Theory and Practice of Second Language Acquisition
vol. 11 (1), 2025, pp. 1/24
https://doi.org/10.31261/TAPSLA.16026

Bruno Costa https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3168-5108
School of Arts and Humanities, Centre of Linguistics
University of Lisbon, Portugal

Jorge Pinto https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5583-880X
School of Arts and Humanities, Centre of Linguistics
University of Lisbon, Portugal

Who Cares If the Teacher Has a Cat? The Impact of Affect and Interaction upon Motivation in Online Portuguese L2 Classes during the COVID-19 Pandemic[1]

Abstract

This study examined the motivational impact of affect/interaction in emergency remote teaching (ERT) Portuguese L2 classes. Participants were two groups of students from 13 countries living in Portugal (N = 16). A mixed-method paradigm was adopted, consisting of a closed questionnaire, class observations, and semi-structured interviews. Results showed a generally positive impact of the practices adopted by both teachers. Comparatively, the group whose teacher evidenced a stronger affect-based strategy presented better results in measures related to motivation to learn Portuguese (MLP), perception of the teacher/classes (PTC), perception of individual capacities (PIC) and test anxiety, regardless of learners being more critical of the lack of socialization and reticent about sharing personal information. However, the group whose teacher favored interactive tasks showed greater engagement and enjoyment/flow. Statistical tests revealed a significant positive correlation between PTC and MLP, and a negative correlation between these two and test anxiety. It is proposed that the combination of affect and interaction can compensate for the demotivating effect of lack of face-to-face contact in ERT L2 classes.

Keywords: emotions, motivation, interactions, engagement, ERT L2 teaching, COVID-19

[1] The authors acknowledge the financial support provided by the Portuguese National Science Foundation (FCT) to the Centre of Linguistics of the University of Lisbon (reference UIDB/00214/2020).

The unruly spread of the SARS-COVID-19 virus had an overwhelming impact on people's routines in every corner of the world. The short-notice closure of school buildings severely constrained education in most countries, forcing teachers to adapt their course plans, materials, and teaching strategies to a digital format with which many had been unfamiliar until then. Students were also challenged by a new virtual reality for which many were physically and emotionally unprepared. This new educational model has been referred to as emergency remote teaching (ERT), owing to the particularities that distinguish it from other online formats (Hodges et al., 2020). In such a context, L2 classes were no exception to the toll that this shift has taken on both teachers and students.

Lately, the role played by emotion/affect in learning has been brought to the foreground of educational research (Pekrun, 2006; Rodrigo-Ruiz, 2016) and studies on the acquisition of an L2 (Altarriba & Canary, 2004; Dewaele, 2011; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, 2016; Fraschini & Tao, 2021). Research in this area has recently started to look into achievement emotions experienced by L2 learners in the classroom, such as foreign language enjoyment (FLE), foreign language anxiety (FLA), classroom test anxiety (CTA), foreign language boredom (FLB), and, more recently, flow.

FLE has been defined as a "complex emotion, capturing interacting dimensions of challenge and perceived ability that can reflect the human drive for success in the face of difficult tasks" (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016, p. 216). Horwitz and colleagues (1986, p. 128) defined FLA 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." CTA has been defined as "a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure in a test situation" (Zheng, 2010, p. 38). FLB refers to a state of low physical and cognitive arousal experienced in L2 classes, associated with some negative perceptions of the time not flowing, dragging on, and disengaging behaviors, like withdrawal and distraction (Li et al., 2021). Finally, flow is closely linked to the intensity and duration of FLE in an L2 classroom (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2022), but excels it in the sense that it creates a distinguished state in which "a learner's thoughts, feelings, and behavior reflect effortless and harmonious coordination in challenging situations that offer both risk and reward" (Dewaele & MacIntyre, p. 20).

Teachers' emotions, attitudes, and classroom practices strongly impact the way learners participate in the educational process (Dörnyei, 2001; Arnold-Morgan & Fonseca-Mora, 2007; Dewaele, 2011). How they approach learners and class activities influences students' emotions, engagement, self-confidence, and motivation (Arnold-Morgan & Fonseca-Mora, 2007; Garret & Young, 2009; Dörnyei, 2009; Dewaele, 2011). The goal of this study is to examine the impact of two different strategies used by teachers in ERT classes conducted

with Portuguese L2 multicultural groups—one emphasizing learners' interactions and another underpinned by the sharing of affect/emotion—upon a cohort of achievement emotions (i.e., FLA, CTA, FLE, flow, FLB), as well as on other learner-centered factors (i.e., self-esteem, motivation, perception of the teachers and the classroom and engagement).

Teachers' Impact of Different Variables in the Classroom

Several studies have analysed how teachers' emotions, attitudes, and strategies influence different variables in L2 classes. Teacher friendliness has been found to predict FLE (Dewaele, Magdalena, & Saito, 2019). While FLA is more linked to learners' internal variables, FLE is more predicted by teachers' characteristics. Thus, more positive attitudes towards the teacher are a strong predictor of FLE (Dewaele, 2023). Dewaele and MacIntyre (2022) also suggest that flow is more closely related to FLE than to FLA and that teachers' feedback can bring about flow, which can also be induced when they boost L2 enjoyment in class. Finally, Li and Dewaele (2020) highlight that learners' attitudes towards the teachers and the activities performed in class are two important predictors of FLB.

Recognizing that the teacher-learner relationship remains an under-examined factor in motivation, Moskowitz et al. (2022) investigated this variable more closely. The findings confirmed the impact of both the interpersonal teacher-learner relationships and teachers' behaviors and attitudes upon learners' motivation towards the L2. Particularly, participants revealed an appreciation for their teachers' taking interest in their personal lives and bonding with them, paralleled with criticism of teachers' distant and intimidating behavior, which has been reported as anxiety-provoking, underscoring the complex nature of emotions in L2 learning.

With the outbreak of COVID-19, a new context for the investigation of these variables has emerged. In the context of L2 studies, the emotional impact of ERT has been investigated by scholars like Resnik and Dewaele (2021), Dewaele, Albakistani, and Ahmed (2022a, 2022b), and Wang and Jiang (2022), to mention just a few. Two variables that appear to be central in most studies are the role played by teachers' and learners' emotions and by social interactions in this "disembodied" (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021, p. 21) context of learning. Findings have been somewhat inconclusive so far.

Achievement Emotions in the Context of L2 ERT Classes during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Resnik and Dewaele (2021) studied tertiary-level EFL learners in ERT classes in Europe and reported a general decrease in both positive and negative emotions, proposing that ERT classes dull learners' emotions. Regarding FLE, a decline in the personal and social subscales was highlighted, whereas teacher appreciation remained more stable. The authors found a significant variation in the sources of FLE when comparing ERT to face-to-face classes. Participants referred to their teachers as being supportive, but increased boredom was reported owing to learners' social detachment and lower engagement, curbing the development of a sense of collectivity. The lower levels of anxiety were assumed to be a consequence of students interacting less and using the language less often. In general, levels of FLE outweighed those of FLA, and the moderate link between these two measures found in regular classes disappeared in ERT.

Dewaele, Albakistani, and Ahmed (2022a) carried out a mixed-method study with EFL Arab learners, investigating positive and negative views concerning both in-person and online classes. Positive views regarding in-person classes included the feeling of being more socially satisfying and more likely to generate positive emotions, while in ERT the flexibility and the feeling of confidence awarded by this format were underscored. The negative aspects of ERT classes consisted of technical issues in the use of the internet, lack of social interaction !and immediate feedback from teachers, absence of the pleasant atmosphere of in-person classes, and negative emotions related to physical separation. In face-to-face classes, the only negative aspect informed was that classes were more time-consuming. The authors concluded that both positive and negative emotions can co-occur in online classes, as is true of in-person sessions, and that the lower levels of FLA found in ERT could be a consequence of FLE neutralizing the deleterious effects of anxiety. In a different study, the authors found that learners in ERT classes experienced less flow than in regular classes and that the sources of flow differed considerably, being reduced to attitude towards teachers in ERT (Dewaele, Albakistani, & Ahmed, 2022b).

Resnik, Knechtelsdorfer, and Dewaele (2022) conducted a more granulated study on the measures of FLA in ERT classes with tertiary-level EFL students. Statistical analysis of the quantitative data revealed a considerable drop in levels of FLA. However, the qualitative data gathered from interviews showed that FLA is a complex phenomenon and that some aspects of online classes can be more anxiety-provoking than others. Not only did anxiety-provoking aspects of FLA in ERT outnumber those indicated in in-person classes, but also the

sources of anxiety varied significantly in the two contexts. In ERT classes, the use of technology, online exams, uncertainty about class/task requirements, turn-taking difficulties, shortage of feedback, and increased workload were among the main anxiety factors reported. The authors concluded that teachers need to ensure that learners are provided with plenty of interaction with teachers and peers, which is crucial for learners to get to know one another, build connections, and form social bonds, as well as for diminishing class embarrassment. FLB also increased in ERT classes, as participants reported experiencing distraction, disengagement, frustration, and social disconnection. Similarly, Li and Dewaele (2020) found that participants learning EFL in a university course in China in ERT mode experienced considerably more FLB than in face-to-face classes.

Looking more closely into FLE in ERT classes, Wang and Jiang's (2022) study with Chinese L2 learners revealed that participants experienced high levels of FLE in their classes. It was found that FLE private and FLE teachers presented higher measures than FLE atmosphere. FLE private was associated with students perceiving their progress in the L2, learning new things in class, as well as using Chinese in their classroom interactions. FLE teacher was linked to teachers' supportive behavior, as well as their diversified instructional approaches. Group activities engaging teachers, peers and learners positively predicted FLE, as participants referred to getting a feeling of belonging from such tasks. Teacher-related variables were found to contribute significantly to FLE.

Two studies took a qualitative-only approach to L2 learning in ERT. Elmas and Öztüfekçi (2021) examined L2 learning demotivation from the prism of Engeström's (1999, 2009) activity theory (AT) in a case study. The findings confirmed that demotivation was strongly linked to negative aspects of the institutionalized teaching/learning context, such as the methods used and the tasks assigned to participants. Wilson and Lengeling (2021) studied university students' reflective journal entries during the shift to virtual language classes. The challenges mentioned by learners related to technological obstacles, but also the lack of interaction. Emotions were described as a "rollercoaster," with highs and lows. Overall, learners' anxiety was surmounted by their motivation to learn the L2, and participants' reflections unveiled their resilience along the process.

The relationship between learners' perceived social support and their engagement in ERT L2 classes was tested by Luan et al. (2020). Learners' perceived social support predicted behavioral engagement, which, in turn, predicted cognitive, emotional, and social engagement. The findings confirmed that peer support plays a significant role in behavioral engagement. Likewise, Mihai et al. (2022) sought to investigate factors that determine learners' engagement in ERT L2 classes, targeting moderately engaged vs. highly engaged learners.

The study confirms that highly motivated students are less anxious and more engaged and that teaching methods play an important role, especially by promoting interaction, which, in turn, leads to a sense of community, belonging, friendliness, and safety.

The Study

Methodology

Objectives and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to check which of the two strategies used by two different teachers in their respective Portuguese L2 groups in ERT mode was more effective in terms of motivating their learners: one that is strongly based on affect or one that is mostly underpinned by tasks that explore classroom interaction. The following research questions have been formulated:

RQ1: How does an affect-based teaching strategy impact learners' motivation in ERT Portuguese L2 classes?

RQ2: How does an interaction-intensive teaching strategy impact learners' motivation in ERT Portuguese L2 classes?

RQ3: Which variables are impacted by each of these strategies?

Participants

Participants were two groups of adult learners (eight per group) of Portuguese L2 (level B1.2) classes in the University of Lisbon, from 13 different countries. The teachers were two female, European Portuguese L1 speakers. Classes were held on Zoom, twice a week, during the whole semester.

Study Design and Instruments

To answer our research questions, a mixed-method approach was adopted, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The data analyzed herein were collected through the following instruments: (a) a closed questionnaire consisting of a small version of the AMTB (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993), to measure participants' attitudes and motivation to learn Portuguese at the beginning and at the end of the course; (b) a class observation grid (Appendix A) adapted from Guilloteaux and Dörnyei's (2008) scheme to measure participants' behavioral engagement in online classes (attention, participation, and volunteering for

teacher-fronted activity); (c) a class observation journal where relevant information about the class dynamics, especially learners' behaviors, attitudes, interactions, teachers' attitudes, emotions and strategies and the reactions they elicited from the students, and the general classroom atmosphere, was registered; and (c) interviews with students, focusing on affective and motivational aspects of the classes. A thorough content analysis was then carried out on these data, and themes were identified both inductively and deductively. A final triangulation of all data was conducted.

For the purposes of the present study, four main variables in the questionnaire were emphasized, namely: (i) learners' perceptions of individual capacities (PIC), which is a measure combining self-esteem and language anxiety; (ii) test anxiety (CTA); (iii) attitude and intensity of motivation to learn Portuguese (MLP); and (iv) perceptions of the teacher and the classes (PTC). The items developed to measure PIC, which was not originally included in the AMTB, have been formulated based on Zheng (2010) and Deci and Ryan (1995). Statistical tests were run on the quantitative data, using the software SPSS. As the samples were rather small for parametric tests, we first decided to run a paired samples Wilcoxon test on each category, comparing the results from the first and the second questionnaire. Spearman's rank coefficient was calculated to verify the statistical dependence between the ranking of these four variables.

Findings

The AMTB Questionnaire

To analyze the results of the questionnaire, the 32 items were rearranged according to the eight categories they belong to and, following Zheng (2010), a numeric scale was designed for the answers, so that "I totally disagree" = 1, "I partly disagree" = 2, "I partly agree" = 3, and "I totally agree" = 4. The items that correspond to the categories PIC and CTA (self-esteem, language anxiety, and test anxiety) received inverted values, as the statements were written positively (e.g., "Before I take a Portuguese test, I feel confident and at ease").

First and foremost, it must be said that both Group 1 and Group 2 revealed highly motivated and rather similar profiles at the end of the course, displaying the same order in the ranking of all four variables (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1

Ranking of Means at the End of the Course in Group 1 (N = 8)

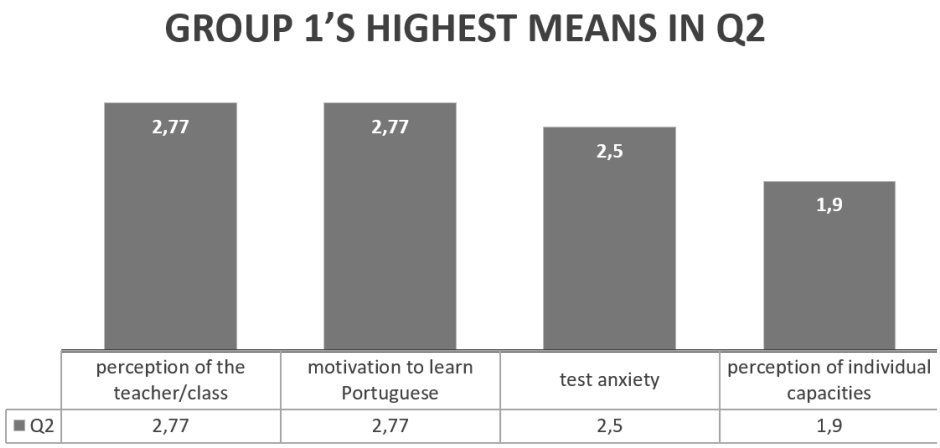
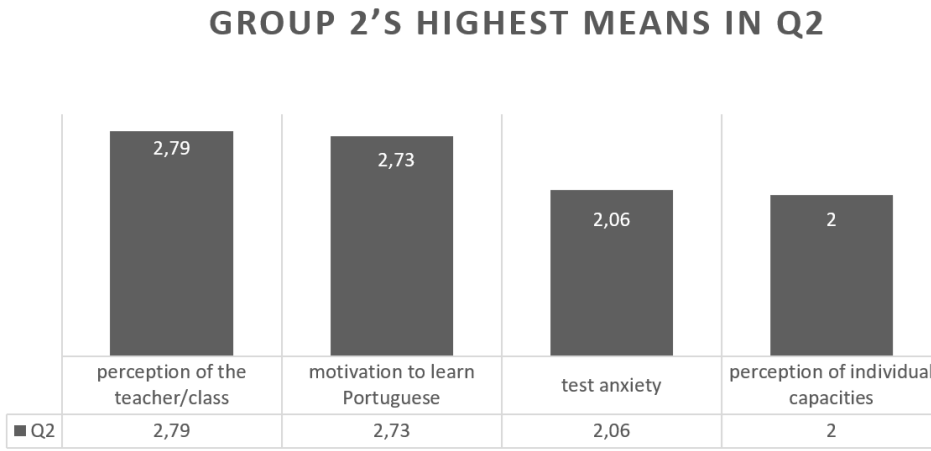


Figure 2

Ranking of Means at the End of the Course in Group 2 (N = 8)



The comparison of the mean in Questionnaire 1 (Q1) and in Questionnaire 2 (Q2) revealed that some variables behaved differently in Group 1 and in Group 2: in the former, there was a decrease in MLP (–0.22) and PTC (–0.3), and an increase in CTA (+0.21) and PIC (+0.21), denoting a drop in participants' self-esteem and a surge in their language/test anxiety. In the latter, there was a decrease in PTC (–0.37) and MLP (–0.16), as well as in PIC (–0.16) and CTA (–0.13), revealing, conversely, an increase in learners' self-esteem and less FL anxiety (see Table 1 and Figure 3).

Table 1

Group 1's and Group 2's Variation of Means from the Beginning to the End of the Course

	GROUP 1		GROUP 2	
Variable	Increase	Decrease	Increase	Decrease
PERCEPTION OF INDIVIDUAL CAPACITIES (PIC)*	+0.16			–0.09
COGNITIVE TEST ANXIETY (CTA)*	+0.21			–0.13
MOTIVATION TO LEARN PORTUGUESE (MLP)		–0.22		–0.16
PERCEPTION OF THE TEACHER AND THE CLASSES (PTC)		–0.3		–0.37

Note. *These measures are reversed, so an increase represents a negative result in learners' self-esteem, FL classroom anxiety and test anxiety, whereas a decrease represents a positive result in these variables.

Spearman's rank coefficient results showed both in Group 1 and in Group 2 a significant positive correlation between PIC and CTA (Corr = 0.554, $\alpha < 0.05$) and a non-significant negative correlation between PIC and PTC (Corr = 0.489, $\alpha > 0.05$) and MLP (Corr = –0.505, $\alpha > 0.05$). A significant negative correlation was found between CTA and PTC (Corr = –0.635, $\alpha < 0.05$) and MLP (Corr = –0.571, $\alpha < 0.05$). Finally, a significant positive correlation between PTC and MLP was found (corr = 0.591, $\alpha < 0.05$).

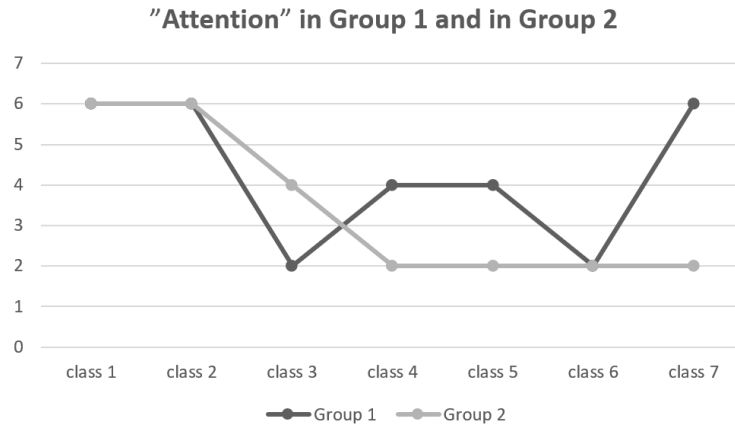
The Class Observation Grid

The analysis of the learners' attention, participation, and volunteering shows the ebb and flow of behavioral engagement in both groups along the classes observed throughout the school term. Figures 4, 5, and 6 reveal that, as a general pattern, learners in Group 1 demonstrated greater behavioral engagement than those in Group 2. Each variable, however, presented a specific behavior that deserves an analysis of its own, as follows.

Starting with the learners' attention (Figure 3), it was observed that both groups start the course at a significantly high level (6), which, from class 2 onwards, drops brusquely, reaching its lowest value (2) in class 3 (Group 1) and class 4 (Group 2). From this point on, it stabilizes at this level in Group 2 and, in Group 1, increases again, to stabilize at 4 from class 5 to class 6. After a drop to level 2 in class 5, there is a peak to level 6 in class 7, where it remains. Hence, in terms of attention, Group 1 displays a more dynamic pattern, whereas Group 2 seems to have a constant downward tendency.

Figure 3

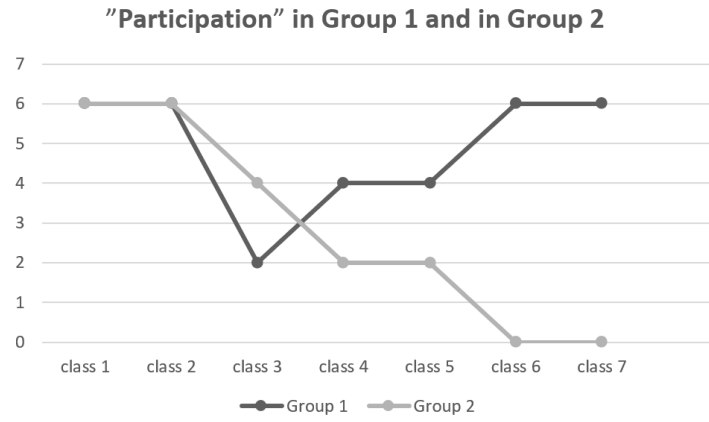
Variation of "Attention" in Group 1 and in Group 2 along Class Observations



Concerning the learners' participation in class (Figure 4), once again a more dynamic pattern in Group 1 combined with an uncurbed downward tendency in Group 2 is observed. Both groups start at a high level of participation at 6, then experience a fall from the second class onwards, landing at 2 in Group 1 in Class 3 and Group 2 in Class 4. Then, it goes back up in Group 1, stabilizing at 4 in classes 4 and 5, and reaching a new peak at 6, where it remains from class 6 onwards. In Group 2, however, after stabilizing at 2 in classes 4 and 5, it drops brusquely to 0, where it remains.

Figure 4

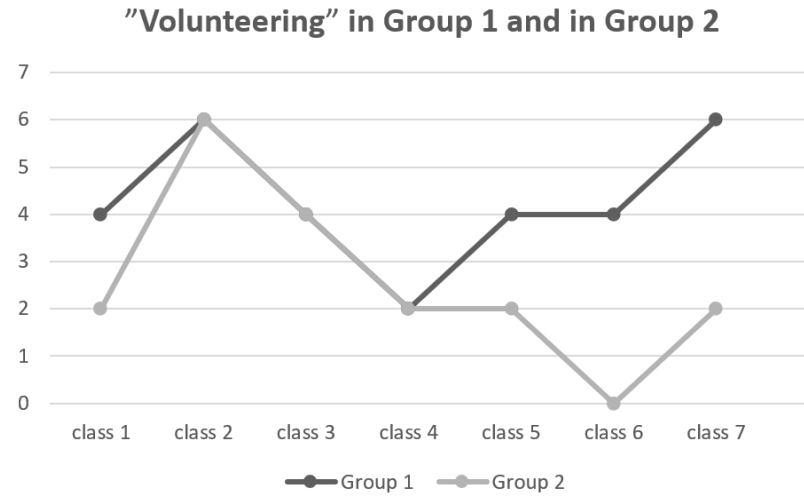
Variation of "Participation" in Group 1 and in Group 2 along Class Observations



Finally, regarding the learners' behavior of volunteering readily for teacher-fronted activities (Figure 5), the overall pattern observed in the two groups seems equally dynamic, although a greater downward tendency can still be noticed in Group 2 and a prevailing upward pattern is seen in Group 1. Thus, in Group 1, there is a clear upward tendency, with students gradually volunteering more in the classes, after a short period of less spontaneous participation, while in Group 2 this behavior continuously deteriorates, only to go back to the initial level in the last observed class. Hence, Group 2 starts and ends at the same point in terms of volunteering, which is a rather low level when compared to Group 1. The latter not only starts at a higher level but ends at its peak.

Figure 5

Variation of "Volunteering" in Group 1 and in Group 2 along Class Observations



In the next section, some qualitative data collected during the class observations shall be described and analyzed, attempting to explain the results found both in the questionnaire and in the class observation grid.

Class Observation Journal

The content analysis of the journal used during the class observations has yielded two main categories, that is "teacher" and "learners." In the first category, the following subcategories were identified: "relationship with learners," "promoting learners' self-esteem/motivation," and "strategies, activities, materials, and topics." In the second category, learners' reactions to these subcategories were registered.

Teachers

Relationship with Learners. Compared to T1, T2 showed a much more affectionate attitude and relationship with her group, remarkably during the initial and final moments of the class, while greeting them and saying goodbye warmly. She was quite comfortable sharing with her group private information and made references to learners' real experiences shared in class. When she heard a meow coming from one of the computer cameras, she said, empathetically: "Oh, I had not noticed that someone else had a cat at home, too!" She also generally expressed tolerance and respect, fostering learners' autonomy and individuality. Occasionally, however, her answers to students' questions or remarks were less warm or welcoming, displaying an expression of impatience or frustration, especially when something in class did not play out as she had expected due to technological constraints.

In general, T1 only greeted students after they had greeted her, as they joined the virtual room for class. By and large, positive non-verbal communicative behaviors were predominantly observed (smiling, expressing a welcoming and friendly attitude, and laughing in class). However, occasionally she let on a relatively dull expression, showing her tiredness by laying her head upon her hand while teaching. At other times, she seemed upset by wrinkling her brow when a student asked questions.

Promoting Learners' Self-esteem/Motivation. Predominantly, positive encouragement to learners' self-esteem by T1 was observed, among other things in the form of the delivery of positive feedback, remarking, for example: "It has never been so easy to assign an oral task to a group! It's been really great! Thank you!" Yet, occasional negative feedback was noticed, as was the case when T1 remarked to a student, who was taking too long to finish the assignment: "This task is so easy!" In terms of motivating learners, there was a great number of incentives for integrative motivation, illustrated by T1 bringing up cultural aspects of the L2. Motivating learners through cooperation was also a recurrent strategy, above all by encouraging their interaction in oral debates and classroom discussions.

T2 also frequently encouraged learners' self-esteem, mainly through careful positive individual comments on their performance after a presentation, something which was not seen in T1. However, T2 did not eschew negative comments. When learners' performance in an assignment was poor, for example, she told them that next time they should listen more carefully and more times to the audio. As for fostering learners' motivation, great emphasis was given to encouraging integrative motivation, by a comprehensive account of historical and cultural events in Portugal.

Strategies, Activities, Materials, and Topics. T1 favored a strategy based on oral debates and classroom discussions, presenting daily expressions and other language structures in a contextualized way. The materials used in class were taken originally from real sources, such as blogs and newspaper articles. The topics covered issues that were mostly related to the routines and experiences of the learners, but also to the Portuguese culture.

T2's strategy was strongly based on having learners deliver individual oral presentations having texts or films previously assigned as prompts. Great emphasis was given to Portuguese culture and history. There were some successful experiences with the use of technology in class, but sometimes it went sideways, especially concerning the use of some materials adapted to be used online, as the teacher herself was relatively unacquainted with the digital environment. Another commonly observed practice was to discuss the course plan with the group (sometimes for several minutes), giving them the chance to collectively decide on the course plan and deadlines for the assignments.

Learners

Learners' Reactions. A great deal of interaction was observed between learners and T1 and among learners themselves, most of which happened during oral tasks that were based on a topic extracted from a previously read text. A considerable amount of personal information and emotion was shared during these discussions, most of which involved issues related to learners' identity. Group 1's multiculturality was highly explored, yielding lively debates about customs and cultural specificities. Some episodes of frustration and relative distress were also identified, nonetheless.

In Group 2, a significant amount of interaction was seen between the students and T2 in varied moments of the class, but considerably less communication was seen among the students themselves. Learners shared a great deal of personal information with the teacher, though. Still, occasionally, learners were unresponsive to T2's encouragement for them to volunteer their answers. There was also a particular episode in which a sheer atmosphere of boredom and lack of interest was noticed. This happened in a class in which T2 took up an excessive amount of time to discuss the course plan with the students. T2 and some students were seen on the verge of a fallout, as exemplified by student A204's remarks that she had already answered ten emails, asking T2 if they could go back to class.

Interviews. The interviews focused on an array of topics related to learners' perceptions of the strategies and attitudes of the teachers, as well as on certain elements located in the classroom context. For the purposes of this study,

two main topics stand out: "perceptions of the class," and "perceptions of the relationship with the teacher." The former includes aspects such as activities, participation, and interaction, among others, and the latter comprises perceptions of the teacher's attitudes and the sharing of personal information and emotions in class.

Perceptions about the Class. Participants in Group 1 were particularly fond of the oral debates, cited as the most motivating activity and an opportunity for learners to get to know each other better, getting around the constraints imposed by the ERT mode: "I had motivation when we delivered presentations and discussed, we had a class in which we presented our region or something about our country" (A106). Participants considered topics related to the culture of the L2 and their own cultural identities as particularly motivating, but the fact that not all students had the chance to speak proportionally combined with the amount of time used in these discussions earned severe criticism from some respondents.

Group 2's answers revealed a different profile, as learners reported a particular appreciation for activities that focused on grammar and vocabulary. The oral presentations were generally referred to as demotivating, as they lasted for too long, and "each person speaks individually and then it is too long for them to be able to speak again" (A206). Student A104 claimed that what she found least motivating was "those oral presentations in general, especially in front of a computer, I think they are super selfish because each student minds their own business and disregards what is going on," highlighting that these tasks could have been more motivating if they had engaged the class as a group, exploring some tools that the digital platforms provide for interaction, such as "breakout rooms."

In fact, almost all participants highlighted the lack of interaction as something negative. Student A207, for instance, stressed that what he found least positive was the context because, as he admitted: "We didn't notice many debates, we mostly just read." Student A204 added that "it was a pity not getting to know the other students better, not having had more discussions with them." In this group, the most enjoyable aspect of the course was often related not to the practice, but to the outcome of the tasks, when students realized their progress: "The strongest points of the course were the writing activities and the oral presentations. I benefited a lot from these practices. I feel that I have improved my writing skills and I feel much more confident in speaking Portuguese" (A201).

Perceptions about the Teachers. When asked whether they notice when their teacher greets them before they do, participants in Group 1 provided threefold answers: one-third claimed that they do not notice and do not care if they do;

one-third informed that they do notice, but do not really care; and another one-third stated that they do notice, and that they would have appreciated it that T1 had greeted them before. As for smiling, the unanimity of the interviewees informed that they notice when teachers smile, rating it as an important aspect of teacher-learner communication. A negative aspect regarding T1's attitude was that she sometimes judged students' opinions when she should limit herself to teaching the language: "Unfortunately, whenever we spoke, she judged our way of thinking, and did not stick to correcting our Portuguese […] the class is not about my opinion!" (A102). Another negative point attributed to T1 was some impatience when learners asked her questions.

In Group 2, most of the interviewees reported that they notice when teachers smile, and a close minority claimed that they do not notice or care about that. When it comes to greetings, most of Group 2's students claimed that they notice and feel good about teachers greeting them first. An aspect that was highly criticized was T2's lack of expertise with the technology, resulting in poorly adapted materials for ERT classes. Likewise, T2's frequent complaints when something went sideways were stressed by some students. As for the fact that T2 adopted a strategy of discussing the program with the group, it was remarked that "she spent too much time discussing the activities and the 'why' of the tasks" (A206). A positive aspect that was reported was the way she presented some topics to the group. Thus, student A205 remarked: "What I enjoyed the most in the course was the class when she told us the history of the April 25th Revolution in Portugal […] we barely spoke in that class, but I think it was a good class because I noticed she was well, she was emotional and willing to share."

Concerning the exchange of personal information between teachers and learners in class, Group 1 showed a relatively more open stance than Group 2 in both directions. Most students acknowledged the importance of teachers sharing information about their lives, as this ushers in a friendly environment and contributes to topics of mutual interest. As for the importance of students sharing personal information with their teachers, most respondents stated that, if it is restricted to basic information and is relevant for the class, it can be helpful, highlighting, again, its contribution to the choice of topics. Others, still, acknowledged that this could help to set a connection between pupils and teachers.

Group 2's responses marked a less acknowledgeable position regarding the importance of teachers sharing personal information with their students and vice-versa. Student A204 was assertive in this respect: "For me, that has nothing to do with the class!", adding that "teachers should be, remain, 'teachers'… whether or not they have kids, or cats, who cares?". As for sharing their personal information with teachers, the bulk of the students restricted its relevance to the topic of the class and general information about them.

Regarding the exchange of emotions, a more equitable pattern was found between both Groups, in both directions. Hence, in Group 1, most respondents were at least partly receptive to emotional exchanges, while others highlighted the importance of being professional: "It's a job, and we all have our moments, but I think that when you get to work, all that's happened before should be left at the door, both for students and for teachers" (A106). In Group 2, the human side of teachers was stressed: "Yes, I want the teacher to feel comfortable, to know that she can share. They're people too, so, to an extent, it is (ok for them to share)" (A206). A red flag was raised to sharing negative emotions, and in Group 2 there was an explicit reference to T2's frustrations when something went wrong.

Discussion

The Impact of Emotion: Motivation to Learn Portuguese (MLP), Perceptions of the Teacher and Classes (PTC), and Perceptions of Individual Capacities (PIC)

As observed in the results of the AMBT questionnaire, both groups exhibited a highly motivational result at the end of the course. It is suggested that, to a large extent, this is because both teachers shared a lot of emotions and engaged in real communication with their learners. What is more: both positive and negative emotions were shared, with an overall positive impact in the end. This contrasts with data presented in studies like Resnik and Dewaele (2021), where ERT classes were reported as showing significantly less emotion than traditional classes.

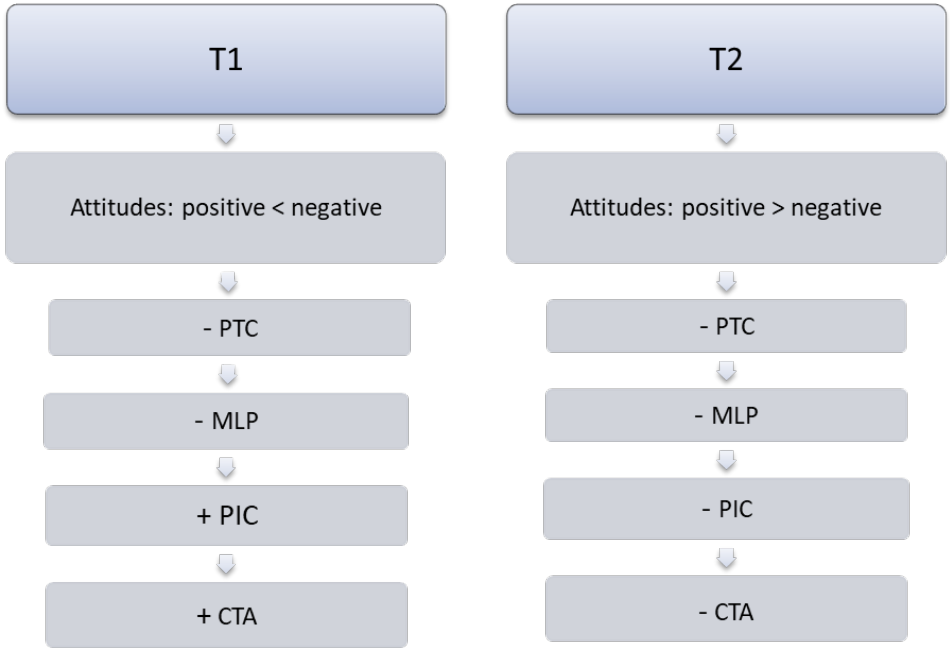
In the present study, both teachers acted as facilitators (Rogers, 1983), which does not imply a fear of expressing one's feelings and emotions (good or bad) but prescribes an awareness of how to communicate them to learners (Rogers, 1983, in Zimring, 1994, p. 4). That is exactly what the data show: they generally expressed positive emotions, but did not avert expressing tiredness, difficulties, or frustrations in a genuine and transparent way. This meets the conclusion advanced by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014, 2016), that is, it seems more advisable to find the correct ratio between positive and negative emotions than to concentrate on eliminating the latter from the classroom.

Participants in both groups reported less motivation (MLP) and less appreciation for their respective teachers and classes (PTC) by the end of the course. As seen, despite T1's and T2's generally friendly and positive approach to students in class, they both exhibited some negative attitudes and experienced some hardships which explain the decrease in the measures of MLP and PTC. The way T1 responded to some of the students' questions was a bit distant and

sometimes revealed some impatience, as the interviews confirm, with students reporting feeling judged on their opinions rather than on the language. Her overall impersonal attitude in the early moments of the class is another aspect that did not go unnoticed: all students in T1 reported noticing and considering it important that teachers smile in class. As for T2, it was noticed that the amount of time spent on discussing the course plan and the recurrent problems faced with the online format took a definite toll on learners. The statistical tests confirm the correlation between PTC and MLP in both groups, giving further empirical validity to the data.

Figure 6

The Impact of Affect in T1's and T2's Attitudes upon PTC, MLP, PIC and CTA



The better results exhibited by Group 2 (↑PIC) are assumed to stem from the more affectionate attitude T2 maintained in class, balancing the overall negative perception students had of the class and exerting a positive effect on learners' self-esteem, classroom anxiety, and test anxiety. Conversely, T1's less affectionate attitude is assumed to account for the lower measures Group 1 exhibited in PTC, MLP, PIC, and test anxiety. This conclusion finds support in Rubio-Alcalá (2017), who claims that teachers can reduce learners' self-esteem when they express an attitude of intolerance, do not give them enough time to answer a question, and are incautious of their feedback and corrections,

among other things. Figure 6 below shows the impact of the different attitudes adopted by T1 and T2 in their respective groups.

Hence, the findings reported in previous studies in face-to-face contexts showing that teacher variables are more closely linked to enjoyment than to anxiety (Dewaele & Ferrer, 2022) are not entirely licensed in the present study. At least to some extent, learners' self-esteem and anxiety were affected by teachers' different attitudes in each group. The qualitative data support this conclusion, which is further corroborated by the statistical tests revealing a significant negative correlation between test anxiety (CTA) and PTC and MLP. Zare and Risiati (2012) inform of an association between test anxiety and the two variables in PIC (self-esteem and classroom anxiety), endorsing the conclusions from the present results.

The Impact of Interaction: Engagement, FLE, Flow, and FLB

As seen, a great deal of interaction was reported in both groups. In Group 1, both a 'teacher-student' and a 'peer-peer' type were identified, based on debates which led to greater interaction, while in Group 2 the individual presentations led to mostly 'teacher-student' interaction. Group 1 excelled against Group 2 in all components of learners' behavioral engagement (attention, participation, and volunteering). Thus, it is proposed that promoting debates in the classroom yields greater engagement than individual presentations. This is also suggested to lead to more episodes of flow, as was observed in a class in Group 1 in which learners failed to notice that T1 had lost her internet connection, continuing the debate without her. In Group 2, conversely, an opposite pattern was identified, that is, while one student was delivering their presentation, other students would mind their own business, answering emails and the like.

Participants' FLE during their interactions also seemed to predict their engagement, confirming the findings of studies focusing on traditional L2 classes (Aubrey, King, & Almukhaild, 2020; Phung, 2017) and ERT classes (Mihai et al., 2022). Aubrey, King, and Almukhaild (2020) found greater engagement ensued in tasks that represented diminished anxiety and increased enjoyment, such as those that yielded exciting discussions. This seems to be exactly what happened in Group 1, where students were interactive and collaborative, illustrating what Phung (2017) defined as social engagement. Also confirmed was the impact of social support on engagement reported by Luan et al. (2020), leading to a sense of community, belonging, friendliness, and safety (Mihai et al., 2022). That was specifically stressed in some of the answers found in this study: in Group 1, such interactions were recalled with joy, pointing to FLE social; in Group 2, the lack of it was referred to with lament, with students experiencing mostly FLE private, associated with a feeling of making progress in the L2.

It seems that teachers' impact on learners' enjoyment (FLE teacher) was incidental, through the choice of topics that seemed personally relevant and that validated learners' experiences and the support needed for engaging in such tasks. Participants appreciated the sense of engaging in meaningful communication (Phung, 2017), sharing and hearing about each other's cultures and the customs of their countries, confirming that, with multicultural groups, the topic "culture" seems naturally suitable (Aubrey, Kim, & Almukhaild, 2020; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2022).

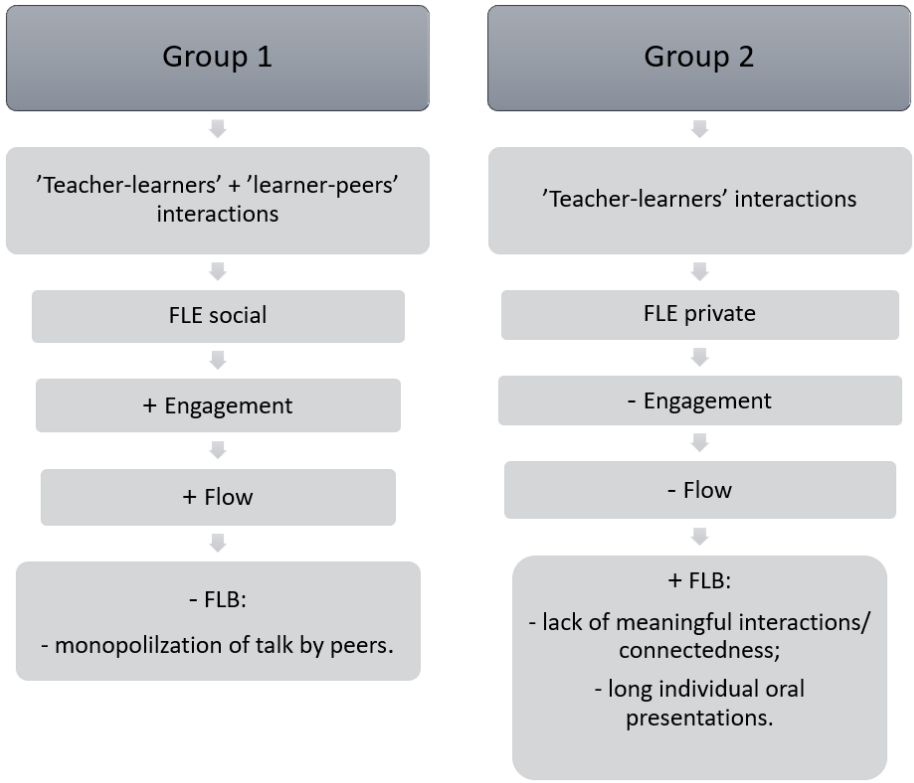
In Group 2, some students specifically criticized the lack of social contact in distal classes, which was not verified in Group 1, where plenty of interaction was afforded. This echoes the findings of Elmas and Öztüfekçi (2021), who concluded that demotivation in ERT classes is strongly linked to the methods used and the tasks assigned to participants. Similarly, Wilson and Lengeling (2021) found that learners' disengagement in class can be associated with technological obstacles and the lack of interaction. Dewaele, Albakistani, and Ahmed (2022a) reported that physical distance also curbed the chance to build meaningful relationships with classmates and the teacher, as seen in Group 2. Yet, the authors highlight that ERT classes could provide opportunities for relationship-building. We propose that the processes experienced in Group 1 illustrate the latter, making up for the lack of physical contact in ERT classes. Figure 7 illustrates the processes ensuing from the different interaction patterns in the two groups.

In short, the analysis of the patterns of interaction and their impact on each group has shown that engagement, FLE, flow, and FLB are closely linked to task and strategy choices. In classes where learners have a chance to interact and receive social support from teachers and peers, more engagement, FLE social, and the experience of flow are expected to ensue. Conversely, mostly FLE private, less engagement, and more FLB are predicted in environments that lack 'peer-peer' interaction.

Some pedagogical implications for online teaching are that teachers invest in tasks that encourage learners to embark on personally meaningful and emotionally engaging interactions. They should also provide enough social and academic support. Lack of interaction prevents the development of social cohesion and teacher-learner connection. Finally, it is proposed that students who do not engage as much in meaningful exchanges with their teachers and peers may become less sensitive to the benefits of relatedness, and, consequently, unable to account for the emotional and cognitive value of simple things, such as the discovery of a particular appreciation for cats shared by their teachers.

Figure 7

The Impact of the Pattern of Interaction upon FLE, Engagement, Flow and FLB in Group 1 and in Group 2



Conclusions

In short, the findings in this study can be thus synthesized: the more affectionate way that T2 related to her group yielded better results in terms of motivation to learn Portuguese, self-esteem, anxiety, and test anxiety. The interactions-intensive practice set in train by T1, in turn, resulted in more engagement, FLE social, and occasional experiences of flow. Boredom was predicted by activities that did not allow for interaction to unfold, as was the case with the long individual oral presentations in Group 2.

Pedagogically, it is worth keeping in mind that any conclusion regarding what predicts learners' emotional responses in L2 classes must be interpreted with a grain of salt, regardless of the format of the classes. It seems more advis-

able that, instead of focusing on one strategy or another, teachers try to combine different practices in their classes, to account for the different emotional profiles of their groups. Martins, Silva, and Pinto (2022) make a statement for a new approach to language teaching known as a "post-method" (Kumaravadivelu, 1996, 2006), consisting of multiple approaches that complement each other, attending to all dimensions of the learner. We believe that the combination of genuine and meaningful interactions (e.g., plentiful pair work and group work using breakout rooms and whole class interactions in engaging themes) with emotional and affective support from teachers (e.g., delivering positive and individualized feedback, discussing the challenges experienced throughout the course) is one way of leading online classes on the right track.

Limitations of the Study

These findings have encountered some limitations, however: a first shortcoming has to do with the fact that the qualitative data used for analyzing FLE and FLA could have been complemented with validated quantitative instruments, such as the scales used in Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). Another limitation relates to the small number of participants in this study, which prevents a broad generalization of these findings, though the diversified qualitative and quantitative data analyzed do provide strong validity to the conclusions advanced herein.

References

Altarriba, J., & Canary, T. M. (2004). The influence of emotional arousal on affective priming in monolingual and bilingual speakers. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 25*(2,3), 248–265.

Arnold, J. (Ed.). (1999). *Affect in language learning.* Cambridge University Press.

Arnold-Morgan, J., & Fonseca-Mora, M. (2007). Affect in teacher talk. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Language acquisition* (pp. 107–121). Continuum.

Aubrey, S., King, J., & Almukhaild, H. (2020). Language learner engagement during speaking tasks: A longitudinal study. *RELC Journal, 53*(3), 1–15.

Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (1995). Human autonomy: The basis for the self-esteem. In M. Kernis (Ed.), *Efficacy, agency and self-esteem* (pp. 31–49). Plenum Press.

Dewaele, J.-M. (2011). Reflections on the emotional and psychological aspects of foreign language learning and use. *Anglistik: International Journal of English Studies, 20*(1), 23–42.

Dewaele, J.-M. (2023). Psychology of language learning: Personality, emotion and motivation. In L. Wei, Z. Hua, & J. Simpson (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of applied linguistics* (pp. 374–385). Routledge.

Dewaele, J.-M., Albakistani, A., & Ahmed, I. (2022a). Levels of foreign language enjoyment, anxiety and boredom in emergency remote teaching and 'in-person' classes. *The Language Learning Journal*, *52*(1), 117–130. https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2022.2110607

Dewaele, J.-M., Albakistani, A., & Ahmed, I. (2022b). Is flow possible in the emergency remote teaching foreign language classroom?. *Education Sciences, 12*(7), 444. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12070444

Dewaele, J.-M., & Ferrer, M. (2022). Three entangled foreign language learner emotions: Anxiety, enjoyment and boredom. *Elia: Estudios de Lingüística Inglesa Aplicada*, *22*, 237–250.

Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. (2014). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Studies of Second Language Learning and Teaching, 4*(2), 237–274.

Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. (2016). Foreign language enjoyment and foreign language classroom anxiety. The right and left feet of FL learning? In P. MacIntyre, T. Gregersen, & S. Mercer (Eds.), *Positive psychology in SLA* (pp. 215–236). Multilingual Matters.

Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. (2022). You can't start a fire without a spark. Enjoyment and the emergence of flow in foreign language classrooms. *Applied Linguistics Review*. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2021-0123

Dewaele, J.-M., Magdalena, A., & Saito, K. (2019). The effect of perception of teacher characteristics on Spanish EFL learners' anxiety and enjoyment. *The Modern Language Journal, 103*(2), 412–427.

Dörnyei, Z. (Ed.). (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge University Press.

Dörnyei, Z. (2009). The psychology of Second Language Acquisition. Oxford University Press.

Elmas, E., & Öztüfekçi, A. (2021). L2 demotivation in online classes during Covid-19: From an Activity Theory perspective. *International Journal of Education, 9*(3), 72–78.

Fraschini, N., & Tao, Y. (2021). Emotions in online language learning: Exploratory findings from an *ab initio* Korean course. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 45*(5), 1305–1323. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1968875

Garret, P., & Young, R. (2009). Theorizing affect in foreign language learning: An analysis of one learner's responses to a communicative Portuguese course. *The Modern Language Journal, 93*(2), 209–226.

Guilloteax, M., & Dörnyei, Z. (2008). Motivating language learners: A class-oriented investigation of the effects of motivational strategies on student motivation. *TESOL Quarterly, 42*(1), 55–77.

Hodges, C., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T., & Bond, M. (March 27, 2020). The difference between emergency remote teaching and online teaching. *Educause Review*. https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning

Horwitz, E., Horwitz, M., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 70*(2), 125–132.

Li, C., & Dewaele, J.-M. (2020). The predictive effects of trait emotional intelligence and online learning achievement perceptions on foreign language class boredom among Chinese university students. *Foreign Languages and their Teaching, 5*, 33–44.

Li, C., Dewaele, J.-M., & Hu, Y. (2021). Foreign Language Learning Boredom: conceptualization and Measurement. *Applied Linguistics Review, 11*, 485–511.

Luan, L., Hong, J-C., Cao, M., Dong, Y., & Hou, X. (2020). Exploring the role of online EFL learners' perceived social support in their learning engagement: a structural equation model. *Interactive Learning Environments, 31*(3), 1703–1714.

Martins, C., Silva, F., & Pinto, J. (2022). O que ainda não sabemos e precisávamos de saber para o ensino do Português Língua Não-Materna. *Revista da Associação Portuguesa de Linguística*, *8*, 9–10, 301–313.

Mihai, M., Albert, C., Mihai, V., & Dumitras, D. (2022). Emotional and social engagement in the English language classroom for higher education students in the COVID-19 online context. *Sustainability, 14*, 4527. https://doi.org/10.3390/su14084527

Moskowitz, S., Dewaele, J.-M., & Resnik, P. (2022). Beyond the boundaries of the self: applying Relational Theory towards an understanding of teacher-student relationship as a driver of motivation in foreign language learning. *Journal of the Psychology of Language Learning 4*(2), 1–17.

Pekrun, R. (2006). The Control-Value Theory of achievement emotions: Assumptions, corollaries, and implications for educational research and practice. *Educational Psychology Review, 18*, 315–341.

Phung, L. (2017). Task preference, affective response, and engagement in L2 use in a US university context. *Language Teaching Research, 21*(6), 751–766.

Resnik, P., & Dewaele, J.-M. (2021). Learner emotions, autonomy and trait emotional intelligence in 'in-person' versus emergency remote English foreign language teaching in Europe. *Applied Linguistics Review, 14*(3), 473–501.

Resnik, P., Knechtelsdorfer, E., & Dewaele, J.-M. (2022). Differences in the intensity and the nature of foreign language anxiety in 'in-person' and online EFL classes during the pandemic: a mixed-methods study. *TESOL Quarterly, 57*(2), 618–642.

Rogers, C. (1983). *Freedom to learn for the 80s*. Charles E. Merrill Publishing.

Rodrigo-Ruiz, D. (2016). Effect of teachers' emotions on their students: some evidence. *Journal of Education & Social Policy, 3*(4), 73–79.

Rubio-Alcalá, F. (2017). The links between self-esteem and language anxiety and implications for the classroom. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney, J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications* (pp. 198–216). Multilingual Matters.

Wang, Q., & Jiang, Y. (2022). A positive psychology perspective on positive emotion and foreign language enjoyment among Chinese as a Second Language learners attending virtual online classes in the emergency remote teaching context amid the Covid-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 798650.

Wilson, A., & Lengeling, M. (2021). Language learning in the time of Covid-19: ELT students' narrated experiences in guided reflective journals. *Íkala: Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura, 26*(3), 571–585.

Zare, P., & Risiati, M. (2012). The relationship between language learning anxiety, self-esteem and academic level among Iranian EFL learners. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities, 20*(1), 219–225.

Zheng, Y. (2010). *Chinese University Students' Motivation, Anxiety, Global Awareness, Linguistic Confidence, and English Test Performance: A causal and correlational investigation* (Doctoral Dissertation). Available from ProQuest dissertation and theses database (Document ID 28389413).

Zimiring, F. (1994). Carl Rogers (1902–1987). *Prospects: The Quarterly Review of Comparative Education, 24*(3/4), 411–22.

Appendix A

Extract from the Classroom Observation Grid for Assessing Learners' Motivated Behavior in Online Classes

Variable	Description	1–2 times	3–4 times	5 or + times
Attention	Students appear to be paying attention. They are not displaying any inattentive or disruptive behavior: they keep their cameras on during most of the class; they do not turn their heads to gaze out on their surroundings or to speak to someone near them; their eyes are staring at the computer screen as the teacher or their colleagues speak or as materials are being screenshared; they offer appropriate non-verbal responses, by nodding their heads, for example.			
Participation	Students are actively taking part in classroom interaction or working on assigned activity			
Volunteering for teacher-fronted activity	At least one third of the students are volunteering without the teacher having to coax them in any way.			

Source: adapted from the *MOLT Classroom Observation Scheme* (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008, p. 62).