in English on various topics (e.g., collaborative consumption, positive emotions, artificial intelligence, bitcoin, design in life, etc.) every other week for 10 weeks in half classes, keeping all the other activities the same for all classes. To test the effects of TED talks, two classes from each instructor were randomly chosen as the experimental group (with TED talks) and the other two as the control group (without TED talks), and these were considered to be two different learning modes in the present research. In experimental classes, a 15-18 minute TED talk was played

first and then analyzed by the instructors in terms of the move structure (Appendix B), ideas, and development of the ideas. After that, the students were asked to discuss and share ideas on any aspect of the video in terms of questions and answers, group discussions, and pair work. The analysis and discussions took up about 30 minutes. Meanwhile, the students were encouraged to watch and imitate TED talks, including those discussed in class, after class, for at least one TED talk per week. It was hoped that the TED talks would provide students with a nearly realistic context to listen to, watch, and model their English speeches on at their own pace and from different angles such as the organization and delivery of the speeches.

Participants

A total of 322 (217 male and 105 female) first-year postgraduate students from eight natural intact classes of the Advanced English Speaking course taught by two instructors participated in this research. They were chosen as participants of the present research because they had the need to communicate in academic oral English, which is more challenging and anxiety-provoking than general oral English, and the use of TED talks was consistent with the aim of the course.

With an average age of 22.295 (SD = 2.59), the students were from various disciplines such as Civil Engineering, Architecture, Chemistry, Automation, and Economics and Management. Data for the final analyses showed that 166 (114 male and 52 female) students were in the experimental group and 156 (103 male and 53 female) students were in the control group. During the 16-week term, each instructor and the students met once a week, lasting 90 minutes each time.

Instruments

The participants in this quasi-experimental research made individual presentations and answered the English Speaking Anxiety Scale before and after the 10-week period, as detailed below.

English Speaking Performance

Students' English peaking performance was measured via oral presentations in the present research. The students were required to give an eight-minute oral presentation on subjects of their own choice in weeks 2 and 3 (pre-test, namely prior to the use of the TED talks) and weeks 14 and 15 (post-test, namely after the use of the TED talks) respectively, each followed by a five-minute question and answer session to clarify or expound ideas. Both topics and presentations should be formal and academic.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire had two parts: the background information questionnaire and the English Speaking Anxiety Scale. The background information questionnaire was intended to collect such information about the participants as gender, age, and discipline. The 12-item Speaking Anxiety Scale used in the present study was modified from the 33-item Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). To measure students' English speaking anxiety, the present study selected only the items associated with anxiety/confidence when speaking English, which resulted in a total number of 12 items named the English Speaking Anxiety Scale (ESAS). Example items were "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English in my class" and "I don't feel anxious when I talk to native speakers of English". All the ESAS items were placed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree', with values 1-5 assigned to the descriptors respectively. Consequently, the higher the ESAS score, the more anxious about speaking English a respondent was. The basic characteristics of ESAS are presented in Table 1, which revealed fairly high reliability and good mean item-total correlation for ESAS in each phase for both the experimental and control groups.

Table 1

Characteristics of the English Speaking Anxiety Scale (ESAS)

Group/Learning mode	*Phases*	*No. of items*	*Reliability*	*Mean item-total correlation (p = .01)*
Experimental group (N = 166)	Pre-test	12	.924	.505
	Post-test	12	.806	.463
Control group (N = 156)	Pre-test	12	.921	.464
	Post-test	12	.802	.480

Data Collection Procedure and Analyses

The present study employed an experimental design and collected data over a 10-week period of time during a 16-week semester. Since the placement test showed that the students were at a similar English proficiency level, the eight intact classes were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups, with four classes in each group. In week 1, the instructors informed students of the course purpose and requirements, classroom activities, and the use of TED talks in respective classes. Students filled in the survey and a consent form, and gave oral presentations in weeks 2-3 as well as in weeks 14-15. Each oral presentation was recorded and assessed in terms of overall performance and move structure. The overall performance was holistically scored by two instructors using the oral presentation rubric adapted from the one developed by Bresciani and his associates (2009) (Appendix A) on a scale of 1-20. The rubric covered four dimensions: Organization, originality, authenticity, and delivery, with a score of 1-5 for each dimension. To better fit the present situation, the significance of the topic and citation of resources were added while being interesting and enthusiastic was deleted from the rubric. With an inter-rater reliability of .913, the mean of the two scores was chosen as the final score of an oral presentation. Meanwhile, the two instructors scored each presentation's move structure on a scale of 1-20 according to the scheme adapted from the one developed by Chang and Huang (2015) (Appendix B). The scheme consisted of five main categories and nine subcategories of move structures of oral presentations: listener orientation, speaker presentation, topic introduction, topic development, and closure. Listener orientation is when presenters greet and engage the audience; speaker presentation is when presenters introduce themselves and connect themselves with their topics; topic introduction is when presenters introduce their topics to the audience; topic development is when presenters develop their topics in different ways, describing, supporting, and expanding the main theme; and closure is when presenters signal the completion of their presentations. With an inter-rater reliability of .929, the mean of the two scores was chosen as the final score of the move structure of an oral presentation.

The survey data were analyzed via SPSS 20. Paired samples t-tests were conducted to explore differences in English speaking performance and anxiety of the experimental and control groups between the two phases; independent samples t-tests were run to examine differences in English speaking performance and anxiety between the experimental and control groups in the two phases; and then a one-way between-groups analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to explore the effects of the TED talks on English speaking performance and anxiety.

Results

Changes in English Speaking Performance and Speaking Anxiety

In order to explore the differences in English speaking performance and anxiety of the experimental and control groups in two phases, paired samples t-tests were run between pre- and post-test scores of oral presentations, move structure, and English speaking anxiety. The results are reported in Table 2, which shows that the experimental group scored higher on their oral presentations (mean = 17.60 ~ 20.25) and move structure (mean = 17.22 ~ 21.13) but lower in ESAS (mean = 2.87 ~ 3.14) in phase 2 than in phase 1. All of the differences were statistically significant, with t values ranging from -24.53 to 4.92 ($p \leqslant .001$), as evidenced by the paired samples t-test results reported in Table 2. A similar pattern was observed for the control group over the 10-week period, with t values ranging from -24.73 to 6.53 ($p \leqslant .001$). These findings clearly indicate that

both the experimental and control groups did significantly better on their oral presentations and move structure and became significantly less anxious about speaking English at the end of the 10-week period.

Table 2

Means and SDs of English speaking performance and anxiety of the experimental and control groups (N = 166)

Mean		*Pre-test*		*Post-test*		*Paired samples t-test results*		
		SD	*Mean*	*SD*	*t*	*p*	*Cohen's d*	
The experimental group (N = 166)	Oral presentations	17.60	1.49	20.25	1.37	-24.53***	.000	22.08
	Move structure	17.22	1.46	21.13	1.18	-23.74***	.000	13.96
	ESAS	3.14	.81	2.87	.59	4.92***	.000	1.23
The control group (N = 156)	Oral presentations	17.78	1.67	20.15	1.39	-21.37***	.000	8.46
	Move structure	17.55	1.43	20.62	1.46	-24.73***	.000	10.23
	ESAS	3.30	.78	3.02	.59	6.53***	.000	1.47

Notes: *** = p ≤ .001; degree of freedom = 165; effect size of Cohen's d: small = d ≤ 0.2; medium = d = 0.5; large = d ≥ 0.8 (Cohen, 1988)

Differences in English Speaking Performance and Anxiety between the Experimental and Control Groups

As summarized in Table 2, the experimental group scored slightly lower on their oral presentations, move structure, and ESAS than the control group in phase 1, but higher on their oral presentations and move structure, though lower in ESAS than the control group in phase 2. Nevertheless, statistically significant difference occurred in move structure (t = -2.04, p = .043) between the two groups in phase 1, and in move structure (t = 2.46, p = .014) and ESAS (t = -2.31, p = .021) in phase 2, as reported in Table 3. These results indicate that the experimental group did significantly better on move structure than the control group (d = .02) but their oral presentations and English speaking anxiety were similar to the control group in phase 1. Meanwhile, the respondents in the experimental group did significantly better in terms of move structure (d = 0.11) and reported feeling significantly less anxious about speaking English (d = 0.15) than their counterparts in the control group in phase 2.

Table 3

Independent samples t-test results of English speaking performance and anxiety

	Pre-test			*Post-test*		
	t	*p*	*Cohen's d*	*t*	*p*	*Cohen's d*
Oral presentations	-1.02	.310	/	.685	.594	/
Move structure	-2.04*	.043	0.02	2.46*	.014	0.11
ESAS	-1.88	.061	/	-2.31*	.021	0.15

Notes: * = p ≤ .05; degree of freedom = 320; Effect size of Cohen's d: small = d ≤ 0.2; medium = d = 0.5; large = d ≥ 0.8 (Cohen, 1988)

Effects of Using TED Talks on English Speaking Performance and Anxiety

To explore the effects of TED talks on English speaking performance and anxiety, a one-way between-groups analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted on oral presentations, move structure, and English speaking anxiety, respectively. Preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of regression slopes, and reliable measurement of the covariate.

Effects on Oral Presentation

In order to explore the effects of using TED talks on students' oral presentations, ANCOVA was employed with post-test oral presentation scores as the dependent variable, pre-test oral presentation scores as a covariate, and learning modes (namely the experimental group using the TED talks and the control group using conventional methods) as the independent variable. The results are reported in Table 4, which shows that the learning modes had no effect on students' post-test oral presentations (F = 2.346, p = .127, partial Eta squared = .007).

Table 4

Results of ANCOVA on oral presentations

Resources	*Type III sum of squares*	*df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*p*	*Partial Eta squared*
Intercept	329.359	1	329.359	253.873	.000	.443
Pre-test oral presentations (covariate)	197.132	1	197.132	151.951	.000	.323
Learning modes	3.043	1	3.043	2.346	.127	.007
Error	413.850	319				

Effects on Move Structure

In order to explore the effects of using TED talks on the move structures of oral presentations, ANCOVA was employed with post-test move structure scores as the dependent variable, pre-test move structure scores as a covariate, and learning modes (namely the experimental group using the TED talks and the control group using conventional methods) as the independent variable. The results are reported in Table 5, which shows that the learning modes had a significant effect on students' post-test move structures (F = 12.228, p = .001, partial Eta squared = .037).

Table 5

Results of ANCOVA on move structures

Resources	*Type III sum of squares*	*df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*p*	*Partial Eta squared*
Intercept	326.464	1	326.464	110.296	.000	.257
Pre-test move structures (covariate)	167.061	1	167.061	56.441	.000	.150
Learning modes	36.193	1	36.193	12.228***	.001	.037
Error	944.206	319				

Effects on English Speaking Anxiety

In order to explore the effects of using TED talks on students' English speaking anxiety, ANCOVA was employed with post-test ESAS scores as the dependent variable, pre-test ESAS scores as a covariate, and learning modes (namely the experimental group using the TED talks and the control group using conventional methods) as the independent variable. The results are presented in Table 6, which indicates that learning modes had no effect on students' post-test English speaking anxiety (F = 2.112, p = .147, partial Eta squared = .007).

Table 6

Results of ANCOVA on English speaking anxiety

Resources	*Type III sum of squares*	*df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*p*	*Partial Eta squared*
Intercept	39.863	1	39.863	183.553	.000	.365
Pre-test ESAS (covariate)	42.427	1	42.427	195.361	.000	.380
Learning modes	.459	1	.459	2.112	.147	.007
Error	69.278	319				

Discussion

This quasi-experiment investigated the changes in and effects of TED talks used as a learning mode on Chinese postgraduate students' English speaking performance and speaking anxiety over a period of 10 weeks.

Research question one was related to changes and differences in English speaking performance and speaking anxiety during the 10-week experiment. Analyses of the data revealed that both the experimental and control groups outperformed in post-test oral presentations and move structures and became significantly less anxious about speaking English after the experiment, with a large effect size. Consistent with those found in many studies on anxiety in SL/FL contexts (Alcòn-Soler, 2015; Ataiefar & Sadighi, 2017; Grant et al., 2018; Hsiao et al., 2017; Lindgren et al., 2016; Liu, 2021; Liu & Yuan, 2021; Moeller & Catalano, 2015), these findings further confirm the belief that increased exposure and practice help improve speaking performance and reduce anxiety. As previously described, to improve students' English speaking ability in formal situations, the instructors organized various activities to practice using English. Ten weeks' instruction in this way definitely provided substantial exposure and chances to practice speaking English, which enhanced the students' English speaking skills and performance as well as their confidence in speaking English. As students' proficiency in spoken English increased, they became more confident when speaking English, and vice versa. At the same time, these findings further confirm the dynamic nature of foreign language anxiety (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Gregersen, 2020; Liu, 2021; Liu & Xiangming, 2019; Piniel & Csizer, 2015; Shirvan & Taherian, 2021; Xiangming et al., 2020).

Research question two was concerned with the effects of TED talks on students' English speaking performance and anxiety. This question was answered by the results of independent samples t-tests of English speaking performances and anxiety scores between the experimental and control groups and ANCOVA of TED talks on English speaking performance and anxiety. Independent samples t-tests revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in move structure but were similar to the control group in oral presentations and English speaking anxiety in phase 1, suggesting that they were basically at a similar starting point in English speaking performance and anxiety prior to the experiment. The tests also showed that the experimental group did significantly better in move structure and became significantly less anxious about speaking English than their counterparts in the control group in phase 2, although with a small effect size. This was partially consistent with the results of ANCOVA which demonstrated that using TED talks had a significant effect on students' move structures in their oral presentations but had no effect on their oral presentations and English speaking anxiety. These findings clearly indicated that using TED talks helped improve students' English speaking performance and reduce their speaking anxiety levels. As previously reviewed, virtual reality created by technology (i.e., computers and multimedia) provides realistic sociocultural contexts for language learning, in which learners can interact in real-world situations with instruction from educational applications (Greenhow & Galvin, 2020; Hwang & Chang, 2011; Mulyono & Suryoputro, 2020). Likewise, using TED talks provided adequate chances for the participants to learn from and model the talks, especially the move structures of the talks in the present research, and enhanced their confidence when giving English oral presentations. This was largely the reason why the experimental group outperformed the control group in move structure and English speaking anxiety. Nevertheless, probably because the TED talks did not offer any chance for viewers to interact with the speakers or other viewers, as in other learning-oriented virtual environments (Greenhow & Galvin, 2020; Hsiao et al., 2017; Mulyono & Suryoputro, 2020; Taguchi, 2018), it seemed that the participants' overall English speaking performance was not significantly affected by the TED talks. Even so, as suggested in Huang, Hsu, Lai, and Hsueh (2016) and Hwang and Wang (2016), situated learning with computers and multimedia technologies can be employed as an alternative to real-life settings to supplement SL/FL classroom teaching and learning. This can not only increase learners' interest in, exposure to, and practice of the target language but also other linguistic competencies like pragmatic abilities (e.g., the ability to address the audience, the ability to elicit responses from the audience, the ability to stress an idea, etc.) as well as confidence in using the language (Gee, 2012; Huang et al., 2016; Kim, 2009; Lan & Lin, 2016; Liu & Xiangming, 2019). Ultimately, their competence in the language will be promoted and emotions in learning and using the language will become more positive and proactive (Hsiao et al., 2017; Lindgren et al., 2016; Liu & Xiangming, 2019; Shirvan & Taherian, 2021; Xiangming et al., 2020). For example, the participants using TED talks in the present research raised their awareness of textural features of English oral presentations and improved the move structures of their oral presentations. Understandably, they became more confident and less anxious when giving oral presentations in English. With more practice, they would learn to become more

skilled at organizing and presenting the contents and interacting with the audience, improve their pronunciation and intonation, and learn to stress important ideas better. Accordingly, they would also enhance their proficiency in oral English. This is especially so in the pandemic COVID-19 context when most schools are closed and shifting to online teaching and learning. As evidenced in López-Carril et al. (2020), TED talks can be employed as useful pedagogical resources in education.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that there were some limitations in the present research. The major limitation was that it remained unclear whether the students in the control group accessed and watched TED talks on their own outside the classroom. This made it less likely to determine the degree of effects that TED talks had on the respondents' English speaking performance and anxiety. Future research should be more cautious to reduce such risks. Moreover, interview data would enable us to better understand how TED talks helped improve students' speaking performance and decrease their anxiety. For example, whether it was the content of TED talks or increased exposure and familiarity with English speeches aided by TED talks that played a more important role in affecting students' speaking performance and anxiety remains to be further researched. Furthermore, it is commonly acknowledged that individual differences (e.g., differences in cognition, language aptitude, emotion, behavior, and personality) play a crucial role in SL/FL teaching and learning (Liu, 2018; MacIntyre & MacDonald, 1998; Skehan, 1989), thus future research should include more such individual variables to explore the varying effects of technology as well as their interactive effects on SL/FL learning. The results may also, in return, provide useful feedback for the development and innovation in technology.

As technologies and technology-created virtual environments are increasingly applied in language education, their effects need to be continuously researched, which will reveal more effects of the technology on SL/FL teaching and learning.

Conclusion

The present longitudinal study examined the changes in and effects of TED talks used as a learning mode on Chinese postgraduate students' English speaking performance and speaking anxiety. The study yielded the following major findings:

1. both the experimental and control groups performed significantly better in oral presentations and reported feeling significantly less anxious about speaking English in the post-test phase,
2. the experimental group did significantly better on move structures and were significantly less anxious about speaking English than the control group in the post-test phase, and
3. learning modes exerted a significant effect on students' move structures of oral presentations but had no effect on their oral presentation performance and English speaking anxiety.

These findings clearly showed that TED talks significantly improved students' oral presentations' move structures and that the experimental group did better on their oral presentation and became less anxious than the control group in phase 2, indicating that TED talks did benefit the students' learning of oral English. The present study not only contributes to the current literature, which is short of studies on the effects of technology on SL/FL teaching and learning and the dynamic characteristic of emotions associated with SL/FL learning, but also suggests that virtual situated learning like TED talks should be incorporated into SL/FL teaching and learning. Nevertheless, the application and effects of TED talks in second/foreign language classrooms need to be further researched.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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Appendix A

Oral presentation scoring rubric

Criteria	***5***	***4***	***3***	***2***	***1***
Organization	Information presented is complete and in a logical order. Very good timing and pace.	Information presented is nearly complete and in a logical order. Appropriate timing and pace.	Some information is presented out of sequence. Some information is missing. Have some timing and pacing problems.	Poor sequence or illogical presentation of information. Much information is missing. Poor timing and pace.	Lack sequence/logic in the presentation. Present too much/ little material for the allotted time.
Originality	Ideas are very creative or original; expand on established ideas.	Ideas are fairly original or creative.	Ideas are moderately original or creative.	Ideas are limited in originality and creativity.	Ideas are not original or creative.
Authenticity	Topic is extremely relevant and/or significant. Very well-cited. .	Topic is fairly relevant and/or significant. Well-cited.	Topic is moderately relevant and/or significant. Has some citation problems.	Topic is somehow relevant and/or significant. Poorly-cited.	Topic is not relevant and/or significant. Little/no citation
Delivery	Rely little on notes, express ideas fluently in own words. Very good voice, body language, and communication skills. Very good PPT slides.	Rely little on notes. Fairly good voice, body language, and communication skills. Good PPT slides	Often refer to notes. Pause often. Good voice, body language, and communication skills. Fairly good PPT slides.	Rely extensively on notes. Low voice, inappropriate body language and communication skills. Poor PPT slides.	Read notes/materials. inappropriate body language and communication skills. Poor PPT slides.

Appendix B

The coding scheme for oral presentation move structures

Main categories	*Subcategories*	*Examples*
Listener orientation	A1. Greet audience	*Good morning, everyone.*
	A2. Engage the audience	*AI (artificial intelligence) has been heatedly discussed in recent years.*
Speaker presentation	B1. Introduce oneself	*I am Joan from the School of Civil Engineering.*
	B2. Show stance/position (optional)	*I believe architecture is closely related to people's health.*
Topic introduction	C1. Announce the topic	*The topic of my presentation is climate change and food quality.*
	C2. Outline structure (optional)	*The outline of my presentation is as follows: I'll talk about the first industrial revolution, and then the second industrial revolution, followed by the third and the fourth industrial revolutions respectively.*
Topic development	D1. Present the content logically	*Studies have shown that people are unwilling to have a second baby due to many reasons, such as .... The two main reasons are the cost of education and high housing prices. ...*
Closure	E1. Concluding messages	*That's the end of my presentation.*
	E2. Acknowledgements/gratitude	*Thank you for listening.*

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Moroccan EFL Public High School Teachers' Perceptions and Self-Reported Practices of Assessment

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This study aims to investigate the perceptions and self-reported practices of Moroccan EFL public high school teachers towards traditional and alternative assessment. The data were collected from 51 teachers in Northern Morocco using a self-developed online questionnaire. The questionnaire items about teachers' perceptions and self-reported practices were valid and both their data and sampling were acceptable for factor analysis of three subscales (traditional assessment, alternative assessment related with assessment as learning, and assessment for learning), and all scales proved to be reliable. Based on the three research questions, the study yielded the following results: (1) Teachers perceived the objectives of alternative assessment to be significantly more important than those of traditional assessment. (2) Based on their self-reported practices, teachers mainly used traditional assessment methods more often than alternative assessment methods associated with assessment as and for learning. (3) When comparing teachers' perceptions with their self-reported practices, we found that teachers' perceptions regarding traditional assessment matched their practices; while the majority of teachers admitted that they found alternative assessment important even though they did not often use it in order to support students to be able to reflect on their own learning or to enhance their performance in the learning process. Thus, these findings are significant for researchers, teachers, and educators to help them reconsider their perceptions of alternative assessment and how they should be enacted in practice with the aim of resolving the mismatches found in this study.

***Keywords*:** traditional assessment, alternative assessment, assessment of/for/as learning, EFL teachers' perceptions, self-reported practices

Introduction

Assessment has been one of the biggest areas of interest for scholars and practitioners in a multitude of fields of language teaching and learning. Traditional assessment (TA) has been applied in schools and for job recruitment and qualifications for many years. Recently, however, other forms of alternative assessment (AA) have been developed to meet both teachers' instructional objectives and students' needs in terms of their long-term progress evaluation. Despite the globally increasing interest in AA practices (Stognieva, 2015), the Moroccan educational system still grapples with the use of TA methods, which have often resulted in pass-fail decisions (Bouziane, 2017; Ouakrime, 2000). The high-stakes English examinations at the Baccalaureate level in Morocco have been the major criterion used to measure students' language skills despite the opportunity for English teachers to implement the recommended forms of formative assessment (e.g., portfolio, project, self- and peer-assessment) as prescribed in the English language guidelines (Ministry of National Education, 2007). Owing to such a strict reliance on final examinations, it cannot be claimed that teachers are free to switch from TA to AA, and therefore this has a direct impact on students' motivation for learning and on teachers' preparation of instructional materials, known in language testing and assessment research as the *washback* effect (Ghaicha & Oufela, 2021; Green, 2013). Thus, Moroccan EFL teachers are required, on the one hand, to administer and prepare their students for this exam, and, on the other hand, they are expected and encouraged to use AA methods, which is, in practice, negatively influenced by their time constraints, class sizes, and lack of training (Ghaicha & Omarkaly, 2018). The need for the more purposeful and frequent use of AA to increase the efficiency of English learning and teaching is warranted, especially on the part of the school administrations, which can encourage and support teachers. To address the problem, this study investigated the assessment

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situation in Moroccan public high schools in which EFL is introduced to students during the second year (after one year of English study in middle school). To achieve the purpose of this investigation, examining teachers' perceptions and self-reported practices of both TA and AA is warranted to help identify the extent to which their perceptions are enacted via specific classroom-based practices regarding the use of different assessment methods.

The Framework of Assessment for/as/of Learning

Within the framework of assessment, there is considerable inconsistency surrounding the meanings of classroom-based assessment (CBA). Rea-Dickins (2007) considered it to be effective formative language assessment where "learner performance is analysed in terms of learning goals and instructional processes rather than a finished product" (p. 507). In terms of practices and procedures, Davison and Leung (2009) viewed CBA as linked to and conceptualised as teacher-based assessment (TBA). The latter shares many characteristics with assessment for learning, which is often identified as a part of formative assessment and defined usually in opposition to traditional examinations, which are primarily designed for the purposes of selection and accountability (Davison & Leung, 2009; Lan & Fan, 2019). In contrast, Hill and McNamara (2012) defined CBA from a holistic perspective involving both formative (assessment for/as learning) and summative assessment (assessment of learning).

To provide definitions for these types of assessment, three main concepts were developed originally by Black and William (1998). The first concept is assessment for learning (AfL), which is defined by Gan, Liu, and Yang (2017, p. 1126) as "a process in which teachers seek to identify and diagnose student learning problems, and provide quality feedback for students on how to improve their work" so that they can meet the intended outcomes (Davidson & McKenzie, 2009). The second one is assessment as learning (AaL). It is based on learners' reflections on evidence of learning through their ability to build knowledge of themselves as autonomous and independent learners (Briggs, Woodfield, Martin, & Swatton, 2008; McDowell, Wakelin, Montgomery, & King, 2011). AaL also requires teachers' involvement in supporting students' learning by providing them with feedback regarding their performance (Earl & Katz, 2006). The third concept, assessment of learning (AoL), is used to "determine and report on student achievement at the end of a learning cycle" (Lan & Fan, 2019, p. 112).

Essentially, there are two basic modes of CBA that might be interrelated with other types of assessment: traditional and alternative. The former, linked to summative assessment (AoL), is designed to determine the extent to which learners meet the instructional goals and outcomes, as well as to confirm what and how much they know at the end of the learning process (Davidson & McKenzie, 2009; Earl & Katz, 2006; Nasab, 2015). On the other hand, the latter, associated with formative assessment, is meant to find information not only about what students know and can do with what they have learned (AfL), but also how they can reflect on and guide their own learning progress (AaL) (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018; Brown & Hudson, 1998).

Traditional and Alternative Assessment

Whereas AA requires students to be able to demonstrate what they have learned in the classroom through meaningful tasks that replicate real-life situations (Phongsirikul, 2018), traditional test practices direct teachers to assess students' language skills through summative tests and final examinations. They are also designed to provide information on students' achievements rather than on their learning strategies, interests, and motivations (Nasab, 2015). Because traditional methods do not assess reflective/critical thinking, self-, and peer-evaluation (Stognieva, 2015), AA has become a prominent approach that combines learning, instruction, and evaluation (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018; Anderson, 1998). According to Bolshakova (2015) and Brown (2004), some of the main characteristics of AA revolve around developing students' cognitive ability to create, produce, or perform performance-based assessment tasks that reflect real-life situations. Thus, the aim of AA is to support the development of learners who are able to link previous information with new experiences in the real world. In contrast, in a context where only TA is used, this assessment, as argued by Shams and Tavakoli (2014), is considered undesirable because of its focus on rote learning, on the reproduction of information on exams, and on judging students' performance based on scores (grades). However, this argument does not neglect the use of TA, but effective CBA should also include alternatives. The latter might contain tests and other non-standardised methods, which, like TA, need to be constructed in responsible, rigorous, and principled

ways (Brown, 2004) by teachers to assign scores for or make judgements on students' final products (Brown & Hudson, 1998).

As another comparison, Aksu Ataç (2012, p. 11–12) distinguished between standardised testing, which is a form of TA, and authentic assessment, which is referred to as AA (Hamayan, 1995; Monib, Karimi, & Nijat, 2020). The former regards testing and instruction as separate activities, focuses on lower-order knowledge and skills (recall or recognition of facts, ideas, and propositions), forbids students to interact, and provides norm-referenced feedback through comparisons with others' results (Chan & Liam, 2010; Omari, Moubtassime, & Ridouani, 2020). On the other hand, the latter considers assessment to be an integral part of instruction (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018), focuses on higher-order learning outcomes and higher-level thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, reflection, creative thinking, problem-solving, and the application of information and knowledge (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018; Brown & Hudson, 1998), and, in accordance with principles of criterion-referenced testing, compares learners' performances with aims and proficiency levels. AA also encourages collaborative and autonomous learning (Nasab, 2015), and compares learners to their previous achievements when providing self-referenced feedback about their improvement (Chan & Liam, 2010; Omari et al., 2020).

The most commonly employed TA techniques in EFL/ESL classrooms are true/false tests (Nasab, 2015), multiple-choice tests, essays, short-answer tests (Dolezalek & Sayre, 2009), matching, fill-in-the-blank (Bolshakova, 2015; Brown, 2004), information transfer (Brown, 2004; Hughes, 2003), question-and-answer tasks, and completion items (Brown, 2004). Unlike TA methods, many scholars (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018; Cirit, 2015; Monib et al., 2020; Rezaee, Alavi, & Shabani, 2013; Shams & Tavakoli, 2014) have argued that there are many kinds of AA methods. The most fundamental ones, which can be either part of AaL or AfL, are oral interviews (Brown, 2004), portfolios (Bolshakova, 2015; Galichkina, 2016; Richards & Schmidt, 2010; Zubizarreta, 2008), teacher observation (Baranovskaya & Shaforostova, 2017; Brown, 2004; Maxwell, 2001), project work (Bolshakova, 2015; Galichkina, 2016; Richards & Schmidt, 2010), self-assessment (Baranovskaya & Shaforostova, 2017; Bolshakova, 2015; Shams & Tavakoli, 2014), peer-assessment (Azarnoosh, 2013; Galichkina, 2016; Stognieva, 2015; Topping, 2009), conferences (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018; Brown, 2004), oral presentations (Learning Centre, 2010), and reports.

Despite the differences between TA and AA, it is productive and advantageous if teachers do not have to choose between them. Likely, some mix of the two will best meet the teachers' or students' needs to have deeper insights into the learners' main strengths and weaknesses (Babni, 2019). For this latter aim to happen, Nasab (2015) argued that "teachers must be attentive to the diverse ways of assessment and not to rely too heavily on a single method of assessment" (p. 175). Thus, effective CBA involves the dynamic use of multiple sources of information collected through TA and AA tasks (Baranovskaya & Shaforostova, 2017).

The Role of EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Self-Reported Practices in Assessment

The term 'perceptions' is defined as uniquely individualised experiences, mental and personal constructions, assumptions, and propositions (McDonald, 2012; Richards & Schmitt, 2010) which, in the EFL context, influence teachers' judgements and decisions (Kirkgoz, Babanoglu, & Ağçam, 2017). Whereas self-reported practices are indicators for "which teaching practices were used during a lesson and how often they were employed [...] by teachers [...]. Self-reporting is intended to assist teachers to assess their own classroom practices" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 476). In the context of assessment, investigating teachers' perceptions is important to the understanding and implementation of CBA (Sach, 2012). For example, if "the teachers accept or have positive perceptions on alternative assessment, they will surely support the assessment and make sure the AA succeeded in reality" (Nasri, Roslan, Sekuan, Bakar, & Puteh, 2010, p. 40). Self-reported practices also have meaningful alignment with perceptions, beliefs or/and conceptions (Brown, 2009; Brown, Chaudhry, & Dhamija, 2015). Thus, the extent to which teachers' perceptions match their practices has a great influence on their mode of assessing their students' performance (Hakim, 2015). However, when using CBA effectively, teachers' assessment literacy plays an important role because it connects assessment quality with student achievement (Ashraf & Zolfaghari, 2018). As a wider definition, this construct also includes theoretical and practical knowledge, skills, and abilities, which are "required to design, develop, maintain or evaluate, large-scale standardised and/or classroom-based tests, familiarity with test processes, and awareness of

principles and concepts that guide and underpin practice, including ethics and codes of practice” (Fulcher, 2012, p. 125).

Related to TA and AA, some previous studies conducted in different contexts, focused on several assessment components or characteristics when analysing teachers’ perceptions and their self-reported practices. The findings of Phongsirikul’s (2018) study demonstrated that both teachers and students accepted TA more than AA. Kirkgoz et al. (2017) found that pen-and-paper exams, performance tasks, in-class observation, quizzes, and project assignments are the most frequently used assessment types, whereas oral exams and presentations are the least employed types in assessing learners’ performance. Nasri et al. (2010) found that teachers have positive perceptions of AA, especially as a way of promoting students’ self-confidence and involvement in learning as well as for developing their critical and creative thinking skills. In the Moroccan context, most of the recent studies (Babni, 2019; Benzehaf, 2017; Ghaica & Omarkaly, 2018; Ghaicha & Oufela, 2021) targeting the EFL high school context have mainly explored Moroccan teachers’ perceptions and practices related to AA. Since it is not typical in Morocco to find a common investigation of teachers’ perceptions and self-reported practices towards TA, AA, and their related assessment concepts (AoL/AfL/AaL), a consideration of such duality is warranted. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe teachers’ perceptions and self-reported practices with both TA and AA in Moroccan public high schools. To achieve this objective, the following questions were addressed:

1. What are Moroccan EFL high school teachers’ perceptions about TA and AA objectives?
2. What are Moroccan EFL high school teachers’ self-reported practices regarding the application of both TA and AA methods?
3. What is the relationship between Moroccan EFL high school teachers’ perceptions and their self-reported practices?

Methodology

Participants

The present study was conducted in Morocco with a focus on Moroccan EFL public high school teachers. An exploratory quantitative study using a survey method was designed, first, to be able to analyse the similarities and differences between teachers’ perceptions about TA and AA associated with AaL and AfL in terms of their objectives and methods, and second, to compare the perceived importance of the specific type of assessment objectives with its counterpart regarding the application frequency of its methods. Thus, data were randomly collected through an online questionnaire. The study involved 51 EFL teachers at different public high schools in the northern part of Morocco, mainly in Rabat, Casablanca, Tangier, Meknes, and Fes.

Table 1 contains the main characteristics of the sample based on the background information collected. The number of males exceeds the number of females. Teachers between the ages of 26–30 and 31–35 are the dominant sub-sample. Respondents with 1–5 years of teaching experience are the most significant participants. As for the number of students in a class, most teachers teach around 31–35 students or even more. Therefore, mostly young, novice teachers, who have been teaching large groups of students, participated in our study.

Table 1

Characteristics of the participants

Baseline characteristic	*Full sample (N = 51)*	
	N	*%*
Gender		
Female	11	78
Male	40	22
Age		
20–25	8	16
26–30	18	35
31–35	17	33
over 35	8	16
Years of teaching experience		
1–5	36	71
6–10	8	16
11–15	5	10
over 15	2	4
Number of students in a class		
20–25	1	2
26–30	6	12
31–35	24	47
over 35	20	39

Instrument and Procedure

In the current study, a self-developed, three-part questionnaire was used (see Appendix). The first part asks general background information, allowing for an appropriate description of the sample; thus, the variables (Table 1) will not be considered in data analysis and interpretation.

To meet the first purpose of the study regarding teachers' perceptions about TA and AA objectives, the next part of the questionnaire was designed based on the aims and main characteristics of these assessment modes as well as the concepts of assessment for/as/of learning. When developing the questionnaire items, 13 total statements were formulated. Out of these, four items are related to TA and which also belong to AoL (e.g., *Assessment should assign grades to students.*). The other items describe AA in two ways: five statements cover AaL in terms of how teacher assessment can support students' assessment, performance, and learning (e.g., *Assessment should provide students with the information they need to guide and improve their own learning.*). The remaining four items represent AfL (e.g., *Assessment should focus on what students can do with what they have learned*.). For each item, the teachers had to decide on the extent to which they agree/disagree with the statements formulated. A five-point Likert scale was used ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). A scale with an odd number was chosen because it allowed teachers to express their neutral positions.

To fulfil the second purpose of the study, the aim of preparing the last part was to explore teachers' self-reported practices behind the application of TA and AA methods. Therefore, this part required teachers to rate how frequently they use 18 assessment methods. Nine of them were related to TA (e.g., multiple-choice tests, essays, short-answer tests, etc.), six items included AA methods related to AfL (e.g., reports, conferences, projects, etc.), and three items focused on AA methods linked to AaL (e.g., self- and peer-assessment). In the case of all methods, a five-point Likert-type scale was offered ranging from one (never) to five (always). Since these points are approximately the same distance from each other, they can be interpreted on interval scales.

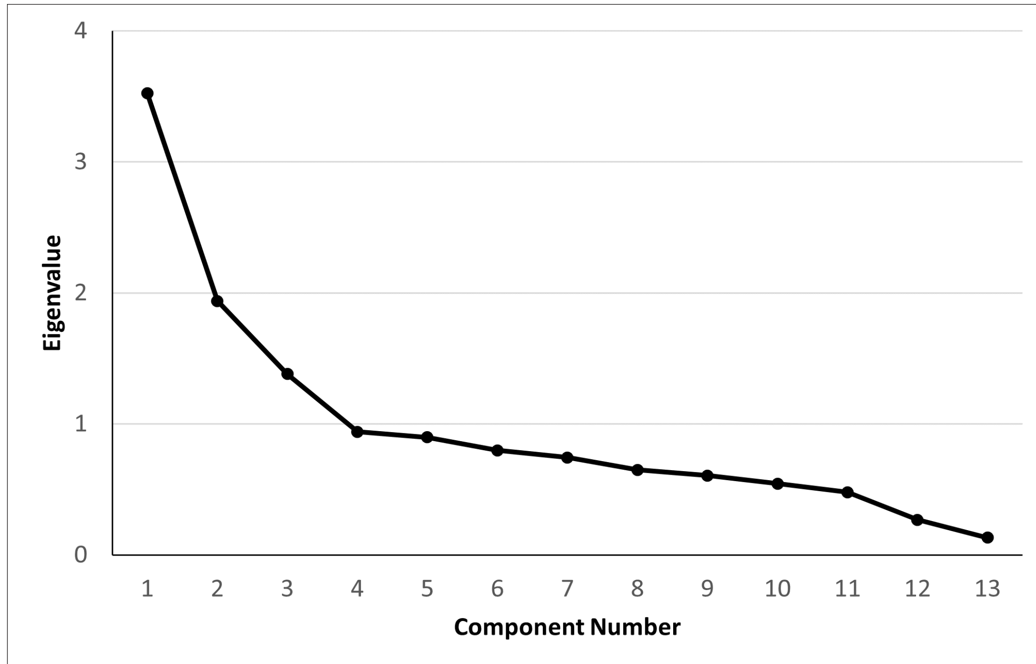
Before using the designed questionnaire, the clarity of its items was tested via a pilot study by collecting remarks from a group of teachers, which were taken into consideration while finalising the questionnaire. The

latter was distributed online and anonymously completed by the involved respondents. As the third aim of our study was to explore the relationships between teachers' perceptions and their self-reported practices, first the validity and reliability of the questionnaire items related to these two measured dimensions were examined to ensure that the items are relevant to the research focus, and before analysing them at scale level, the extension of the results are reliable and valid. Thus, the purposes of using exploratory factor analyses were to identify and compare the empirical structure of the variable system with the theoretical structure and to reduce the data set to a manageable size while maintaining the original information of the items as much as possible (Field, 2009; Pituch & Stevens, 2016). Therefore, principal component analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation was performed to determine the contribution of each variable to the factor structure and to create composite scores. The reliability of the scales was also examined by calculating the values of Cronbach's alphas.

As for the factorability of the 13 questionnaire items on teacher perceptions, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) was .54, which, as recommended by Kaiser (1974), was mediocre and above the minimum acceptable value of .5. The KMO values for the individual items ranged between .38 and .76. Furthermore, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(78) = 177.24$, $p < .001$, and confirmed that the correlation coefficients between the items were sufficient for PCA. Additionally, each item correlated significantly, $.23 \leqslant r \leqslant .63$, $p < .05$, with at least two other variables. Likewise, communalities were above the minimal acceptable limit of .3 in all cases (ranging from .30 to .74, the average was .53). The number of factors was determined based on the scree plot (Figure 1), which shows that three components were above the eigenvalue of 1 and explained 52.67% of the variance. Factor loadings were above the suggested limit of .4 (Pituch & Stevens, 2016) for all of the factors. Therefore, the three-factor resolution was displayed as suitable because it can be supported by the theoretical background. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients (Table 2) were moderate and acceptable. Deleting any questionnaire item would not improve the alpha of the scales.

Figure 1

Scree plot regarding teachers' perceptions



Regarding the validity of the questionnaire items examining teachers' self-reported practice, the KMO was mediocre, .62, and KMO values for the individual items ranged between .38 and .76. The correlations between items were appropriate for PCA as Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(136) = 336.93$, $p < .001$. All items correlated significantly, $.26 \leqslant r \leqslant .71$, $p < .001$, with at least two other items. Communalities ranged between .29 and .72 and the average was .53. Factor loadings above .4 were considered when determining the factors. Three components had eigenvalues above 2 and the value of the fourth component was slightly higher

than 1 (1.16) (Figure 2); therefore, the three-factor resolution explaining 52.82% of the variance was preferred because it allows the comparison of teachers' perceptions on assessment objectives with the application frequency of these assessment methods. As for the reliability of the scales, all Cronbach's alpha figures (Table 2) were acceptably high.

Figure 2

Scree plot regarding teachers' self-reported practices

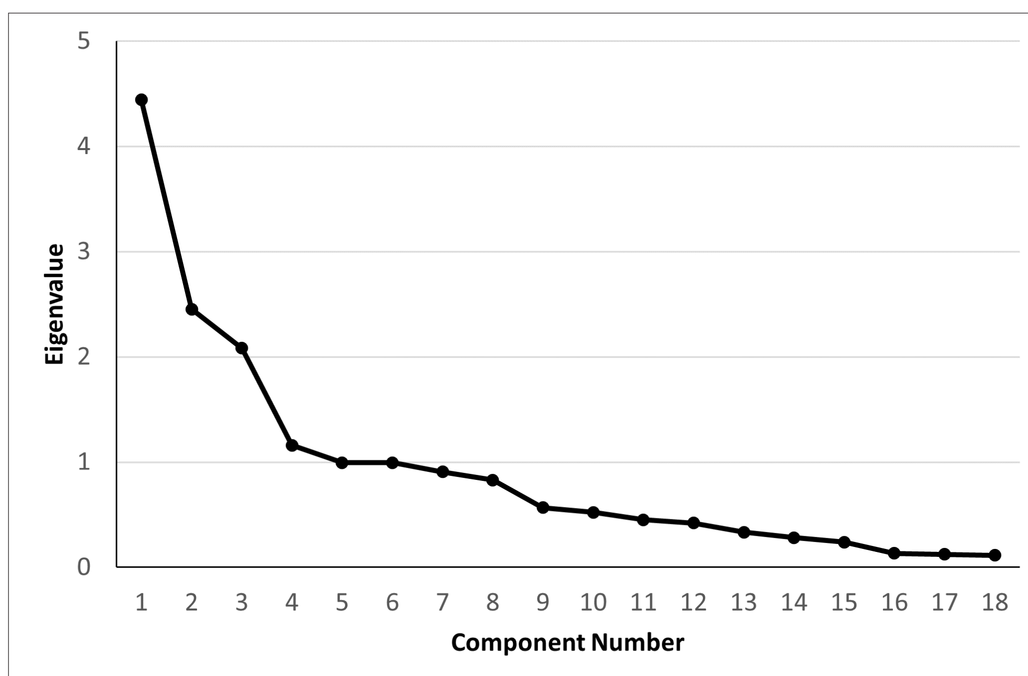


Table 2

Summary of PCA and Cronbach's alphas

Dimension	*Scale*	*Initial Eigenvalues (% of variance)*	*Cronbach's alpha*
Perceptions	AA objectives associated with AaL	27.12	.71
	AA objectives associated with AfL	14.92	.63
	TA objectives associated with AoL	10.63	.69
Self-reported practices	AA methods associated with AaL	12.25	.71
	AA methods associated with AfL	14.42	.79
	TA methods associated with AoL	26.15	.78

Data Analysis

To answer the three research questions, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) V25 was used. First, to characterise teachers' perceptions, descriptive statistical analyses were used. The differences between questionnaire items were also examined using a series of t-tests. Second, the frequency of using TA and AA methods was analysed with descriptive statistics, and the differences between them were revealed by performing t-tests. Finally, the differences between the scales (Table 2) were compared and the relationships between them were explored by calculating the correlation coefficients.

Results

Research Question One

Table 3 contains descriptive statistical parameters for the questionnaire items measuring teachers' perceptions about the importance of TA and AA objectives. The statements are presented in descending order of their averages. By performing a series of paired samples t-tests, we examined whether there were significant differences between the means of each two items in this order. Based on all this, the statements can be divided into two groups.

The first group consists of nine statements related to AA. Without exception, there were no significant differences between the means ($4.22 \leqslant M \leqslant 4.67$). Typically, most of the teachers involved in our study agreed or strongly agreed with the stated objectives for AA. The use of the lower values of 1 to 3 was not typical. Our sample can be considered homogeneous ($0.52 \leqslant SD \leqslant 0.82$). Significant differences ($p < .05$) in pairs were found only between the means of the first two and the last two statements belonging to this group, most of which are items describing the aims related to AaL.

The second group contains four statements measuring the degree of agreement with objectives related to TA. The separation from the previous group is shown by the significant difference between the means related to the statement *"encourage collaborative learning"*, which refers to AA, and the item *"encourage students to recall or recognise facts, ideas, and propositions in life"* which is a characteristic element of TA, $t(50) = 2.99$, $p = .004$. A significant difference was also found between the means of the last two statements, $t(50) = 3.85$, $p < .001$. The heterogeneity of the sample was verified by the larger standard deviations ($0.94 \leqslant SD \leqslant 1.19$) compared to the questionnaire items belonging to the previous group ($0.52 \leqslant SD \leqslant 0.82$). This means that teachers, who took part in this study, generally agreed with the statements related to TA; but compared to the previous group, the majority of teachers chose values of 2, 3, and 4, and the first scale point in the case of the last statement.

Table 3

Moroccan EFL public high school teachers' perceptions of TA and AA objectives

Statement ***Assessment should...***	***Frequency (%)***					***M***	***SD***
	1	***2***	***3***	***4***	***5***		
...provide students with feedback regarding their performance.	0	0	2	29	69	4.67	0.52
...ask students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills by performing meaningful tasks that replicate real-world challenges.	0	0	4	29	67	4.63	0.56
...allow students to evaluate their own performance.	0	2	2	33	63	4.57	0.64
...promote learners' autonomy and self-confidence.	0	2	8	25	65	4.53	0.73
...determine the extent to which learners meet instructional goals and outcomes.	0	0	6	39	55	4.49	0.61
...focus on what students can do with what they have learned.	2	0	4	43	51	4.41	0.75
...encourage students to analyse, synthesise, and apply what they have learned in a substantial manner.	0	4	10	31	55	4.37	0.82
...provide students with the information they need to guide and improve their own learning.	0	2	8	43	47	4.35	0.72
...encourage collaborative learning.	0	0	24	31	45	4.22	0.81
...encourage students to recall or recognise facts, ideas, and propositions in life.	0	10	31	35	24	3.73*	0.94
...increase competition among students.	6	16	25	29	24	3.49	1.19
...assign grades to students.	2	16	27	41	14	3.49	0.99
...focus on how much students remember of what has been covered during the course.	14	27	29	24	6	2.80*	1.13

Notes. 1 = Strongly Disagree, *2* = Disagree, *3* = Neutral, *4* = Agree, *5* = Strongly Agree. * Mean significantly differs from the previous statement at $p < .05$.

Research Question Two

Table 4 contains different assessment methods for which we examined how often the teachers involved in this study stated that they used these methods to obtain information about their self-reported practice. The table shows the application frequency of assessment methods in descending order of the means. Paired samples t-tests were used in pairs to examine the differences between them. We distinguished three major groups.

In descending order based on the averages, only TA methods are in the first six places. Respondents applied mostly or/and always true/false tests, filling the gaps, and question-and-answer tasks. Matching exercises and sentence completion were sometimes or/and mostly used by these teachers. However, sentence completion was significantly more often used than short-answer tests, $t(50) = 2.52$, $p = .02$.

The second group is mixed in terms of its composition because it includes not only traditional but also various AA methods. When examining, in pairs, the application frequency of the TA techniques, chiefly multiple-choice tests, information transfer, and essays, there was no significant difference between multiple-choice tests and information transfer. These methods were sometimes used by about 50% of the respondents, while essays were applied less frequently. The difference between multiple-choice tests and essays was significant, $t(50) = 3.00$, $p = .004$. In the cases of AA methods, which can be used to fulfil AaL purposes, the means were still moderate. When determining the application frequency of teacher observation, the sample was heterogeneous ($SD = 1.35$). The reason for this heterogeneity may be that this method can be applied both informally and formally and, therefore, there may be large individual differences in the interpretation. Compared to this method, the teachers used peer-assessment significantly less, $t(50) = 3.00$, $p = .004$, rarely and sometimes, while there was no significant difference between the frequency of self- and peer-assessment. Among the methods that support learning, projects and presentations were most often used, and there was no significant difference between these two methods in terms of their application frequency.

The third group consists of assessment methods that support learning. The difference between the frequency of application of presentations and reports was significant, $t(50) = 5.11$, $p < .001$. However, the frequency of using reports did not differ significantly from that of interviews and portfolios. Teachers, who completed the questionnaire, used conferences the least. As an indicator of this, the difference between this method and portfolios was significant, $t(50) = 4.15$, $p < .001$. Conferences had the smallest standard deviation, 0.66, indicating that teachers judged the frequency of its application as the least used method as it was reported to never be used by 73% of the respondents.

Table 4

Moroccan EFL public high school teachers' self-reported practices of TA and AA methods

Method	***Frequency (%)***					***M***	***SD***
	1	***2***	***3***	***4***	***5***		
True/false tests	4	0	24	41	31	3.96	0.96
Filling the gaps	0	2	29	39	29	3.96	0.82
Question-and-answer tasks	0	4	29	45	22	3.84	0.81
Matching exercises	0	4	39	37	20	3.73	0.83
Sentence completion	0	14	33	29	24	3.63	1.00
Short-answer tests	6	6	53	27	8	3.25*	0.91
Teacher observation	14	18	20	27	22	3.25	1.35
Multiple-choice tests	8	10	53	22	8	3.12	0.97
Projects	6	27	45	16	6	2.88	0.95
Information transfer	14	16	51	14	6	2.82	1.03
Presentations	10	33	33	16	8	2.78	1.08
Peer-assessment	14	25	45	12	4	2.67	0.99
Essays	14	41	27	14	4	2.53	1.03
Self-assessment	20	24	47	8	2	2.49	0.97
Reports	35	25	31	8	0	2.12*	0.99
Interviews	37	27	29	6	0	2.04	0.96
Portfolios	51	20	20	8	2	1.90	1.10
Conferences	73	22	4	2	0	1.35*	0.66

Notes. 1 = Never, *2* = Rarely, *3* = Sometimes, *4* = Mostly, *5* = Always. * Mean significantly differs from the previous method at $p < .05$.

Research Question Three

Table 5 presents the results of descriptive statistical analyses based on the composite scores of the scales that emerged from the factor analysis of the two dimensions. Higher scores describing teachers' perceptions indicated greater importance of the given assessment objectives, while higher results in the case of teachers' self-reported practice revealed the more frequent use of the given assessment methods.

As the separate analysis of the individual questionnaire items measuring teachers' perceptions showed (Table 3), Moroccan teachers involved in our study agreed or strongly agreed on the importance of AA objectives. The minimum and maximum values, means, and standard deviations of the created scales describing AA objectives associated with AaL and AfL were also similar, there was no significant difference between the means of these scales. Furthermore, the correlation between these two scales was significant, $r = .43$, $p = .002$. The teachers perceived the objectives of AA as more important than that of TA, because a significant difference was found in the case of AaL, $t(50) = 9.34$, $p < .001$, and AfL, $t(50) = 10.19$, $p < .001$. The respondents were generally neutral when rating the importance of TA objectives and the sample was more heterogeneous compared to the other two scales measuring AA purposes. There was also a significant correlation between perceptions associated with AfL and TA, $r = .30$, $p = .03$.

Based on their self-reported practice, the teachers involved in our study used methods associated with AaL more often than those of AfL. The difference between the two scales was significant, $t(50) = 4.52$, $p < .001$. The respondents used TA methods more often than those of AA, and the difference was significant compared to AaL, $t(50) = 5.71$, $p < .001$, and AfL, $t(50) = 13.08$, $p < .001$. The sample was more homogeneous in terms of the frequency of using TA methods compared to AA techniques. Even in the case of self-reported practice, there was a significant correlation between the application frequency of AfL and TA methods, $r = .31$, $p = .03$.

When comparing teachers' perceptions with their self-reported practices, no significant difference was found between the means of TA objectives and their associated methods, $t(50) = 1.25$; $p = .22$. However, concerning AA, objectives associated with AaL were considered more important by the teachers involved in this research, while the methods of this assessment were much less frequently used. The difference between the means of scales describing the perceptions and self-reported practices regarding AaL was significant, $t(50) = 12.93$, $p < .001$. When comparing the importance of objectives associated with AfL and the application frequency of their methods, a similar tendency was found based on the significant difference between the means of these two scales, $t(50) = 18.51$, $p < .001$. However, this degree of difference was somewhat larger compared to the other two scales covering perceptions and methods associated with AaL.

Table 5

Moroccan EFL public high school teachers' perceptions and self-reported practices of TA and AA in comparison

Dimension	*Scale*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*M*	*SD*
Perceptions	AA objectives associated with AaL	3.20	5.00	4.47	0.47
	AA objectives associated with AfL	2.75	5.00	4.48	0.48
	TA objectives associated with AoL	1.75	5.00	3.38	0.77
Self-reported practices	AA methods associated with AaL	1.00	5.00	2.80	0.84
	AA methods associated with AfL	1.17	4.00	2.18	0.67
	TA methods associated with AoL	2.50	5.00	3.54	0.58

Discussion

Moroccan EFL High School Teachers' Perceptions about TA and AA

The teachers involved in our study clearly acknowledged the importance of the AA objectives because most of them agreed or strongly agreed with each statement. This was also evidenced by the fact that there was no

significant difference, but a close relationship between the scales describing AfL and AaL objectives. Likewise, and also in the Moroccan context, respondents in Ghaicha and Omarkaly's (2018) study expressed their agreement or strong agreement to all questionnaire items related to the effectiveness of AA in helping students demonstrate and apply their competencies in real-life situations, to be more motivated and active during the lesson, and to measure their higher-order thinking skills. Our findings also corroborate the results of Babni's (2019) study where most Moroccan teachers indicated a high degree of agreement with the questionnaire items on AA and perceived it as an imperative approach in English language teaching and learning.

In our survey, teachers also perceived the objectives of AA to be significantly more important than those of TA. This is encouraging, as research evidence strongly demonstrates that AA is advantageous concerning its effective learning outcomes for students (Aksu Ataç, 2012; Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018; Cirit, 2015; Nasab, 2015; Phongsirikul, 2018). The results of our study were also in conformity with studies that compared TA to AA in terms of teachers' perceptions. For example, Babni (2019) found that 74% of English teachers acknowledged that they perceived AA to be much more effective than TA.

Moroccan EFL High School Teachers' Assessment Practices

Based on their self-reported practice, the teachers taking part in this study used TA methods, mainly true/false tests, filling the gaps, question-and-answer tasks, matching exercises, and sentence completion more often than any AA methods. This finding is in harmony with the findings of Ghaicha and Omarkaly's (2018) study, which revealed that teachers have more positive perceptions and greater preferences towards traditional methods rather than alternative ones. The use of other TA techniques, namely multiple-choice tests and information transfer, was mediocre and showed similarities to the application frequency of AA methods associated with AaL. At scale level, the difference between the use of methods linked to AaL and AfL was also significant. The reason for this difference may be that teacher observation was primarily marked as more frequently used than self- and peer-assessment, and secondarily as more similar in terms of the frequency to the two methods of AA associated with AfL (projects and presentations) rather than the remaining methods, chiefly reports, oral interviews, portfolios, and conferences. Additionally, in the study of Ghaicha and Omarkaly (2018), portfolio was rarely used, and the findings of Benzehaf's (2017) study conducted via a questionnaire and interviews demonstrated that only 10% of teachers applied self- and peer-assessment. Therefore, these AA methods have not been utilised in Moroccan EFL high schools. This could be related to teachers' pressure and tendency towards finishing the curriculum that ends with a high-stakes examination (Ghaicha & Oufela, 2021; Ouakrime, 2000). This race against time has become a priority from the perspective of teachers and students regarding the teaching and learning process as well as an obstacle for teachers as they attempt to provide both effective feedback and new learning opportunities (Ouakrime, 2000).

The Relationship Between Moroccan EFL High School Teachers' Perceptions about Assessment and Their Self-Reported Practices

When analysing the relationship between the different scales, we found significant correlations between AfL and TA in both the perceived importance of their objectives and the application frequency of their methods. The reason for these significant correlations can be that both forms of assessment focus on student performance and aim to determine the extent to which learners meet instructional outcomes, although they differ significantly in their emphasis, as the aim of AfL is to enhance the teaching-learning process, while TA refers to the qualification of knowledge acquired at the end of the learning process. In terms of assessment practice, TA methods can also be used to enhance the teaching-learning process and fulfil the purposes of AfL. These are achieved, for example, when students have the opportunity either to check their answers with a key after completing tests requiring short answers or to discuss the results with their peers. AA methods can also be used to assess learning outcomes at the end of the learning process, especially when students, for instance, perform their presentation or share the results of their portfolio at the end of the process and receive grades for these products from their teacher. Based on our survey, we have no information on how the products of AA are incorporated into the final grades or how teachers apply the methods of TA and AA in their classroom practice. However, the significant relationship between objectives and the self-reported application frequency of the methods related to AfL and TA reveals the complex nature of teachers' perceptions and application of assessment. This finding encourages teachers to try various methods of TA and AA rather than focus on one approach (Babni, 2019; Nasab, 2015).

When comparing teachers' perceptions with their self-reported practices, we found that teachers' perceptions regarding TA match their practices because there was no significant difference between the two scales describing the objectives and methods of TA. Therefore, it can be argued that Moroccan teachers believed that they were assessment literate regarding their perceptions of TA and believed they reflected their knowledge in their practices, which was justified by their frequent employment of traditional methods. These are apparently enacted in secondary education through two modes of continuous assessment: three quizzes (15 to 20 minutes) and two summative tests per semester (Ministry of National Education, 2007). This may also indicate Moroccan English teachers' potential for implementing and scoring standardised tests.

As found in previous studies (e.g., Ghaicha & Omarkaly, 2018; Phongsirikul, 2018), our study also revealed that most teachers admitted that they found AA important even though they did not often use it to either have students reflect on their own learning and support AaL or enhance their performance in the learning process and promote AfL. For instance, many of them reported that they appreciate the value of encouraging collaborative learning, but its practice, for example, via peer-assessment, is not emphasised as a frequently used method by Moroccan teachers. This may reveal the teachers' lack of knowledge on how to put the objectives of assessment into practice as well as lack of institutional support. Ghaicha and Oufela (2021) argued that Moroccan school authorities (administrators, school managers, counsellors, and other teachers) do not actually support teachers' use of AA strategies.

A key question that arises from these findings is why such differences in self-reported practices arise between TA and AA methods. In our study, the composition of the sample (Table 1) may have influenced the results. As argued by Hakim (2015), teaching experience can influence the application frequency of AA methods. Unfortunately, we did not have the opportunity to investigate this due to the small sample size. Other possible reasons, as stated by some researchers (Ghaicha & Omarkaly, 2018; Ghaicha & Oufela, 2021; Isik, 2021; Janisch, Liu, & Akrofi, 2007; Nasri et. al. 2010), might be associated with the perceived familiarity with assessment techniques, preoccupation with exam scores, time constraints, limited English proficiency, an increase in teachers' workload, the educational system, classroom size and materials, a lack of assessment-related training courses, and issues of communication and collaboration between different stakeholders (teachers, learners, and administrators). Thus, the related findings should nudge researchers and educators to reconsider teachers' perceptions of assessment and how they should be enacted in practice to resolve the mismatches found in this study.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has some limitations that can be related to a variety of factors. For instance, we examined a few elements of assessment literacy and analysed the characteristics of classroom assessment through teachers' perceptions and self-reported practices, although no information was available about their behaviour. We also lacked a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods that could have been achieved by conducting interviews with teachers or implementing classroom observations to explain the quantitative results. The study also did not represent the view of all EFL teachers in the Moroccan context and because of the relatively low sample size, we were not able to obtain information about the influencing role of individual differences and classroom environmental factors. For example, no reflection on teachers' perceptions and practices of TA and AA in relation to their teaching experience, age, gender, and the number of students they teach in an average class was utilised. Furthermore, only teachers were included in the study. Despite these limitations, in many cases, we were able to formulate hypotheses about the interpretation of the findings and the reasons for the mismatches found in this study. These problems also indicate possible directions for further research. The developed questionnaire, for which the validity and reliability have been verified, can be applied in further studies and, therefore, can pave the way for researchers to get more detailed information about the classroom assessment beliefs and methods of EFL teachers by involving additional types of research and other relevant stakeholders. Thus, future research is needed to investigate the perceptions and practices related to different CBA approaches that encourage lecturers to rethink and ameliorate their assessment practices by applying varied AA and TA tasks effectively, which allows students to develop and assess their language abilities.

Conclusion

In general, the findings of this study demonstrated that most Moroccan EFL public high school teachers have positive perceptions towards the objectives of TA and AA. They were assessment literate and reflected their understanding of TA objectives into actual use; however, there was a mismatch between what teachers perceive and what they stated that they do in their classroom regarding AA associated with AfL and AaL. Based on these findings, it is deemed necessary for teachers to change their classic teacher-centred assessment to a learning-centred approach. To achieve this, ELT training centres need to adopt solid training that considers the alignment of teachers' understanding of the principles of AA and their actual enactment in the classroom through various types of assessment methods that are effective both during and at the end of the learning process. Schools also need to be encouraged to involve AA activities as a part of their policy and a part of teachers' courses as follow-up activities. Setting up a system of support that could help teachers conduct AA is also needed in order to overcome some obstacles (e.g., overloaded classes, logistics); thus, classroom management issues should be reconsidered. These recommendations can raise the awareness of English teachers, trainers, and researchers of the numerous AfL and AaL methods that can be implemented in ELT classrooms.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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Appendix

Teacher Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect data on your perceptions and actual practices of assessment. Responding to this questionnaire should not take more than 15 minutes. Your responses will remain confidential, anonymous, and will be used only for research purposes. Thank you so much for your collaboration.

Part 1: Personal and demographic information

Please place a tick in the appropriate box for questions 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Gender

Male □ Female □

Age

20–25 years old □ 26–30 years old □ 31–35 years old □ Over 35 years old □

Years of teaching experience

1–5 years □ 6–10 years □ 11–15 years □ Over 15 years □

Approximate number of students in the classes you teach

20–25 students □ 26–30 students □ 31–35 students □ Over 35 students □

Part 2: EFL public high school teachers' perceptions of traditional and alternative assessment

1. To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements as far as your assessment practices are concerned? Please, tick (√) the appropriate box.

Assessment should...	*Strongly Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
...provide students with feedback regarding their performance.	□	□	□	□	□
...assign grades to students.	□	□	□	□	□
...ask students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills by performing meaningful tasks that replicate real-world challenges.	□	□	□	□	□
...determine the extent to which learners meet instructional goals and outcomes.	□	□	□	□	□
...encourage collaborative learning.	□	□	□	□	□
...increase competition among students.	□	□	□	□	□
...provide students with the information they need to guide and improve their own learning.	□	□	□	□	□
...promote learners' autonomy and self-confidence.	□	□	□	□	□
...allow students to evaluate their own performance.	□	□	□	□	□
...focus on how much students remember of what has been covered during the course.	□	□	□	□	□
...focus on what students can do with what they have learned.	□	□	□	□	□
...encourage students to recall or recognise facts, ideas, and propositions in life.	□	□	□	□	□
...encourage students to analyse, synthesise, and apply what they have learned in a substantial manner.	□	□	□	□	□

Part 3: EFL public high school teachers' actual practices of traditional and alternative assessment

1. Rate how frequently you use the following assessment methods. Please, tick (√) the appropriate box.

Assessment methods	***Never***	***Rarely***	***Sometimes***	***Mostly***	***Always***
	1	***2***	***3***	***4***	***5***
Multiple-choice tests	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Essays	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Conferences	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
True/false tests	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Interviews	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Short-answer tests	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Projects	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Teacher observation	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Matching exercises	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Portfolios	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Self-assessment	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Peer-assessment	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Question-and-answer tasks	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Presentations	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Filling the gaps	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Sentence completion	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Reports	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻
Information transfer	◻	◻	◻	◻	◻

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Listening Boredom, Listening Boredom Coping Strategies, and Listening Performance: Exploring the Possible Relationships in Saudi EFL Context

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Researchers paid ample attention to an important variable called boredom in numerous contexts; however, limited research exists regarding the association of boredom with listening comprehension performance in EFL settings. Thus, the current study aims to establish the association between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance by deploying listening boredom coping strategies as a mediating construct. A quantitative research approach, and a cross-sectional and correlational research design was used to conduct this study. A listening comprehension test and questionnaires were used to gather the data from 313 Saudi EFL learners. Results directed that there exists a negative yet significant association between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance. In addition, listening boredom showed a positive and significant association with all of the four listening boredom coping strategies. Furthermore, three out of four listening boredom coping strategies (i.e., behavioral, cognitive, and behavioral avoidance) showed a positive and significant association with listening performance; however, cognitive avoidance strategies showed a significant yet negative association with listening comprehension performance. Lastly, results regarding mediation indicated that listening boredom coping strategies mediated the relationship between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance. Based on the results, various recommendations were presented to EFL learners, instructors, and policymakers.

Keywords: listening boredom, listening boredom coping strategies, listening comprehension performance, Saudi EFL learners

Introduction

The sentiments of the students play a substantial part in boosting their motivation and learning (Graesser & D'Mello, 2012; Hökkä et al., 2019; Pekrun et al., 2002; Trevors et al., 2017). Past studies related to the sentiments of the students have majorly focused on their apprehension while taking a test. Nonetheless, there are limited studies on experiences related to boredom (Mann & Robinson, 2009; Mora, 2011; Shehzad et al., 2020). One of the reasons of dearth of studies regarding boredom in comparison to other sentiments including anger and anxiety could be due to the unnoticeable nature of boredom (Nett et al., 2010). Past studies confirmed that the relationship between boredom and learning performance of the students is significant but negative (Pekrun et al., 2002; Shehzad et al., 2020; Tze et al., 2016). In simple terms, past studies' findings affirmed that boredom related sentiments have an adverse effect on the process of learning. Moreover, they revealed various causes of boredom including difficult tasks (Graesser & D'Mello, 2012), deficiency of interest in the subject, and decreased level of motivation (Graesser et al., 2014).

Previous studies confirm that learners employ several strategies to cope with the boredom during academic tasks (e.g., chatting with peers, thinking about something else that is unrelated, trying to pay more attention to the topic at hand etc.) (Eren & Coskun, 2016). The findings of the past studies found a positive and substantial association between boredom and boredom coping strategies (Eren, 2016; Finkielsztein, 2019; Nett et al., 2011,

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Shehzad et al., 2020). Furthermore, in a few recently conducted studies, boredom coping strategies was used as a mediating variable between boredom and performance in the domain of reading and mathematics (Shehzad et al., 2020; Eren & Coskun, 2016).

The review of the previous studies affirmed that numerous scholars piloted studies on the notion of boredom in various disciplines including psychology, education, educational psychology (Mora, 2011; Sharp et al., 2017; van Tilburg & Igou, 2017); however, there is a scarcity of research in foreign language setting. Few recently conducted studies recommended that future studies should consider carrying out studies in EFL settings (Kruk & Zawodniak, 2018; Shehzad et al., 2020). Tze, Daniels, and Klassen (2016) affirmed that more research ought to be conducted on the concept of boredom, as it is one of the most frequently experienced feelings by the learners in an academic environment.

More particularly, in EFL setting, there is a scarcity of studies concerning the connection between boredom and four main language skills in general and listening skill in particular. Shehzad et al. (2020) conducted a study involving the association between boredom, boredom coping strategies and reading comprehension performance. The current study merely focuses on English listening skill as it plays a crucial role in the development of other productive (i.e., speaking and writing) as well as receptive skills (i.e., reading) (Alhaison, 2017; Oxford, 1993). A recent study affirmed that the government of Saudi Arabia devotes a considerable chunk of budget on curriculum designing, recruitment of English native speakers as teachers, language laboratories, and English language instructors' coaching courses (Rahman & Alsaisoni, 2013). In addition, Saudi Ministry of Education aims to incorporate all major skills related to English language in Saudi EFL learners including listening skill (Rahman & Alsaisoni, 2013).

Unfortunately, the data gathered from the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) (2019) website shows poor performance of Saudi EFL learners in terms of English listening skills. The average bands acquired by them in IELTS academic category are second lowest in the world, i.e. 5.4; whereas, situation is more appalling in IELTS general category, where average bands are 5.1, i.e., lowest in the world. The past literature also confirms that Saudi EFL students struggle in English listening skills and their performance is below the par (Hamouda, 2013; Mohamed, 2018; Oteir & Aziz, 2017). Therefore, with the aim of attaining insights pertinent to the alarming condition of Saudi students' English listening, it appears unavoidable to conduct an inter-field research concerning constructs that have not been investigated in relation to EFL listening comprehension performance. Consequently, this study intends to determine the relationship between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance of Saudi EFL learners by using listening boredom coping strategies (i.e., behavioral, cognitive, behavioral avoidance, cognitive avoidance) as a mediating variable. More precisely, this study intends to attain four objectives:

1. To determine the connection between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance.
2. To determine the connection between listening boredom and listening boredom coping strategies (i.e., behavioral, cognitive, behavioral avoidance, cognitive avoidance).
3. To determine the connection between listening boredom coping strategies (i.e., behavioral, cognitive, behavioral avoidance, cognitive avoidance) and listening comprehension performance.
4. To determine the mediating role of listening boredom coping strategies (i.e., behavioral, cognitive, behavioral avoidance, cognitive avoidance) between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance.

Literature Review

Listening Comprehension Performance

Numerous definitions regarding 'listening comprehension' can be found in the previous literature. According to Brown and Yule (1983), it denotes that a listener comprehends what his/her ears receive. In simple words, if a listener learns the intended message via hearing, he/she will comprehend it. Dirven and Oakeshott-Taylor (1984) described it as an outcome of teaching methodology and is considered analogous to several terms including speech comprehension, spoken language comprehension, and speech perception. Hamouda (2013) and Rost (2002) defined it as a collaborative process to create meaning involving listeners. Verbal utterance is

comprehended by listeners via numerous linguistic and non-linguistic hints that include sound discrimination, stress and intonation, schematic knowledge, and grammatical constructions. According to Nadig (2013), it comprises numerous processes that are responsible for comprehension of verbal language including recognition of speech sounds, recognition of syntax of phrases and sentences, comprehension of meaning of distinct words.

Listening comprehension is considered as a crucial skill that L2 language users need to develop to learn the target language effectively (Vandergrift, 2007). Listening is deemed as the major route for language input and acquirement (Krashen, 1981; Osada, 2004) and an indispensable characteristic of communicative competency (Richards, 2008), which can assist the development of the remaining language skills (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

The importance of listening comprehension is evident from the aforementioned literature. Owing to its importance, several scholars conducted research on this crucial variable. For instance, rigorous review of the literature revealed that many studies were carried out regarding the influence of listening instruction on listening comprehension performance (Fathi, & Hamidizadeh, 2019; Namaziandost et al., 2020). In addition, several studies determined the influence of teaching methods on listening comprehension (Djabbarova, 2020; Etemadfar et al., 2020). Furthermore, few researchers determined the role of captions/ subtitles in listening comprehension (Hsieh, 2020; Hwang et al., 2019). Moreover, numerous researchers evaluated the impact of linguistic variables on listening comprehension including vocabulary knowledge (Li, 2019), and pronunciation awareness (Rahbar et al., 2020). Various researchers considered technology-related variables and determined its influence on listening comprehension performance including computer assisted language learning (CALL) (Abdolrezapour, 2019), and mobile assisted language learning (MALL) (Salih, 2019). A vast number of studies exist regarding the association of psychological variables with listening comprehension performance including motivation (Baleghizadeh & Rahimi, 2011), anxiety (Zhang, 2013), emotional intelligence (Froiland & Davison, 2019), self-efficacy (Ramli et al., 2019). However, a significant gap still exists in the literature regarding the relationship of a very crucial psychological variable, i.e., boredom and listening comprehension performance. Thus, the current study fills this gap by determining the relationship between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance by employing listening boredom coping strategies as a mediator.

Boredom and Boredom Coping Strategies

Numerous researchers incorporated the notion of boredom in several domains including language learning (Zawodniak et al., 2017), education (Sharp et al., 2019), psychology (Westgate & Wilson, 2018), and therefore, they named it as an academic boredom (Acee et al., 2010), workplace boredom (Fisher, 1993), and relational boredom (Harasymchuk & Fehr, 2010). Owing to the intense interest in the notion of boredom, the scholars offered numerous definitions. Most of them reflect boredom as a destructive feeling that has a negative impact on the individual's accomplishment. For instance, according to Conrad (1997), when a person does not take significant interest in the current situation, he/she suffers from an unwanted condition known as boredom. In addition, according to Eastwood et al. (2012), boredom is considered as a psychological aversive situation, in which a person fails to engage in a task.

Pekrun (2006) offered a theory called control-value theory. According to this theory, there are two major kinds of sentiments, i.e., positive activating sentiments and negative deactivating sentiments. Positive activating sentiments include hopefulness, joy, dignity etc. Whereas, negative deactivating sentiments include despair, boredom etc. (Pekrun, 2006). Pekrun (2006) affirmed that negative deactivating sentiments including boredom, unlike positive activating sentiments, have a negative yet substantial impact on learner's accomplishment. In order to confirm the aforementioned hypotheses of control-value theory, a recent study was conducted which analysed 29 studies and resolved that academic accomplishment was negatively and significantly affected by boredom (Tze et al., 2016). Intriguingly, previous literature confirmed that boredom showed more adverse influence on learners' academic accomplishment as compared to few of the other sentiments including apprehension, rage etc. (Pekrun et al., 2002). Conversely, few studies established a positive impact of boredom on learners' accomplishment (Harris, 2002).

The review of the past studies indicated that there exists a significant yet negative connection between boredom and several types of accomplishments including mathematical accomplishments, academic accomplishments, general studies accomplishments (Castens & Overbey, 2009; Cowan & Piepgrass, 1997; Eren & Coskun, 2016; Pekrun et al., 2014; Putwain et al., 2018). Nevertheless, there exists a limited literature in EFL context (Kruk & Zawodniak, 2018; Pawlak et al., 2020). More particularly, regarding the skills of English

language, there exists only one study that determined the connection between boredom and reading comprehension performance (Shehzad et al., 2020).

As indicated previously, apart from getting bored, learners deploy several strategies to cope with the boredom feeling (Eren, 2013). Intriguingly, there is a dearth of studies that conducted research related to boredom coping strategies (Eren & Coskun, 2016; Shehzad et al., 2020). This lack of studies could be attributed to the absence of an appropriate framework related to learners' boredom coping strategies. Thus, Nett et al. (2010) filled this gap by developing a thorough theoretical framework regarding boredom coping strategies. The strategies were segmented into subsequent four parts: behavioural strategies, behavioural-avoidance strategies, cognitive strategies, and cognitive-avoidance strategies. In cognitive strategies, people modify their viewpoints related to the boring situation, for example, by making themselves focused again on the topic under discussion. Behavioural strategies on the other hand require people to change a boring circumstance themselves by, for instance, introducing a topic that they believe the other students would be more interested in.

Contrariwise, the activities present in the cognitive-avoidance strategies are unconnected to the current scenario (e.g. preparing oneself for the next class during a lesson); whereas, the activities present in behavioural-avoidance strategies are related to the behavior of the learners that have no connection with the current situation (e.g., getting involved in a conversation with class fellows during a lesson) (Nett et al., 2010). Considering the above-mentioned framework related to boredom coping strategies, Nett et al. (2010) established a tool named coping with boredom scale. Several studies employed that scale in different contexts (Eren, 2013; Eren & Coskun, 2016; Nett et al., 2011; Shehzad et al., 2020; Tze et al., 2016). Aforementioned research affirms that this particular tool could be employed in different contexts. Thus, the present research also deployed this model pertinent to boredom coping strategies. In addition, past studies found a substantial connection between numerous kinds of accomplishment and boredom coping strategies (Eren & Coskun, 2016; Nett et al., 2010; Shehzad et al., 2020). Last but not the least, boredom coping strategies have been deployed as a mediator in several past studies (Eren & Coskun, 2016; Shehzad et al., 2020; Zhou & Kam, 2017).

Based upon the review of the past studies, subsequent hypotheses were generated:

H_1: There exists a substantial and negative association between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance.

H_2: There exists a substantial and positive association between listening boredom and listening behavioral boredom coping strategies.

H_3: There exists a substantial and positive association between listening boredom and listening cognitive boredom coping strategies.

H_4: There exists a substantial and positive association between listening boredom and listening behavioral avoidance boredom coping strategies.

H_5: There exists a substantial and positive association between listening boredom and listening cognitive avoidance boredom coping strategies.

H_6: There exists a substantial and positive association between listening behavioral boredom coping strategies and listening comprehension performance.

H_7: There exists a substantial and positive association between listening cognitive boredom coping strategies and listening comprehension performance.

H_8: There exists a substantial and positive association between listening behavioral avoidance boredom coping strategies and listening comprehension performance.

H_9: There exists a substantial and positive association between listening cognitive avoidance boredom coping strategies and listening comprehension performance.

H_{10}: Listening behavioral boredom coping strategies act as a mediator in determining the association between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance.

H_{11}: Listening cognitive boredom coping strategies act as a mediator in determining the association between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance.

H_{12}: Listening behavioral avoidance boredom coping strategies act as a mediator in determining the association between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance.

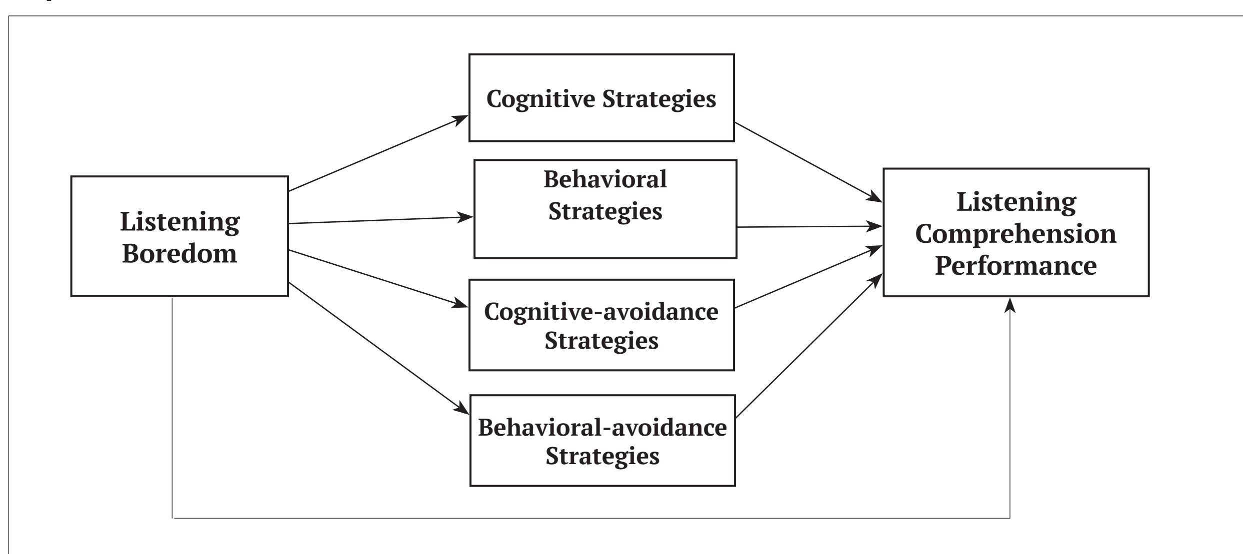
H_{13}: Listening cognitive avoidance boredom coping strategies act as a mediator in determining the association between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework of the current study is depicted in Figure 1. As can be seen in Figure 1, Listening Boredom acts as an independent variable. Listening Boredom Coping Strategies (i.e., behavioral, cognitive, behavioral avoidance, cognitive avoidance) is the mediating variable. Lastly, Listening Comprehension Performance is the dependent variable of the study.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Methodology

Research Design

The current research deployed a quantitative research approach. In addition, a correlational and cross-sectional design was employed. In correlational research design, the association between variables is determined employing statistical procedures (Creswell, 2005). Thus, the current study specified the relationship between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance by deploying listening boredom coping strategies as a mediator.

Sample

A total of 313 Saudi EFL learners, both male and female participated in the study. More particularly, data was collected from second semester students of Preparatory Year Program (PYP) of five public sector universities in the central region of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Proportionate stratified random sampling was deployed to select the requisite number of students. As stated earlier, students were selected from five universities; thus, considering the total population of each of the universities, a certain fraction of the students was chosen. For instance, the strength of students in university D was highest as compared to the other universities; therefore, a larger sample was selected from it (refer to Table 1). In order to determine the appropriate sample size, a sampling table was used (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). According to this table, the appropriate sample size for the

population of 1744 should be 313. It is worth mentioning that prior to data collection process, the students were asked whether they agree to partake in this research. Therefore, the process of collecting the data formally set off after seeking permission of the subjects.

Table 1

Statistics of sample

No.	*Name of University*	*Population*	*Percentage*	*Questionnaires Disseminated*
1	University A	455	26.08%	81
2	University B	389	22.30	70
3	University C	327	18.75%	59
4	University D	419	24.02%	75
5	University E	154	8.83%	28
	Total	**1744**	**100%**	**313**

Instruments

A total of three tools were deployed to gather the data containing a listening comprehension test and two questionnaires. To be more particular, in order to gather data regarding the independent construct, i.e., listening boredom, 'Level of Boredom Scale' containing seven statements having a five-point Likert scale was adapted from Shehzad et al. (2020). As the aforementioned instrument lies in the English reading domain; thus, it was modified to make it fit into English listening domain. In addition, 'Coping with Boredom Scale' was also adapted from Shehzad et al. (2020) to collect data regarding the mediator, i.e., listening boredom coping strategies. It consists of 20 statements having a five-point Likert scale. Last of all, a listening comprehension test based on Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) was adopted from Namaziandost et al. (2018) to evaluate the listening comprehension performance of Saudi EFL students. The test consists of 30 multiple-choice questions (MCQs). As evident from the previous study, the test has high reliability (i.e., 0.798) based on KR-21 method (Namaziandost et al., 2018).

Data Collection Procedures

The data were collected within five weeks (i.e., 19th January 2020 to 23rd of February 2020). Prior to data collection, a formal permission was sought from the deans of PYPs (Preparatory Year Programs) of five universities. Subsequently, we visited each of the five research sites to obtain catalogues of the students registered in PYP. After scrutinizing the catalogues, sample size was finalized. Afterwards, we administered the listening comprehension test and questionnaires. It is important to mention here that the subjects were apprised of the objective of the study. They were also assured of the fact that their identities would be kept private. Subsequent to data collection, questionnaires were reassessed to detect any missing responses. Finally, the gathered data were processed for data analysis.

Data Analysis

In the first place, outliers and missing values were evaluated. It is evident from Table 2 that collected data do not have any outliers and missing values. Next, the normality of the collected data was evaluated by deploying the benchmark of Skewness and Kurtosis. According to the benchmark, Skewness' value is supposed to be lower than 2 and the Kurtosis' value is supposed to be lower than 7 (Curran et al., 1996). It is clear from Table 3 that main analysis can be done, as data is normal. Main analysis has two models (i.e., measurement model and structural model).

Measurement Model

The major purpose of evaluating a measurement model is to determine the reliability and validity of the constructs. To evaluate the measurement model, a statistical software called Smart PLS 3.0 was used. Therefore, factor loadings, convergent validity, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability, and discriminant validity were assessed. It was confirmed by Hair et al. (2010) that AVE and factor loadings' values must not be

less than the prescribed benchmark of 0.5 (see Figure 2, Table 3, and Table 4). In addition, Fornell and Larcker (1981) affirmed that the value of CR must be greater than 0.7 (see Table 4).

Table 3 and 4 depict that all the values of CR, AVE, and factor loadings lie in a recommended range. In addition, external consistency of the model was assessed through discriminant validity as shown in Table 5 by deploying 'Heterotrait-Monotrait' (HTMT). Henseler et al. (2015) declared that the values of HTMT should not be higher than 0.85. Table 5 provides evidence that the external validity of the model is determined.

Table 2

Data statistics

	No.	Missing	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Standard Deviation	Excess Kurtosis	Skewness
LCP1	1	0	3.22	3	1	7	2.098	-1.08	0.433
BAV1	2	0	3.202	3	1	7	1.923	-1.028	0.363
BAV2	3	0	2.821	2	1	7	2.109	-0.381	0.977
BAV3	4	0	2.711	2	1	7	2.174	-0.438	1
BAV4	5	0	2.884	2	1	7	2.126	-0.497	0.925
BAV5	6	0	2.809	2	1	7	2.015	-0.264	0.965
CAV1	7	0	2.769	2	1	7	2.279	-0.581	1.006
CAV2	8	0	2.642	2	1	7	2.037	0.063	1.166
CAV3	9	0	2.803	2	1	7	1.852	-0.052	0.936
CAV4	10	0	2.751	2	1	7	1.9	0.094	1.04
CAV5	11	0	2.728	2	1	7	2.066	-0.243	1.024
BA1	12	0	2.809	2	1	7	1.981	-0.194	0.974
BA2	13	0	2.792	2	1	7	2.191	-0.52	0.964
BA3	14	0	2.694	1	1	7	2.282	-0.519	1.034
BA4	15	0	2.659	2	1	7	2.038	0.041	1.16
BA5	16	0	2.78	2	1	7	2.117	-0.179	1.136
CA1	17	0	3.341	3	1	6	1.575	-1.11	0.184
CA2	18	0	3.243	3	1	6	1.73	-1.426	0.147
CA3	19	0	3.324	3	1	6	1.576	-1.295	0.105
CA4	20	0	3.237	3	1	6	1.619	-1.394	0.163
CA5	21	0	3.191	3	1	6	1.625	-1.514	0.022
LB1	22	0	3.283	3	1	6	1.6	-1.34	-0.002
LB2	23	0	3.26	3	1	6	1.622	-1.328	0.301
LB3	24	0	3.237	3	1	6	1.64	-1.45	0.018
LB4	25	0	3.266	3	1	6	1.62	-1.375	0.171
LB5	26	0	3.26	3	1	6	1.654	-1.431	0.05
LB6	27	0	3.162	3	1	6	1.706	-1.491	0.097
LB7	28	0	3.301	3	1	6	1.645	-1.45	-0.02

Figure 2

Measurement model

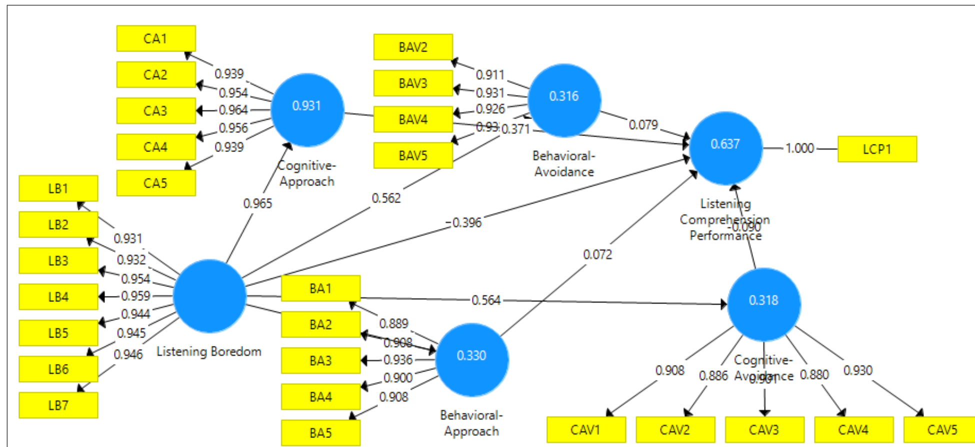


Table 3

Factor loadings

	Behavioral-Approach	*Behavioral-Avoidance*	*Cognitive-Approach*	*Cognitive-Avoidance*	*Listening Boredom*	*Listening Comprehension Performance*
BA1	0.889					
BA2	0.908					
BA3	0.936					
BA4	0.9					
BA5	0.908					
BAV2		0.911				
BAV3		0.931				
BAV4		0.926				
BAV5		0.933				
CA1			0.939			
CA2			0.954			
CA3			0.964			
CA4			0.956			
CA5			0.939			
CAV1				0.908		
CAV2				0.886		
CAV3				0.901		
CAV4				0.88		
CAV5				0.93		
LB1					0.931	
LB2					0.932	
LB3					0.954	
LB4					0.959	
LB5					0.944	
LB6					0.945	
LB7					0.946	
LCP1						1

Table 4

Reliability and convergent validity

	Alpha	*rho_A*	*CR*	*AVE*
Behavioral-Approach	0.947	0.95	0.959	0.825
Behavioral-Avoidance	0.944	0.947	0.96	0.856
Cognitive-Approach	0.973	0.973	0.979	0.903
Cognitive-Avoidance	0.942	0.945	0.956	0.812
Listening Boredom	0.98	0.98	0.983	0.893
Listening Comprehension Performance	1	1	1	1

Table 5

HTMT

	Behavioral-Approach	*Behavioral-Avoidance*	*Cognitive-Approach*	*Cognitive-Avoidance*	*Listening Boredom*	*Listening Comprehension Performance*
Behavioral-Approach	0.808					
Behavioral-Avoidance	0.732	0.825				
Cognitive-Approach	0.576	0.561	0.85			
Cognitive-Avoidance	0.861	0.623	0.562	0.801		
Listening Boredom	0.574	0.562	0.765	0.564	0.745	
Listening Comprehension Performance	0.501	0.494	0.789	0.484	0.79	1

Structural Model

Bootstrapping feature was deployed to evaluate the structural model. Various researchers recommended that bootstrapping feature is considered as one of the most important steps in mediation analysis (Hayes, 2009; Zhao et al., 2010).Additionally, Hair et al. (2014) endorsed the usage of bootstrapping feature for studies involving mediating variables.

The outcomes of the bootstrapping are shown in Figure 3. More precisely, t-value, p-value, and path coefficients can be seen in Figure 3. Furthermore, the acceptance or rejection of research hypotheses regarding direct associations is depicted in Table 6.

Figure 3

Structural model

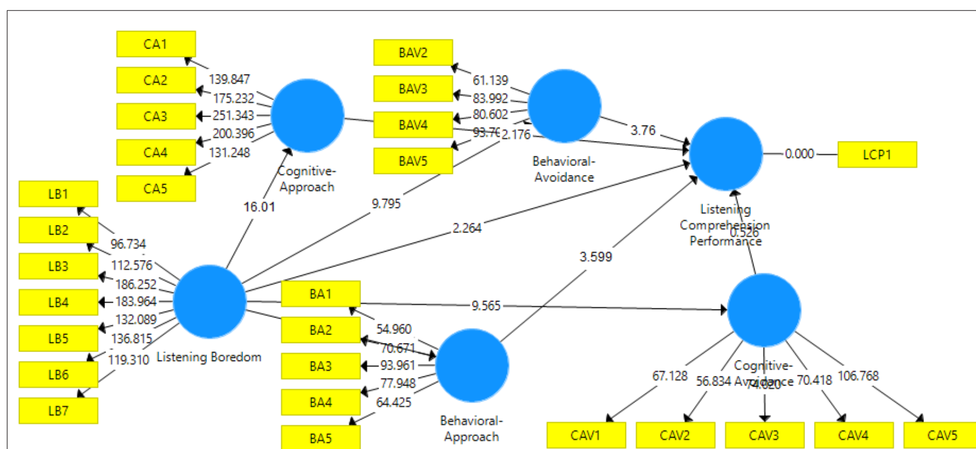


Table 6

Direct effect results

	Original Sample (O)	*Sample Mean (M)*	*Standard Deviation (STDEV)*	*T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)*	*P Values*
Behavioral-Approach -> Listening Comprehension Performance	0.072	0.075	0.02	3.599	0
Behavioral-Avoidance -> Listening Comprehension Performance	0.079	0.073	0.021	3.76	0
Cognitive-Approach -> Listening Comprehension Performance	0.371	0.363	0.171	2.176	0.03
Cognitive-Avoidance -> Listening Comprehension Performance	-0.09	-0.088	0.172	0.526	0.599
Listening Boredom -> Behavioral-Approach	0.574	0.58	0.059	9.714	0
Listening Boredom -> Behavioral-Avoidance	0.562	0.568	0.057	9.795	0
Listening Boredom -> Cognitive-Approach	0.965	0.965	0.06	16.01	0
Listening Boredom -> Cognitive-Avoidance	0.564	0.57	0.059	9.565	0
Listening Boredom -> Listening Comprehension Performance	-0.396	-0.406	0.175	2.264	0.024

As seen in Table 6, hypotheses regarding direct associations (i.e., H1 to H9) are accepted. More particularly, findings regarding first research objective indicated that there exists a negative yet significant connection between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance (β = -0.396; p-value= 0.024). Furthermore, findings regarding second research objective indicated that listening boredom showed a positive and significant association with behavioral strategies (β = 0.574; p-value= 0.000), cognitive strategies (β = 0.965; p-value= 0.000), behavioral avoidance strategies (β = 0.562; p-value= 0.000), cognitive avoidance strategies (β= 0.965; p-value= 0.000). Lastly, the findings of the third objective also showed a positive and significant association between listening comprehension performance and behavioral strategies (β = 0.072; p-value= 0.000), cognitive strategies (β = 0.371; p-value= 0.03), and behavioral avoidance strategies (β = 0.079; p-value= 0.000). However, there exists a negative and significant association between listening comprehension performance and cognitive avoidance strategies (β = -0.09; p-value= 0.599).

The outcomes of the mediation analysis are shown in Figure 3 and Table 7. β value and p-value manifest that all the four listening boredom coping strategies act as a mediator in establishing the association between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance.

Table 7

Indirect effect results

	Original Sample (O)	*Sample Mean (M)*	*Standard Deviation (STDEV)*	*T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)*	*P Values*
Listening Boredom -> Behavioral-Approach -> Listening Comprehension Performance	0.041	0.046	0.011	3.713	0
Listening Boredom -> Behavioral-Avoidance -> Listening Comprehension Performance	0.045	0.04	0.077	0.581	0.561
Listening Boredom -> Cognitive-Approach -> Listening Comprehension Performance	0.358	0.35	0.164	2.179	0.03
Listening Boredom -> Cognitive-Avoidance -> Listening Comprehension Performance	-0.051	-0.051	0.1	0.513	0.608

Results and Discussion

This study aimed to attain four key objectives as stated earlier. Consequently, based upon past literature, four hypotheses were generated. The results of the first research objective showed that there exists a significant yet negative association between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance among Saudi EFL learners. Therefore, the aforementioned finding supports the first hypothesis. In simple words, results indicated that Saudi EFL learners' listening comprehension performance is reduced whenever they feel bored in English listening lessons. This particular result is in line with numerous past studies in the domain of mathematics (Castens & Overbey, 2009; Cowan & Piepgrass, 1997; Eren & Coskun, 2016; Pekrun et al., 2014; Putwain et al., 2018). In EFL domain, this finding supports the finding of Shehzad et al. (2020), which confirmed that reading boredom is negatively associated with the reading comprehension performance. In addition to empirical studies, aforementioned finding also supports control-value theory, which affirms that the notion of boredom negatively affects the performance of the learners (Pekrun, 2006). The possible reason of the aforementioned finding could be attributed to the possibility that Saudi EFL learners might be kinesthetic learners. According to Al-Hebaishi (2012), kinesthetic learners learn best when they are allowed to get engaged in doing or touching anything while learning. He further elaborated that they get bored by just listening to lectures.

Additionally, the results of the second research objective designated that there exists a positive and substantial relationship between listening boredom and all of the four listening boredom coping strategies (i.e., behavioral, cognitive, behavioral avoidance, cognitive avoidance). This result supports several research hypotheses (i.e., H2, H3, H4, H5). Aforementioned result is in line with a number of previous studies (Eren & Coskun, 2016; Nett et al., 2010; Shehzad et al., 2020), which indicate a positive and significant connection between boredom and all of the four boredom coping strategies. A thorough theoretical framework related to boredom coping strategies was established by Nett et al.(2010). They suggested that this framework ought to be incorporated in the future studies in different domains. Most of the past studies incorporated it in mathematics domain (Eren & Coskun, 2016; Pekrun et al., 2014; Putwain et al., 2018), a recent study incorporated it in English reading domain (Shehzad et al., 2020); however, according to researcher's good knowledge, no study has incorporated it in English listening domain. Thus, the present research employed this framework and conducted a study in EFL listening domain as suggested by Nett et al. (2010).

In addition, the findings of the third research objective were in line with the numerous hypotheses (i.e., H6, H7, H8), which showed that there exists a positive and substantial association between listening boredom coping strategies and listening comprehension performance; however, one of the strategies (i.e., cognitive avoidance) showed a significant yet negative association with listening comprehension performance. Thus, H9 is rejected. In simple words, results designated that the usage of listening boredom coping strategies except one type (i.e., cognitive avoidance) resulted in the improvement of listening comprehension performance. Several studies confirm this finding (Eren & Coskun, 2016; Nett et al., 2011; Shehzad et al., 2020). A recent study's findings asserted that the usage of these strategies not only assists students to reduce the feeling of boredom but also contributes in regulating their feelings and motivation level, which consequently improve their performance (Nett et al., 2020).

Finally, the results of the fourth research objective designated that all of the four listening boredom coping strategies (i.e., behavioral, cognitive, behavioral avoidance, cognitive avoidance) mediated the relationship between listening boredom and listening comprehension performance. Therefore, all the four hypotheses related to mediation (i.e., H10, H11, H12, H13) support this finding. This finding is in accordance with several studies (Shehzad et al., 2020; Zhou & Kam, 2017). However, Eren and Coskun's (2016) outcomes are different from current study's findings. Their study on Turkish learners found that mathematics boredom coping strategies failed to mediate the connection between boredom and performance in mathematics domain.

Conclusion

The results attained from the current research can be valuable for EFL listening instructors, learners, syllabus designers, and policymakers. More particularly, EFL teachers can improve the listening comprehension performance of the learners by incorporating listening boredom coping strategies in their EFL listening lectures. Consequently, it is hoped that the students would take greater interest in the lessons, which would result in

better listening comprehension. Syllabus designers should incorporate such content that is interesting and related to the culture of the EFL learners. Therefore, the listening comprehension performance of the learners would improve.

Despite the fact that the current research fills several substantial gaps; still, it has a few weaknesses. First, the current study has deployed a quantitative approach. It is believed that more robust results could have been obtained if qualitative approach had been deployed. Second, a cross-sectional design was deployed in this study owing to time restraints. However, the usage of longitudinal research design would have provided more reliability to the collected data as the data is collected multiple times in it. Third, current study did not consider private university students. Finally, yet importantly, the results of this study can only be generalized to the university students.

This study proposes numerous recommendations to other researchers. First, future researchers should consider conducting research using the same conceptual model on English writing and speaking skills since the reading and listening skills have already been explored by Shehzad et al. (2020) and the current study. Second, the future research studies regarding boredom ought to be conducted in EFL settings as also recommended by Kruk and Zawodniak (2018). Lastly, future studies should consider collecting data from EFL university students studying in both private and public sector universities.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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Emotional Intelligence in Distance Learning: A case study of English as a second language via distance learning

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Distance learners studying English confront emotionally demanding obstacles. A mixed methods study was conducted to explore the role that distance learners' emotional intelligence (EI) plays as they learn English. In phase one of the study, 238 students responded to a composite questionnaire that yielded their EI scores, demography, and viewpoints regarding the English course. In phase two, 18 volunteers selected based on their EI scores were interviewed to obtain qualitative data to build upon the quantitative results. This paper presents a case study of a student called Aini. The findings revealed that Aini's EI helped her manage her emotions, perceptions, and actions, and ultimately obtain her obligatory English credits for graduation. It is imperative to inculcate students' EI to help them manage their emotions in order to adapt and persevere, not only when learning English via distance learning but also to successfully accomplish one's goals in life.

Keywords: distance learning, emotional intelligence, case study, mixed methods study, situational barriers, institutional barriers, dispositional barriers

Introduction

Scholars acknowledge that learning a second language can be emotionally challenging (Hurd, 2000; Oxford 2015). Language learners have been found to experience anxiety, shame, anger, insecurity, sadness, confusion, contentment, pride, and joy (Oxford, 2015). In distance education, learning English as a foreign language (FSL) can become even more emotionally challenging due to the distance learning setting (Hurd, 2007; Oxford, 2015). Hurd (2000) explains that in traditional language classrooms, lessons and activities are planned and prioritised by the language teacher. The structure, support systems, regular checks, and better access to face-to-face communication with the teacher and course mates for seeking advice can help the language learner cope. However, for distance learners who are left to their own devices, it can become an emotionally exasperating experience (Hurd, 2000). Hurd (2007) highlights that the "inherently non-social nature of this mode of learning, which militates against the interdependence that many language experts would consider fundamental to successful language learning" (p. 242) would require the distance learners to manage their emotions in the absence of teachers and peers. If second language learners cannot concentrate well and have a weak learning ability, it could negatively affect their efforts to achieve academic accomplishments (Horowitz, Horowitz & Koop, 1986, as cited in Homayouni et al., 2020) and induce negative emotions.

Emotions influence the manner in which people rationalise, decide, and act (Hewstone & Stroebe, 2001; Lewis & Haviland-Jones, 2000). Since emotional knowledge is vital for determining the decisions that one makes, the inability to regulate one's emotions can negatively affect one's efficiency when forming effective judgments. While examining poor judgement despite high intellect, Bechara et al. (2000) posited that "too little emotion has profoundly deleterious effects on decision making" (p. 193), which was as harmful as being too emotional. Hutchinson et al. (2018) advocate that with the advancements in understanding the role of emotions in neuropsychology, there should be more efforts taken to analyse the importance and functions of emotions. "It is now recognised that emotion and cognition processing are integrated in the brain and therefore jointly contribute to behaviour, particularly memory, attention and decision-making" (LeBlanc et al., 2015, as cited in Hutchinson, et al., 2018, p. 607).

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Recognising the impact of emotions, this study examines the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in the distance English language learning scenario. Oxford (2015) observed that "emotional intelligence is an important factor in language learning" (p. 61). This study is underpinned by the principles of EI, which initially were described as the capacity to control emotions, manage emotional situations effectively, and use emotional knowledge to make discerning decisions (Mayer & Salovey, 1993). Later, Mayer and Salovey (1997), refined the definition of EI to the "ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (p. 10). Research has also shown that EI can predict success in various aspects of life (Bar-On & Parker, 2000; Goleman, 1995; MacCann et al., 2020; Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Schutte et al., 1998).

In the field of education, numerous studies have been conducted to examine the influence of EI on the learning of the English language. Pishghadam (2009) investigated the role of EI in relation to the four language skills in second language learning. He compared the EI scores of 508 Iranian university students with their academic achievements in reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills. He concluded that second language learning was strongly associated with several dimensions of EI. Pishghadam found that stress management and being able to control one's emotions led to better reading skills, a high level of EI and intrapersonal abilities assisted in listening skills, interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies can contribute to better speaking skills, and good adaptability promoted better writing skills.

The findings concurred with Zarezadeh's (2013) study, which discovered that EI had a positive impact on English language learning amongst Iranian students. Intrapersonal intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and general mood were found to influence speaking skills because the mutual performance characteristics needed for speaking count on these capabilities. Students' EI in terms of the ability to manage stress, maintain a good mood, and adapt to the context of a text helped them in reading. Next, students who have emotional awareness, self-esteem, and self-confidence proved to be better listeners.

Guven (2016) investigated the relationship between EI and university students' attitudes towards ICT and media tools for learning English. It was found that students who can understand their emotions and those of others are more likely to adopt ICT and media tools for learning English. Guven explained that learning a language is a social process that necessitates intrapersonal and interpersonal communication and collaborative interaction, which are aspects of EI that lead to the use of ICT for the enhancement of English language learning.

An experimental study involving EI intervention was conducted by Ebrahimi, et al (2018) to investigate the influence of EI enhancement on the speaking skills of EFL students. The learners in the treatment group who received EI enhancement achieved significant improvement in speaking. The speaking skills of the control group progressed but not as significantly as the treatment group's. The findings of the study supported the results of Soodmand Afshar and Rahimi's (2014) study that investigated the relationship among the EI, critical thinking, and speaking ability of Iranian students in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes. The participants completed an EI questionnaire, the California Critical Thinking Skills Test, and underwent an interview adapted from the IELTS Speaking Skill Test. The results indicated that high EI students had high speaking abilities. Conversely, low EI participants had low speaking abilities. The multiple regression analysis of the data showed that EI was the strongest predictor of the speaking ability of the participants rather than critical thinking. They concluded that "learners who are more able to control their own emotions and those of the others might be considered as better speakers than those who think critically" (p. 53).

In another study to investigate the relationship among EI, learning style, language learning strategy use, and the L2 achievement of Iranian EFL learners, Soodmand Afshar et al. (2016) found that strategy use and EI were strong predictors of second language achievement. Using Pearson correlation analyses, they discovered that second language achievement was significantly related to EI and language learning strategies used. But there was no significant relationship between learning styles and L2 achievement. The results of multiple regression analysis showed that strategy use, followed by emotional intelligence, was a stronger predictor of L2 achievement. They declared that

> high emotionally intelligent learners are able to guard against the interfering effects of negative emotions and neutralise their obtrusive influence, less emotionally intelligent learners are likely to succumb in the face of intricate and ill-defined situations and are unable to control destructive emotions (p. 647).

In a recent study, Aliasin and Abbasi (2020) investigated the relationship between EI and the use of metacognitive reading strategies by second language learners in Iran. Multiple regression analysis showed that "the EI scales of general mood and interpersonal skills significantly contributed to the prediction of the use of metacognitive reading strategies by EFL learners" (p. 31). They concluded that EI is positively connected to the students' emotional and cognitive capacity to deploy the respective metacognitive reading strategies to enhance their language learning.

In a Malaysian EI study, Hamdzah (2020) employed a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between EI and Malaysian University English Test (MUET) performance among 250 undergraduate students at a technical university. The findings indicated that EI had a significant correlation with the students' MUET performance and can actually predict the students' MUET performance. The results of this study showed that EI influences student performance on English proficiency tests that evaluate listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Finally, using structural equation modelling, Homayouni et al. (2020) investigated EI and English language anxiety amongst 321 bilingual students who were learning English. They defined language anxiety as "a feeling of tension, embarrassment, fear, apprehension, and worry about the negative evaluation of others that deprives the learner of the ability to take risks in various learning situations, including making contact and direct communication and face-to-face conversation (p.143). The results demonstrated that EI impacted English language learning both directly and indirectly via the English language anxiety experienced by the respondents in their study. Based on the findings, it was postulated that increasing EI can decrease language anxiety, resulting in enhanced English language learning (Homayouni et al., 2020). The findings of these studies confirmed the positive relationship between EI and English language learning.

A number of studies have investigated the impact of EI on distance and online learning. Among the studies, Valizadeh (2016) investigated the correlation between EI and EFL students' conceptions of autonomy in distance education. Learners' autonomy, defined as "the ability to manipulate one's own social surroundings and activities" (Valizadeh, 2016, p. 22), was found to be related to their EI. The results showed that the EI component of independence correlated significantly with learner autonomy. Autonomous distance learners' language learning experience is linked to their EI, whereby they demonstrate committed effort, action, and active involvement during distance learning. The students displayed a positive orientation towards learning EFL because they had positive attitudes in their learning experience.

In a similar vein, Zahed-Babelan and Moenikiab (2010) examined the role of EI in predicting students' academic achievement in a distance education system. The results of their study agreed with findings of previous studies indicating that EI predicted academic success in distance learning environments where there is a separation between teacher and student. Generally, distance learners need to depend on independent learning and intrapersonal capabilities to regulate themselves in the distance learning program. They asserted that "individuals must control negative emotions like fear, anxiety, and frustration so that positive emotions like enthusiasm and a sense of accomplishment can increase" (O'Regan, 2003, as cited in Zahed-Babelan & Moenikiab, 2010, p. 1159).

In Pakistan, Buzdar et al. (2016) investigated the psychometric aspects, i.e., EI, of 432 English students as determinants of distance learners' foreign language readiness for online learning. Pearson correlation coefficients showed that the learners' readiness for and success with online learning was significantly and directly related to the distance learners' EI abilities such as self-emotions appraisal, others-emotions appraisal, use of emotions, and regulation of emotions.

In another study, Berenson et al. (2008) investigated the role of EI as a predictor for success in online learning environments. The participants consisted of Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Asian, and Middle Eastern ethnic groups. They examined resilience, which is viewed as a dimension subsumed under the broader construct of EI as effective self-awareness. Resilience was defined as coping behaviours when students encounter

obstacles, life stressors, and external obligations. The findings showed that resilience was strongly and directly associated with EI but did not predict GPA.They declared that successful students showed high resilience in "establishing and maintaining healthy relationships, ethical standards, the willingness to take risks for beliefs, the mastery of self in a social environment, and the persistence to work through difficult situations with self-confidence" (Kemp, 2002, as cited in Berenson et al., 2008, p. 3).

Similarly, Engin (2017) conducted a correlational study to determine whether EI is linked to students' readiness in online learning. The findings indicated that students' EI was related to their online learning readiness. Students with high EI social skills, self-control, and well-being demonstrated higher online learning readiness behaviour. Moreover, the self-control dimension of EI predicted the students' readiness for online learning more than other dimensions of EI. Engin (2017) summarised that students with high EI social skills presented successful self-directed learning behaviour, such as "implementing own study plans, searching for support when learning problems are encountered, good time management, determining own learning targets, and having high expectations for learning" (p.38). These studies show that EI was found to positively influence students' readiness, autonomy, orientation, behaviour, and success in distance and open learning.

Overall, numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the influence of EI on academic achievement and English language learning in distance and online learning contexts. However, most of these EI studies (Aliasin & Abbasi, 2020; Berenson et al., 2008; Buzdar et al., 2016; Engin, 2017; Hamdzah, 2020; Homayouni et al., 2020; Soodmand Afshar & Rahimi, 2016; Zarezadeh, 2013) employed quantitative methods. The quantitative findings were informative, but the data were somewhat detached, reducing participants to mere numbers, which resulted in the loss of vital information about the participants' contexts and real-life experiences. These EI studies did not reveal rich qualitative data about distance EFL learners. Thus, this explanatory mixed methods case study sought to fill the gap by first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to give a fuller picture of the phenomenon being studied. "The refinement results in exploring a few typical cases, probing a key result in more detail" (Creswell, 2012, p. 543).

This study explored the impact of distance learners' EI on their distance learning experiences at the School of Distance Education (SDE) Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). SDE USM has been delivering distance education programmes in Malaysia since 1971. The SDE has transitioned from handing out lecturers' notes to students to the broadcasting of recorded lectures over the radio, to the sending of pre-recorded audio and video materials, to live audio and electronic board conferences as well as video conferencing, to e-learning portals, and finally to the present internet live video streaming (Hilmi & Mustapha, 2017). Most of the time, distance learners study off campus except for the Intensive course, which is held every academic session. The Intensive course lasts for about two to three weeks. It is compulsory for all distance learners to attend on-campus activities at SDE USM during this time. All major, minor, and university courses have face-to-face sessions and other activities such as quizzes, tests, presentations, laboratory work, and tutorials during the Intensive course.

A study by Idrus (2007) discovered that the SDE students were mainly working adults from all over Malaysia who were offered an opportunity to pursue a tertiary education via a distance learning mode. Notably, Saw et al.'s (1999) study outlined that the adult students at SDE USM encountered various obstacles when they became distance learners because they had to grapple with many responsibilities. They needed to change from the traditional face-to-face-learning method they were accustomed to at school to a hybrid distance education programme that required more self-regulated learning. Another study by Azli et al. (2000) found that the female adult learners at SDE USM faced more challenging obstacles as they had to manage roles such as being spouses, mothers, and employees, which took up a lot of their time and reduced their social interactions. Through exploring the problems and coping mechanisms of distance learners, Dass's study (2001) documented that distance learners at SDE USM experienced emotional duress as they struggled with their academic challenges on top of their occupational, familial, and social obligations as adult distance learners. She highlighted that the 534 distance learners in her study faced problems with their English language courses. This was owing to the Malaysian public education system that utilises the Malay language as the medium of instruction.

Undisputedly, adult distance learners encounter a myriad of obstacles causing emotional trials that influence their engagement and accomplishments in learning (Cross, 1981; Hurd, 2000). They need to adapt to their new distance learning environment, which expects independent self-regulated learning and a familiarisation with

new technologies for distance learning. Sugilar (2021) states that distance learners face numerous barriers to learning that are induced by inadequate support services, low student motivation, insufficient course information, and technical difficulties caused by online classes. The first category of barriers is referred to as Situational Barriers (SB). They comprise issues concerning learners' occupation, family, finances, environment, and insufficient social support. The second category is referred to as Institutional Barriers (IB). They comprise issues concerning the course programme and its implementation, academic workload, institutional support and facilities, assessment, as well as teaching and learning requirements. The third category is referred to as Dispositional Barriers (DB). They comprise issues concerning self-worth, low motivation and self-regulation, weak learning history, as well as individual inclinations and study patterns (Cross, 1981; Osam et al., 2016).

Background of the Study

The courses at SDE USM are mainly taught in the Malay language, except for the obligatory English credit units that the students must attain for graduation (SDE Guidebook, 2020/2021). Many students need to enrol for the English Level II and English Level III proficiency courses in order to graduate. These proficiency courses furnish the students with effective communication skills. Distance learners mainly self-study using modules, reference materials, recorded lectures, and attend some face-to-face lectures during the Intensive course. Assessments are conducted through coursework, continuous assessment, and the final examination.

In this scenario, learning English is difficult for the students as they are adults with differing learning styles and abilities to learn a second language. The opportunities for the students to communicate and learn English also differ as they come from different states in Malaysia. Some states are urban and use English more compared to other states that are more rural with less English usage in the community. Some SDE students have failed and had to repeat their English course(s). There were cases where the students passed their major and minor courses but were unable to graduate because they failed their English course(s). This was an emotionally distressing situation that made learning English an excruciating experience for distance learners.

This study addressed the following research question:

How does a distance learner's emotional intelligence influence her experiences in the English Level III course at the School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia?

Methodology

Data Collection

An explanatory sequential mixed methods study (Creswell, 2012) was employed in this study. The rationale for this two-phase approach was to use the quantitative participant characteristics in phase one "to guide the purposeful sampling for a qualitative phase" (Creswell, Plano Clark et al., 2003, as cited in Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006, p. 72) in phase two. This design allowed the researchers "to obtain quantitative results from a population in the first phase, and then refine or elaborate these findings through an in-depth qualitative exploration in the second phase" (Creswell, 2012, p. 543).

The students registered in the English Level III course were informed about the study after permission was granted by USM. They were duly informed about their rights, that participation was voluntary with no extra credits, and that the data would be anonymised to ensure confidentiality. In the briefing, they were urged to answer as honestly as possible. It was emphasized that their views about their learning experience would contribute to a better teaching and learning environment. All of the participants were debriefed to ensure that they were not negatively influenced by participating in the research.

Participants

In the first phase of the main study, a total of 238 distance learners returned the questionnaire that included their informed consent. The students took between 50 minutes and 65 minutes to complete the composite

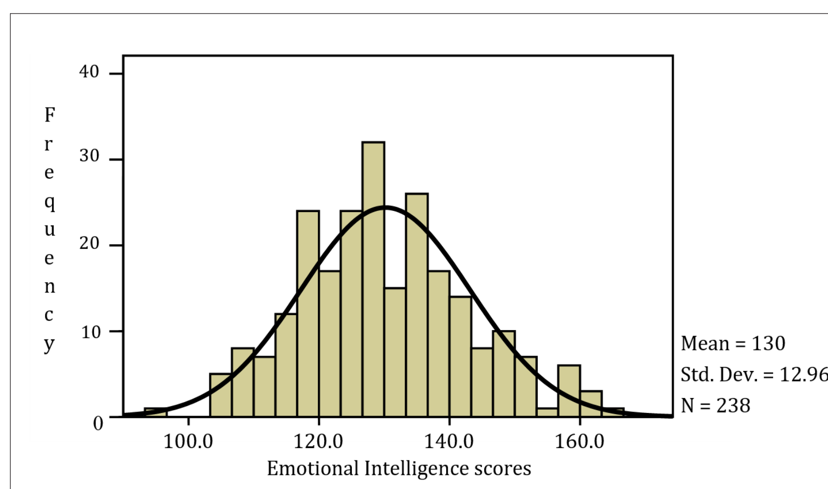
questionnaire. The participants consisted of 118 males and 120 females. Their ages ranged between 28 and 52 years old. Figure 1 shows the the EI scores of the participants.

Assessments and Measures

For the first phase of the study, the Schutte's Self-Report Inventory (SSRI; Schutte et al., 1998), a self-reported EI scale with 33 items that evaluates overall EI, was used to acquire the EI score of the participants. The lowest EI score was 33 and the highest EI score was 165. Schutte et al. (1998) reported that the SSRI includes three dimensions of EI, namely, "appraisal and expression of emotion in the self and others, regulation of emotion in the self and others and utilization of emotions in solving problems» (p. 175). The SSRI has good reliability, with .82 for internal consistency and .78 for test-retest reliability. It predicted the academic achievement of college students. The SSRI scale utilised to obtain the EI scores of the students has been found to generate reliable EI scores for adolescents and adults. In this study, the SSRI showed a Cronbach's alpha of .90, which indicated a high level of internal consistency (Pallant, 2011).

Figure 1

Distribution of the EI scores of the participants



Most of the participants (66%) scored close to the mean of 130. The mode was 124 and the standard deviation was 12.96.Forty-three (18.1%) of the respondents were in the High EI group with EI scores of 143 and above. One hundred fifty-seven (66%) of the students were in the Mid EI group with EI scores between 143 and 117. Thirty-eight (15.9%) of the students were in the Low EI group with EI scores of 117 and below.

In phase two, 18 students were chosen based on their EI scores, which were obtained from the first phase of the study to get "a sample that is satisfactory to their [the researchers'] specific needs" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 103). The 18 students were selected to participate in the qualitative approach of the study as "qualitative data helps explain or build upon initial quantitative results" (Creswell, Plano Clark et al,. 2003, as cited in Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006, p. 71). The 18 participants were individually interviewed using a semi-structured interview. This allowed for some flexibility in seeking clarification from the students about the issue of interest. The students could freely express their experiences based on their circumstances (Polit & Beck, 2012) to disclose actual details, meanings, and connotations about the phenomenon being studied.

With assurance of confidentiality, the students allowed the interviews to be audio recorded. The students were made to feel comfortable and at ease. Each interview took between 60 – 80 minutes.

This study showcases a distance learner pseudonymized as Aini. She was purposively sampled, indicating that she was chosen for specific purposes based on the researchers' "judgement of their typicality" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 103) to obtain the data for the study. Cohen et al. (2000) contend that purposeful sampling is a non-probability sample that "can prove perfectly adequate where researchers do not intend to generalise their

findings beyond the sample in question" (p. 102). Aini was deemed to have potentially experienced emotional tribulations since her questionnaire showed that she previously failed English in the Malaysian Certificate of Education examination. She also failed English Level II of the distance education programme. After a re-sit, she obtained a C for the course. At the time of the study, it was Aini's second attempt at the Level III English course as she had failed it the previous year. Aini had an EI score of 138 (placing her in the Mid EI group) and was willing to participate in the interview. She was one of the few students who submitted comments via a diary that would allow for the triangulation of information regarding the phenomenon being studied**.** The interview included these questions:

1. What are your perceptions regarding the English Level III course?
2. Are there any obstacles that you faced in the English Level III course?
3. What did you do to manage your situation?

Data Analysis

The quantitative data gathered for this study from the survey questionnaire were analysed using SPSS Statistics for Windows (Version 26). The composite questionnaire also furnished the students' demography and perceptions about the English course. The audio-recordings of the interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed to discern, classify, and create themes that were significant for addressing the overarching research question of the study (Evans, 2018). The codes were obtained through the initial coding of significant words to the phenomenon of interest through close reading. It involved reading and rereading the interview transcripts until reaching a sufficient level of familiarity. These codes were further refined in an iterative manner. They were categorised into major themes that are significant to address the overarching research question of the study (Evans, 2018). The coding schemes included perceptions about the English course, the barriers experienced, and the actions taken to manage the situation. The consistency and reliability of the codes and themes were confirmed via inter-rater discussion and validation. Other than the main rater, there was a verifier rater. An inter-rater confusion matrix was drawn up based on the coding conducted by the main and verifier raters on 10% of the transcripts. The inter-rater reliability for the main rater and the verifier rater indicated a Cohen's kappa of 0.91. Cohen's kappa is a widely used measure of agreement. The value of $\kappa = 0.91$ in the present study indicated that there was a very good agreement in coding (McHugh, 2012, p. 279). We strove to be transparent and reflexive in our construction and interpretation of the qualitative data to ensure the credibility of the results. The analysis of the qualitative data in the case-study also included the informants' direct quotes with their contextual background and the students' profiles and field notes that were individually recorded to provide rich detailed and circumstantial data about the informants (Bryman, 2004; Cohen et al., 2000; Evans, 2018).

Results

Aini was Malay and her mother tongue was the Malay language. She was 36 years old at the time of the interview. Aini came from a working-class family. Her father was a farmer and her mother was a homemaker. She joined the Social Science degree programme. She majored in Economics and minored in History. She had been in the programme for four years and this was her final year. She was married and had five children aged eleven years, ten years, nine years, eight years, and seven months. One of them was a special needs child with Down syndrome. She was a secondary school teacher. Her husband was with the regional Fire Department. They lived in the staff quarters of the regional Fire Department in a rural village in Kelantan. Incidentally, Kelantan is located on the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia and USM is located on the West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia. The Malays in Kelantan are protective of their cultural identity; they speak the Kelantanese dialect more widely than the National Malay language and can be antagonistic towards a foreign language such as English. A journey by car from the SDE USM in Penang to Aini's home takes six to seven hours. Aini was verbal and expressive in conveying her thoughts and experiences as if she were sharing and unloading her emotional tension.

Aini's Perceptions of the English Level III Course

When asked about her perceptions regarding the English course, Aini said, "I am worried as I am in my fourth year. Passing the English courses is a requirement for graduation, but I failed it last year. I am more worried about my English grades than my other subjects."

Reflecting on the English course, she added, "It is my greatest challenge. "She found the course challenging explaining that "the course is challenging as I can't write well in English. "She added, "I am very, very worried about the course because I don't understand the language." Being in her final year made the emotional challenge she felt more acute because if she did not pass it, she would not be able to graduate. She said, "I am afraid I cannot graduate due to failing the English course." Aini recorded the following comment in her diary: (I am very worried about my English course).

However, Aini viewed the course as advantageous. She said, "The course is useful as I can teach my children." She also viewed the modules favourably, stating, "The modules were beneficial, that is what I like about the course." On the one hand, it could be seen that Aini liked the course because the modules were beneficial. On the other hand, due to failing the course, Aini said, "I feel I have tried very hard, but I still failed. That is why I don't like the course."

At the same time, Aini viewed the course as disadvantageous. She mentioned, "It is a disadvantage because I need to re-sit it this year." Aini was also frustrated by paying more attention to her English paper but not passing the paper, at the cost of spending less time for her other courses that carried four units in comparison to the English paper that only carried two units. She added, "I pay more attention to my English course than my other courses which carry four units. It is not worthwhile."

Aini again stressed that the course was disadvantageous when she had to come to SDE USM during the long vacation intersession to re-sit the English Level III course that she failed. (The long vacation intersession was held to help final year students graduate by allowing them to re-sit the papers that they failed). Aini shared, "This course has been disadvantageous to me. I have had to come all the way here to re-sit the paper in order to graduate. It is such an inconvenience. I don't like it."

Aini's Perceived Situational Barriers

Aini perceived her work as a great situational barrier. She commented, "I have many job responsibilities, teaching Living Skills and being in the Panitia [Committee]." She added, "I am also involved in academic and non-academic societies." She further explained, "I am also conducting workshops for the PMR exam students." She later remarked, "That was the first one, I will have to conduct at least three workshops this year." Aini's job exhausted her, she shared, "After work, sometimes I am too tired to study." This issue was also reported in Aini's diary: (I am busy with many job responsibilities).

Aini also had great responsibilities in terms of her family and home. Aini said, "I am busy with my daily chores." She elaborated, "I have the internet at home, but I don't get a chance to use it because I'm busy and tired from caring for my children." Aini talked about her children, "I have five children to care for; eleven, ten, nine, and eight years old, and a seven-month-old baby."

Among her five children, Aini had one special child suffering from Down syndrome who needed more attention. She said, "Everyone is healthy except my special child who is suffering from Down syndrome who needs more attention, which is a challenge. However busy I am, I'll have to feed him otherwise he will not eat." Aini further explained, "I also had to give him more care as he could only walk at the age of three. He's better now as compared to when he was younger. Previously, he used to cry and turn blue because he had some problems with his heart, and I had to bring him to the hospital from time to time."

Aini further described how hectic her responsibilities were with the monitoring of her children's schoolwork and their welfare. Aini remarked, "My children are close to me and I have to help them with their schoolwork. If they cannot finish their work, they don't go to sleep. Sometimes they sleep at midnight." When Aini went to the mosque she had to bring her children along. She mentioned, "I bring the kids with me. When I return, I help them finish their work."

Upon reflection, Aini admitted that she did not have sufficient time for her English Language learning because of her numerous responsibilities at home and Aini's job takes up most of her time during the day. She reported, "I come home from school at 3:00 pm." Her job also required her to conduct a workshop that took up more of her time. She commented, "I conducted a workshop from 8 – 10 pm last night." Aini also shouldered many family

and home responsibilities at the cost of her studies. She reasoned, "Because of my responsibilities, I can't find time for my studies."

Due to the lack of time, Aini's English studies lasted only two months. She explained, "It was only for two months, because I didn't have the time." She added, "It took me an hour to drive there and an hour to drive back, which was time consuming." Aini sometimes planned to read her books in school but she disclosed, "I sometimes bring my books to school hoping to do some studying but I seldom can find time to read them." Aini also mentioned that she sometimes spent time visiting her parents and her parents-in-law. She said, "We visit them regularly. Sometimes we have to spend three hours a week visiting them."

Aini further disclosed some financial challenges. She said, "We sometimes have to send money to our parents, who are farmers." Aini also explained that during the Intensive course she had to spend some extra money to employ her former student as a babysitter for her new-born baby. She said, "I had to dig into my savings to pay the babysitter RM 300 for three weeks. Thank God this is my last year." Aini also had to pay tuition for her economics tutoring. She explained, "There is a teacher with a Master's in Economics at school. I asked him to help teach us. I paid him RM30.00 per hour, which was another financial strain."

Distance was also a barrier for Aini. She was attending special classes that were about an hour's drive from her home after her busy day. "I went to special classes that were far away in Tanah Merah." Aini also mentioned some problems caused by other disruptions in her personal life. She suffered a miscarriage in the midst of her studies. She disclosed that it could have been due to attending her tuition classes that were far away from home after her busy day. "I had a miscarriage, which disrupted my studies."

Aini also tried to initiate a study group but unfortunately, it didn't last. She reported, "Early this year, a few of us formed a study group. But one by one we dropped out, so our plan was disrupted." She also recalled when her children were ill. She said, "My children haven't been sick for a long time, thank God. When they were sick my plans were disrupted."

According to Aini, her English language learning was not successful because of the English language practices in Kelantan. English was taught in Malay and the Kelantanese people spoke a variation of the standard Malay language that was different. In addition, there was no apparent motivation for the students to learn English effectively and competently. Aini recollected,

> *My teachers during my school days taught English in Malay all the way to my college days. That is the environment here in Kelantan. Most of us speak Kelantanese. In fact, where I teach now, the third week of school is English Week; but we still use the Malay language. There is no penalty for using the Malay language. That is why we remain weak in English.*

Aini also experienced a lack of social support. Aini's husband worked with the District Fire Brigade on shifts. Aini divulged that he was helping her less nowadays. She said, "*He was promoted to a senior officer position last year. A slight pay increase, but he now has more responsibilities and he helps me less."* Aini did not have friends who could help her in English. She lamented, *"I do not have friends who are good at English to help me."* Aini also wrote about inadequate social support in her diary: (*I can't find any friends who are good at English to help me).*

Aini's Perceived Institutional Barriers

Aini perceived her academic workload as an institutional barrier. She felt that her major and minor course combination was not a problem but her academic workload was heavy. She pointed out, *"I am taking eight courses and the English course, 28 units altogether, which is heavy. I major in Economics and minor in History. The combination is alright. I like History so it does not cause much of a problem."*

Aini remembered clearly that she had problems during the Intensive course. She had another baby before the Intensive course and had to bring the baby along as she was still nursing her. She employed a former student to take care of her baby when she attended lectures. However, she found the dormitory regulations that were not child friendly an institutional barrier. Aini recalled,

> *I then had this new-born before the last Intensive course, and I had to bring her to the Intensive course because I was nursing her. She is fantastic, she didn't cause any trouble.She sleeps early at night, a very good baby. She stayed with me at the dormitory surreptitiously because the dormitory did not allow children.*

Aini also mentioned that there was not enough teaching. She said, *"Actually, the teleconferencing for the English course is insufficient."* She complained about the English course teleconferencing schedule, "*Also, the teleconference was held during unsuitable hours."* Aini recalled scheduling problems during the Intensive course too, *"Sometimes a few of my classes were scheduled one after another at night; ending late at night, like the English course."* Aini complained, *"Sometimes we had a terrible schedule. We had classes throughout the day, and we had to sit for assessments as well, so we had very little opportunity to revise."*

Aini also mentioned some assessment issues as institutional barriers. She said, *"During the last Intensive course, we only had one week to complete our English assignment."* Aini felt it was difficult to complete the assignment in a week amidst her hectic schedule during the Intensive course. Aini also expressed that she found answering multiple-choice questions challenging saying that *"the final exam had multiple-choice questions that were difficult."*

Aini's Perceived Dispositional Barriers

Aini's values and priorities created dispositional barriers. Being a devout Muslim, Aini illustrated this in her views. She stressed, *"I personally teach my children the Quran. That is my duty."* Aini's religious fervour was demonstrated in her statement, *"At about 9.00pm, I go to the mosque to attend religious talks to prepare for my afterlife."* Aini's convictions based on her values and priorities overshadowed her studies.

Although Aini expressed interest in learning the English language, the circumstances and barriers she encountered greatly challenged her self-control. She said, "*Yes, I am interested in studying English. Unfortunately, I gave up halfway."* Aini herself acknowledged that her efforts to learn English were unsuccessful partly due to her lack of motivation. She said, *"My motivation is not strong enough."* Aini's low perception of herself as an English language learner formed a dispositional barrier that hampered the progress of her language learning. She disclosed, "*I am not good at English. I didn't think I could do the assignments."*

Aini's preference for studying English face to face with a lecturer was a dispositional barrier too. She explained, *"I like to study with a lecturer in a face-to-face situation."* Unfortunately, there was little opportunity for Aini to benefit from this mode of teaching in the SDE USM education programme because there were very few lectures in one academic year. However, Aini also admitted that during the lectures she was conscious about losing face in a huge crowd. Aini said, *"I'm not afraid of the lecturers but I'm shy to ask questions as I don't want to appear silly."*

Aini's Actions to Manage Her Situation

Aini pointed out, *"I enrolled for some English tutoring at the cost of RM300 per month."* She also mentioned forming a study group, saying, *"Early this year, a few of us formed a study group."* Aini also tried multi-tasking to attend to her problem. She explained, "*While I am teaching my children, I try to do some learning myself."*

Knowing that she had limited time and many responsibilities, she organised the completion of her school duties before the Intensive course. She stated, *"I would normally plan to finish my schoolwork before the Intensive course begins."* Aini also made plan for doing her homework and studying. She stated, *"I plan to go to the Regional Centre to do my revision in the morning just before my exams."* Aini had also made contingency plans in case she failed. She said, *"Anyway, this is my final year. If I fail, I will go to USM to re-sit the paper during the long vacation intersession."*

During the Intensive course, Aini felt pressure when she received her English assignments. She admitted disengaging from the task for a short while. *"I avoided it; I redirected my attention to other things for a day or two."* She later recovered from the disengagement and completed her assignment.

As a mother, Aini felt guilty for neglecting her special needs child when she focused on her studies. She commented, "*Sometimes he goes to sleep without his food, and I feel guilty."* Aini's perceptiveness of her son's needs, and her own emotions were vital for reminding her of her priorities in order to hold the family intact**.** To maintain harmony and bliss within the family, Aini also highlighted that "*my husband is the head of the family, I try to be sensitive to his feelings."*

With regard to her failure in English, Aini disclosed, "*I didn't feel too bad. I thought of my friends who were in the same boat as I am in and I accepted it."* She also shared her feelings with her friends and sought their advice. Aini said, *"I often seek the help and support of my friends to express my emotions and experiences."* She added, "*Sometimes I have fun with my children, and I become spirited again."* There were other times when Aini indulged in going out as a family to promote emotional well-being. She said, *"Occasionally we go out as a family to enjoy ourselves."* Additionally, in her diary, Aini wrote, *(I pray to God Almighty when I feel stressed).* However, Aini admitted that sometimes she engaged in distressing emotions. She confessed, *"When I feel bad and disturbed, I sometimes get depressed. I am not perfect."*

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore the influence of a distance learner's EI on her experiences with the English Level III course at the School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia. The findings of the study are consistent with previous EI studies. Aini's perceptions, perceived barriers, and actions in her English learning experience appear to measure up with existing EI literature. Aini showed that she was able to perceive, appraise, and express her emotions about the English course quite readily. She liked the English course for the advantages that the course afforded her but there were moments and situations when she disliked the course due to her failure and the emotional challenges she encountered. However, due to her repeated failures, Aini was inclined to perceive the English course as emotionally challenging. Zarezadeh (2013) noted that some students "always appear to fail or reveal little progress despite all efforts and strivings they invest" (p. 1286). This is because learning a second language "gets severe for the adults because they are expected to communicate with a language which is different from their mother tongue" (p. 1286). Nevertheless, Zarezadeh (2013) found that EI had positively influenced English language learning amongst her Iranian participants. Homayouni et al. (2020) posited that language anxiety can be reduced by raising EI, resulting in improved English language learning.

Aini was able to recognise the numerous barriers she faced in learning English. She was aware that it was difficult for her, as she lived in a rural village in Kelantan where the community hardly used English, to learn a second language that is different from her mother tongue. Aini realised that she had to concentrate on her demanding job, her family, and especially her special needs child who needed constant care. Mindful that her time was limited, her tasks were numerous, and her schedule was packed, Aini did make some arrangements to succeed in her academic pursuits. Although, disruptions to her plans caused great emotional challenges and the impact was tremendous when her children fell ill, Aini regulated her emotions to deal with the challenges. These challenges corresponded with Cross's (1981) statements and Hurd's (2000) observation that distance learners of English endure isolation and insufficient time due to a variety of obligations that cause hardships. Aini's resilience is supported by evidence from Berenson et al.'s (2008) study that found resilience to be strongly associated with EI. Resilience was considered a dimension subsumed under the broader construct of EI as effective self-awareness. Aini's coping behaviours when she faced impediments, stressors, and external responsibilities can be attributed to her EI. This concurs with Valizadeh's (2016) study, which found that learners' autonomy was linked to their EI.

In recapitulating the significance of emotions in English language learning, Hurd (2007) emphasised that "emotions are interior signals and function as a guide for actions and cognition. They are therefore central to the way in which students approach what they are doing" (p. 253). In line with this, Aini demonstrated that she could perceive and understand her own emotions. She also considered the emotions of her husband and children. Being a Malay woman, whose husband does not possess a tertiary education, Aini endeavoured to be perceptive and understanding towards her husband's feelings to ensure a conducive environment for her to study. Taking advantage of her emotional knowledge, Aini took great care to recognise her husband's feelings and her children's needs, especially those of her special needs child with Down syndrome, to maintain harmony

and bliss within the family. Norboevich (2020) postulates that "people with a high level of development of emotional intelligence have expressed abilities to understand their own emotions and the emotions of other people, they can control their emotional sphere, which determines their higher adaptability" (p. 103).

Relying on her EI, Aini exhibited the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitated thoughts to enable her to manage the obstacles that she encountered in her English learning environment. She was cognizant of the barriers and recognised the reasons that jaded her emotionally. Aini accepted the onerous barriers that challenged her English learning and courageously managed her situation to obtain the minimum English language requirements for graduation. Aini displayed the ability to regulate her emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth as well as positive outcomes. When Aini found out that she failed her English course, she initially felt sad. However, she later placated herself by comparing herself with her friends "*who were in the same boat*." Similarly, when Aini faced challenges, she utilised various strategies such as paying for English tutoring, forming a study group, and multi-tasking to attend to her problems. She organised her schedule and homework, and even made contingency plans in case she failed. This concurs with Soodmand Afshar et al.'s (2016) findings regarding the importance of strategy use and EI in EFL achievement. It was found that emotionally intelligent students can "guard against negative emotions and neutralise their obtrusive influence, less emotionally intelligent learners are likely to succumb in the face of intricate and ill-defined situations and are unable to control destructive emotions" (p. 647). Similarly, Aliasin and Abbasi (2020) found that students' emotional and cognitive capacity to use reading strategies to improve their language learning is positively related to their EI. Aini did not admit defeat amidst the barriers she faced. She attended to the problem and planned her activities to solve her problems rather than avoid them. Aini also engaged in activities to promote emotional well-being, such as finding respite from her stressful routine by playing with her children. Aini's ability to manage her emotional impediments shows that she was able to manage negative emotions like worry, anxiety, and exasperation and tried to promote positive emotions to be able to continue with her academic pursuits, as mentioned in Zahed-Babelan and Moenikiab's (2010) study. In a nutshell, EI is important because "it is not enough to be smart and hardworking – to have the added edge for success, students must also be able to understand and manage emotions to succeed at school" (MacCann et al., 2020, p. 174).

This case study can be considered a positive affirmation of the role of EI in a person's life experiences and success (Bar-On & Parker, 2000; Goleman, 1995; Homayouni et al., 2020; MacCann et al., 2020; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Aini appeared to have operationalised her EI amidst the excruciating challenges she faced and was able to adapt and create a conducive environment for her learning, or more precisely, achieve the required English course credits for graduation. This phenomenon corresponds with the findings of Valizadeh's (2016) study on EI and learner autonomy. Aini can be described as an autonomous distance learner whose language learning experience is linked to her EI. She demonstrated committed effort, action, and active involvement in distance learning to achieve her goals. The manifestations of EI as shown in Aini's case demonstrate that EI is important for English language learners, especially those in distance learning, to make them adaptable and resilient when surmounting the emotionally challenging obstructions in their academic journey.

Conclusion

This study has shown that EI positively influenced a distance learner's experiences. Aini's EI helped her manage her emotions, perceptions, and actions to overcome her challenging situations to obtain her obligatory English credits for graduation. Distance learning programmes need to be continually improved to reduce the barriers faced by the students. All stakeholders in distance language learning must acknowledge the significance of emotions and EI in distance education. English language education providers must pay attention to the emotional needs of English language learners to ensure that the students are engaged, get support, and can achieve success in learning the target language. If the students do not get effective support, they may become disengaged, feel isolated, suffer negative learning experiences, and may even drop out of the programme. Language instructors need to be given EI training so that they become emotionally intelligent teachers.

Given the importance of EI, it is imperative to enhance students' EI via training, interventions, mentoring, and counselling programmes to endow them with the ability to withstand the difficulties and emotional tribulations in their arduous journey of learning English and in other forms of lifelong learning. EI enhancement could help

individuals navigate, adapt, persevere, and thrive not only when learning English via distance learning but also but also for accomplishing one's goals in life successfully.

A limitation of this case study is that the results cannot be generalised to other students. Social desirability bias should be considered because the respondents' EI scores were obtained via a self-reported instrument. Researcher bias and the reactivity of the participants in this study cannot be totally ruled out. Future research can explore the impact of EI intervention on students' engagement and learning in the unprecedented remote teaching and learning scenarios brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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New Understanding of the Barriers to Foreign Students Adaptation in the Changing Educational Landscape: A Narrative Analysis

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The COVID-19 pandemic has changed nowadays life in every aspect so irreversibly that there is no doubt that the educational landscape must be continuously re-evaluated and revised. In this regard, particular emphasis is given to the issues of academic mobility and adaptation of foreign students. The aim of the study is to clarify a new understanding of the issues traditionally faced by foreign students in universities in the host country and to analyze new barriers that have arisen as a result of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper reports on a narrative research study exploring the experiences and perceptions of 42 first-year bachelor and master foreign students having come to Russia for the first time. Taking into account that human behaiviour can be predicted through language patterns, we analysed language features to compare the participants' rational and emotional perception of the barriers to adaptation highlighted from their narratives. The findings suggest that almost all issues traditionally faced by foreign students have received a new understanding or have changed their hierarchy in their perception. Contemporary challenges have also created new barriers to adaptation. Temporalities and restrictions in physical movement received special emphasis as an obstacle to adaptation of foreign students. In the context of the total transformation that awaits higher education after the end of the pandemic and its transition to a hybrid format, the results of this study can be used by academic developers to establish a system of foreign students' psychological adaptation.

Keywords: narratives, foreign students, barriers to adaptation, temporalities, restrictions in physical movement, evaluative language analysis

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the educational landscape around the world in a fundamental way. It could not but determine the modification of the barriers faced by foreign students in the context of the export of education. Researchers around the world are engaged in elaborating models of psychological adaptation of foreign students to the realities of educational institutions of the host society, and also they study foreign students' adaptation effectiveness and how it is related to their academic achievement and earning a degree (Moussa, 2021), their balancing through social experience (Selvitopu, 2020). Scholars focus on developing models of intercultural competence, its main components being intercultural stability and interest, the lack of ethnocentrism and intercultural interaction management (Gritsenko et al., 2021), highlight the barriers and enablers for the adaptation and integration of international students, that turns to be differences in teaching and learning philosophies, the dominant culture's fear of the "others" or cultural insecurity (Abdulai et al., 2021).

Although these studies were carried out by authors from all over the world, they describe fairly similar barriers that foreign students face upon arrival in the country regardless of the context of a particular country. Foreign

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students face a great deal of challenges when they enter a new cultural environment. Among these barriers the most mentioned are discrimination and stereotypes (Bello, 2021; Green & Mayatt, 2011), pressure to assimilate culturally and acculturation challenges (Balante et al., 2021; Karim et al., 2021), native-born hostility towards immigrant students (Murillo, 2021). Such psychological problems as depression (Kamalova et al., 2021), high level of stress (Chaiyasat, 2020), loss of self-efficacy (Céspedes et al., 2021) and self-stigmatization (Harvey, 2001; Glace et al., 2021) are also associated with the barriers to successful adaptation. Foreign students mention facing problems with job seeking and problems related to integration and adaptation to the new context of life (Gonta & Bulgac, 2019; Baker et al., 2021), also they noted as a barrier for their future career planning absence of specific campus programming aimed at helping foreign students make the transition from academic life to employment (Tikhonova et al., 2021). But still, one of the most vital challenges is a language barrier (Stevens, 2012; Green & Mayatt, 2011; Podboj & Lujić, 2020).

Meanwhile, some papers describing the barriers of the "new generation" have appeared so far, and if before the pandemic some of them were perceived as unobvious or picking up steam, the pandemic situation not only actualized them, but turned them into the most significant and decisive ones. Let's consider temporalities, for example. Even before entering the country most of the migrant students experienced a long and exhausting period of time waiting for their departure due to the unpredictable process of visa application. When in the host country, their whole life also becomes dependent on the legal framework of visa and residence permit regulations and the need to renew them. Migrant students experience temporal effects of the border and visa regime on their everyday lives focusing on the control over and through time (Tazzioli, 2018). 'Waiting' is increasingly recognized as an undeniable aspect of the migration experience (Baas, 2019). Moreover, online-focused delivery of education affected almost 90% of higher education institutions around the world (Alemany-Arrebola et al., 2020) and turned out to be a new challenge for bothforeign students and students from the host society resulting in low levels of academic self-efficacy. Due to the closed borders foreign students face increased challenges that generate their anxieties about their future career (Hari et al., 2021). But the greatest concern today is restrictions in physical student mobility and shutdown, they are considered to be the biggest challenges that occurred in higher education during the COVID-19 (Yıldırım, 2021).

Hence, it is obvious that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused not only a transformation in the perception of barriers foreign students face in the universities in the context of the export of education, but also has actualized new barriers that are transforming the educational landscape. The aim of this study is to clarify a new understanding of the barriers traditionally faced by foreign students and to analyze those of the "new generation".

Methodology

Theoretical Background

An important aspect of any research is the selection of a method for obtaining and processing qualitative data, which makes it possible to efficiently identify and describe the phenomenon under study. Analysis of studies devoted to the problems of localization of aspects that complicate the foreign students' adaptation let us state narratives as the desired method. Thus, Webster and Mertova (2007, p. 1) assert that 'narrative records human experience through the construction and reconstruction of personal stories'.

The notion of narrative was observed from varied perspectives of different social and linguistic traditions, and as a result is difficult to define. Narratives being discursive constructions also convey social analysis denoting how social phenomena reflect in them. Sociolinguistic analysis of personal narratives implies not only focusing on the structure and syntactic features of canonical narratives (Labov, 1972) but also treats them as a type of social interaction (Norton, 2013; Podboj & Lujić, 2020). In this light narrative discourse is understood as specific communicative events designating linguistic practices and complex social and ideological processes behind them **(**Podboj & Lujić, 2020)**.**

Consoli (2021) insists that narrative inquiry is not only just telling stories, but systematical analysis of ''the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates'' (Bell, 2002, p. 208) aimed at the understanding, creation and sharing of new knowledge. Moreover, the main feature of narrative discourse is to represent the

viewpoints (van Krieken, 2018). The former can be distinguished with the help of linguistic markers that can be represented in discourse in various ways.

J.C. Gimenez (2010) distinguishes two main approaches to analyze narratives: componential and functional. The componential analysis consists of identifying and examining the elements of a narrative and their interaction. Functional analysis, on the contrary, studies the purpose of narratives. Among the most functions that narrative can serve, the scholars widely studiedhow narrators represent or interpret the world (van Krieken, 2018); how they represent self and others (Kowalska, 2021); and how they construct their – gendered, ethnic or class identities (Bamberg, 2012).

Functional analysis is helpful to represent how the migrant students tell the stories of their adaptation period in the host society and what challenges they face due to the pandemic and to show how a narrative approach can generate new knowledge by revealing the attitudes of the host society to foreign students and their perception of the host society.

A lot of research is done on sustaining a sense of self within a new cultural environment. There are some terms associated with displeasing development of new identities in cross-cultural experiences, among them ‘liminality’, ‘third spaces’, ‘in-betweeners’ (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Boland, 2020).

The narrative presentation of the cultural experience of behavior in typical social situations is the most frequent form of substantiating certain behavioral norms and endows a person’s actions with a stable meaning. The narrative makes it possible to highlight national images and mentality, ethnocultural models of behavior (Aleschanova, 2006). Narratives can help to understand complex systems and allow us to connect time and disconnected elements into a whole system to find the meaning (Tomassini et al., 2021). Individuals and groups construct narratives in order to organise their experiences and ‘map their reality’ (Wilkins & Thompson, 1991).

Narrativeslet us learn something in a new way. They serve as a distinct form of discourse that focuses on the biographical, social, cultural and historical situations that have conditioned life experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Narrative enquiry analyzes life experiences as narrated by those who live them, create coherence and meaning, reflect their understanding of events and behaviours over time (Tomassini et al., 2021; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This technique is also supported by research on the cross-cultural experiences of international students where it is seen as a particularly appropriate way to explore the process of reforming professional and cultural identities in a new environment (Green, 2011; Belford, 2017). In the linguistic approach to narrative, text can be expounded according to its various levels of structure and meaning (Gee, 1991; Riessman,1993; Tomassini, 2021), illustrate its value and interpret it.

Participants

42 migrant students aged from 17 to 37 (mean age =20.8, 21 male, 21 female) took part in the study. The older participants seeking for a Master degree were included in the study because of the added value of their perspectives. The students came from Uzbekistan (5), Afghanistan (4), Kazakhstan (3), Nigeria (3), Albania (2), Turkmenistan (2), Azerbaijan (2), Egypt (2), Syria (2),Tajikistan (2), Moldova (1), Republic of Belarus (1), China (1), Indonesia (1), Brazi (1), Macedonia (1), Uganda (1), Serbia (1), Jordan (1), Algeria (1), Benin (1), Equatorial Guinea (1), Venezuela (1). Two people did not state the country they came from.

While all the participants do share a similar mission (to get education abroad), their life, time spent abroad, background, as well as their goals, dreams, aspirations and identity are not the same. At the same time, all study participants speak English as a second foreign language at a level not lower than upper-intermediate. Knowledge of the English language at the indicated level is necessary for a deep understanding of the interview questions and the ability to analyze the respondents’ answers as instances of spoken discourse paying special attention to the rhythm and prosodic features. Undoubtedly they represent an important element of the respondents’ narrative production and identity construction. Language proficiency was verified by the IELTS certificates being required at the stage of their enrollment.

The participants were students of the Bachelor’s and Master’s degree programmes at the Moscow State University of Food Production, RUDN University and the Higher School of Economics. The authors of the study

and the interviewees did not know each other before the interview. There was a call for narrative research participants among foreign students at the Universities and therefore the respondents were recruited. Submission of the narratives was voluntary and the participants were made aware that they could be used for research purposes. In their instructions, participants were notified that anonymity would be followed.

Instruments

Semi-structured interview, included the following questions was used:

- Please, notify the main challenges you face during your first months in a new educational and cultural environment in Russia.
- Please, describe your feelings connected with these challenges. Try to describe all the challenges.Did you expect to face them? Why / Why not? Illustrate all the challenges you faced with examples. Comment on your ability to speak Russian. In your opinion, is it necessary for you to pay more attention to Russian for professional or everyday communication? Why?
- In your opinion, what measures do universities require to undertake to help foreign students during their adaptation period?

Having completed the interviews, we used an automated transcription service provider, Happy Scribe.[1] When we got the transcription back we checked and edited it. For the purpose of our research we needed a very verbatim transcription so we checked every utterance to be transcribed in detail with all stutters, verbal tics ('like', 'uh'), and involuntary vocalizations (laughter).

Methods and Approaches

The analyses of the narratives of personal experiences elicited in research interviews were used to achieve the aim of this research.

Polkinghorne's (1995) Concept of Paradigmatic Analysis
By comparing similarities and differences between stories this type of analysis helps researchers to emphasise patterns in the narratives. The concept is based on coding to highlight the topics of talk and then sort topics into different categories in order to generate themes.

Levels of Narratives Structure and Meaning Investigation
We organized the text identifying the pitch glides so that every line features a central idea, articulated syntactically and intonationally. Then we grouped the lines into stanzas being somewhat larger groups about a single topic and capturing a single scene, a notional image on a specific event, claim, or piece of information. Following the Gee's (1991) approach we linked stanzas on the same topic to strophes and then to parts. When the basic stage was completed we identified the main line of the plot through the use of present tense verbs and non-subordinate clauses. The next level was focused on psychological subjects of the main sentences and represent points of view from which the material of a stanza is viewed and what the narrator emphasized in order to interpret the viewpoints expressed throughout the text. Then we highlighted the focused material (words, verbs, adjectives and rhetorical figures) of each stanza to interpret it thematically based on the previous levels of analysis. At this stage it was important to interpret and give sense to the whole structure of the text in terms of key images and themes.

Evaluative Language Analysis
As we worked with the transcribed narratives it was possible to capture rhythm and prosodic features of spoken discourse that can help in representing participants' identities and the meaning of their messages. Taking into consideration that languagepatternscanbegoodpredictors ofaspectsofhumanbehavior, we studied language features of the narratives focusing on utilized word-levellinguisticmodelsoffering a large spectrum of linguistic dimensions. The participants' feelings towards the challenges they face were interpreted through the analysis of evaluative language of the narratives. After W. Labov (1972) we considered evaluative language occurring throughout the narrative as the means used by a narrator to indicate the point of the narrative and to explain

[1] Interview Transcription. https://www.happyscribe.com/interview-transcription

why the participants treated their experience of the challenges they faced in different ways. In this light, evaluation-bearing elements of language (modal system, grammatical mood, morphological structure, evaluative components of word meaning, etc) were examined.

Procedure

At the first stage of our study we analysed the relevant literature devoted to the barriers foreign students face in a new country (the results are presented in the introduction to the current paper). Thus we figured out the list of possible challenges.But we did not present them to the research participants in order to identify only those barriers that each of them faced in reality, without offering them “hypothetical” barriers that they may not have encountered.

At the second stage 42 foreign students were asked to recount their experience of coming to Russia to study and answer questions concerning barriers and challenges they face in the host country. Thus, 42 semi-structured interviews were conducted. These interviews were recorded for future transcription. All the questions were asked in English. The interview script consisted of a combination of questions of participants’ background (age, sex, birth place, the length of their residence in Russia) and open-ended questions. To protect our respondents’ namesand their personal information, we used pseudonyms.

The third stage was connected with the interpretation of the participants’ responses to identify the challenges they faced. The participants were not given a list with specified challenges to match to their experience, although we had created the one based on the relevant literature. Our initial approach to analysis was deductive: having a set of codes based on an existing research framework we read through the transcripts and assign excerpts to codes. But then we realized that despite the fact that some of the barriers mentioned by the respondents correspond to the similar challenges we have identified in the analyzed sources, their content is strikingly different from those described by other researchers.

And then we turned to an inductive and iterative approach supported with paradigmatic analysis: we analyzed the transcripts, the literature and emerging themes to get a “best fit”. At first, we read the narratives without commenting on or discussing them. After that each narrative was read independently. Now we identified key themes and sub-themes, moreover, we noted impressions and highlighted key quotations from the narratives. This approach allows not only to analyze the real barriers faced by foreign students, but to identify possible new barriers to adaptation caused by the pandemic or to localize the “new” content of “typical” barriers.

At the fourth stage of the study the linguistic features of the narratives were analyzed to identify the feelings towards the challenges foreign students face in the new cultural environment of the host society in the time of the pandemic.We analyzed narratives to identify a number of lexicogrammatical structures that can express evaluation in discourse: intensifiers and quantifiers, comparators, superlatives, hedges, negatives, questions, imperatives, and subordinators. We also studied adverbs, verbs, and adjectives of affect, certainty and doubt, explicitly evaluative and emotive lexis, emphatics, and modals. The analysis is supported with examples from narratives.

Results and Discussion

As a result of the analysis of narratives, we have identified an array of similar examples illustrating the barriers to efficient adaptation to the realities of studying in Russia specified by the research participants. The examples were categorized according to the frequency of presenting similar ideas to illustrate the experience of the described barrier. These examples are highlighted in italics and are presented after the colon at the end of the paragraph revealing one or another aspect of the analyzed barrier.

Barriers to Adaptation of Foreign Students in the Host Society

The analysis of narratives made it possible to record both the deeply studied barriers that foreign students face in most cases, and the barriers that have recently attracted the attention of researchers. The hierarchy of these barriers (from the most significant barrier to the least pronounced) in terms of their frequency are as follows:

(1) the language barrier, (2) temporalities generated by the difficulties of the visa regime and bureaucratic delays associated with paperwork, (3) difficulties with adaptation and socialization and the psychological problems they generate, (4) difficulties with finding a job, (5) transition of classes to the online format and belonging to university in the time of the pandemic, (6) lack of understanding of teaching methods, (7) lack of a unversity councelling in solving routine issues, (8) discrimination on ethnic and cultural grounds, (9) difficulties with physical movement around the city due to the pandemic; (10) unpreparedness to study abroad.

Language Barrier

Problems related to poor knowledge of a foreign language of the host country have received widespread coverage in narratives. It is interesting that, in addition to its "traditional" understanding, this problem reveals new emphasises. Almost all survey participants indicated that they experience problems due to poor knowledge of the language of the host country. The linguistic barrier complicates almost all spheres of students' lives in the host country (socialization, adaptation, solving issues of daily life, employment, learning success, professionalization). The following statements are the most typical:

> (1) One of the main challenges we face is learning the Russian language; (2) I have C1 level in Russian, but it is still too hard for me to understand the native people; (3) It is hard for me to understand my friends, especially jokes. That's why I started to talk with them less. I'm afraid of making silly mistakes; (4) I do not understand everything and becauseof insufficient knowledge of a foreign language, I have fears that I won't be able to acquire all the knowledge and skills to achieve success in my chosen profession.

At the same time, foreign students believe that solving the problem of the language barrier should not be their exclusive need. More than 50% of the study participants indicated that the population of the host country should speak English and stimulate communication with foreigners:

> (1) The Russian people are good people. They are not racist, but they will not help you easily. Language is the big obstacle in adaptation. If the student learns the language well, he will overcome all obstacles, but Russian students should be directed to deal more with foreigners so that the language is taught faster; (2) I had a problem with the Russian language, and it is true that not everyone here knows English well.

Especially foreign students admit that considering the importance the export of education has for the economy and development of the country, administrative workers must be fluent in foreign languages:

> (1) One of the biggest problems is the low level of the English language in Russia. After learning the language for only 4 months, I still can not communicate freely in Russian. That is still a problem because of the low level of English in the administration system. Big percentage of Russians are not even trying to communicate with foreigners; (2) If more workers in the administration would be bilingual, that would be great.

It should be noted that the research participants emphasize the need to revise the approach to overcoming the language barrier. Participants (75%) indicated that during their preparation for training and their first year in the university, the main emphasis was on learning the language of professional and academic communication. Meanwhile, it is the lack of knowledge of everyday language that complicates socialization and adaptation to the realities of the host country as much as possible:

> (1) Communication is better for me than professional learning; (2) I am at level B2(upper intermediate) and I think that I should pay more attention to academic Russian. I also should learn more street words to communicate more fluently with native speakers; (3) A lot of attention should be paid to speaking Russian for everyday communication; (4) I have C1 level Russian. But it seems like it is in professional communication, because I can easily understand lessons, events etc. But usually I do not understand what my friends are saying (or writing on telegram) even with help of translation; (5) I believe that there should be a course on colloquial expressions and intonations; (6) I would rather pay more attention to Russian for everyday communication. It's better to use English for professional communication.

The general concept of the importance of overcoming the language barrier has long been covered in an overwhelming number of studies on the topic (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Green & Mayatt, 2011; Podboj & Lujić, 2020). Today, the emphasis on the importance of the purposeful study of the host country everyday language

and the strategies for this study design is crucial (Canagarajah, 2013; Meniado, 2019). The requirement of foreign students that representatives of the host society should master the English language as the language of universal communication seems to be a new trend in the context of the export of education. The analyzed narratives allow us to state that foreign students in the times of the pandemic are becoming quite demanding to the host society. They consider themselves "accepted" with infringed rights, but being important actors in the development of society and the country (both the host and the native ones). Hence, the level of their exactingness towards the society of the host country also increases, including the way its representatives communicate with them (Abdulai et al., 2021). It is noteworthy that students from different countries showed similar expectations.

Temporalities

The phenomenon of temporalities as a part of experience of the need to wait for a visa and a work permit has been gaining its importance in recent years. At the same time, it has been little studied in relation to foreign students. In the meantime, it not only has a significant impact on their psychological state, but also shapes their expectations from the learning process in the host country. More importantly, the time constraints experienced by foreign students can drastically determine their primary professionalization as a result of studying at a university in the host country:

> (1) The slow-track migration and document procedure took me a few weeks to complete; (2) There are a lot of bureaucratic procedures associated with the preparation of the necessary documents for legal residence in the country. The understanding of the inevitability of their extension and renewal already drives me into depression; (3) I faced slow administration work with big bureaucracy. All of the documents took more time than I expected; (4) The procedures, whether medical check-ups or migration, should take less time and have less bureaucracy; (5) The need for constant waiting … I mean, paperwork for obtaining a visa and waiting for a decision on its provision, obtaining a residence permit in a hostel, for work.. all this stuff is painfully difficult for me. At such moments, I feel that the desire to do something and move somewhere is disappearing…

It is obvious that the visa regime is concerned with time: duration of the stay, the limit of work hours and the time spent on visa processing (Robertson, 2019), and these time restrictions change the perception of reality, their own capabilities, and transform plans. O. Mauri (2020) investigating the temporal forms of control engendered through the global border and visa regime and their impact on fragmenting the lives of foreign students named them temporal borders. It is clear that this is how time-related aspects of academic migration are perceived by the participants in this study. At the same time, temporary permits help to respond to short-term labor market needs (Könönen, 2019), and permanent residency might facilitate transnational lifestyles and regular border crossing (Baas, 2015), which is extremely important in a situation of globalization of the labor market.

Temporalities also have a second dimension, which is practically not studied in connection with foreign students. We are talking about experienced temporalities (how time is lived, imagined and understood (Folke, 2018). 98% of the study participants noted a change in the perception of the speed of events during their stay in their home country, and during their studies at a university in the host country:

> (1) I expected that the opportunity to study in another country would make me happy and open up new horizons for me. But everything is very slow. When I was in my country, it seemed to me that every day would be full of events. Now it seems to me that nothing is happening; (2) I am constantly faced with the need to combine my schedules: study schedule, work schedule, communication schedule with a family who lives in a different time zone. And every day it becomes more difficult for me. Everything seems blurry and unreal. Feeling tired. It's like I'm walking in a vicious circle. I have no energy left to study. It seems to me that nobody cares about me; (3) When I thought about my studies in Russia, I planned out every step I would take, built in my development strategies. But the reality is cruel. I can't do everything as planned. I am afraid that I am not ready to study abroad. Perhaps I chose the wrong specialization, since I am not able to complete everything according to the schedule.

Similar results were reported in the study by J.N. Folke (2018). The former states that there is much written on the acceleration of modern life, but little about slowness. According to M. Griffiths (2014), speed is fetishized,

stillness and passivity tend to be considered as negative phenomena. The author depicts how migrants treat imbalance and powerlessness of the immigration system on the ground of four empirical temporalities: sticky time, suspended time, frenzied time and ruptured time. Uncontrollable chaotic experiences can be the result of change or movement deficiency. Paying attention to experienced temporalities can help students to anticipate new experiences in a new academic environment.

Uncontrolled experience of temporalities can reduce the motivation of foreign students to study, their potential adaptability to the realities of the host society, and, accordingly, reduce the potential for primary professionalization.

Adaptation and Psychological Problems

Adaptation to the realities of the host society and its culture, of course, requires psycho-emotional expenditures, giving rise to a feeling of insecurity, and, often, psychological / mental problems:

> (1) The most difficult thing for foreign students is communicating with new people outside their homeland, due to different cultures. But foreign youth contributes to the development of the country in which they study, and not only in financial terms;(2) making friends wasn't, and still isn't easy. Culture and people are different in my country and in Russia. I came from a country where I had a lot of friends and people are genuinely polite there and here I sit in my apartment all day and have almost zero friends; (3) This generates uncertainty and a bit of fear, provokinga lot of emotions; (4) I fear that my inability to quickly adapt to new conditions of life will lead to a decrease in my success in the new country; (5) the culture of my country is very different from that of Russia. I fear that my otherness will prevent me from achieving maximum success, but I need help to adapt successfully. I am afraid to do something wrong, so I avoid any unnecessary actions. It depresses me. I am ashamed to discuss my fears with my fellows from my country. It is even more difficult for me to explain them to the Russians.

And again it is quite clear that the host society should change its attitude towards foreigners regardless of their country of origin and make efforts to optimize the process of their adaptation into culture and everyday life. The basic arguments are the importance of the export of education, the globalization of the international labor market and the creative potential of each specific newcomer in a situation of its efficient development:

> (1) I think that finding new friends was a great challenge for me. Russians in general seem to me as pretty cold when it comes to communication. I wish they were more friendly; (2) Not only teachers but even students should try to help and should try to understand that for foreigners everything is not as easy as it is for them; (3) The lack of cooperation of Russians with foreigners students might decrease the potential ofthe export of education in Russia; People should demonstrate foreign students ways to adapt to local social environment.

Similar problems of adaptation are highlighted in a number of studies (Bethel et al., 2020; Chaiyasat, 2020; Ladum & Burkholder, 2019), which emphasize students' experience in culture shock and associated acculturative stress, cultural adjustment, negative emotional responses and others, strategies that could enhance student-host connectedness during cross-cultural transitions. At the same time, it is obvious that foreign students today demonstrate a demanding attitude towards members of the host society, noting the need to jointly create a cooperative environment that can benefit both representatives of the newcomers and the host society (Bethel et al., 2020).

Job Opportunities

Almost all survey participants (96%) indicated that it is much more difficult for a foreign student to find a job related to the acquired profession in the host country. The main area in which you can quickly find a job is the service sector (housekeeping, nursing, delivery, cleaning). The main problems concerning employment are associated with the host country language, difficulties in the preparation of documents, the need to obtain a work permit, lack of knowledge of the employment procedure and the need to synchronize incompatible work and study schedules:

> (1) I think that I have fewer rights when looking for a job in Russia due to the rules for obtaining a residence permit; (2) have less rights in finding a job than someone who was born here, but I hope there will be opportunity for me to show my qualities and get a chance to have stable job

> in Moscow; (3) I think that I have less rights to get a good job that I can combine with my studies, I mean.. compared to Russian students. But if the university provided support at the stage of obtaining a part-time job, foreign students could strengthen their positions. Help is needed not only in the process of paperwork… We need training on passing job interviews, we need an analysis of the available labor market

Similar difficulties are experienced by students studying in other countries of the world. So, O. Maury (2020), in his study provides the following list of the most accessible job opportunities for foreign students in Finland: delivering newspapers, cleaning the rooms in hotels, serving fast food, the delivery service for the post office, etc. For example, there are some restrictions in the Russian legislation that make foreign students work only according to the profession specified in the permit.[2]

Online Format of Education and Belongingto University

The forced transition to online education, due to the COVID - 19 pandemic lockdown, complicates the life of foreign students in terms of educational success as well as in terms of adaptation to the host group, learning the Russian language and primary professionalization:

> (1) The first thing concerns the online courses that we have no choice but to undergo; (2) We live in the time of the covid and the closing of borders. But it's also time to think about us - foreigners. Taking classes online is very difficult. Also I have no opportunity to become a real part of my group; (3) Yes, we need to pay more attention to Russian language, because the studying online is different from studying physically, because studying physically we can communicate and interact with people and that will make us learn the language very fast; (4) I can't have the full experience online. I imagine that if my education were offline, my level of Russian would be better; (5) It is necessary to start lessons in person because online lessons are difficult to understand and many students complain about learning lessons online; (6) I cannot understand whether the choice of my future profession turns out to be correct, the online format of classes does not allow me to fully realize this. Due to the online format, it is line interaction. I do not like the online learning format, but I am glad that I have the skills to difficult for me to control my daily routine and be engaged; (7) if online classes are inevitable, universities should organize workshops to prepare students for classes in this format; (8) The pandemic has demonstrated that it is no longer possible to completely abandon online learning. Therefore, I am very glad that the school paid a lot of attention to work in a digital environment.

There is no doubt that not only foreign students experience difficulties in adapting to educational realities in the format of online learning. But there is also no doubt about the fact that for this category of students it turns out to be even more difficult than for students of the host society (Yıldırım et al., 2021). It is quite obvious that even after the end of the pandemic, reality will remain as digital as possible[3,4], and it is necessary to develop the skills of efficient communication through the e- environment among students and teachers. Thus, Yildirim et al. (2021) believe that physical student mobility will decline in the next few years. And lots of offline courses have already transformed into online ones and their number will continue to grow. In fact, in the time of the pandemics hybrid education gives some opportunities for foreign students to continue their education using new technical tools and to have a chance not to lose their sense of belonging to their universities. At the same time, as H. Haugen and A. Lehmann (2020) noted in their commentary that the educational industry (on the example of Australia) feared that pivoting to digital education would decrease retention rates and willingness of the foreign students to pay full fees. It is quite evident that in the future it will acquire a hybrid format, but it is no less obvious that such a format requires appropriate training of students. The analysis of narratives revealed that some students are more ready for the online format than others. The latter statement is confirmed in a study by Aristovnik et al. (2020), who substantiated that the students' demographics have impact on the acceptance of online education and adaptation of new life standards: male, part-time, first-level, applied sciences, a lower living standard, from Africa or Asia were significantly less satisfied with their academic work / life during the crisis, whereas female, full-time, first-level students and students faced with financial problems were generally affected more by the pandemic in terms of their emotional life and personal circumstances.

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[2] Work opportunities for international students iRussia.https://studyinrussia.ru/en/life-in-russia/arriving-in-russia/job-for-students/

[3] Mitchell, N. (May 7, 2020). "Students to decide which institutions survive COVID-19", available at: https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story520200507135847614

[4] Jørgensen, T. and Claeys-Kulik, A.-L. (february 6, 2021),"What does the future hold for Europe's universities?",available at: https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story520210204091600372

Online education gives students a sense of isolation from the university and its realities, a lack of understanding why the cost of education does not decrease due to the transition to the online format:

> (1) Lack of access to university laboratories makes education a fiction, universities need to think over virtual reality tools, create remote laboratories and simulators. And, most importantly, you need to teach students how to use these tools; (2) Due to the online teaching format, I do not feel connected with the university. Now for me, this is a building that I have visited several times. I lack a sense of belonging; (3) Online learning is not as effective as offline learning. Why does the tuition fee stay the same? Universities should take this point into account; (4) The pandemic is likely to forever reshape the ways of educational interaction. It turns out that it is necessary to build new forms of interaction, think over new applications that allow the teacher to control the activities of students online. Foreign students need special online support. Maybe there should be tutors accompanying the online education of foreign students?; (5) If there is no access to face to face communication with students of the host university, it is necessary to create opportunities for workshops and seminars to overcome barriers in communication, so that online classes are efficient, everyone feels like members of a group, and we (foreign students) won't embarrass to participate in classes.

The results obtained maximally confirm the statement of Yıldırım and colleagues (2020) that university life consists of a sense of belonging relations among university students, academicians, physical campus and the identity value of the university. The online format of the educational process does not let all components of university life develop to the utmost, but offers new components that can form its new identity: interaction, participation, learning culture and support (Peacock et al., 2020). Students openly declare the relevance of the purposeful development of a new identity of the "student of the online format" as a tool for increasing the education efficiency.

Educational Practice

A significant part of the respondents (83%) noted difficulties in understanding methods of teaching at the host university:

> (1) I can not understand my chemistry teacher`s teaching method. I will be glad if she consultes me more; (2) I am worried about my studies. I can't understand the teaching approach. It is not similar to the one in my native country. Often think that I may fail the exam; (3) I'm not able to get used to the system of learning. It is difficult for me to complete hometask. I am not able to understand the material of learning.....It is really a challenge; (4) in a globalized world, it would be correct to create universal approaches to teaching and learning. Any of them should be understood to every student, regardless of his status, teaching methods would make it possible to better assimilate the studied material.

The European Union Association is developing the project "Universities Without Walls - a vision for 2030" to create the university of the future: a hybrid cross-border organization, which allows attracting much higher numbers of students, and combining physical and virtual facilities.[5] The creation of a new model of higher education will also require universal approaches to teaching methods. At the same time, online learning / e-learning is becoming a mandatory teaching and learning process of educational institutions (Aristovnik et al., 2020). Moreover, researchers also note the need to develop a new culture of educational interaction, which requires the development of appropriate skills for both teachers and students (Peacock et al., 2020).

University Counselling

According to the research participants, the overwhelming number of barriers can be eliminated provided there is an efficient system of support for foreign students at the university level:

> (1) We had to wait the whole day for our documents to be checked and accepted. And no one came from our university to pick us up from the airport and guide us the way to thehostel; (2) It was very difficult for me to draw up all the necessary documentation at the university: I did not understand how the system of a unified dean's office works and it was very difficult for me to

[5] European Union Association. (2021). Universities without walls – A vision for 2030. https://www.eua.eu/resources/publications/957:universities-without-walls-%E2%80%93-eua%E2%80%99s-vision-for-europe%E2%80%99s-universities-in-2030.html

> find the necessary rooms and classrooms; (3) Not all Russian universities do care about a preparatory year for foreign students. This is the most important year for a foreign student, and because the key to any country is its language in order to adapt faster, you must learn the language faster; (4) In my opinion, attention should be paid to exactly how everything is arranged at the university. How is the adaptation of foreign students organized, are the teachers ready to communicate with foreign students, are all procedures at the university transparent: will foreign students be able to deal with them?

The results of studies around the world have proved it. Foreign students are overeager about the lack of built-in support at the level of the university and its campus: from the development of a navigation route for a foreign student within the university, to the existence of structures that implement the preparation of foreign students for employment, visits to the clinic and specialists in psychological adaptation. In their studies, E. Tikhonova et al. (2021a, 2021b) analyze the possibilities of virtual reality as a tool for adapting foreign students to the realities of the host university and country. Moreover, virtual reality can be used to stimulate a digital learning environment for universities and students to be together in the same place regardless of wherever they are physically and with digital representations of themselves (Chi & Idris, 2021). Also, it allows students to explore complex subjects when traditional teaching methods fail (Hamilton et al., 2021).

The research participants clearly emphasize the need to involve not only teachers and staff, but also students of the host university in the process of creating productive educational interaction:

> (1) Universities should make more events in order to bring Russian students closer to foreign students; (2) Teachers should be nicer and considerate, that it is not our fault all this happened. It is so difficult to study under pressure. That's while there are so manyfailures from our side. We want to study but only the University can help foreign students; (3) I think universities should increase the number of speaking clubs where foreign students have a chance to speak with natives; (4) Students are instructed to deal more with foreign students and there should be specific hours each day when foreign students talk to some Russian students to strengthen their language so that they adapt faster; (5) A crash course in cultural differences and local manners will be of of great use; (6) They should have accommodated foreigners in one hostel. Since no one will be local, everyone will have to communicate with each other; (7) The university must put in every department people who speak several languages.

Perceiving themselves as active actors of academic mobility and the modern educational landscape, students persistently emphasize the need for the host environment to be ready to build effective interaction. Quite similar results are demonstrated in the works of S. Ünal (2017) who believes that both the developed and developing countries should make new plans, develop new strategies and cooperate in terms of foreign students 'adaptation. Abdulai et al. (2021) state that the chance for foreign students to adapt to a host country culture will be influenced by the host country's receptivity, conformity of the migrant students to the host cultures, and the presence and organization of other home culture members. Thus, M, Ozios and P. Pasque (2019) considers the university administrators as being responsible for equality, social justice and positive public attitude in the dialogue between foreign students and the representatives from the host society.

Discrimination

Cases of discrimination in the analyzed narratives are represented by an extremely limited number of participants (2% of participants):

> (1) I can't say that there is a fear of Muslim people. But there is a wrong prediction about the Uzbek people. Because most of the people who are coming from my country are immigrants who didn't have full education, they misbehave. So, among other people goes such a thought that all Uzbek people are coming from villages and even think that Uzbekistan is the same country as Afghanistan. Which none of these kinds of assumptions are right; (2) I had problems with racism because of the fact that I'm Arab; (3) I faced discrimination, only because I am not Russian; (4) Not all of the Russians are racists, the majority of people there show to the foreign student that they are accepted in Russia and not under discrimination because of their nationality, color of the skin, politics in his/her country, tradition, culture etc.

In a significant number of completed studies, the problem of discrimination resulting in the stigmatization of consciousness is mentioned by students in the first place (Ünal, 2017; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). The

pandemic, however, has pushed the problems of discrimination to a secondary level, updating the barriers activated by the pandemic. In the time of the pandemic foreign students are anxious about their future andhave to consider all the consequences of leaving their country of study to go back to their native country and possibly be locked out indefinitely. They claim a flexible visa regime, emotional support and counselling on behalf of the universities, moreover, they want the citizens of the host society to stop asking them when they are going to come back home because of the spread of COVID-19.[6] In our study, direct discrimination was not reported, but still there is some evidence that in other countries foreign studentd remain the subjects of the prejuduced attitude and agression. A.C. Balingue (2021) reported that fear of COVID-19 has escalatedsocial discrimination and hate crimes towards studetns from Asian region, especially from China.

Mobility restrictions due to lockdown measures turned out to be quite "new" for students:

> (1) I don't want the borders to get closed because it might prevent us from going back and forth to our homeland; (2) I'm having a hard time moving around; (3)Having friends is also hard because most of them live far from the centre; (4) I think I will return to my country, because the world is now in a very difficult situation due to the pandemic; (5) It seems to me that it is more correct today to choose a university in your native country or neighboring countries for training. Then the pandemic will not lead to a long separation from your relatives, and if everything goes worse, I mean epidemiological situation, it will be easier to return home.

Restrictions in movement have led to disastrous results for academic mobility. For example, in Finland, 90% of students participating in academic exchange programs in 2020 decreased their mobility.[7] At the same time, foreign students faced challenges both in education and work due to restriction of mobility.[8] Specifically, the inability to work during the pandemic frustrates students from less developed countries, who believe that their opportunity to study abroad can be the start of their careers. Moreover, there is also a redistribution of the academic mobility geography. Thus, after the pandemic, students from China and Hong Kong prefer universities in the Asian region (Taiwan, Japan, etc.) as opposed to universities in Europe and the USA (Xiong et al., 2020).

Unpreparedness to Study Abroad

The arguments of foreign students about the self-exactingness appeared to be very interesting. More than 73% of respondents noted that education abroad requires targeted preliminary preparation both at the level of learning the language of the host country and at the level of developing soft skills:

> (1) Having decided to get higher education in Russia I have finished a special school of Russian in my country. And now I don't have any problem with Russian language; (2) Studying, and especially studying in another country, requires relying on the developed skill of planning your time. Only the correct time management will allow me to achieve the goals that I set for myself in relation to my future; (3) I feel that I do not have the skills that are necessary to successfully study abroad. I am not sufficiently familiar with the culture and the Russian language, I have not learned to think critically: I feel that emotions often prevail over reason. I am really bad at time management. It's a pity that I didn't bother to develop these skills when I was in my homeland. Now there is also a quarantine. I'm afraid I will have to return to my homeland and study at the university there.

A relatively new trend associated with student mobility has turned out to be a deep awareness of the fact that entering a foreign university is not equal to successful professionalization. Studying at a university in a foreign country requires additional effort and is associated with psycho-emotional complexities, and therefore requires a set of formed soft skills. Personality is associated with definite traits, aims and motivation.In the context of the labor market, they can be considered a significant added value that increases employee success (Rego et al., 2016). In the same way, they increase the potential of the student in the context of primary professionalization.

[6] Chikaonda, G. P. (November 5, 2021). Far and away. https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2021/11/05/challenges-international-students-during-covid-opinion

[7] Finnish National Agency for Education. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on higher education student mobility in Finland. https://www.oph.fi/en/news/2020/impact-covid-19-highereducation-student-mobility-finland

[8] European Commission. (2020). Inform # 2 – impact of COVID-19 on international students in EU and OECD member states series of EMN-OECD informs on the impact of COVID-19 in the migration area. https://ec.europa.eu/homeaffairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/00_eu_inform2_ students_final_en.pdf

For a foreign student, the developed soft skills optimize the process of his adaptation to the realities of the host society as much as possible.

Experiences of Barriers to Adaptation by Foreign Students: Evaluative Language Analysis

This section presents the emotional reactions of foreign students regarding the difficulties they faced in the host country institution through the analysis of their language. The relation of the rational assessment and the emotional subtext of the statement makes it possible to implement the double check of the statements content.

Expressing feelings is a difficult part of verbal communication. Standards and norms for emotional expression could also vary based on nationality and other cultural identities and characteristics. Despite the fact that expressing feelings is more complicated than other forms of expression, emotion sharing is an important part of how we create social bonds and empathize with others, and it can be improved.

It should be noted that the English language in this study is a means of communication and the foreign students not being native speakers of it can't represent all the peculiarities of the language. But still, their knowledge of English at the upper-intermediate level lets us consider that they have acquired some features of the English linguaculture. In English culture, open expression of emotions is not encouraged, restraint and self-control are considered the main features of decent behaviour (Wierzbicka, 1999). Perhaps this is why emotions in English are often expressed implicitly. The implicit means of conveying emotional information in English discourse include the means of grammar, among which we can single out, for example, modal verbs (Pounds, 2015; Hidalgo-Downing, 2015).

Evaluation of the University Activities Focused on Foreign Students' Adaptation

Having studied the narratives, it was found that the mostly used means of evaluation-bearing elements of language revealing foreign students' attitude towards the challenges they face in the new environment of the host society was modality. In addition to such meanings as obligation, necessity, prohibition, permission, opportunity, etc., modality units often express the speaker's emotional attitude to the communicated (Ozyumenko, 2015). In parallel with the implementation of primary and secondary functions, these modal units act as a means of transmitting various emotional information.

Most foreign students expressed their emotional attitude and feelings towards measures universities required to undertake to help foreign students during their adaptation period through the use of modal verbs:

> … **should give** more time for students to learn the Russian language properly; **should help** us to better master the language, **should help** us in the process of establishing the necessary living conditions to live in Russia; **should give** us another chance to learn the Russian language

It is clear that *'should'* is used here to express thoughts or advice, in other words, foreign students tell another person to do as they want. In this usage it is very similar to '*must'*, and even translated in the meaning of «must», however, it was pronounced with a softer intonation and less categorical. As a result, there is no strict motivation for action, there is only advice, although it can be and sounds urgent, even to the point of necessity:

> … **should be** more flexible and try to help more; **should take** less time and have less bureaucracy; **should increase** the number of speaking clubs where students have a chance to speak with natives

Problems with Communication Evaluation

Moreover, the inability of foreign students to communicate effectively in the national language (Russian) used in the universities might affect their adaptation and integration into the host universities and communities. They believe it happens because most public servicesprovide information only in their main national language which may limit the ability of migrants to assess essential public services:

> … **must** put in every department people who speak several languages;

In this example it is seen that here '*must'* emotionality overshadows obligation, which makes it possible to use this modal verb for conveying advice or recommendation. The use of comparatives and superlatives is also considered as a way to express foreign students' feelings and evaluation :

> … one of the **bigges**t problems is the low level of the English language in Russia; **more flexible** stuff; **less** time and **less** bureaucracy; life in Moscow is **better** than the life I had

Complains about the Lack of Assistance
It was found out that foreign students from the Global South (21%) turned out to be more exacting than students from ex-Soviet Central Asia. They complain that they have to survive without any assistance from the university administration expressing themselves, again, using modals and comparatives:

> … you **need to survive** by yourself; the teachers to be **more nicer** and **considerate; have to** stay alone and survive in such a big city as Moscow

Their use of *'should'* in combination with a perfect infinitive expresses criticism and reproach toward the university facilities service:

> … the administration **should have accommodated** students of different nationalities together as they could communicate with each other; someone **should have met** us at the airport

Evaluation of the New Learning Environment
The differences in teaching and learning methods might pose some challenges to foreign students' adaptation and integration into the host universities academic cultures during the first year of their studies. Following Y. Kim (2000) we believe that students are often entangled with issues that are usually taken for granted and start feeling anxiety in their new learning environment and societies. We also agree with Abdulai et al (2021) who state that when people are anxious because of the new learning environment, they start to feel awkward and pay attention to minor issues. The participant convey frustrations and evaluation through the use of explicitly evaluative language, particularly adjectives (Pounds, 2015):

> The only thing that made me **anxious** was the slow-track migration and document procedure; I am still very **anxious** about my studies, about the process to issue the visa; the border and slow migration is **disheartening**; don't want to look **dumb** in front of my teachers and other students; preparing documents was very hard and **stressful** process; I am **underinformed**

> … **very hard** to study; **very complicated** as well; everything is **so bad;quite difficult** for me;**a little bit difficult** in especially a cultural way

Shattered Expectations
Abdulai et al. (2021) insist that academic cultures in the host universities can either be a resource or an enabler for the integration and adaptation of foreign students into the host universities, or a barrier for their inability to efficiently adapt and integrate into the host universities teaching and learning cultures. And we can't agree more that this is because culture is shaped by beliefs, attitudes, values, experiences, norms, behaviours, worldviews, which become entrenched over time. Their expectancies are triggered by the expressions of uncertainty and emotive stances (Pounds, 2015):

> I came from a country where I had a lot of friends and people are **genuinely** polite; Moscow is **really** expensive; everything in my country is **absolutely** different; we are **quite** well known for our generosity, we have many foreigners and we treat them in a good way; I **was expecting that** people in Moscow would be as polite as my uzbek people who live in Uzbekistan

Abdulai et al. (2021) have already proved that people usually filter both verbal and non-verbal messages using their own cultures and evaluate host cultures comparing them to their own as the benchmark or standard.

These utterances reveal discriminatory treatment based on negative perceptions about an individual's country of origin and its culture. What is good to note is that cultural expressions are embedded with some degree of ethnocentrism (Kim, 2001).

> … being a foreigner is a **little** hard ; they don't speak English **quite** well; **I truly believe that** the russian teaching department is simply spectacular

The fact that facilitating interaction between foreign students and students from the host country both inside and outside the classroom improves their adaptation into the host university, enhances their communication

and cognitive skills, and as well as cultural awareness (King et al., 2017). In our study students feel loneliness and disappointment because they can't make friends due to the language barriers and their status marked by the use of hedges and boosters:

> … finding new friends was **sort of** a great challenge for me; I'm **definitely** not the only one that has a problem with making friends here; they **probably** don't want to communicate with a new person outside of their circle.

Moreover, modal expressions with the meaning of the desired action are used to denote frustration and unrealizability (Ozyumenko, 2015):

> **I wish** they were more friendly; **if only** I didn't sit in my apartment all day and had almost zero friends; **I wish** they would help.

Problems with Language

Following Heggins and Jackson (2003) studying challenges of Asian students' adaptation and integration in US Midwestern University we found out that foregn students in Russia also encountered barriers related to language proficiency. This inability and a lack of confidence in their communication skills hindered their adaptation into the host culture. The research carried out by Abdulai et al. (2021) proves that foreign students believe they could also increase their access to important information and public services at the host universities and communities knowing the Russian language better. The respondents used the means of modality reporting their feelings about the Russian language and their ability to communicate in it:

> … **should pay** more attention to academic Russian; **should learn** more street words to communicate more fluently with native speakers; **should focus** myself on learning a higher level of Russian;there **should be** a course on colloquial expressions and intonations;but Russian students **should be directed to deal more** with foreigners so that the language is taught faster.

> … **need to focus** more on Russian for professionals because I need it for the specialty I've chosen; **need** practice to talk; **need to pay** great attention to the Russian language to receive the largest amount of knowledge.

Attitude towards Ddiscrimination

The findings of Lee and Rice (2007) discovered that students from Asia, Africa, South America, and the Middle East experienced discriminatory treatment in the form of verbal attacks and other direct confrontation in the learning environments in most universities in the USA. In our study, foreign students do not point out a direct discrimination but speak about overall hostility towards them. Again, the use of intensifiers, comparators, boosters, hedges and attitudinal (meta)-discourse markers reveal the respondent's feelings through the evaluation:

> I **truly** got a culture shock about the people; **of course**, I don't think that all Russian people are mean; they don't respect foreigners **like** before and they have **actually** an evil attitude with us as foreigners; I'm afraid of making silly mistakes and **it seems like** that people not always keen on to explain you something twice; people **absolutely** forgot about simple politeness and humanity;

> … people were **pretty** cold; **less** smiling; **extremely** nice.

Negatives, questions and subordinate that-clauses can also convey the degree of their despair:

> **I agree that not** all of the russians are racists; surely, they **are not** under discrimination because of his/her nationality, color of the skin, politics in his/her country, tradition, culture etc; it **is not** our fault thatall these happened so **why** pressure and fail us so much?; they **are not** racist, but they **will not help** you easily.

Also, foreign students use the verb 'need' to denote advice, not necessity:

> … **need to focus** more on teaching students the language depending on their major

Uncertainty in Finding a Job

Although foreign students are increasingly welcomed into higher education in Russia, the hospitality of the host nation and institution remains conditional, and contested. Foreign students are worried about this fact and believe that in Russia, as in some EU countries, migration issues are based on the perception that foreigners represent a potential threat to the local labour markets and should be controlled (Stein & Andreotti, 2016). This belief is reflected in their responses and is highlighted by the use of nonpropositional evaluative resources that can be seen to fulfill a specific evaluative function, among them boosters and comparatives being quite notable (Pounds, 2015):

> I have **less** rights to have a job here because of residence permit policies; **of course,** I will have **less** rights in finding a job than someone who was born here; **in fact**, as a foreigner I won't have good opportunities to express myself; I think we have **fewer** rights to find a job in Russia because of residence permit policies; I think that I have **fewer** rights when looking for a job in Russia due to the rules for obtaining a residence permit.

Restrictions due to the Pandemic

In times of the pandemic foreign students as well as students from the host society have to take on new roles, adapt to new technologies and new strategies of communication. For many of them it turned to be a new challenge, in this case they convey theevaluation explicitly:

> Online lessons are **difficult** to understand and many students **complain** about learning lessons online; via online I **only** achieved the basic command of the language.

Moreover, the whole situation of closed borders and vague future perspectives make students feel anxious and be uncertain:

> So it's complicated because the pandemic is **so uncertain**; with the time of the covid and the closing of borders, now **it's time to think** about us. We follow the courses **poorly** and **under informed;** the pandemic had the **lion's share of heartache.**

Positive from the Very Beginning

Despite all the difficulties not all the students express negative feelings, some of them (29 %) are really happy and use evaluative and emotive lexis:

> I feel **privileged** to be here; … my classmates in a group, I feel **the spirit of help** and understanding; I am **happ**y to be with them.

The analysis above revealed evaluative meaning associated with certain expressions that typically collocate with either positive or negative words, common grammatical patterns associated with evaluative meaning to be a good marker in studying foreign students' feelings towards new challenges they face in the new cultural and academic environment in the host country. The ability to recognize hidden emotional shades that the speaker wants to convey in his utterance, to adequately interpret his communicative intention, in other words, to see his pragmatics behind the semantics of the utterance, is of great importance in intercultural communication. And emotional competence proves to be a crucial and an integral part of intercultural communicative competence (Ozyumenko, 2015).

Limitations of the Study

We limited our study to a small segment of educational migrants mostly from Arab,Asian and African countries, but there were few students from European countries. So, that remains unclear how students from other countries and cultural contexts would relate with these findings, and that can be treated as an issue offuture research. Such research could broaden the scope of the study and cover other geographical areas and migration contexts.

Only the first year students (bachelors and masters) participated in our study in order to track exactly the experience of initial adaptation. Accordingly, it is necessary to track the same aspects at each year of study in order to trace the transformation of these barriers perception.

Due to the fact that the focus of the research was on the first-year students, the empirical fieldwork did not include the economic dimension of foreign students` integration and adaptation processes. None of the respondents dwelled on this aspect directly. Meanwhile, the ability of earning money and specifically as a result of primary professionalization (being the economic measurement of the success of part-time work during the period of study at the university within the studied profession), can significantly determine the efficiency of a foreign student's adaptation not only to new academic environments, but also to hosting communities. Hence, this aspect requires close study, especially in dynamics (to trace the change in their perception from the first to graduation courses).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to track changes in the foreign students' perception of traditional barriers to adaptation to the realities and university of the host country, as well as to identify new barriers due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. An analysis of narratives of the first-year foreign students (seeking for a bachelor's or a master's degree) who had not previously visited Russia made it possible to: (1) identify the real barriers that foreign students faced in 2021 in the beginning of their studies in the host country; (2) analyze the hierarchy of barriers from the point of view of real actors of academic mobility; (3) analyze their new understanding to specify whether the perception of traditional barriers has changed; (4) to identify new challenges for international students posed by the pandemic; (5) to compare the rational attitude of students to the described barriers, with their emotional perception.

The data obtained indicate the change in the usual hierarchy of barriers to adaptation of foreign students. Thus, the problems of discrimination and the psychological aspects associated with it have shifted from the leading positions to the last lines of the "top list". At the same time, the language barrier still remains at the head of the list, determining, in many respects, the severity of the remaining barriers. Temporalities, which were previously identified as a barrier by individual students and researchers, took the leading position. In addition, foreign students began to view the online learning format and physical travel bans as significant challenges in the process of adapting to the realities of the host society. Considerable attention is paid to the feeling of foreign students' identification with the university during the pandemic. Hence, it becomes necessary to develop new tools for developing this identity and to work out in detail its content. This need becomes even more urgent due to the conclusions of the researchers about the inevitable transition to hybrid educational models after the end of the pandemic. In our opinion, it is also important that foreign students understand the fact that studying abroad requires additional and purposeful preparation, the development of a number of soft skills. And it is the student who ought to take responsibility for this preparation. It should also be noted that students understand the importance of the export of education for any country, hence they are more demanding about the support that the host university is ready to provide and the strategies of communication between the host population and the students from other countries.

Linguistic analysis of narratives demonstrated the coincidence of the rational description of the challenges faced by the research participants with their emotional experience. The latter reflects the desire «to be true to oneself» and to overcome the barriers and not consider them as invincible obstacles.

Further, it is necessary to trace the transformation in the perception of the analyzed barriers by foreign students from course to course, based on the logic of changes in the educational landscape caused by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Exploring the Relationship Between L2 Listening and Metacognition After Controlling for Vocabulary Knowledge

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Metacognition is known to be important for L2 listening comprehension. However, it is unclear how much variance in listening performance it can explain after controlling for vocabulary knowledge. To examine this, data from the listening section of the TOEFL Junior test, the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ), and the Listening Vocabulary Levels Test were collected from 76 high school EFL learners in Japan. The MALQ measured five subscales of metacognition representing metacognitive skills and metacognitive knowledge. Representing skills, the MALQ measured perceptions of the ability to (1) plan and evaluate performance, (2) direct attention, and (3) overcome listening problems. Representing knowledge, it measured strategic knowledge of (4) avoiding mentally translating speech and person knowledge of (5) maintaining positive attitudes about listening. The descriptive results showed that participants used their metacognition moderately. Of the subscales, they directed attention the most, planned and evaluated performance least, and perceived their ability to avoid mental translation, solve problems, and maintain optimism equivalently. The results from the hierarchical regression analysis further showed that vocabulary knowledge and metacognition overall predicted listening performance. Of the MALQ subscales, only person knowledge predicted comprehension. These findings indicate that, contrary to earlier findings, metacognition was important for listening comprehension after accounting for vocabulary knowledge.

Keywords: second language listening comprehension, metacognition, vocabulary knowledge, individual differences, hierarchical regression

Introduction

Metacognition, or the ability to mentally step away from what we are thinking about to observe and evaluate our thoughts (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012), is known to be important for listening comprehension. Researchers investigating metacognition and listening performance have taken an individual differences approach to examining their relationship and the findings have consistently shown that skilled listeners use more metacognitive resources when listening than their less-skilled counterparts (Goh & Kaur, 2013; Li, 2013; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). This is because skilled listeners plan what they will do before listening, monitor their comprehension as they listen, and evaluate their performance afterwards; unskilled listeners, by contrast, may listen in an unplanned or incidental manner (Goh, 2008). Despite the importance of metacognition for listening, there remains a dearth of empirical studies examining the relationship when vocabulary is also taken into account. This is an important oversight because current language proficiency theory (e.g., Hulstijn, 2015, 2019) suggests that metacognition may only be important for comprehension after learners have exceeded the threshold of language knowledge needed to understand a spoken text. The current study aims to address this gap in the literature and contribute additional empirical evidence on the importance of metacognition for listening.

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Literature Review

Metacognition and Processing

Metacognition happens at the meta-level of processing. Nelson (1996) explains that when completing cognitive activities, like comprehending speech, information is processed on two levels—an object level and a meta level. Most cognitive activity is happening at the object level, and for listening comprehension, this involves linguistic processing through three stages—perception, parsing, and utilization (Anderson, 2005). Vandergrift and Goh (2012) explain that at perception, sounds in the speech stream are distinguished among one another. These sounds are then grouped into meaningful units in the parsing stage when lexical candidates in linguistic knowledge are matched with what was perceived. Existing knowledge (e.g., topical, discourse, pragmatic knowledge) is then applied to the newly parsed unit, which is combined with previously parsed units in the utilization stage. As utterances are processed through the three stages, a mental representation of the speech is generated for use in subsequent communicative acts (e.g., responding to speech).

Meta-level processing governs the object-level processing by (1) monitoring the status of object-level processing and (2) if problems occur, controlling object-level processing by directing resources to overcome the problems in order to achieve the task goal. Veenman, Van Hout-Wolters, and Afflerbach (2006) explain that processing at the meta-level draws upon metacognitive knowledge and skills. Metacognitive knowledge refers to the interaction among person, task, and strategy knowledge during a cognitive activity. Person knowledge is what a person knows of his/her own abilities and limitations. Task knowledge is what they know about the nature and demands of tasks. Strategy knowledge is what they know about the strategies that are available and how to use them to accomplish tasks (Flavell, 1979). Metacognitive skills draw upon these three knowledge bases to regulate learning activities and solve problems as they arise by planning, monitoring, and evaluating performance. Metacognitive knowledge and skills are developed in specific contexts or domains and progress as domain-specific knowledge is increased (Pressley & Gaskins, 2006). Only after knowledge of that context or domain becomes proceduralized do metacognitive knowledge and skills transfer to other domains (Borkowski, Chan, & Muthukrishna, 2000). For language learning, this would mean that metacognitive skills for second language listening tasks develop as learners increase their knowledge of the second language and that these skills would not be useful for other language learning domains (e.g., reading) until the learners had acquired some degree of procedural knowledge of the language.

Metacognition and Second Language Listening

Listening comprehension is defined as the ability to accurately identify information explicitly provided within speech and to make inferences based on that explicitly provided information (Wagner, 2004) in order to accomplish implicit (not consciously aware of or deliberately striving to achieve) and/or explicit listening goals. Hulstijn (2015, 2019) explains that language proficiency and, by extension, language performance are influenced by the interactions among core and peripheral variables. Core variables consist of linguistic knowledge (e.g., vocabulary, syntactic, and phonological knowledge) and access to that knowledge, while peripheral variables consist of non-linguistic knowledge (e.g., topical knowledge), metacognition, and general cognitive abilities (e.g., working memory). The core variables are stronger predictors of listening comprehension outcomes than the peripheral variables, but the peripheral variables can become important for listening as linguistic knowledge increases. This is consistent with Borkowski et al.'s (2000) notion that the amount of domain-specific knowledge may affect how much influence metacognition has on task performance. They explain that metacognition does not become helpful for cognitive activities (i.e., listening comprehension) until some domain-specific knowledge is acquired. This means that for listeners with limited linguistic knowledge, metacognition would not be helpful for overcoming problems and completing comprehension tasks because listeners are busy making sense of what they hear at the early stages of language processing (i.e., perception and parsing). This would ultimately leave little cognitive space remaining for metacognitive resources to be employed.

Borkowski et al. (2000) also explain that metacognition may not be needed if students have enough knowledge to render task completion very easy. This means that for language learners with sufficient linguistic knowledge to comprehend all of the information in speech, metacognition may not be needed because comprehension tasks can be completed by drawing solely on this knowledge. This all indicates that in order for metacognition

to be helpful for listening comprehension, listeners need enough linguistic knowledge to understand some or most of the speech, but not so much that they understand all of it. Metacognition can serve in a supportive role to domain-specific knowledge. When listeners have insufficient linguistic knowledge to understand everything they hear, they utilize their metacognitive resources to help overcome these deficiencies and complete comprehension tasks (Vandergrift & Baker, 2015). The empirical literature seems to support this notion (Vandergrift & Baker, 2015, 2018; Wallace, 2020), a review of which follows below.

Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire

Research studies that have examined the relationship between metacognition and listening comprehension have used the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ; Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, & Tafaghodtari, 2006) to measure metacognition. The MALQ is a 21-item survey designed to elicit listener perceptions of five dimensions of metacognition that represent metacognitive knowledge and skills: Directed Attention, Problem Solving, Planning and Evaluation, Mental Translation, and Person Knowledge. Directed Attention items represent metacognitive monitoring and elicit perceptions of how well listeners regain their attentional focus if they lose it during a listening event. A common problem that weaker listeners experience is focusing too narrowly on a word or phrase that they mishear and ignoring the remainder of the speech. Skilled listeners, on the other hand, constantly monitor their comprehension as they listen and redirect their attention to comprehend the input as needed to accomplish their listening goals.

Problem Solving items also represent metacognitive monitoring and elicit how well listeners overcome problems as they arise during a listening event. One problem that weaker listeners experience is to assume that what they hear is consistent with their expectations of the speech's content, thus leading to miscomprehension or confusion regarding the speaker's message. Skilled listeners ensure their understanding is consistent throughout a listening event by systematically pausing to check whether their understanding is plausible based on their existing knowledge of the topic and what was said earlier in the speech. If their interpretations do not make sense, then skilled listeners will adjust their interpretations. Another problem that weaker listeners face is misunderstanding a word or stretch of speech and being stuck on working out the meaning. Skilled listeners overcome this potential problem by using their existing knowledge and/or the context provided in the speech to help them guess at the meaning of the unknown words.

Planning and Evaluation items represent planning and evaluation metacognitive skills and their connection with metacognitive knowledge. These items elicit perceptions of how well listeners plan what they will listen to before they start listening and evaluate their performance afterwards. Skilled listeners make predictions about an upcoming speaking event by thinking about (1) what they know of the topic, (2) the language they may encounter on that topic, (3) how the text may be structured, (4) how to accomplish the upcoming task, and (5) what the goal of listening will be (Vandergrift et al., 2006). Bringing this information into conscious thought makes it easier to parse what is said and then utilize it to demonstrate comprehension because it is activated before listening and does not need to be retrieved from long-term memory during a listening event. Skilled listeners will also reflect on and evaluate their performance after listening with the aim of identifying listening problems they encountered and planning how to overcome them moving forward. Reflecting on their performance increases listeners' metacognitive knowledge. They become more knowledgeable about (1) their limitations as listeners (person knowledge), (2) how to accomplish those kinds of tasks (task knowledge), and (3) how effective the strategies were that were employed (strategic knowledge).

The final two dimensions represent metacognitive knowledge. Mental Translation items elicit perceptions of how frequently listeners translate what they hear. Avoiding mentally translating speech is a strategy used by skilled listeners because translating while listening consumes valuable cognitive resources that can be devoted to other cognitive activities during a listening event (e.g., making connections between information in the input and existing topical knowledge; answering comprehension questions). Finally, the Person Knowledge dimension elicits attitudes toward listening in the target language. Skilled listeners tend to hold positive attitudes toward listening, which helps give them confidence to perform well on listening tasks and reducing their anxiety when completing them.

Empirical Studies

The empirical literature has shown that despite being important for comprehension, language learners may not use very much of their metacognition when they listen. Studies examining metacognition and listening comprehension using the MALQ have shown that learners reported using a moderate amount of metacognition. For example, university language learners in Singapore (Goh & Hu, 2014), Iran (Bozorgian, 2014), and China (Li, 2013), and senior high school students in Jordan (Al-Alwan et al., 2013) reported a moderate amount of metacognition when listening (below 4.0 on a 6.0 Likert scale). Of the subscales measured on the MALQ, those representing the metacognitive skills, and monitoring in particular, are more frequently reported by learners than metacognitive knowledge. Goh and Hu's (2014) high-intermediate Chinese EFL learners in Singapore reported that directed attention and problem solving were the two most frequently used skills while listening, and planning-evaluation was more frequently used than either the person knowledge or mental translation subscales representing metacognitive knowledge.

Similar findings were reported for Li's (2013) low-level Chinese university EFL students and Al-Alwan et al.'s (2013) intermediate-level Jordanian high school EFL students. The Problem Solving, Directed Attention, and Planning and Evaluation subscales were more frequently reported than Mental Translation and Person Knowledge in these studies. One explanation for these findings may be that the learning contexts of these studies focused on improving metacognitive skills and did little to increase metacognitive knowledge. Granted, only two aspects of metacognitive knowledge were accounted for in these studies, but they do demonstrate that learners tend to mentally translate as they listen and struggle with maintaining a positive attitude toward listening in English, despite their level of proficiency. Another explanation may be that the learners may not have had sufficient listening experiences needed to increase their metacognitive knowledge. Metacognition is known to increase as learners gain more learning experiences and that their metacognition can transfer across domains. For example, if learners develop the ability to re-direct their attention if they lose it while completing a math problem, then they may transfer this to listening in a second language. If this holds for language learners, the results of existing studies suggest that, for intermediate-level listeners and below, metacognitive skills may be considered domain-general and more easily transferrable to and from other domains. However, metacognitive knowledge may be domain-specific; and in order to increase metacognitive knowledge for second language listening, learners would need more second language listening experience.

The empirical literature has also shown that metacognition shares a positive relationship with listening comprehension. In several studies, scores from the MALQ correlated with listening comprehension scores (e.g., Al-Alwan, Asassfeh, & Al-Shboul, 2013; Li, 2013; Vandergrift & Baker, 2015, 2018; Wang & Treffers-Daller, 2017). This means that listeners who have more metacognition tend to comprehend speech better than those with less metacognition. However, the relationship between metacognition and listening comprehension may not be as direct as these findings indicate. When overall metacognition was examined in isolation of any other variable, it was shown to be predictive of listening comprehension. For example, results from Vandergrift et al.'s (2006) regression analysis showed that scores on the MALQ were predictive of listening test scores for language learners with varied L1 backgrounds and L2 proficiency levels. However, vocabulary knowledge was not controlled as a variable in the study and a growing trend in the empirical literature is that metacognition does not predict comprehension when vocabulary knowledge is taken into account. For example, Vandergrift and Baker's (2015, 2018) path analysis showed that MALQ scores did not have a direct effect on listening comprehension scores, but that scores from vocabulary knowledge test did for lower-level teenage French language learners. Similarly, Wang and Treffers-Daller (2017) reported that only language proficiency and vocabulary knowledge test scores were predictive of listening comprehension test scores, but metacognition scores were not for Chinese university EFL students of varied proficiency levels. Vocabulary knowledge in each of these studies was defined as vocabulary size, or the number of unique words the participants knew. Overall, these results indicate that having greater knowledge of target language vocabulary was more important for listening performance than having greater metacognition resources.

When the subscales of the MALQ were examined for their direct relationship with listening, mixed findings were reported. Al-Alwan et al. (2013) reported that metacognitive skills were most important for comprehension. Scores from all three skills subscales of the MALQ (problem solving, directed attention, planning and evaluation) were predictive of listening test scores. For higher-level listeners, Goh and Hu (2014) reported that only Person Knowledge scores and Problem Solving scores were predictive of comprehension scores. In both of

these studies, Problem Solving was the strongest predictor of the subscales for Listening Performance, suggesting that listeners who were able to overcome their problems as they listened performed better on the listening tests. However, when vocabulary knowledge was controlled for in the analysis, only person knowledge scores were reported to be predictive of listening comprehension scores (Wang & Treffers-Daller, 2017). This is an interesting finding, considering that person knowledge is consistently reported least often by participants in varied contexts across proficiency levels. Wang et al.'s findings suggest that listening success depends mostly upon the vocabulary size of the listeners, but maintaining a positive attitude toward listening (person knowledge on the MALQ) can also explain some of the variance in listening performance. These studies demonstrate that in order to examine metacognition in the context of listening comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, as one indicator of linguistic knowledge, should be controlled.

The Current Study

The current study aims to examine the relationship among second language listening comprehension, metacognition, and vocabulary knowledge. Data from the study comes from a larger study that examined the relationship among listening comprehension, domain-specific knowledge, and domain-general cognitive abilities (Wallace, 2020). In the larger study, metacognition was found to have an indirect relationship with comprehension through domain-specific topical knowledge. However, it was unclear how the dimensions of the MALQ may predict comprehension after controlling for vocabulary knowledge. This study aims to address this limitation and provide a more in-depth understanding of how metacognitive knowledge and skills may have influenced listening comprehension for lower-level senior high school students. Specifically, the study intends to (a) explore the self-reported levels of metacognition among Japanese high-beginner L2 listeners as reported on the MALQ, (b) examine intrapersonal differences among the subscales of the MALQ for these listeners, and (c) examine the degree to which overall metacognition and the subscales of the MALQ predict L2 listening performance after controlling for vocabulary knowledge.

Methodology

Participants

A convenience sampling method was used to recruit participants from two second-year senior high school classes in Japan. In total, 76 students elected to participate in the study. The participants studied in the top language program in the school, where they received up to 10 hours of English instruction per week. Curricular aims of the program were to develop linguistic proficiency for success on high-stakes university entrance exams, which consist mainly of reading, vocabulary, and grammar activities. The predominant teaching methodology for six of the 10 hours focused on increasing vocabulary and grammatical knowledge through the translation of written English texts to Japanese. The remaining four classes aimed to improve writing and speaking skills. Listening was not given much attention in this context. The proficiency level of these students was high-beginner, around the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) A2 level. This was later confirmed by the descriptive statistics showing that the participants scored an average of 60% on the listening test measuring CEFR levels A2-B1.

Instruments

L2 Listening Comprehension Test

L2 listening was measured using a practice version of the TOEFL Junior Standard test. The test was designed to measure L2 listening ability for learners ranging in the CEFR A2-B1 levels. The test consisted of monologues and dialogues among students and teachers in an academic setting. The first half of the test consisted of single items associated with a single audio track (17 items), while the second half consisted of multiple items (3-5 items) per listening track. The participants indicated their comprehension by answering multiple-choice questions with four answer options. The questions and answer choices were available in written form while the tracks were played. The items examined the ability to identify the main ideas and details of academic and non-academic texts, make inferences based on speaker intonation, comprehend idiomatic language, and understand the discourse functions of a text (Educational Testing Service, 2018). One point was assigned for each correctly answered item. Correct items were totaled to represent listening performance.

Metacognition Questionnaire
Metacognition was measured with the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ), an instrument widely used to examine L2 listeners' metacognition (Vandergrift et al., 2006). The 21-item questionnaire measured five dimensions of metacognition representing metacognitive skills and metacognitive knowledge (see Table 1). The questionnaire was translated into Japanese to ensure the participants could clearly understand the items. It was back translated into English to ensure the translation was accurate before being administered. The questionnaire was given immediately after the listening test to best capture listening perceptions. Six items on the MALQ were reverse-coded. Three items representing the mental translation subscale were reversed because avoiding translating while listening represents better listening behavior. Two Person Knowledge items and a Directed Attention item were also reversed because they were negatively worded. Overall and scaled item groups were formed to represent the MALQ scores and subscales, respectively. All items were averaged together to represent a metacognition overall value for analysis. Items representing each subscale were averaged together to form five scales for analysis.

Table 1

Metacognitive knowledge and skills, MALQ subscales, and number of items per subscale

	Metacognitive skills			*Metacognitive knowledge*	
Skill/knowledge type	Monitoring	Monitoring	Planning/ evaluation	Strategy knowledge	Person knowledge
MALQ subscale	Directed Attention	Problem Solving	Planning & Evaluation	Mental Translation	Person Knowledge
Number of items	4	6	5	3	3

Vocabulary Knowledge Test

Vocabulary knowledge was measured using the Listening Vocabulary Levels Test (McLean, Kramer, & Begler, 2015), a paper-based auditory vocabulary size test developed specifically for Japanese EFL learners. The test consisted of six sections. The first five sections (24 words each) consisted of the first five-thousand most frequently occurring words in English based on the British National Corpus and Corpus of Contemporary American English. A final section (30 words) measured knowledge of words extracted from the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000). Participants heard English words followed by a sentence not indicating its meaning. They matched the English words with their Japanese equivalent from four answer options. One point was assigned for each correctly answered item. Correct items on the test were totaled to represent vocabulary knowledge.

Data Collection Procedures

The listening test was administered in its paper-and-pencil form after school in the students' classrooms. The participants heard the recordings once and responded to the questions in 40 minutes. Immediately after the test, the participants completed the MALQ within 15 minutes and were directed to focus their reflections on how they listened during the listening test. The vocabulary test was administered on a different day. The participants heard the recordings once and responded to the items in 50 minutes. The responses to the listening and vocabulary tests were scored by hand once by the researcher and again by a research assistant. The test scores and MALQ responses were input into Microsoft Excel and imported into SPSS for analysis.

Data Analysis and Screening

The scores used in the analyses were the correct responses on the listening test and vocabulary test, the average scores of all of the MALQ items, and the average scores for items representing each subscale of the MALQ. The maximum score was 40 for the listening test, 6 for the MALQ overall score and each subscale score, and 150 on the vocabulary test. Overall, there were eight variables included in the analyses: Listening Performance, Metacognition Overall, Directed Attention, Mental Translation, Person Knowledge, Planning and Evaluation, Problem Solving, and Vocabulary Knowledge. Reliability estimates were calculated first to ensure the instruments were internally consistent. Cronbach's alpha values above .60 are considered acceptably reliable in applied linguistics research (Dornyei, 2007).

To answer research question one, descriptive statistics were calculated to determine how much metacognition the participants reported having. To answer research question two, a one-way within-subjects analysis of variance was conducted to determine significant differences among the subscales of the MALQ. To answer research question three, Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were first calculated for the listening test scores and the MALQ scores to establish a linear relationship among the variables. Only those relationships that were statistically significant were included in the subsequent hierarchical multiple regression analyses. Two hierarchical regression analyses were then conducted. In the first analysis, a Listening Performance variable was regressed onto a Vocabulary Knowledge variable in the first step. In the second step, the Listening Performance variable was regressed onto the Metacognition Overall variable. The second analysis followed the same procedure as the first hierarchical regression analysis except that in the second step, the Listening Performance variable was regressed onto variables representing each of the MALQ subscales. The analyses were conducted using SPSS version 24.

Before conducting the analyses, the assumptions underlying the statistical procedures were verified. In line with Goh and Hu (2014), the sample size was evaluated for its adequacy in detecting a medium-sized effect between predictor and outcome variables using Green's (1991) formula: $N \geqslant (8/f2) + (m-1)$. In the formula, *N* is the number of participants, m is the number of predictor variables, and f 2 is the effect size. A medium effect size of 0.13 was entered into the formula. According to the formula, the minimum sample size needed to detect a medium effect would be 63 for the first regression analysis and 66 for the second analysis. This indicates that the sample size of 76 in the current study was adequate to detect a medium-sized effect.

The data subsequently underwent several analyses recommend by Field (2009) to verify that it met the assumptions underlying the procedures. To confirm the assumption of univariate normality, descriptive statistics were inspected. Skewness and kurtosis values outside the absolute value of 2.0 were considered outliers and removed from the dataset. It has been argued that outliers may not need to be removed from a dataset (e.g., Larson-Hall & Herrington, 2010). However, alternative methods proposed to address the outlier issue also call for data to be removed, albeit in a different way. Therefore, three outliers were removed, accounting for less than 4% of the data. For multivariate normality, Mahalanobis distances were inspected for the predictor variables. Those significant at 0.001 were removed from the analysis. To test the assumption of sphericity for the analysis of variance, Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was conducted. If the assumption is violated, the Greenhouse-Geisser correction would be estimated. Assumptions underlying regression were also verified for both regression analyses. To check the assumption of independent observations, a Durbin-Watson statistic was calculated. Values below 1.0 and above 3.0 would violate this assumption. To verify the absence of multicollinearity, a variance inflation factor was calculated. Values below 0.1 would indicate multicollinearity among the predictor variables. The test whether the residuals were normally distributed, the Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted. If the results of the test are not significant, the residuals would be normally distributed. Finally, homoscedasticity was confirmed by running a Breush-Pagan test. If the results of the test showed the predictor variables not affecting the residual values, the assumption would be met.

Results

Table 2 reports the mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, and reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for each of the measures. The Cronbach's alphas ranged from .63 to .85. Most alphas were above .70, indicating good internal consistency. The Planning and Evaluation subscale (.63) was below .70, though it is acceptably reliable (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Dornyei, 2007). The lower alpha value was likely due to the limited sample size. The absolute value of the skewness and kurtosis estimates were within 2.0, suggesting that the scores were approximately normally distributed.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics and reliability estimates of measures (N = 76)

Variables (total items)	*M*	*SD*	*Min.*	*Max.*	*Skewness*	*Kurtosis*	*alpha*
Listening Performance (40)	23.58	7.01	11.00	39	0.248	-0.968	.85
Metacognition Overall (6)	3.90	0.61	1.95	5.5	-0.039	0.956	.84
Directed Attention (6)	4.40	0.81	1.50	6.0	-0.593	1.690	.72
Mental Translation (6)	3.94	1.08	1.00	6.0	-0.273	-0.064	.73
Person Knowledge (6)	3.92	1.08	1.00	6.0	-0.273	-0.064	.70
Planning and Evaluation (6)	3.26	0.83	1.60	5.8	0.280	0.439	.63
Problem Solving (6)	4.08	0.84	2.00	5.7	0.006	-0.432	.72
Vocabulary Knowledge (150)	100.91	9.84	75.00	132	0.618	1.190	.74

Results from Analysis of Variance

To answer the second research question, a one-way within-subjects analysis of variance was calculated. The results from Mauchly's Test of Sphericity indicate that the assumption was violated. Therefore, the Greenhouse-Geisser correction was estimated. The results show that there were statistically significant differences among the MALQ subscales, F (3.12, 234.09) = 21.44, $p < .001$. Post hoc tests using Bonferroni correction revealed that Directed Attention (M = 4.40, SD = 0.81) was more frequently reported than the other four subscales on the MALQ and the differences were statistically significant. Problem Solving (M = 4.08, SD = 0.84) was reported more frequently than Mental Translation (M = 3.94, SD = 1.08) and person knowledge (M= 3.92, SD = 1.08), but the differences among the three subscales were not statistically significant. Planning and Evaluation was reported less frequently than the other four subscales (M = 3.26, SD = 0.83) and the differences were statistically significant.

Results from Correlation Analysis

Bivariate correlations were calculated for the variables. The assumptions underlying correlation (e.g., absence of outliers, interval-scaled data, linearity, normal distribution) were found to meet the requirements for the procedure. The correlations and their associated confidence intervals are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Bivariate correlations among the observed variables (N = 76)

	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Listening Performance	1						
Metacognition Overall	.350** [.13, .57]	1					
Directed Attention	.233* [.01, .46]	.789** [.65, .93]	1				
Mental Translation	.302** [.08, .52]	.428** [.22, .64]	.239* [.01, .46]	1			
Person Knowledge	.385** [.17, .60]	.673** [.50, .84]	.455** [.25, .66]	.335** [.12, .55]	1		
Planning and Evaluation	.049 [-.18, .28]	.618** [.44, .80]	.348** [.13, .57]	-.046 [-.28, .19]	.195 [-.03, .42]	1	
Problem Solving	.260* [.04, .49]	.821** [.69, .95]	.634** [.46, .81]	.113 [-.12, .34]	.403** [.19, .62]	.429** [.22, .64]	1
Vocabulary Knowledge	.484** [.28, .69]	.219 [-.01, .45]	.165 [-.06, .39]	.263* [.04, .49]	.145 [-.09, .37]	.045 [-.19, .28]	.151 [-.08, .38]

Notes. **p<.01,*p<.05; 95% confidence intervals in brackets

The results in Table 3 show that the Listening Performance variable shared a moderate correlation with the Metacognition Overall variable (*r* = .350, 95% CI = .13, .57) and the Vocabulary Knowledge variable (*r* = .484, 95% CI = .28, .69). Each variable representing the subscales of the MALQ correlated with the Listening Performance variable except for the Planning and Evaluation variable (*r* = .049, 95% CI = -.18, .28).

Results from Regression Analyses

To answer the third research question, two hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. The data met the assumptions underlying the two regression analyses (Metacognition Overall and MALQ subscales). In both analyses, the Durbin-Watson statistic was between 1.0 and 3.0, the variance inflation factor was between 0.1 and 2.0 for each variable for each analysis, the Shapiro-Wilk test was not significant, and the Breush-Pagan test results showed that no predictor variable had a significant effect on the residual values.

In the first analysis, the Vocabulary Knowledge variable was added in the first step and the Metacognition Overall variable was added in the second step. The regression model was significant, $R^2 = .297$, adjusted $R^2 = .278$, $F(1, 73) = 6.505$, $p < .01$. The Vocabulary Knowledge variable ($\beta = .428$, 95% CI: 0.16, 0.45) and Metacognition Overall variable ($\beta = .256$, 95% CI: 0.65, 5.25) were significant predictors of the Listening Performance variable. The Vocabulary Knowledge variable explained 22.4% of the variance in Listening Performance scores and the Metacognition Overall variable explained an additional 5% of variance. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Hierarchical regression predicting listening performance from vocabulary knowledge and the MALQ subscales (N = 76)

	B	*SE B*	β	sr^2	R^2	*adjusted*	ΔR^2
Step 1					.235	.224	
Vocabulary Knowledge	0.35	0.07	.484*** [0.20, 0.49]				
Step 2					.297	.278	.05
Vocabulary Knowledge	0.31	0.07	.428*** [0.16, 0.45]	.418			
Metacognition Overall	2.95	1.26	.256** [0.65, 5.25]	.250			

Notes. ***p <.001, **p <.01, 95% confidence intervals in brackets

In the second analysis, variables representing the subscales of the MALQ replaced the Metacognition Overall variable. Because the Planning and Evaluation variable failed to share a linear relationship with the Listening Performance variable, it was removed from the analysis for violating the linearity assumption underlying regression. The data met the other assumptions underlying regression analysis. The regression model was significant, $R^2 = .351$, adjusted $R^2 = .304$, $F(5, 70) = 7.557$, $p < .001$. The Vocabulary Knowledge variable was a significant predictor of the Listening Performance variable ($\beta = .410$, 95% CI: 0.15, 0.44) in the model. Of the subscales added in the second step, only the Person Knowledge variable ($\beta = .273$, 95% CI: 0.29, 3.27) was a significant predictor of the Listening Performance variable. The Vocabulary Knowledge variable explained 22.4% of the variance in Listening Performance scores and the Person Knowledge variable explained an additional 8% of variance. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Hierarchical regression predicting listening performance from Vocabulary Knowledge and MALQ subscales variables (N = 76)

	B	*SE B*	*β*	sr^2	R^2	*adjusted*	ΔR^2
Step 1					.235	.224	
Vocabulary Knowledge	0.35	.072	.484*** [0.20, 0.49]				
Step 2					.351	.304	.08
Vocabulary Knowledge	0.29	.072	.410*** [0.15, 0.44]	.392			
Directed Attention	-0.47	1.14	-.045 [-2.73, 1.80]				
Mental Translation	0.62	0.70	.096 [-0.77, 2.01]				
Person Knowledge	1.78	0.75	.273* [0.29, 3.27]	.230			
Problem Solving	1.10	1.12	.131 [-1.12, 3.33]				

Notes. ***p <.001, *p <.05, 95% confidence intervals in brackets

Discussion

Metacognition Overall and the MALQ Subscales

The descriptive statistics show that the students reported having a moderate amount of metacognition. This means that they used their metacognitive skills or metacognitive knowledge some of the time during the listening test. These findings are consistent with earlier studies showing that second language learners in varied contexts and of wide-ranging proficiency levels use a moderate amount of metacognition when listening (e.g., Al-Alwan et al., 2013; Goh & Hu, 2014; Li, 2013). A common explanation offered for this result is that pedagogical approaches for listening do not focus on improving metacognition, despite the reported importance it has on learning in general and for improving listening comprehension more specifically. In many language learning contexts, the comprehension approach, which refers to having students repeatedly listen to audio texts and answer comprehension questions (Field, 2008) is used overwhelmingly. While this approach gives learners practice at listening in the target language and perhaps training in improving the ability to answer questions eliciting a certain type of listening (e.g., listening for details), it does little to help improve the ability to plan before a listening task, monitor comprehension, or evaluate performance afterwards; nor does it help listeners use their strategic knowledge or person knowledge to benefit their understanding of the target language speech. For the present study, it is possible that the participants may not have received that much listening instruction. Most of their pedagogical focus is oriented on the written word through reading, grammar, and vocabulary, and the spoken input they encounter is limited to hearing their classroom teachers speak.

The Directed Attention variable was the most frequently reported on the MALQ. This means that during the listening test, the participants monitored their attentional focus and redirected it to best complete the listening task more consistently than other metacognitive skills or knowledge. This result is consistent with Goh and Hu (2014), who reported that Directed Attention was the most frequently reported subscale of the MALQ for their high-intermediate Chinese EFL students. In their study, Directed Attention scores were statistically equal to the Problem Solving scores, suggesting that their listeners reported using their monitoring skills more frequently than any other subscale of the MALQ. Problem Solving was the second highest reported subscale in the current study, but the difference was statistically significant from the Directed Attention subscale. This means that participants were more aware of how to direct their attentional resources than they were in using their existing linguistic knowledge and listening experience to overcome their comprehension problems.

The Problem Solving variable was statistically equal to the two metacognitive knowledge variables, Mental Translation and Person Knowledge. This means that participants used their problem-solving skills, strategic knowledge, and person knowledge equivalently during the listening test. These findings were somewhat unexpected since earlier studies have reported that metacognitive skills, and monitoring in particular, were used more frequently than metacognitive knowledge (e.g., Al-Alwan et al., 2013; Goh & Hu, 2014). These results may be due to the strong connection with knowledge among each of these subscales. When overcoming listening problems, participants used their linguistic knowledge and listening experience to help them. When the participants reported on their strategic knowledge for the Mental Translation variable, they drew upon their knowledge for how to avoid translating speech as they listened; and they used what they knew of themselves as listeners (Person Knowledge variable), particularly about maintaining a positive attitude, when listening. These three MALQ subscales drew upon different knowledge bases than either the Directed Attention subscale, which is involved with sensory and perception processes, or the Planning and Evaluation subscale, which is involved with goal setting and achievement processes. Altogether, these results indicate that the participants used their perceptive processes most frequently as they listened and drew upon their knowledge resources to a lesser extent.

The most surprising result was that the Planning and Evaluation variable was the least frequently reported. This unexpected result differs strikingly from earlier studies showing that Planning and Evaluation was among the most frequently reported subscale of the MALQ (e.g., Al-Alwan et al., 2013; Goh & Hu, 2014; Goh & Kaur, 2013; Li, 2013). It means that the participants did not frequently plan how they were going to listen before the listening tasks began or evaluate their performance afterwards, and suggests the participants were unskilled listeners. Skilled listeners plan their approach to an upcoming listening task in order to best prepare them for achieving their implicit or explicit listening goals. By not doing this, listeners run the risk of continuing to struggle with listening tasks because they come into the listening event cold and they may miss key details of the speech while familiarizing themselves with what is being discussed. Skilled listeners also appraise their performance after listening to identify their listening strengths and weaknesses and to consider how to adjust their approach in subsequent listening tasks. Not doing this may cause them to make the same mistakes repeatedly because they are not learning from their errors. It is also interesting that the participants infrequently planned for or evaluated the listening tasks because the test-centered nature of the learning context nearly ensures that they have considerable experience in learning test-taking strategies, like previewing the questions and answer options before a task begins.

The results show that the participants utilized the metacognitive skills to different degrees during the listening test—they monitored frequently, but they only sometimes planned and evaluated their performance. An explanation for this result may be that the students had not received much explicit instruction on how to plan and evaluate their listening performance (Goh & Hu, 2014). When instructional focus is given to developing metacognitive skills and knowledge, students reported using them frequently during listening tasks (Fahim & Fakhri Alamdari, 2014; Graham & Macaro, 2008; Rahimirad & Shams, 2014). However, the Japanese EFL curriculum concentrates on improving reading comprehension and grammatical accuracy, and increasing vocabulary knowledge (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008). Strategic knowledge is addressed in the form of preparing learners to complete tasks similar to those they would encounter on high-stakes language assessments, such as university entrance exams.

L2 listening, Metacognition Overall, and the MALQ Subscales

Two hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to examine the relative contributions that scores from the MALQ overall and scores from the subscales of the MALQ made on listening comprehension scores after controlling for vocabulary knowledge. Results from the first analysis showed that the Vocabulary Knowledge variable had a moderate effect on the Listening Performance variable and that the Metacognition Overall variable made a weak contribution beyond that explained by Vocabulary Knowledge. This means that vocabulary knowledge was the most important for listening, but that metacognition also contributed to listening performance, albeit to a lesser degree. This finding is consistent with the Core-Peripheral language proficiency model (Hulstijn, 2015, 2019) showing that core linguistic knowledge and processing variables are more important for language performance than peripheral variables like metacognition. However, this finding is inconsistent with previous studies showing that when vocabulary knowledge is controlled for that metacognition does not explain variances in listening. For example, metacognition was not predictive of

listening comprehension when Wang and Treffers-Daller (2017) included vocabulary knowledge and language proficiency variables into their regression model. Similarly, Vandergrift and Baker (2015; 2018) controlled for vocabulary knowledge for teenage French L2 learners and reported that metacognition scores were not predictive of comprehension scores. One explanation for this may be that the vocabulary level of the participants in the current study was adequate for them to process the speech at lower levels (perception and parsing), but not so high that they understood all of the language on the listening test. Because processing was not consumed at these lower levels, the participants would have had enough cognitive resources to devote to their metacognition. This explanation aligns with Borkowski et al. (2000), who claimed that metacognition becomes important for performance after some domain-specific knowledge has been acquired. In the current study, this domain-specific knowledge is target language vocabulary.

The results from the second hierarchical regression analysis showed that only the Person Knowledge variable was predictive of the Listening Performance variable. This means that after controlling for vocabulary size, the ability to maintain a positive attitude about listening in the target language had a direct effect on comprehension. This finding is consistent with Wang and Treffers-Daller (2017), who also reported that Person Knowledge scores were the only MALQ subscale to predict comprehension scores after controlling for vocabulary knowledge. Wang and Treffers-Daller argued that their results reinforce the importance of high self-efficacy and low anxiety for language performance and similar claims can be made about the current study's findings. Of the five subscales measured by the MALQ, Person Knowledge may be the only one that is considered an affective variable, or one related to feelings of self-esteem. The items measuring person knowledge ask how listeners feel about listening in the target language, which differs from how items measuring the other four subscales elicit perceptions of what listeners actually do during a listening event. The other four variables may then be considered cognitive in nature, meaning that they involve how listeners process information, and not how they regulate their feelings about listening. The results showing that the Person Knowledge variable was the only subscale to predict the Listening Performance variable suggest that the affective aspect was more important than the cognitive components of metacognition for the participants in this study. This result is unsurprising considering the importance that language anxiety has been shown to play in language learning in general, and for second language listening in particular (Elkhafaifi, 2005). To address this in the classroom, language teachers may consider including methods to reduce anxiety when listening in the target language within their lessons. Doing so will likely lead to improved listening performance.

Another explanation may be that the cognitive components of the MALQ become more important for listening when listeners have larger vocabulary levels for the given listening tasks. Goh and Hu (2014) reported that Problem Solving scores were the strongest predictor of listening comprehension test scores for high/intermediate-level Chinese EFL learners, and that Person Knowledge scores also predicted comprehension scores. Al-Alwan et al. (2013) showed that scores from the three subscales of the MALQ representing metacognitive skills (problem solving, directed attention, and planning-evaluation) were the only predictors of comprehension scores for low-intermediate-level EFL learners. The participants in both of those studies were reportedly higher than those of the current study, which may explain why the strongest predictors were the cognitive subscales of the MALQ in those studies. However, because vocabulary knowledge was not controlled for in those studies, this claim is speculative. To test the claim's veracity, future research should compare the relationships among the MALQ subscales and listening comprehension between high- and low-proficiency learners after controlling for vocabulary knowledge.

Conclusion

The results showed that the metacognitive monitoring skills were more frequently reported than the planning and evaluation skills and metacognitive knowledge. The results further showed that the Vocabulary Knowledge variable was the strongest predictor of the Listening Performance variable, but that the Metacognition Overall variable and the Person Knowledge variable, in particular, also predicted Listening Performance scores beyond what was explained by the Vocabulary Knowledge variable. These findings support the Core-Peripheral model of language proficiency, which posits that core linguistic knowledge and processing variables are most important for language performance, but that peripheral, non-linguistic variables can influence performance to a lesser degree. The findings also provide tentative support for Borkowski et al.'s (2000) claims that having some domain-specific knowledge is necessary for metacognitive resources to be engaged during a task. Among

the MALQ subscales, the one associated with anxiety (Person Knowledge) had the strongest effect on Listening Performance, highlighting the importance of affect for listening comprehension.

The study is not without its limitations, though. The narrow range of language proficiency levels among the participants limits the degree to which the findings can be generalized to the greater language learner population. Further, the use of correlational analytical methods limits the degree to which causality among the variables can be established. Although this study continued a tradition in the empirical literature with its approach, future studies may consider utilizing a longitudinal design to observe changes among the relationships over time. Adding a qualitative measure (i.e., diaries) would also be advantageous for this purpose. Future studies may also consider broadening the scope of metacognition to include task knowledge and metacognitive experience. Metacognitive experience, which refers to the previous experiences listeners have had using their metacognitive knowledge to accomplish listening tasks, has yet to be adequately measured in the empirical literature, despite its reported importance for task performance. Future studies are encouraged to consider developing a tool to measure metacognitive experience to allow for observations between it and listening comprehension to be made.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs) in Self-directed Language Learning: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs) postulated as a novel motivational construct in second language acquisition (SLA) research to explain periods of intense and enduring behavior in pursuit of a highly valued goal or vision. Nonetheless, much of the discussion related to this new motivational phenomenon has remained theoretical, and only a limited number of empirical studies have investigated its various dimensions in language learning. The current qualitative study employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore a period of intense motivation experienced by an Iranian language learner in self-directed and mobile assisted language learning. The findings provided further empirical evidence for the triggering stimulus and the core characteristics of DMCs in terms of goal/vision orientedness, a salient facilitative structure, and positive emotionality in explaining the essence and the universal meaning of the phenomenon experienced by the participant of the current study.

Keywords: directed motivational currents (DMCs), mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), motivation, self-directed language learning, positive emotions

Introduction

Research on second language (L2) learning motivation as an important cause of variability in language learning success, has been a major topic within second language acquisition (SLA) research for over five decades (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2012), and has seen an “unprecedented boom” during the past ten years (Boo et al., 2015). Recently, in line with the current emphasis on the complexity and situated nature of L2 learning motivation, Dörnyei and his colleagues introduced a new motivational construct called Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs), to explain periods of intense and enduring motivational drive in pursuit of a highly valued goal or vision (Dörnyei et al., 2015; Dörnyei, Ibrahim, et al., 2014; Dörnyei, Muir, et al., 2014; Muir & Dörnyei, 2013). The experience of DMCs is a vision-led, self-regulation effort that is associated with “the excitement of journeying down a ‘motivational highway’ towards new pastures” (Dörnyei, Ibrahim, et al., 2014, p. 103), and “emerges within the framework of a salient structure of behavioural acts – many of them being routines performed on ‘motivational autopilot’ – which are permeated by the sense of elevated emotionality associated with approaching a coveted prize” (Dörnyei, Muir, et al., 2014, p. 27).

It has been argued that DMCs can align a diverse set of motivational factors working simultaneously in a complex system (Dörnyei, Ibrahim, et al., 2014; Muir & Gümüş, 2020), and they rise “when a specific set of initial conditions fall into place to allow for directed motivational energy to be charged into a behavioural sequence that is aimed towards a predefined explicit goal” (Muir & Dörnyei, 2013, p. 359). Despite being a novel conceptualization of language learning motivation, different aspects of DMCs are well-established in mainstream theories of motivation in psychology (Dörnyei et al., 2015), and this new construct has great potential to act as a fundamental organizer of motivational impetus in both individual- and group-level language learning (Dörnyei, Muir, et al., 2014; García-Pinar, 2020; Ibrahim & Al-Hoorie, 2019; Zarrinabadi et al., 2019). Nevertheless, although the experiences of DMCs are shared by many individuals in their lives, as well as language learning endeavors (Dörnyei et al., 2015), much of the discussion related to this new motivational construct has remained theoretical in nature, and only a limited number of empirical studies have been

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conducted to investigate it in language learning (García-Pinar, 2020; Henry et al., 2015; Pietluch, 2018; Safdari & Maftoon, 2017; Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2021; Zarrinabadi & Tavakoli, 2017). In order to fill part of this gap, the current study aimed to investigate this phenomenon as experienced by an Iranian language learner, in the self-directed and mobile-assisted learning of German as a foreign language. The next section provides theoretical and empirical backgrounds for the DMCs, and locates the current study within the growing body of knowledge with respect to understanding this motivational phenomenon.

Literature Review

As a unique and highly distinctive motivational state, DMCs arise when a personal goal of great importance aligns with a structured pathway of action, which becomes automatized and amplified by the energy generated in the pursuit of the goal (Henry, 2019). In this regard, DMCs are different from ordinary motivated behavior, contain a greater sense of urgency, and alter established patterns of daily life (Henry et al., 2015). Despite the fact that different people experience such motivational states differently, it has been argued that DMCs have three core characteristics of being goal/vision-oriented, having a salient facilitative structure, and having positive emotionality (Dörnyei et al., 2015; Dörnyei, Ibrahim, et al., 2014; Dörnyei, Muir, et al., 2014; Henry, 2019).

Being goal/vision-oriented, a DMC is always directional, which means that it leads the individual towards a clearly defined and highly valued goal or end state (Dörnyei, Muir, et al., 2014). This provides a "gravitational effect on motivational energy, systematically channeling behavior toward activities perceived as enhancing the likelihood of goal attainment and away from other, unrelated activities that compete for the learner's time" (Henry et al., 2015, p. 331). Nonetheless, despite the unifying power of a clearly set goal, a DMC cannot sustain its strength without having a sensory component, which is vision. As a key factor of DMCs, vision is a goal that is enriched by the reality of the actual experience of the achievements (like seeing oneself in the desired state) (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2013). In this regard, the power and the intensity of a DMC is highly dependent on the quality of the visionary dimension that is superimposed onto the guiding goal (Dörnyei et al., 2015; Henry et al., 2015).

The second major characteristic of a DMC relates to its salient facilitative structure, which means that this phenomenon has a clear pathway from its rise to the end point. According to Henry et al. (2015), the structure of a DMC has three main components: (1) a set of recurring behavioral routines aligned with the goal achievement, (2) a process of regular checks for the sub-goals and positive feedback for progress, and (3) clear and identifiable starting and ending points. In this regard, Dörnyei et al. (2015) believe that "a DMCs does not simply 'drift' into being, but rather is triggered by a specific event, or by a group of individual factors acting in concert" (p. 58). In fact, a clear starting point (Muir & Dörnyei, 2013), as well as a combination of contextual, personal, and time factors (Dörnyei, Ibrahim, et al., 2014), are required for the successful launch of a DMC. Moreover, an effective launch needs to be followed by the establishment of a set of behavioral routines, which like domino pieces "will all fall one after another from a single push because they are all part of the same chain" (Dörnyei, Muir, et al., 2014, p. 14). Closely related to this aspect is the role of progress checks and affirmative feedback, as the individual being caught up in a DMC makes use of proximal sub-goals to break the pathway into smaller steps (Dörnyei et al., 2015), and in the process needs to receive positive feedback to have a clear and ongoing perception of where she/he is on the way towards achieving the goal (Dörnyei, Ibrahim, et al., 2014).

Finally, since pursuing highly valued goals is related to individuals' identities and contributes to actualizing their potentials, the process of learning will be accompanied by intense pleasure, satisfaction, and fulfilment (Henry et al., 2015). The positive emotionality in a DMC arises from the realization that an individual is approaching the highly valued goal by completing a set of sub-goals, which create more enjoyment and emotional loading. In this regard, the experience of an elevated emotional state helps to sustain the overall motivation and long-term engagement (Dörnyei et al., 2015). It is important to note that this elevated emotional state and enjoyment is not due to the intrinsic value of the activity, but results from making meaningful progress toward the vision that the individual created for the future (Dörnyei, Ibrahim, et al., 2014).

Despite being a novel idea for capturing highly intensive motivational states, the theorizing of DMCs has strong links with well-known motivation theories in psychology (Dörnyei et al., 2015; Dörnyei, Ibrahim, et al., 2014; Dörnyei, Muir, et al., 2014). For example, DMCs share some features with flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014b, 2014a), such as being fully engaged in a goal-directed and highly interesting activity. A key distinction between the experience of flow and other entertaining activities is that in the former, the enjoyment originates from the task itself rather than any external material gains. In this regard, when experiencing flow, one loses a temporal connection to the past or future (losing track of time) and becomes fully engaged in the activity for the sake of the task itself. From this perspective, flow and DMCs share a number of defining features. More specifically, being completely engrossed in some highly motivating activity for a period of time that directs all attentional resources towards achieving a well-defined goal is the defining core of both constructs. Moreover, positive emotionality is a crucial element that generates enjoyment in flow and DMCs. Nevertheless, it has been also argued that flow and DMCs are different with respect to their scope (individual vs. group-based activities), the duration of tasks, the importance of goals within the two types of experiences, and factors related to individual differences (Ibrahim, 2016b). Additionally, DMCs share some aspects with goal setting theory, which aims to explain performance in relation to various goal attributes (Locke & Latham, 2013). Building on mainstream motivation theories in psychology, the theory of DMCs aims to take into account both the role of motivational dispositions, and temporal factors over time (Dörnyei et al., 2015). In this regard, the DMC construct has significant theoretical and practical potential that needs further research and investigation (Dörnyei, Muir, et al., 2014).

Although the empirical research on DMCs is still in its infancy (Muir & Gümüş, 2020), we have recently witnessed growing interest among second language learning motivation researchers to investigate various aspects of this motivational state at individual and group levels for language learning (García-Pinar, 2020; Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2017; Henry et al., 2015; Ibrahim, 2016b; Safdari & Maftoon, 2017; Zarrinabadi et al., 2019; Zarrinabadi & Khajeh, 2021; Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2021; Zarrinabadi & Tavakoli, 2017). The main focus of this growing body of knowledge has been testing the validity of the proposed framework for DMCs. In this regard, the majority of the studies conducted thus far have been confirmatory investigations that aimed to document and account for the participants' experiences in terms of the three components of the DMC framework. For example, in one of the early studies, Henry et al. (2015) investigated this phenomenon as experienced by three learners of Swedish as a second language, and their findings pointed to the validity of the proposed frameworks in terms of being goal/vision-oriented, a salient facilitative structure, and positive emotional loading. In another study, Safdari and Maftoon (2017) conducted a case study with a focus on the language learning experience of a 33-year-old Iranian woman. The findings from this study also provided empirical evidence for the three components of DMCs. Moreover, previous studies also indicated that the experience of DMCs are not unique to language learners, but such a phenomenon has been documented among language teachers (Zarrinabadi et al., 2019; Zarrinabadi & Tavakoli, 2017). Additionally, research has indicated that the core components of DMCs are manifested in the shared experiences of groups of students as well (García-Pinar, 2020; Zarrinabadi & Khajeh, 2021). Collectively, these studies have provided sound empirical evidence for the explanatory power of the original three-part framework proposed for DMCs.

In addition to the abovementioned validity studies, researchers have also focused on examining specific aspects of DMCs. For example, the triggering event of DMCs have been investigated and the findings revealed a number of factors such as "emergent opportunities, negative emotion, moments of realization/awakening, new information, and meeting others who shared the goal" (Ibrahim, 2017, p. 24) that have the potential to initiate intense motivational states among language learners. Zarrinabadi et al. (2019) also reported that teachers' comments, encouragement by close relatives, interacting with tourists, and failure to understand the target language use can give rise to DMCs. In a more recent study, Zarrinabadi and Khodarahmi (2021) explored the antecedents of DMCs among a group of language learners in Iran, and their findings indicated that "others-related factors (e.g. goal contagion and salient others) and social-situational factors (e.g. critical life incidents, ego threat, responsibility) triggered DMCs" (p.12). Moreover, Ibrahim (2016a) investigated the affective aspects of experiencing DMCs. The participants of the study were seven adult language learners and the finding revealed that all the participants felt strong positive emotions and regarded the DMCs as an enjoyable and happy experience. The study also indicated that the positive emotionality in the DMCs stemmed not only from the participants' language learning experiences, but also from the "judgements mainly through a constant feeling of acquiring new personal value and meaning in relation to discovering one's potential, developing important life skills, and becoming a different, unique and better person" (p. 278).

Moving along these lines, the current study aimed to shed more light on DMCs in terms of self-directed language learning experience. This study is significant as for a large number of language learners, self-directed learning through mobile applications and websites is the primary source of language development (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018). Nevertheless, these informal language learning environments have been less represented in existing research on second language acquisition in general (Arvanitis, 2019; Cole & Vanderplank, 2016; Godwin-Jones, 2011; Loewen et al., 2020; Richards, 2015; Xodabande, 2018; Xodabande & Atai, 2020), and the study of the motivational dimension in self-directed and technology-based language learning has remained largely limited (Chik, 2019; Gardner & Yung, 2017). In order to fill part of this gap, the current study set out to investigate the launch of DMCs and the extent to which the core characteristics, as outlined above in general and positive emotional loading in particular, can account for our understanding of intense motivational states in self-directed language learning. In doing so, the following research question was addressed:

> To what extent do the key components of the DMCs account for the experience of intense motivational states in self-directed language learning?

Methodology

Study Design

The current study used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Aagaard, 2017; Eatough & Smith, 2008, 2017; Smith et al., 2009), which is a qualitative research method concerned with the understanding of how individuals make sense of their major life experiences. The concept of 'experience' is of prime importance within the IPA method, as IPA is interested in what happens when the usual flow of daily experiences takes on a significance for individuals when something important happens to them (Eatough & Smith, 2017). IPA aims to engage with these significant experiences through the reflections individuals make about the experience. To this end, IPA research is informed by double hermeneutics in which the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their major life experiences (Smith et al., 2009). In this regard, the researcher uses the same mental capacities as the participants, and tries to make sense of what is happening to them using their own accounts. Nevertheless, she/he is more systematic and self-conscious in making sense of the events.

The choice of a phenomenological method for the current study was motivated by several considerations. First, unlike other research methodologies that aim to identify similarities and differences among the participants, IPA aims to study the phenomenon under investigation as experienced and lived by only small number of individuals (Eatough & Smith, 2008). In this regard, given that experiences with DMCs differ from one individual to the next (as they impact self-image, emotions, and identity, among others), IPA is best suited for investigating this intense motivational surge. Moreover, IPA allows the collection of rich data by giving the subject an opportunity to describe their lived experiences, subjective reflections, and judgements on those experiences in as much detail as needed (Smith et al., 2009). Hence, given the novelty of DMCs as a newly postulated motivational construct on the one hand, and limited empirical research investigating its various aspects on the other, IPA contributes to better understanding the phenomena, and helps explain the impacts it brings to the usual flow of life of individuals.

The Participant

The participant of this study was Ramin (pseudonym), a native speaker of Farsi, age 26. At the time of conducting this research, he was a student in civil engineering in a university in Tehran, Iran. Working a part-time job as an English language teacher in a private institute in Tehran, Ramin is a proficient speaker of English (based on his IELTS band score 7.5), and he is trying to become a capable and accomplished engineer in the future, with the hope of finding a job in a Western country. Ramin has been learning English for the past 10 years and, despite having no academic and educational background in English language teaching, he is regarded as a very successful language teacher. At the time of conducting this study, he was teaching students from different proficiency levels. The first author worked with Ramin as a colleague three years prior to June 2018, when we learned that he was going to start learning German by using the Busuu app installed on his Android smartphone. Because of our interest in researching motivational aspects of language learning beyond the classroom, we

asked Ramin to participate in a research study investigating his language learning experience and motivation over time. The researchers adhered to ethical considerations by assuring the participant regarding the confidentiality of obtained data and informing him on the nature of study.

Procedure and Interview Schedule

In order to understand Ramin's initial motivation for learning German, the first author conducted a short semi-structured interview during the first month of the study (i.e., June, 2018), and he was in prolonged contact with him through a social media network, obtaining his diary reports, and conducting interviews every two months, to track down various aspects of his language learning experience. In the last week of February 2019, after eight months of independent learning of German, Ramin reported an unusual surge in his motivation for learning German, and as some of the characteristics of DMCs were evident in his descriptions, we asked him to participate in an interview (semi-structured) that same week and encouraged him to write short daily reports about this phenomenon and the way it impacted his learning and daily life. We obtained these short descriptions via a social media network (i.e., Telegram), and used them to formulate follow-up interview questions. This enhanced motivational state lasted around five weeks and Ramin's motivation for learning German declined considerably afterward. At the end of this unusual and intense motivational period, we conducted another interview with him to gain a fuller understanding of the phenomenon and the way it influenced his language learning. The final interview lasted for two hours.

Data Analysis

Obtained data from diary reports and semi-structured interviews were analyzed using Nvivo software (version 10). In line with IPA traditions, a close reading of the transcriptions and a critical understanding based on interpretative activity (Eatough & Smith, 2008, 2017; Smith et al., 2009) was followed by a cyclical and evolving process of coding and recoding (Saldana, 2013). In first cycle analysis, in vivo and holistic coding methods were used to divide each interview or diary section into segments related to various aspects of the learner's motivation and learning experience. In second cycle analysis, evolved codes from the first cycle were used for recoding, categorizing, or discarding by cross-referencing within and across interview transcripts and diary reports. Finally, pattern coding was used to aggregate similar codes into categories to describe the learner's experience (for example positive emotionality). Moreover, to ensure credibility in the current study, our findings and interpretations were discussed with the participant during informal meetings and two colleagues who were familiar with qualitative methods were asked to review the transcriptions, coding processes, and findings.

Results

In the following subsections, we turn to describing the participant's experience in terms of the core characteristics of DMCs (i.e., a salient facilitative structure, goal/vision orientedness, and positive emotionality).

A Salient Facilitative Structure

Before experiencing a DMC, Ramin's motivation had gone through occasional fluctuations over time but he was still able to maintain his general interest and determination in his independent learning of German as a foreign language. After six months of learning German and experiencing many motivational ups and downs, Ramin experienced a state of declined motivation that lasted for two months. During this period, he stopped completing new lessons and only used the Busuu app for vocabulary practice and sometimes for reviewing previously learned lessons. The following are some short extracts from his diaries obtained in this period:

After completing some lessons [20 out of 27] in beginner level, I can't really keep on going at this time, and [I] need to go back and maybe redo some lessons again and study grammar. (Diary entry, 11/15/2018)

I'm still looking forward with hope and always think about my goal for learning German. However, I have lost some [of] my confidence and motivation because of difficulties I face in completing new lessons. The experience of learning is not that much fun anymore, and [it] is full of frustration, anger and sometimes confusion. (Diary entry, 11/23/2018)

Frankly speaking, I'm not that optimistic about my ability to learn German with Busuu anymore. This app is only useful in learning vocabulary. (Diary entry, 11/28/2018)

As it is evident from Ramin's diary entries, this period of declined motivation was associated with his experiencing many negative emotions such as frustration, anger, and confusion. However, he was able to continue toward his goal of learning German and, by regulating his emotions and learning goals, he was able to maintain his motivation and long-term commitment, which provided him with a context for experiencing a DMC. For the participant of this study, the triggering stimulus for launching a DMC was a German sentence, displayed on TV at the beginning of a movie.

Yesterday, I saw a German movie on TV which was dubbed in Persian, but I was able to understand some writings at the start of the film. One particular sentence which I understood was «Ein Film von» [a film by]. After seeing this sentence, I don't know what happened, but I became so excited. I realized that I have really learned German, and decided to continue my Busuu German course, and finish what I have started some months ago. (Diary entry, 2/23/2019)

When asked to elaborate on this particular incident in the first interview, Ramin recounted that experience as follows:

I don't know how to explain that, but by reading this sentence, I realized that all my hard work and persistence in learning is finally paying off and I am able to read something in German and understand it. In just a few minutes, I reached my smartphone, and decided to reset all lessons and go back to [the] first unit, and [to] finish reviewing the whole beginner level in one week or two to get my first certificate in German…I know it may sound a little weird or even stupid…but that's how it all started. (Interview data, 2/27/2019)

After the launch of the DMCs, Ramin developed some study routines associated with clearly set sub-goals in his learning of the German language. For example, he reported using every minute of his free time at work to learn German, and also talked about how he uninstalled all of the games from his smartphone to focus only on learning German.

On average, currently I am spending more than two hours every day on my learning, and I have stopped doing everything else except going to work and studying German. While I was at work today, I used every free time and moment I got to practice my German lessons. As I complete new lessons and learn more, I feel more excited about what I am doing. (Diary data)

I also uninstalled all the games and time-wasting applications from my smartphone to concentrate more on German learning with Busuu app. I remember one evening I was so busy learning German that my mom asked me several times to put it [i.e. the smartphone] aside, but I explained to her that I'm not playing games or surfing the net, but studying. I really needed to finish reviewing some lessons that day. (Interview data)

Ramin also mentioned that during this period, he had strong a commitment to achieving daily and weekly set sub-goals. In this regard, he reported changing his daily routines and actions, which was noticed by his family members.

During the past days, I did my best to use every possible chance to review and study my lessons. One day, I was unable to study as I was so busy, so I got up very early in the morning the next day to compensate for that. This was very interesting to my family especially to my mom who always complains about how I get up very late on days that I'm at home. (Interview data)

After five weeks, Ramin completed level one of the German course and took the final test. After getting his certificate, he lost a lot of his energy and enthusiasm for learning German and reverted back to old studying habits. This was clearly the end of his intense language learning activity.

After these five exciting and wonderful weeks, I don't really know how I am going to continue learning German. On the one hand, I want to go on and finish the next level in three weeks too. But I know that I can't do that anymore. I'm

pretty sure that I'm not going to stop working on my German learning, but maybe it is going to take me some time to finish level two. (Interview data)

Goal/Vision Orientedness

During a short period of five weeks, Ramin was deeply involved with his learning of German, and by reviewing all his previously studied lessons he invested a great deal of effort to complete the beginner level German course in the Busuu app. In this regard, he initially set a deadline of two weeks for finishing the first level of the German course, however, this period was extended to five weeks. Data obtained from his short diary reports clearly pointed to the goal/vision orientedness of most of his language learning activities over the five weeks. The superordinate goal for Ramin was finishing the first level of the course in order to get the first certificate in German.

I hope to revise and re-study all 30 lessons in two weeks and get my first certificate in German. I can't wait for that.

I am extremely committed to what I have promised myself, and I want to finish reviewing all lessons in two weeks, no matter what happens.

I think I have done great during the past days, and getting my first certificate is no longer a dream. I have completed half of the course in just one week, and [I am] going to finish it soon. I can already see my name on the certificate.

This self-in-future image is the power that keeps the current level of motivation going. According to Henry et al. (2015) the power of the DMC is determined by the extent to which a visionary dimension is superimposed onto the goal. Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) define a vision as a goal that is enriched by some sensory elements related to the actual experience of achieving it. In the case of Ramin, having this clear vision was expressed by seeing his name on the certificate before finishing the course. Moreover, according to Henry et al. (2015), for a language learner experiencing a DMC, the future-oriented image (or self) becomes part of his/her identity. This identity development was mentioned by Ramin as he started to express his new identity as a German language learner and user in his daily interactions.

I have also noticed that I am using every possible opportunity to tell people around me that I am learning German. It feels really great. I keep talking about how German is different from English and Persian. Sometimes I use German equivalents of some Persian and English words when talking to my friends, family and also my students. (Diary data)

I really want to learn it. I both like the idea of being able to speak German myself, and also the fact that other people consider me [as] someone who is able to speak two important languages. (Interview data)

This new identity development is also in line with the concept of 'transportable identity' proposed by Ushioda (2011) to capture the connection between language learners' target language speaking self and their personal characteristics and lived experiences.

I also installed an app on my Smartphone, German learning with Deutsche welle, but couldn't find time to use it and complete a lesson. However, when I started the app, I listened to [the] first conversation which was mainly about greetings among different people (formal and informal) and since I was able to understand most of them, I felt great and talked about this to a friend and explained how my learning of German was effective. (Interview data)

Positive Emotionality

The most important finding of the current study is related to positive emotionality associated with the experience of a DMC. As mentioned in the previous section, Ramin was learning German for eight months before being caught up in a DMC. In this regard, analyzing and comparing his accounts related to the emotional dimension of language learning before and during the experience of the DMC, shed some light on how some activities that were previously associated with negative emotions can be perceived with positive emotionality during the DMCs experience.

Analysis of the data before the DMC and during the eight months of self-study by Ramin revealed that German grammar, spelling, and pronunciation were the three major sources for negative emotions experienced in the learning process. There were many references in the diary reports to these aspects of language learning, mostly associated with a variety of negative emotions including fear, anxiety, anger, frustration, and disappointment. More specifically, Ramin mentioned that he needed a safe place to practice German pronunciation as he was afraid of practicing German words when other people were around him. Learning German grammar on the other hand was mostly linked to anger and frustration.

I feel really bad when I can't move forward. Today, I made several mistakes again and again in completing grammar exercises.All the way home (I think it took about 20 minutes to complete the last grammar review) I felt anger and frustration and disappointment. What I'm going to do with grammar? (Diary data)

Even after practicing by myself, I thought that my pronunciation is not good at all but annoying. I think I need a safe and quiet place to practice my German pronunciation. When there are other people around me, I skip pronunciation exercises. (Diary data)

… at both situations, I enjoyed the overall experience. However, when I was wrong in spelling words, I became angry and frustrated. You start a lesson with joy, and then suddenly spelling exercises take the fun out of learning! (Diary data)

However, during the DMC, the same aspects were perceived differently and positively by Ramin. For example, in his diary reports there was plenty of evidence of a significant change of his attitude toward German pronunciation and spelling, as he reported practicing German words out loud and in front of his family members and friends.

As I go further, the things are getting harder again with grammar, but that is nothing to be afraid of. I know that I can do it and beat the grammar. Unlike before, I felt more confident today to practice some German words out loud when others were around. I think I can pronounce them correctly enough, and this feeling is great. (Diary data)

When asked to talk about these aspects during the interview session, Ramin provided further examples from how positive emotional loading changed the way he perceived learning activities.

The funny thing was that even spelling was not that annoying as it was before. While reviewing a lesson, I was more careful, and paid extra attention to spelling of difficult words and partly based on what I was able to remember, and partly with the help of Google keyboard, I did very well in answering the questions. (Interview data)

Another aspect of Ramin's experience in relation to positive emotionality was his level of engagement with the task of language learning. In this regard, he reported being occupied with, and thinking about, his German learning in this period even when he was doing other activities. He also mentioned experiencing flow-like states during the five weeks.

I remember how it was when I was deeply involved with doing German lesson with Busuu. For example, when studying at home, I remember forgetting other things that I had to do and working with the app nonstop. When you start a lesson in a quiet place, you don't really want to stop it, because it's full of joy and excitement. (Interview data)

The accounts provided by the participant clearly point to the fact that the positive emotional loading in a DMC is not a result of doing the activities related to language learning; the enjoyment stems from perusing the vision one creates for the future.

Discussion

The current study investigated a short-term intense motivational period in self-directed and mobile-assisted language learning experienced by an Iranian person learning German as a foreign language. The study used the interpretative phenomenological analysis (Aagaard, 2017; Eatough & Smith, 2008, 2017; Smith et al., 2009) to capture the lived experience and the universal essence of being caught in a DMC. The findings in general

provided empirical evidence supporting the potential of DMCs as a novel motivational construct to account for intense motivational behavior in the pursuit of highly valued goals and visions (Dörnyei et al., 2015; Dörnyei, Ibrahim, et al., 2014; Dörnyei, Muir, et al., 2014; Henry, 2019; Muir & Dörnyei, 2013). In this regard, the current study provided additional support for the validity of the proposed framework for the DMCs in terms of its three core components including (1) being goal/vision-oriented, (2) having a salient facilitative structure, and (3) positive emotionality. The results are in line with previously conducted studies investigating the validity the DMC construct (García-Pinar, 2020; Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2017; Henry et al., 2015; Ibrahim, 2016b; Safdari & Maftoon, 2017; Zarrinabadi et al., 2019; Zarrinabadi & Khajeh, 2021; Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2021; Zarrinabadi & Tavakoli, 2017).

By using an IPA methodology, the current study also highlighted the importance of the third dimension of DMC construct, namely, positive emotional loading, in sustaining and energizing motivational effort for language learning. Given that the IPA has great potential for capturing lived experiences, the data obtained from the participant provided extensive accounts on the processes that comprised a multitude of feelings and emotions. The fact that some learning activities that were associated with negative emotions before the launch of the DMC and were then perceived with positive emotionality during this intense motivational experience deserves further attention. Based on the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2013), experiences of fleeting positive emotions have long lasting consequences on individuals' growth and social connections, and these positive emotions transform peoples' lives for the better. More specifically, "positive emotions broaden an individual's momentary mindset, and by doing so help to build enduring personal resources" (Fredrickson, 2003, p. 332). Additionally, a considerable number of empirical studies support the idea that experiencing and expressing positive emotions, has a direct influence on both quality and quantity of life (Fredrickson, 2004). From this perspective, in line with the recent interest in the affective side of language learning and teaching (Agudo, 2018; Dewaele & Li, 2018; Richards, 2020; Teimouri, 2017), the experience of DMCs can have a significant impact on the long-term motivation of language learners.

The current study also examined the start of DMCs. The findings indicated that a seemingly trivial encounter with the German language on TV was a triggering stimulus for the launch of a DMC for the participant of the study. The motivational surge was directed toward achieving a distant goal, which was earning the first certificate in German. In light of complexity theory (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008), and the current emphasis on dynamic systems theory as the epistemological foundation for conceptualizing language learning motivation (Schumann, 2014), it could be argued that this seemingly insignificant encounter with the German language on TV resulted in a so-called butterfly effect with some unpredictable consequences for language learning outcomes (Larsen-Freeman, 2014). In this regard, the current study identified a new triggering event in addition to those mentioned by earlier studies that might have potential for launching DMCs during language study (Ibrahim, 2017; Zarrinabadi et al., 2019; Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2021).

From a pedagogical perspective, the study demonstrated that new learning environments such as those using mobile devices and language learning applications designed for self-directed learning have great potential when learners are highly motivated. Moreover, previous studies have indicated that DMCs can have positive impacts on other learner-related factors such as willingness to communicate (WTC) and self-confidence (Zarrinabadi et al., 2019; Zarrinabadi & Khajeh, 2021). As highlighted by Henry et al. (2015), despite the unique nature of DMCs for every individual, providing the right facilitative conditions for their emergence might result in the successful launch of intense motivational efforts that eventually contribute to developments in second language learning. In this regard, language teachers might consider using the findings from the current study and from the previous research conducted in this area to provide the facilitative conditions for DMCs to be experienced. In such undertakings, it is possible to deliberately trigger the launch of DMCs through focused interventions or group project work that provide learners with a clear vision of their desired future (Dörnyei et al., 2015; García-Pinar, 2020).

Conclusion

Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs) provided us with a new perspective for understanding highly motivated language learning experiences among learners. Given the limited empirical literature investigating different aspects of DMCs, the current IPA study investigated the intense motivational experience of an Iranian learner

during self-directed language learning. The findings shed light on the core components of the DMC framework and the importance of the affective dimensions of DMCs. The current study had some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, given that finding individuals who are experiencing DMCs is somewhat difficult, we investigated the experience of one language learner only. Although we used various data collection methods and conducted the study longitudinally, the findings might not be generalizable to account for the experiences of other language learners. Second, studies on emotions have always been associated with methodological challenges. Despite using IPA to capture the essence of the lived experience for the participant, due to the sensitive nature of talking about emotions and feelings, this study only provides a partial picture of the emotions that might be leading to the DMCs. In this regard, further research is needed to understand the impacts of DMCs on language learning.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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Enforcing L2 Learner Autonomy in Higher Education: The Top 50 Cited Articles

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Learner autonomy as both a pre-condition of self-efficacy and higher achievements in learning and an essential learning outcome has been in the highlight in the higher education domain for many years. This review aims to single out the most influential publications (with 10 citations or more) on foreign language and L2 learner autonomy in tertiary education in the highly reputed journals indexed with the Scopus database, with the publication period limited to the last ten years (2011-2020). The key findings show that the top 50 cited articles on learner autonomy broadly cover conceptual development; self-efficacy and motivation within the learner autonomy concept; educational technologies and web-based activities in fostering learner autonomy; country-specific issues of learner autonomy as the prevailing directions of study in the field of learner autonomy.

Keywords: learner autonomy, higher education, L2, language learning, self-efficacy, motivation, self-regulated learning

Introduction

Learner Autonomy in Learning Languages

In the recent years, several concepts have become or developed into the backbone constructs in higher education. In the 1980s-1990s, learner autonomy came into the limelight. Then it led to greater focus on self-regulation, self-efficacy, learning strategies, learner-centered education, and self-regulated learning. Every five or ten years the mainstream research takes a bend or faces new challenges.

In modern higher education, knowledge building has shifted from "the ready-made knowledge" transferred by the teacher to the knowledge acquisition by the learner on their own. Learning follows the needs of the societies that are transforming (Reigeluth & Joseph, 2002). The superfluous information settings with shorter life cycles for the new knowledge demand that the learner manage to build it independently. "Education has laid great stress on individual acquiring knowledge" (Lin & Reigeluth, 2019). Thus, the learner autonomy concept has turned into the essential outcome of higher education. National curricula in many countries even identify learner autonomy as one of the key learning outcomes (Pu, 2020). Education at large aims to support students in thriving in the digital age and providing them with a more individualised and customised learning experience (Ozer & Yukselir, 2021).

When it comes to foreign language learning, learner autonomy is still among the top themes for researchers and academics. The concept of learner autonomy (LA) was first defined in 1981 by Henri Holec. Though he coined the name of the concept in his book "Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning" (Holec, 1981), its gist and importance were previously discussed by the EU institutions in their major projects in modern languages in the period between 1964 and 1974 as language learning was considered a crucial factor in the successful promotion of European integration.

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Table 1

Learner Autonomy and Autonomous Learner Definitions and Attributes

Year	*Researcher(s)*	*Definition or Attributes*
1981	Holec, H.	the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec, 1981)
1991	Candy, P.C.	knowledge is … built by the learner (Candy, 1991)
1997	Nunan, D.	fully autonomous learning exists only as an ideal concept; most beginner EFL learners are not autonomous (Nunan, 1997)
2007	Little, D.	LA involves critical reflection, decision-making and independent action (Little, 2007, p.30)
2010	Benson, P.	"a testable construct in foreign language education contexts" (Benson, 2010, p.95)
2021	Khaerudin, T. & Chik, A.	a "fully autonomous language learner can manage their learning in the absence of the classroom, teacher, or textbooks"; "LA is not synonymous with learning without teachers" (Khaerudin & Chik, 2021, p.39)

Self-Regulated Learning and Other Concepts

Self-regulation occupies an important niche in education. This construct, affecting academic achievements at all levels of education, was consequently translated into self-regulated learning. Boekaerts, Maes & Karoly (2005) describe self-regulation as multi-component, iterative, self-steering processes in the service of one's own goals. The salient trait of self-regulated learning is attributed to self-control. Adaptive strategies of learners who are engaged into this kind of learning are multiple and include cognitive, meta-cognitive, motivation and other strategies.

In their systematic review of self-regulated learning strategies, Broadbent & Poon's combined taxonomy encompasses metacognition, time management, effort regulation, peer learning, elaboration, rehearsal, organization, critical thinking (Broadbent & Poon, 2015).

Boekarts & Cascallar outline that the students involved in this learning should be "aware of the motivation, volition, and coping strategies" (Boekarts & Cascallar, 2006, p. 201). Zimmerman (1990) describes self-regulated learners as approaching "tasks with confidence, diligence, and resourcefulness" (Zimmerman, 1990, p. 4). They assume greater responsibility for their educational outcomes.

All learners are self-regulated to a degree. But to distinguish self-regulated learners, Zimmerman also features their awareness of relations between regulatory process and learning outcomes and their use of strategies in learning (Zimmerman, 1990).

Self-regulated learning and closely related concepts of self-directed learning and independent learning, all in all, do with fostering learner autonomy. The basic difference lies in the focus of the activities. With self-regulation as the psychological backbone of autonomy, self-directed learning and independent learning have become paths for learners to greater autonomy and educational achievements.

In considering the self-regulation structure, researchers map various subprocesses, including motivation and self-efficacy along with task analysis, self-control, self-observation, self-evaluation and others. In studying learner autonomy, those processes and features are also tackled. On its own, motivation forms an educational field of study, helping to facilitate self-acquisition of knowledge.

To map the most essential themes and directions of research on language learner autonomy, we are to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the trend-setters in the field of language learner autonomy?
2. How influential are the relevant concepts (motivation; self-efficacy; self-regulated learning) in the top-cited research on language learner autonomy?

Methodology

Search Strategy

As the Scopus database encompasses the most reputed peer-reviewed journals in the education domain, the search strategy was focussed primarily on the sources indexed there. The initial search was conducted for all the documents relating to "learner autonomy". Then, the search results were refined and limited to the criteria of years (2016-2021); subject area (Social Sciences): document type (article, review), and keywords (higher education; independent learning; teacher autonomy; self-efficacy; foreign language learning; self-regulated learning; autonomous learner).

The period covers ten years that is wide enough to detect the new directions and shifts in the learner autonomy research.

As educational research is part of Social Sciences, the latter were singled out as the primary inclusion criterion. Many peer-reviewed journals focus on several closely related areas. Thus, their publications may be considered as attributed to more than one subject area. Anyway, it presumably agrees with the chosen subject area criterion.

Then, all the results were listed based on their citation scores (from the highest to the lowest).

Based on our questionnaire conducted among 20 experts (educators; academics; researchers) from three Russian universities (MGIMO University; RUDN University; Moscow State University of Food Production), we singled out the following extra keywords relevant to the learner autonomy phenomenon: higher education; independent learning; teacher autonomy; self-efficacy; foreign language learning; self-regulated learning; autonomous learner.

Questionnaire on Learner Autonomy in Higher Education

To reach more objectivity in selecting the literature for our review on learner autonomy, we turned to twenty experts in the domain with a short questionnaire.

The participants included five university professors of linguistics, and education; five researchers; ten faculty members and lecturers of foreign languages.

The questionnaire encompassed the following questions:

Question 1. Enumerate up to five keywords relevant to learner autonomy in higher education.

Question 2. What are the most essential concepts closely connected with learner autonomy?

Based on Question 1, the prevailing answers formed the extra keyword pool that we used in limiting our search (See Table 2).

As for Question 2, the most popular answers included self-efficacy (11 participants); motivation (10 participants); self-regulated learning (8 participants); teacher autonomy (7 participants); web-based learning (4 participants); self-directed learning (4 participants); independent learning (4 participants); computer-assisted learning – CALL (3 participants); mobile learning (2 participants); computer-mediated learning (1 participant). These concepts were partially covered in the introduction to the review to show the interrelations within the field.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Table 2

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion Aspect	*Inclusion Criteria*	*Exclusion Criteria*
Period	2011 – 2021[1]	Before 2011; 2022 (in press publications 2022)
Subject Areas	Social Sciences	Other Areas if the publications are not simultaneously attributed to Social Sciences
Types of Publications	Article Review	All publications beyond the inclusion criterion
Keywords	Learner autonomy (the initial keyword for the search) Extra keywords: higher education; independent learning; teacher autonomy; self-efficacy; foreign language learning; self-regulated learning; autonomous learner	All publications beyond the inclusion criterion
Citations of the documents	10 and more citations	Fewer than 10 citations
Level of education	Higher (tertiary) education	Elementary education; secondary education; corporate and business education; further education; additional education
Disciplines	Foreign language/ L2	All other disciplines

Scope of the Review

The review was limited to 50 publications, with the citation scores starting with 10. When we got down to our review, we agreed that we would include only the publications with citations of 10 and higher. Influential publications in different subject areas may score various numbers of citations. For Social Sciences (Education) as well as Arts & Humanities (Language and Linguistics) reviews tend to single out documents starting approximately with 10 citations.

Supporting Publications

To support the understanding and give a broader conceptual view of the topical clusters based on the autonomy-related concepts, we selected the documents, relevant to LA and the concepts outlined in the questionnaire from the top journals (mainly highly cited Scopus-indexed articles and reviews). The time span for the extra sources was not limited as some of them were published when the concept of learner autonomy was worded (1981) or a little later.

Though having served as a theoretical basis for the review, the associated extra sources did not enter the Top 50 Most Cited Publications.

Procedure

The initial search with “learner autonomy” in the category covering document titles, abstracts, and keywords brought 1,131 results, including 869 documents indexed between 2016 and 2021. Out of 869 results, 589 publications were attributed to Social Sciences. Limitation to the extra keywords boiled down the results to 335.

[1] The 2021 data are incomplete. But the review does not include any publications for 2021, as so far they have been cited fewer than 10 times.

The results were sorted on the citation (from the highest to the lowest). The highest citation score hit 345. Then, each author was to select the 50 top cited results in compliance with the inclusion criteria. There were only a few (three) documents which caused doubt. General nature of research was combined with some miscompliance with the inclusion criteria (e.g. McMillan, & Rivers, 2011). Having discussed the final list, we singled out 50 articles and reviews (See Appendix 1) out of the first 65 selected documents.

While filtering the search results through the inclusion criteria, upon mutual agreement, we excluded 15 documents being beyond compliance. The excluded publications are given in Table 3 below with our reasoning for their elimination explained.

Table 3

The Excluded Documents: Rationales

Nos	*Document*	*Rationale*
1	Al Nashash, H., & Gunn, C. (2013). Lecture capture in engineering classes: Bridging gaps and enhancing learning.	The article does not relate to foreign language learning. Learner autonomy is considered in capturing lectures in engineering.
2	Burner, T. (2014). The potential formative benefits of portfolio assessment in second and foreign language writing contexts: A review of the literature.	Portfolio assessment in secondary education.
3	Chik, A., & Ho, J. (2017). Learn a language for free: Recreational learning among adults.	Recreational learning among adults. Informal education.
4	Hornstra, L., Mansfield, C., van der Veen, I., Peetsma, T., & Volman, M. (2015). Motivational teacher strategies: The role of beliefs and contextual factors.	Motivation in language learning in secondary school.
5	Kuchah, K., & Smith, R. (2011). Pedagogy of autonomy for difficult circumstances: From practice to principles. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 5*(2), 119-140. doi:10.1080/17501229.2011.577529	Learner autonomy in secondary school setting.
6	Lengkanawati, N. S. (2017). Learner autonomy in the Indonesian EFL settings.	Learner autonomy in secondary school setting.
7	Liakin, D., Cardoso, W., & Liakina, N. (2015). Learning L2 pronunciation with a mobile speech recognizer: French/y/. *CALICO Journal, 32*(1), 1-25. doi:10.1558/cj.v32i1.25962	Mobile-assisted foreign language learning in elementary school.
8	Nielsen, P. L., Bean, N. W., & Larsen, R. A. A. (2018). The impact of a flipped classroom model of learning on a large undergraduate statistics class.	Flipped classroom in statistics class at university.
9	Rose, H., & Harbon, L. (2013). Self-regulation in second language learning: An investigation of the kanji-learning task.	Language learner autonomy in secondary school (kanji-learning task; kanji, the name for Japanese written characters).
10	Scott, G. W., Furnell, J., Murphy, C. M., & Goulder, R. (2015). Teacher and student perceptions of the development of learner autonomy; a case study in the biological sciences.	Learner autonomy in the biological sciences.
11	Sockett, G., & Toffoli, D. (2012). Beyond learner autonomy: A dynamic systems view of the informal learning of English in virtual online communities.	Web-based informal foreign language learning of adults in their spare time.
12	Ting, Y. (2015). Tapping into students' digital literacy and designing negotiated learning to promote learner autonomy.	Web-based activities in secondary school.
13	Tsuda, A., & Nakata, Y. (2013). Exploring self-regulation in language learning: A study of Japanese high school EFL students.	Self-regulation in language learning in secondary school.
14	Yasmin, M., Sarkar, M., & Sohail, A. (2016). Exploring English language needs in the hotel industry in Pakistan: An evaluation of existing teaching material.	Language learning in the workplace.
15	Yeh, Y., & Lan, Y. (2018). Fostering student autonomy in English learning through creations in a 3D virtual world.	Self-assessment of learner autonomy in English language learning in secondary school.

The top 50 most cited documents were broken down into thematic clusters. Each author labelled the documents, then, the breakdowns were checked for consistency. On the whole, no contradictions in the rationales were found.

Before the content analysis, the following six clusters were hypothesized: learner autonomy: theory and conceptualization; self-efficacy and motivation in the LA concept; self-regulated learning; educational technologies and LA; web-based activities in fostering LA; country-specific issues of LA development.

Results and Discussion

The top 50 publications range from the highest 345 citations (Kop, 2011) to the lowest of 12 citations (Gardner & Miller, 2011; Lenkaitis, 2020; Phan & Hamid, 2017).

The analysis of the review results showed that there is a slight trend toward fewer highly cited publications on LA, with 14 publications in 2011; 6 in 2012; 9 in 2013; 3 in 2014 and 2015 each; 5 in 2016; 3 in 2017; 4 in 2018;2 in 2019; 1 in 2020. If the lower numbers for the recent 3-5 years can be caused by the insufficient time for citation, the previous years might have other reasoning.

The review publications were distributed among 27 journals, with the leading position and 11 publications in the *Language Learning and Technology*; 6 publications in the *Computer Assisted Language Learning*; 3 publications in the *System*. Another six journals published by two articles; 18 journals had one publication each.

Geographically, the leading affiliations belonged to the USA (10 publications); Australia (6 publications); Japan (6 publications); Hong Kong (5 publications); the UK (5 publications). The top affiliations included the University of Hong Kong (3); City University of Hong Kong (3); National Research Council Canada (2); University System of New Hampshire (2); and the University of Queensland (2).

By the type of publication (the review was limited to articles and reviews), there were 47 articles, and 3 reviews.

All the documents on the top 50 list belonged to the Social Sciences Domain. But at the same time, some of them were also marked as Arts & Humanities (37 documents); Computer Science (23 documents); and Business, Management and Accounting (1 document).

Four researchers (Kop, R.; Lee, L.; Miller, L.; Rivers, D.J.) authored two publications each. The remaining 73 authors participated in one publication. On average, each publication had 1.54 authors.

Thematic Clusters

The thematic clusters essentially proved the above hypothesis and totalled five. We failed to find stand-alone publications on self-regulated learning in the search for "LA". The ultimate clusters were as follows: learner autonomy: theory and conceptualization; self-efficacy and motivation within the LA concept; educational technologies and LA; web-based activities in fostering LA; country-specific issues of LA development (See Table 4).

The top 50 cited publications were distributed among the clusters with some overlappings. Essential part of publications entered two or more clusters due to the complex nature of the research.

Table 4

Thematic Clusters on Foreign Language Learner Autonomy

Thematic Clusters	*Number of Publications out of Top 50*	*Brief Cluster Description*
Language Learner Autonomy: Theory and Conceptualization	12	The cluster focuses on the learner autonomy theory development. There are articles on perception of the phenomenon and some insights into the general understanding of the field.
Self-Efficacy and Motivation within the LA Concept	9	The theoretical and empirical publications relating to the concepts of self-efficacy and motivation.
Educational Technologies and LA	16	Educational technologies cover publications on MOOC; online learning; task-based instruction; strategy-based instruction; CALL; flipped classroom; blended learning.
Web-Based Activities in Fostering LA	12	The activities embrace collaborative writing; wikis; blogging; gaming; storytelling; virtual communities; videoconferencing; Web 2.0. tools, etc.
Country-Specific Issues of LA Development	18	The publications in this cluster give a glimpse of country-related experiences in learner autonomy practice in the tertiary education.

Language Learner Autonomy: Theory and Conceptualization

This cluster ranges from theoretical aspects of LA to the LA perceptions of the educational process participants (teachers and students). Fuchs, Hauck, & Müller-Hartmann (2012) found that learner autonomy was promoted through awareness as a result of implemented models as well as multiliteracy skills development based on social networking tools. Awareness was also found the key factor in fostering teachers' autonomy. Gao, 2013 analyzed and proved a crucial link between reflexive and reflective thinking and autonomy (Gao, 2013).

LA is thoroughly analyzed in various contexts, including the technologies in current use by L2 learners (Steel & Levy, 2013) and the technologies outside the classroom (Lai, Yeung & Hu, 2016); the self-directed learning (Navarro & Thornton, 2011);

Reinders & White (2016) outlined LA as "an assumed goal of language education" throughout the world. The focused on the close relationship between Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and LA, informing each other.

We found that there were some theoretical research that gave insights into the role constructivism played in L2 learner autonomy (Wang, 2011) and self-determination theory as a theoretical rationale for learner autonomy (Hu & Zhang, 2017).

Self-Efficacy and Motivation

Self-efficacy as an integral part of LA has taken its stake in the research on LA for years. In the review, a few highly cited articles dealt with various aspects of self-efficacy. Tilfarlioglu & Ciftci (2011) conducted their case-study research to determine the links between self-efficacy andLA, and find the relationship between self-efficacy and academic success.

The articles on motivation in language learning gives a glimpse of its relationships with LA (Ueki & Takeuchi, 2013; Chartrand, 2012; Terhune, 2016).

Educational Technologies

Interrelations between autonomy and technology have been studied since the term "learner autonomy" became an integral part of the educational discourse. Reinders & White (2016) gave an overview of 20 years of the field development. Though five years have passed ever since, many issues they outlined are still high on the agenda,

with some new swathes of topics coming into the highlight. More to this end, Steel & Levy (2013) charted the evolution of technologies prevailing in language learning.

One of the most highly cited sub-topics in the cluster (the first three publications on the list) deals with MOOCs, including learning experiences and challenges (Kop, 2011); issues of participant support (Kop, Fournier & Mak, 2011); massiveness, openness, and design of MOOCs (Baggaley, 2013).

Other themes cover autonomous learning through task-based instruction (Lee, 2016); multiliteracy skills development. There were publications on LA in L2 university students' writing and automated evaluation technologies (Wang, Shang & Briody, 2013); LA in blended learning; computer-assisted language learning (CALL); collaborative learning; Skype-based computer mediated communication; interaction in distance education; mobile assisted language learning; flipped classroom; and videoconferencing.

Web-Based Activities

Web-based activities developing LA included in this cluster feature web-based projects (Kessler, Bikowski & Boggs, 2012); blogging (Lee, 2011); digital gaming (Chik, 2014); corpus-building and concordancing; digital storytelling (Kim, 2014); Web 2.0 tools, including social networking (Chartrand, 2012); wikis (Pellet, 2012), and some others.

Country-Specific Issues

The cluster encompasses research conducted in Hong Kong – a digital video project in English for science (Hafner & Miller, 2011); technologies in autonomous language learning outside the classroom (Lai, Yeung, & Hu, 2016); managing self-access language learning; in Vietnam – strategy-based instruction on the promotion of LA (Nguyen & Gu, 2013); LA in foreign language policies; in Australia – the technologies in use by L2 learners (Steel & Levy, 2013); learning support in flipped classroom (Wang & Qi, 2018); in Thailand; in Turkey; in Japan – motivational self-system; blended learning in a CALL environment, etc.; in Saudi Arabia – perceptions of LA; the impact of mobile assisted language learning on LA; in Pakistan – socio-cultural barriers in LA (Yasmin & Sohail, 2018); and in China.

The research in international settings (Germany, Poland, the UK, and the USA) helped to receive empirical findings relating to LA in a task-based telecollaborative learning format (Fuchs, Hauck & Müller-Hartmann, 2012).

Conclusion

Research Question One

The review did not find any strikingly new and unexpected directions of study. The trend-setters met the hypothesis and included country-specific issues of LA development (18 publications); educational technologies and LA (16 publications); theory and conceptualization of learner autonomy (12 publications); web-based activities in fostering LA (12 publications); self-efficacy and motivation within the LA concept (9 publications).

Research Question Two

The relevant concepts of motivation; self-efficacy; and self-regulated learning are influential, but to a degree. The relationships between LA and motivation; LA and self-efficacy were studied in nine publications out of 50. Self-regulated and self-directed learning as a stand-alone direction was not the case with only one publication in the review.

The limitations of the review are connected with the search strategy applied. Other databases might be sought to double-check the findings of the present study. More sources and publications are certain to refine or adjust the results.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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Appendix 1

The Top 50 Cited Articles on Learner Autonomy (2011-2020)

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