

Finnish Second Year High School Students' Perceptions Regarding
Teachers' Role on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

Bachelor's thesis

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| Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Kielten oppitunneilla esiintyvä ahdistus (engl. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety) voi vaikuttaa usean oppilaan elämään, ja estää oppilaita näyttämästä todellista potentiaaliaan oppimistilanteissa. Joskus oppilas voidaan virheellisesti leimata laiskaksi tai epämotivoituneeksi, vaikka todellisuudessa osallistumisen puutteessa voi olla kyse myös ahdistuksesta. Opettajat voivat usein käytöksellään vaikuttaa siihen, millainen ilmapiiri luokkahuoneessa on, ja kuinka mukavaksi oppilaat siellä olonsa kokevat, mikä puolestaan vaikuttaa oppilaiden osallistumis- ja oppimismotivaatioon.</p> <p>Koska ahdistuksen rooli suomalaisessa luokkahuoneessa on ilmiönä vielä pitkälti hämärän peitossa, tässä tutkielmana oltiin kiinnostuneita mahdollisen ahdistuksen yleisyydestä, sekä oppilaiden näkemyksistä opettajan roolista suhteessa ahdistukseen. Tutkittavaksi valikoitua kaksi kieltenryhmää, jotka koostuivat toisen vuoden lukio-opiskelijoista, kahdesta eri kaupungista. Aineistoa näiltä lukiolaisilta kerättiin 20 kysymyksestä koostuvalla sähköisellä kyselylomakkeella. Lomakkeen kysymyksistä 16 oli suljettuja kysymyksiä, vastausvaihtojojen sijoituessa välille 1-5. Loput neljä kysymystä olivat avoimia kysymyksiä, millä pyrittiin kartoittamaan erityisesti oppilaiden käsitykset opettajan roolista suhteessa mainittun ahdistukseen.</p> <p>Tulosten perusteella enemmistö vastajista voittiin määritellä vain lievästi, tai ei lainkaan ahdistuneeksi, mikä tarkoittaa ahdistuneiden oppilaiden olevan vähemmistössä. Vastaajista suurin osa koki opettajan roolin aktiiviseksi, eli heidän mielestään opettaja pystyy vaikuttamaan oppilaiden ahdistukseen omalla toiminnallaan. Opettajien onkin tärkeää ottaa huomioon, että vaikkei opetus voi miellyttää kaikkia, on tärkeää hyödyntää useita erilaisia tapoja ja metodeja, jotta opetus palvelisi mahdollisimman monen oppilaan tarpeita mahdollisimman hyvin, oppimistuloksia ja tehokkuutta unohtamatta.</p> | |
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1 INTRODUCTION

In Finland children start usually learning English in the third grade of primary school, around the age of nine or ten. Since then English is studied frequently: every year of comprehensive school, then compulsory and optional courses in high school and vocational school and eventually at least the minimum amount required in third-degree education, meaning universities or universities of applied sciences. This means that a 25-year-old Finn has studied English for approximately ten years of their lives, possibly even longer. For a lot of people this may not be a problem and for them English is just a subject among others, even something enjoyable. Even though there are as many different ways of teaching English as there are English teachers, for some language learners the experience of language learning might be uncomfortable or unnerving due to several reasons. One of those reasons may be anxiety.

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) as a phenomenon affects students all over the world. As the name of the concept suggests, FLCA is a form of anxiety, bound to a more specific time and place than anxiety in general. General anxiety is a combination of different physical markers like increased heart rate and higher blood pressure as well as muscle tension (Nolen-Hoeksema, Fredrickson, Loftus, Lutz, Atkinson and Hilgard 2014: 474) and mental reactions such as feeling worried, not being able to concentrate (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986: 126) or feeling nervous and uneasy. Where FLCA differs from general anxiety, is that for FLCA the cause of the anxiety is narrower, and at least somewhat clear, whereas for general anxiety a cause, such as language lessons for FLCA, might not be found.

On one hand, even though anxiety is one of the emotions studied the most in relation to language learning (Dewaele and Macintyre 2014, paraphrased in Boudreau, Macintyre and Dewaele 2018: 150), to a large extent the role of emotions in language acquisition has for a long time been widely neglected (Boudreau et al. 2018). On the other hand, when anxiety has been studied, the results have been controversial, since whereas some researchers have noticed the debilitating role of anxiety, some argue that anxiety on the contrary can facilitate language learning. Since the importance of oral as well as communicative as language skills in general are becoming increasingly prominent in Finland based on the national core curricula (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet LOPS 2015; LOPS 2019), it is also important to acknowledge FLCA as a phenomenon, learn to identify the students suffering from it, and develop tools of facilitating or channelling it to help the students reach their potential proficiency level.

The topic of the present study is Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), but in addition to FLCA per se, this study also focuses on examining what role teachers play in the emerging of FLCA. Because FLCA has been previously researched from a variety of perspectives, such as gender differences, spoken language and different cultural factors, in the present study, teachers' role is investigated from the students' point of view, by charting the students' perceptions, in order to gain new information on the issue.

FLCA has been studied for a few decades now, and in several studies the same method, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) has been used. In the present study the focus is on two factors that have not been previously researched in the field of language and anxiety, at least not to a large extent; Finnish students, and the students' perceptions of language teachers' role. It is important to examine the topic even further, so that in the future teachers might gradually be able to become more sensitive towards the connection of language and anxiety. Also, since Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety is something I have faced both through personal experience as well as in peers, no matter the level of education, it is reasonable to investigate the phenomenon properly. Having faced language anxiety also among the students taught as a substitute teacher provoked the need and desire to immerse in the topic, as well as to discover how common foreign language anxiety is among the participants in practise.

In the following sections I will explain the theoretical foundations of the present study by defining concepts more thoroughly, summarising previous research on the topic, and more thoroughly arguing the relevance of the present study. I will also describe my methods while I introduce my research questions, justify my choice of data collecting methods and participants as well as briefly discuss the limitations of this study. Results will be analysed thoroughly, and their relevance and possible contribution to future research will also be discussed.

2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY

It is important to shed light on the theoretical foundations that lie behind Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, to understand the issue more deeply. In this chapter I will define the concept of anxiety and elaborate it further by defining both Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA). After defining the concepts, I will present results and main points of previous research done on the topic, which leads us to the gap this present study aims to fill. Since most of the previous research on the topic relies on some same and crucial sources and definitions of FLCA, I will be referring to those same sources frequently throughout this chapter.

2.1 DEFINING CONCEPTS

Anxiety as a concept is not the easiest, but a crucial one to be defined in order to understand the foundations of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA). One possibly fundamental definition for anxiety has been provided by Scovel (as cited in Park and French 2013), in his review of anxiety research. In his review Scovel defines anxiety as “an apprehension, a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object” (Scovel 1978 cited in Park and French 2013: 463). Besides this definition provided by Scovel, anxiety can also be defined through its biological foundations. Biologically anxiety is caused by the arousal of the sympathetic nervous system, which is a part of the autonomic nervous system. Sympathetic nervous system activates in situations of distress, triggering the “fight or flight” response, causing for example increased heart rate and respiration (Nolen-Hoeksema et al. 2014: 474). In the modern world, the trigger for anxiety can be for example, a classroom situation where one is expected to speak in a foreign language, triggering the fight or flight response. Since in a classroom situation it is neither possible to flee from the situation, nor to fight it per se, the possible distress of mentioned situation might appear in the form of anxiety.

When it comes to FLA, or more specifically to FLCA, it can be explained as a more restricted and more definite part different from general anxiety. Originally the foundations of the concept were established by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). They defined the concept of FLCA as a concept of its own, separate from the concept of general anxiety, and separate from specific

anxiety reactions, which were originally created to differentiate generally anxious people from people who are anxious mainly in specific situations triggering anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986: 125). In a nutshell they define FLCA as “---a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process.” (Horwitz et al 1986, 128), making FLCA a situation bound reaction caused by one’s own schemas. According to Horwitz et al. FLCA can also be divided into three different parts, which are 1) communication apprehension, 2) test anxiety and 3) fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al. 1986: 127). Thus, they also elaborate the concept of anxiety beyond specific anxiety reactions and expand it into something far wider than simply the three sectors already mentioned.

In the same 1986 research article of Horwitz et al., besides the conceptualisation of FLCA, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) is introduced. The FLCAS is a way of measuring language anxiety statistically, as well a way of detecting similar characteristics between students of different anxiety levels, and therefore a highly useful tool of investigating the combination of language and anxiety. With that said, it is also vital to keep in mind that the FLCAS was originally created for English-speaking people living in Northern America, meaning it may not be inclusive towards some culturally bound anxiety triggers existing in countries where English is not the native language (Horwitz, 2016).

2.2 CONTROVERSIAL RESULTS OF PREVIOUS FLA RESEARCH

The results of previous FLA research have been quite controversial, since some have stated that male English Foreign Language (EFL) learners have reported higher anxiety levels than females, whereas in some studies female EFL learners have reported higher anxiety levels than males (Park and French 2013). Also, whereas Horwitz et al. (1986: 129) have found when utilizing a questionnaire created to investigate FLCA that FLCA has a debilitating role on things such as test results or overall performance in classroom situations some argue the contrary. For example, while Park and French (2013: 468) acknowledge the debilitating role of FLCA, they claim that the groups of students with higher anxiety levels might develop “facilitating anxiety rather than debilitating anxiety”, thus improving the learners’ L2 performance. This “facilitating anxiety” can be explained with the students due to their anxiety putting more effort into tasks than students with lower levels of anxiety (Macintyre and Gardner 1994, paraphrased in Park and French 2013: 468). Anxiety in this case was determined

with the FLCAS and the Korean English Second Language (ESL) learners' performances were based on their final grades.

The debilitating role of FLCA has been noticed in a Greek context as well. In a study of spoken language anxiety within fifteen Greek lower secondary school students, aged between 13 and 14 years, approximately one third of the participants reported anxiety debilitating their performance in English lessons (Tsiplakides and Keramida 2009: 41). Anxiety in this study was investigated in a qualitative manner, using semi-structured interviews, group discussions and direct observations. The main reasons for this detected anxiety were 1) fear of negative evaluation and 2) students' perceiving that their abilities to perform are lower than the abilities of their peers, causing the students to avoid taking part in activities requiring speaking in the foreign language, and therefore causing the anxious students to think they are expected to produce speech without any flaws (Tsiplakides and Keramida 2009: 41). In this study there are no mentions of the particular situations triggering the anxiety, but based on the study it can be said that it is crucial for teachers to acknowledge that the students' unwillingness to engage in activities requiring speech might be caused by anxiety, and not lack of skill or motivation (Tsiplakides and Keramida 2009).

Gregersen (2003: 25) has also remarked the debilitating role of anxiety, since according to her, students with high levels of anxiety tend to see making errors as a negative step of learning, and to believe that they are expected to produce speech with no flaws, instead of simply being able to communicate and to be understood. The students, native speakers of Spanish enrolled in third-year English classes at a Chilean university, with high levels of anxiety also felt themselves failing if the teacher corrected them, whereas the students with low or non-existent levels of anxiety did not mind making mistakes and continued speaking nevertheless (Gregersen 2003: 25). This does not mean that the students with lower levels of anxiety, charted using again the FLCAS, did not notice the errors in their speech but that they did not see making errors as a sign of failure, as the anxious students did (Gregersen 2003:25). This feeling of failure caused by making errors might occur because of the high anxiety students' feeling of self-consciousness. FLA can also become a negative "self-fulfilling prophesy", since the feeling of anxiety can eventually cause even higher levels of anxiety (Boudreau, Macintyre and Dewaele 2018: 161). Overwhelming, or simply very high level of anxiety can lead to the high anxiety students not taking part in communication situations (Tsiplakides and Keramida 2009; Horwitz et al. 1986; Gregersen 2003), or even completely keep them from engaging in learning a foreign language (Gregeren 2003: 25).

In a study conducted among female English learners in Saudi Arabia, the students' experiences on FLCA were again charted using the FLCAS, and before that with a questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions (Al-Saraj 2014). What arises from the results is that the situations that were the most anxiety triggering for the 48 students aged between 18 and 20 years were 1) having to hold a presentation in front of the class, which caused anxiety for over 40% of the participants, 2) exams, causing anxiety to over 20% of the participants and 3) not being able to express oneself with the foreign language, also causing anxiety to over one fourth (20%) of the participants. Similar results could be possible in the Finnish context as well, even though the surrounding culture in Finland is quite different from the Saudi Arabian one.

The similarities arising from several previous studies can be seen in how the results are explained and whether FLCA facilitates or debilitates EFL acquisition. Many also state that the effect of surrounding culture has its part in explaining the results. For example, Park and French (2013:468) explain the higher reported anxiety levels of female English learners as well as their shying away from tasks of social interaction with the surrounding, traditionally male-dominated Korean culture, where females are not as encouraged to speak and express their thoughts and opinions as males are. Also Horwitz (2016:73) suggests in her response to the study by Park and French the likely impact of cultural differences, as well as specific societal expectations on achievement (Horwitz 2016: 73). Al-Saraj, who has studied Foreign Language Anxiety of Saudi Arabian female language learners also mentions that foreign language learning has been previously researched predominantly in the context of Western countries, and therefore questions the suitability of these Western tools for other cultures (Al-Saraj 2014: 50). Most of these studies presented here also deem anxiety as a negative issue affecting language learning and emphasize the importance of identifying the students suffering from FLA in learning situations, even though the results are not always unanimous.

2.3 HYPOTHESIS AND RESEARCH GAP

As mentioned above, results such as those of the study conducted by Al-Saraj (2014) might be possible in the Finnish context as well. Since there however is virtually no research on FLCA in Finland, such hypothesis is yet to be examined. Since research conducted in the field of anthropology and social psychology indicates "many differences between western and non-western people's typical ways of understanding themselves, their minds and their behaviour" (Haslam 2013: 50), the results of research conducted in Finland could differ from the results

from research conducted in other countries or continents, because of the existing cultural differences. Finnish people are stereotypically quiet and shy and tend to avoid excessive social interaction. On the contrary, for example Iranian people live in collectivist culture (Ramenzanzadeh 2017: 286, 291). Thus, results of anxiety research of social classroom situations could be very different, when studied in an individualist Finland and when in collectivistic Iran. Even though stereotypes are what they are, simply stereotypes, the reasons and explanations of anxiety of Finnish students might differ from FLCA of Northern American, Korean, or Saudi Arabian students, because of the already mentioned cultural differences, as well as different expectations of achievement (Horwitz 2016: 73). With that said, my hypothesis for the present study is that the results might follow similar tracks than previous research, even though differences might exist, possibly due to cultural reasons. As a part of my hypothesis, I also presume that FLCA as a phenomenon does visibly exist among Finnish second year high school students.

What seems to be lacking from previous research in the field of language and anxiety besides the geographical factor, is the students' hopes and perceptions considering the role of language teachers. Since in Finland language teachers play a crucial role on language learning of Finnish people, it is important to fill this gap and to chart students' hopes on teachers' role considering FLCA, since as mentioned earlier, the students' unwillingness to engage in activities requiring oral communication in the foreign language might not be caused by lack of skill or motivation, but anxiety, or students believing that they are not good enough (Tsiplakides and Keramida 2009: 41). Therefore, if the students express their views on what teachers could do to reduce their anxiety it could eventually help to engage more students to a variety of classroom activities, and hence improve their performance in and out of the classroom, as well as even facilitate language learning in general.

3 PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter I will introduce my research questions, explain and justify survey as a method for gathering data as well as explain my choice of participants for the survey. The gathered data with its limitations will also be briefly discussed at the end of this chapter.

3.1 AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of the present study is to chart Finnish second year high school students' perceptions on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety they might have experienced, and the possible debilitating or facilitating role language teachers possess in relation to the students' possible anxiety. Discovering the frequency of anxiety among students is crucial in order to improve as a teacher, as well as in order to help students gain the most effective learning experience possible.

The research questions the present study aims to answer are:

1. To what extent do Finnish second year high school students suffer from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety?
2. What possible reasons are there for such anxiety?
3. How do the students perceive the role of the teacher when possible debilitating or facilitating factors of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety are considered?

3.2 METHODS

Survey or questionnaire as a method of collecting data is usually quite easily adaptable to one's specific needs, because it can be used to gather information from a variety of things, such as choices people make as consumers, or to ask peoples "opinions on just about everything" (Fink 2002: 1). Survey is also a relatively versatile tool of gathering data, since it can be as broad as needed, or as narrow as needed, meaning it can reach participants from only a few people to thousands. Since surveys can be analysed either in quantitative or qualitative manner, it makes survey as a research method easily adaptable to the preferred style of the research in question. With that said, survey as a method for collecting data is still usually more common within quantitative research. In this thesis my survey utilizes both closed as well as open questions.

My first research question is easier to investigate using closed questions, whereas open questions meet better the needs of my following two research questions, since “open questions let respondents describe the world as they see it, rather than as the questioner sees it” (Fink 2003: 17), which sounds very effective, when interested in students’ personal perceptions and hopes. The 16 closed questions used in the questionnaire designed for the purposes of the present study are based on the FLCA questionnaire (Horwitz et al. 1986), with alterations to better fit the needs of the present study.

For the analysis, I will be using mixed methods. As mentioned, my questionnaire consists of both closed and open questions, creating the need for both quantitative as well as qualitative methods of analysis. There are 16 closed questions utilizing the Likert scale on the scale from 1 to 5 and four open questions in the questionnaire. To get an answer to my first research question, quantitative analysis may be needed at least to some extent, whereas qualitative analysis is necessary especially for the open questions of my questionnaire.

3.3 PARTICIPANTS, DATA AND LIMITATIONS

The participants were Finnish second year high school students. The reason for choosing second-year students is that as first-year students are naturally in their first year of high school studies, they might be more anxious for a variety of reasons, compared to second- or third-year students. At the same time, many third-year students are presumably busy and possibly anxious and stressed because of the approaching matriculation examination, leaving second year students as the optimal group within the preferred level of education.

Altogether 42 second-year students from two different high schools answered the designed questionnaire. One of the schools was in Northern Savonia, and the other one in Central Finland, as it was considered important to gather data from more than just one city.

It is important to keep in mind the fact that since the number of participants is relatively small, it is not possible to draw generalisations from the results. That said, the results might lead way to more thorough and wider research on the topic in the future, where generalisations could possibly be drawn.

It is also important to keep in mind, that this present study focuses on Finnish students, and thus to keep in mind, that since the FLCAS and its questions are originally in English and created under Western circumstances, it has been argued that it could potentially be insensitive

towards other, non-western cultures (Horwitz 2016), and therefore affecting the results. Even though Finland is considered a Western country, cultural differences do exist between Western countries as well. Also, the need to translate the questions to another language may be somewhat problematic at times. This needs to be addressed, since translating the questions might change the meaning of some questions, which naturally is something that needs to be considered when comparing my results to the results of previous research.

4 RESULTS

In this chapter I will present and analyse the results of the questionnaire to which 42 Finnish second year high school students answered. All the students answered the closed questions whereas 41 answered the open questions as well. First, I will introduce a table of the percentages of the students' answers to the first 16 questions, which were to chart the frequency of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), and then I will discuss those findings answering my first research question. That said, it is important to keep in mind that with anxiety in this context I mean the emotional and physical, negatively perceivable reactions or feelings of nervousness in classroom situations. After introducing the results from the closed questions, I will move on to the last four questions, formulated to chart the students' perceptions on the role of the teacher, and analyse those in the light of my second and third research questions.

4.1 THE FREQUENCY OF FLCA

In table one, I present the percentages of the extent of anxiety among participants, which gives an answer to my first research question, “To what extent do Finnish second year high school students suffer from foreign language anxiety?” The table presents each closed question of the questionnaire, the options to them, and the percentages of the students answers to each option, ranging in the scale from 1 to 5, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. From Table 1 one can see, that only a relatively small percentage (always less than 18%) is seen on the extremities of options (strongly agree/strongly disagree) on questions indicating high anxiety, suggesting that only a very small percentage of the students suffer from very high, or even crippling levels of FLCA. When inspecting the more moderate options (somewhat agree/disagree), a higher percentage (up to 36%) is seen at times. The percentages of neutral answers vary between 5% to 19% of answers in each question. When looking at the percentages of extreme options indicating low/non-existent anxiety, the percentages per question vary from the minimum of 17% to the maximum of even 64%, thus showing a much bigger variety of percentages, when compared to the number of neutral answers or answers indicating anxiety.

Table 1: The students' answers to closed questions by percentages

| Question: | Strongly disagree* | Somewhat disagree | Neutral | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|---------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. I never feel quite sure of myself when speaking in my English class. | 17% | 29% | 5% | 33% | 17% |
| 2. I don't worry about making mistakes in my English class. | 12% | 33% | 12% | 31% | 12% |
| 3. I feel anxious when I know that I am going to be called on in English class. | 31% | 17% | 10% | 26% | 17% |
| 4. I feel anxious when I don't understand what the teacher is saying. | 52% | 10% | 19% | 19% | 0% |
| 5. I constantly feel other students are better than me in English | 43% | 19% | 10% | 21% | 7% |
| 6. I'm usually at ease during English tests | 7% | 7% | 14% | 33% | 38% |
| 7. I panic when if I must speak out loud without preparation. | 14% | 36% | 14% | 19% | 17% |
| 8. In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I already know. | 40% | 31% | 5% | 14% | 10% |
| 9. I am ashamed to speak English in front of other students. | 29% | 29% | 10% | 26% | 7% |
| 10. Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it. | 57% | 15% | 7% | 14% | 7% |
| 11. I often feel like not going to English class. | 64% | 14% | 7% | 10% | 5% |
| 12. I am afraid the teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make. | 48% | 24% | 17% | 10% | 2% |
| 13. The more I read for English test, the more confused I get. | 60% | 19% | 10% | 10% | 2% |
| 14. I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in other my classes. | 57% | 14% | 10% | 17% | 2% |
| 15. When I'm on my way to English class, I feel sure and relaxed | 7% | 17% | 12% | 21% | 43% |
| 16. I'm afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English. | 59% | 10% | 5% | 20% | 7% |

*Data in this table are rounded to the nearest whole number, which might lead to percentages not adding up to exactly 100%.

One thing that rises from the results quite quickly is that only a relatively small amount of the students who answered the questionnaire seem to be suffering from high levels of anxiety, i.e. those who answered most of the closed questions with strongly agree or strongly disagree, indicating high levels of anxiety. Through that discovery, the students can be divided into three groups based on their answers: anxious students, calm students (i.e. not anxious) and indefinite ones. Of the 42 students who took the questionnaire, 13 students could be categorized as anxious, since most, meaning over 50%, of their answers to the closed questions supported this observation. 21 students could be categorized as calm/not anxious, since very few (significantly less than 50%) or even none of their answers indicated anxiety, or if they did, only very slightly or rarely. That leaves eight students to categorize to the group of indefinite students, meaning either very controversial or mostly neutral answers. With that said, it is important to keep in mind that even though I roughly divide the students into groups of “anxious” and “not anxious” based on their answers, things are not always as simple as they might seem, which is something I have taken into account while analysing the results. The students categorised as “anxious” answered over 50 per cent of the closed questions in a way that indicated visible levels of anxiety, ranging from moderate, yet clearly existing anxiety, to even crippling anxiety. The calm students on the contrary answered over 50 per cent of the closed questions in a way that indicated very low, or non-existent levels of anxiety. The students classified as “indefinite” gave mostly neutral or somewhat controversial answers to the questions.

Four of the indefinite students answered some questions in a way that indicated almost non-existent levels of anxiety and other questions in turn in a way that did indicate anxiety, meaning that they could not be categorised as simply “anxious” or “not anxious”. One of the indefinite students answered almost every question in a way that indicated either neutral or “not anxious” stance, but indicated test anxiety, based on their answer to question 13, “The more I study for an English test the more confused I become”. Another indefinite student answered the open questions so that about 50 per cent of their answers indicated anxiety and the other approximately 50 per cent of the questions in a way that did not indicate anxiety, leaving the student in the category of “indefinite ones”, even though some dimensions of FLCA did cause at least mild anxiety for the student. The rest of the students classified as indefinite answered most questions with the option “neutral, neither agree nor disagree”. This means that the students classified as indefinite might suffer from only specific dimensions of FLCA, such as test anxiety, as one of the students did, which leads to the observation, that a student can be

suffering from only one or a few specific dimensions of FLCA, instead of foreign language classroom anxiety in general.

What also rises from the percentages is that some situations cause anxiety to a bigger percentage of the students, than others. For example, zero percent of the students answered ‘strongly agree’, and 19% ‘somewhat agree’ to the question “I feel anxious when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying”, leaving a total of 19 percent of the students feeling at least some level of anxiety in such situations. However, 17% answered ‘strongly agree’, and 26% ‘somewhat agree’ when the statement was “I feel anxious when I know that I am going to be called on in English class.”, indicating that for the total of 43% of the students, knowing that they have to answer out loud in the classroom is more anxiety triggering than not understanding what the teacher is saying. It is also clear that the dimensions of FLCA discussed in questions four (not understanding the teacher), ten (feeling anxious even when prepared well), eleven (feeling like not going to class at all due to anxiety), thirteen (the more they read the more confused they get) and fourteen (feeling more nervous in English class than in others) are dimensions that seem to be causing the least anxiety to majority of the students, since in all of those five questions 62% to 79% answered either disagree or strongly disagree, indicating that situations such as not understanding what the teacher is saying, studying for English tests or in general just attending English lessons do not trigger anxiety to the majority of the students.

4.2 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE STUDENTS IN THE THREE CATEGORIES

What was interesting in the answers of all students, was whether there were any major differences between these three anxiety groups, when assessing teachers’ role on FLCA. Of the 13 anxious students, 11 saw the role of language teachers as active to at least some extent, meaning that in their opinion, the teacher can affect their level of anxiety in a variety of ways (which I am going to elaborate later), either facilitating or debilitating it. One of the remaining two saw teachers’ role as passive, one as indifferent. In their opinion, it was for example the group or the students themselves, who play an active role, not the teacher. Interestingly, their answers to the rest of the open-ended questions did however indicate that the teacher can affect how anxiety-triggering or (un)comfortable English lessons are or could be. The seemingly controversial results could be caused for example with some of the students simply interpreting the questions in a different way than others.

Of the 21 calm students, 16 students saw teachers' role as active, and five as passive. Again, those who saw teachers' role as something passive, either simply stated that no, a teacher cannot affect their anxiety, no matter of its level, or that the group matters, not the teacher, when language anxiety is concerned. The answers of those eight indefinite students followed similar tracks: five saw teachers' role as active, one as passive, and two of them answered nothing. Based on this it is safe to say that all three groups followed similar tracks with their answers, meaning that regardless of the level of the students anxiety, the majority of the students (30 of the total of 42) saw language teachers role considering anxiety as something active, meaning the teacher can either relieve or aggravate students' possible anxiety with their actions.

4.3 STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE ROLE OF TEACHERS

When analysing the open-ended questions regarding the students' perceptions on the role of the teacher, I decided to chart whether certain themes or actions are mentioned frequently. I paid attention to word choices, i.e. if similar word choices occurred repeatedly, or if the students' views followed similar tracks in general. It is also important to keep in mind that since in the questionnaire the questions were in Finnish, the translations provided here might at times seem slightly inarticulate or even excessive, in order for the reader to interpret them in the same way the students were intended to.

To the question “Do you think teachers can affect how nervous/anxious/scared you feel during language lessons with their behaviour and actions? If yes, how?” 30 students of 41 answered “yes”, some providing more arguments than others to support their views. To the “how” part of the question, some general thoughts could be seen. A number of students named actions such as encouraging, remembering positive feedback, creating an atmosphere where mistakes are ok, avoiding “forcing” students who did not raise their hands to answer, or vice versa, forcing unwilling students to answer out loud, and providing the opportunity to perform oral tasks in smaller groups, instead of in front of the whole class as ways for the teacher to affect their students feelings of nervousness or anxiety. Besides those 30 students who agreed that teachers can affect their feelings of anxiety and nervousness, six answered “no”, meaning that in their point of view the teacher had no control over their emotional experience of language lessons. The remaining five answers were either controversial, or non-existent, meaning that they could not be categorised to yes or no answers.

Another open question was about teachers' behaviour when mistake correcting was considered. The students were asked "What kind of behaviour or actions would you want from the teacher in terms of correcting mistakes?" What seems to be rising from the answers is the students' hopes of the teacher being considerate, kind and having an encouraging stance or reaction to mistakes. Some students suggested phrases as "nice try" or "close, but not exactly", instead of simply deeming their response as false. According to the students, it is also important for teachers to not react angrily, not to mention mean, belittling comments, and to not nit-pick every little mistake, but to consider the situation and individual student's performance as a whole. The importance of positive feedback was also brought up again.

Another one of the open questions focused more on the classroom atmosphere, and how to make it safe and relaxed. The students were asked "How could the teacher in your opinion contribute to creating a relaxed, positive atmosphere during courses/lessons?" Kind, encouraging attitude was mentioned again by more than one student. Factors such as humour, teachers' own relaxed spirit, the "mistakes are okay" attitude, versatile ways of working, being easily approachable and providing highly anxious students with options for how to perform certain tasks, were also mentioned as factors that contribute to a relaxed and secure atmosphere, where the students can feel comfortable to use the target language.

Last one of the open questions was to more explicitly present the factors behind anxiety-triggering and uncomfortable atmosphere. The students were asked "What possible actions of the teacher cause a distressing, anxiety-triggering atmosphere, where for example speaking English out loud or answering the teachers' questions in general causes anxiety and feelings of nervousness?" Again, some general factors could be detected. Things such as having to answer to the whole class, when not wanting to answer at all in the first place (i.e. not raising their hand to answer), creating unnecessary pressure with phrases such as "everybody knows this already" or "you all have learned this already, you should know the answer", sardonic and belittling comments to wrong answers or mistakes and teachers negative attitude were mentioned as factors causing distress, uncomfortable atmosphere and anxiety.

Based on the answers the students provided to the last four questions, some possible general reasons for (their) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety can be supplied. If the teacher is in some way unpleasant or even mean, very harsh and strict, and not easily adaptable, the students could be expected to exhibit more anxiety, than students of warm, kind and encouraging teachers. It also seems that a possible trigger for anxiety is when the teacher cannot "read" and

interpret the class and the students correctly, meaning that they might for example pick a highly anxious student to perform a task in front of all the other students of the class, simply due to misinterpreting their behaviour. Also using working methods that are unsuitable for the target audience might lower the students' willingness to participate, since besides simply lowering their motivation, using unsuitable methods might be causing more anxiety than other working methods would.

Some conclusions can be drawn from the results. First, even though in the present study only a minority of the students seem to be suffering from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, the phenomenon is very much real for those suffering from it, meaning that teachers should be provided with tools of detecting, and affecting it. Second, all (language) teachers should remember the positive, not only the negative. This means that encouraging the students, reminding them that it is okay to make mistakes, and giving positive feedback instead of only correcting mistakes can have a big effect on the students, and their emotional experience of (English) lessons, the whole subject, or even school in general. Remembering the positive feedback instead of only correcting mistakes, can also have a positive effect on the students' motivation to engage in activities. Overall, sensitivity can be seen as an important quality of a "good" teacher, at least in reference to students' levels of anxiety. Third, it is important not to give every lesson the same way repeatedly. It is important to use varying methods and ways of working. Using varying methods and ways of working makes the students' more equal, since this way it is more likely that every student has the possibility to use their strengths, compared to only few ways of working, which might work well for some students, and cause crippling anxiety to others repeatedly, and vice versa.

5 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to chart the frequency of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) among Finnish second year high school students, as well as to investigate their perceptions considering teachers' role in the arising of FLCA. What was also of interest, was the underlying reasons triggering FLCA in the first place, but the most attention was paid to teachers' role, since in the field of language and anxiety, it has been previously researched far less frequently than topics, such as gender differences (Park and French 2013) or spoken language anxiety (Tsiplakides and Keramida 2009).

The hypothesis for the present study was that the results would most likely follow at least somewhat similar tracks than previous research, meaning that FLCA as a phenomenon would be clearly visible among the participants. This was expected due to cultural reasons as well as due to my personal experiences. At least the second part of my hypothesis was not well supported, since only a very small part of the participants indicated very high, or even crippling levels of anxiety with their answers, and therefore a majority of the students indicated only very low or even non-existent levels of anxiety. Even though my hypothesis was not well supported, the findings of the frequency of FLCA among the participants gave an answer to my first research question, which was particularly designed to chart the frequency of FLCA. That said, based on my first research question, it is possible to say that roughly 31% of the participants suffered from FLCA, ranging from moderate to severe, whereas approximately 50% did not seem to suffer from FLCA at all. The remaining 19% gave controversial answers, meaning that they could not be simply categorised as “anxious” or “not anxious”.

Even though as a future teacher it is nice to see language lessons not causing crippling anxiety to many of the participants, my expectations of the frequency were inaccurate. Though the amount of students indicating anxiety and therefore being categorised as “anxious” rose higher when inspecting the more moderate answer options of the questionnaire instead of only the extremities of the options, most of the time only a minority of the students chose options that indicated anxiety. Yet, to at least some extent the results of the present study did follow similar tracks with previous research. When compared to the results of Horwitz et al. (1986), the amount of answers per option seemed to follow a similar pattern, at least when the extremities of options indicating anxiety were concerned. In both the present study and the one conducted by Horwitz et al. (1986), it was usually a clear minority of students who answered with the

options “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree” in a way that indicated anxiety. Then again, when inspecting the more moderate options, the amount grew again higher.

My second research question was about the possible underlying reasons of FLCA, which was indirectly charted with the open questions of the questionnaire, especially with the ones considering classroom atmosphere. From the answers to those particular questions, it could be interpreted that factors such as teachers’ inconsiderate behaviour, very harsh and strict attitude and pressuring unwilling students to engage in front of the whole class contribute to creating a stressful and unpleasant classroom environment, and therefore those factors might be possible underlying reasons for FLCA. Factors such as unpleasant team spirit between the students, bullying or not knowing the other students also naturally affect how comfortable and relaxed the students feel to use the target language in classroom situations, but since the present study focused on the teachers’ role, I decided not to pay that much attention to those other possible triggers of FLCA, even though it still is reasonable to mention them at least briefly.

The third research question was directly about the students’ perceptions on the teachers’ role. This was charted with the questionnaire as well, with a couple of open questions. As mentioned previously in chapter 4, one question was to find out whether the students saw teachers’ role as active or passive in relation to anxiety. As mentioned in section 4, most of the students saw the teachers’ role as something active, meaning that they can either facilitate or worsen students’ anxiety with their actions. For example, actions of the teacher such as encouraging, giving positive feedback, and not pressuring unwilling students to engage more, were seen as factors facilitating the possible anxiety. To summarize the answer to my third research question, the participating students perceive language teachers’ role in relation to FLCA as mostly something active, and that teachers can with their actions and behaviour either facilitate or aggravate students’ language anxiety.

Even though the number of students categorised as “anxious” were a minority, it does not mean that certain classroom situations could not be anxiety triggering to students categorised as “not anxious” because the division took into account only each students’ answers as a whole, where students with the majority of answers indicating anxiety, were categorised as “anxious” and vice versa. This means that some individual dimensions could still be anxiety triggering, even if the student does not seem to indicate FLCA in general. This observation could open the opportunity to investigate the different dimensions of FLCA more thoroughly in the future, since this study focuses only on FLCA as a whole, instead of going more thoroughly into details

and different possible dimensions. This and the relatively small number of participants naturally causes limitations for the present study. As I have mentioned earlier in chapter 3, because the number of participants is quite narrow, generalisations cannot be drawn from the results. In conclusion, when this relatively small number of participants is combined with the somewhat harsh or black and white way of analysing the results, research on the topic is still needed.

More thorough research on the topic is also needed because it could be beneficial to chart the frequency of FLCA even on a societal level. For example, in spring 2020, over 21 000 people registered to take matriculation examination in advanced level English (Ylioppilastutkintolautakunta 2020). In the present study, 31 per cent of the students suffered from FLCA. Therefore, if similar results applied to Finnish high school students in general, that would make over six and half thousand anxious students in the matriculation examination of English every spring. Naturally, the number of anxious students could also be a lot lower or a lot higher and to confirm the frequency of FLCA, it could be reasonable to chart the frequency among larger groups of students as well. Also, because matriculation examinations can be stressful even without any additional anxiety, to high anxiety students the situation could be extremely anxiety triggering, and therefore prevent them from presenting their (language) skills as well as they could. Besides that, even though individual students might not suffer from test anxiety, even if they were categorised as anxious, or vice versa suffer from test anxiety even when not categorised as anxious, the progressively multimodal matriculation examinations could trigger different dimensions of FLCA at the same time, not just the possible dimension of test anxiety. Of course, there might also be students who improve their performance due to anxiety, as was suggested by Macintyre and Gardner (1994, paraphrased in Park and French 2013: 468) according to who it is possible for the anxious students to put more effort into their performance, than students with no anxiety. That said, since one can now only hypothesize, further and more thorough research on the topic is clearly still needed.

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APPENDIX 1:**Kysely Kandidaatintutkielmaan/Anni Torvinen**

Olen kolmannen vuoden kieltenopiskelija Jyväskylän yliopistosta, ja täällä kyselylomakkeella keräään aineistoa kandidaatintutkielmaani. Kyselyyn vastaaminen on täysin vapaaehtoista, ja kyselyyn vastataan täysin anonymisti. Kyselyn tuloksia tullaan käyttämään tähän kandidaatintutkielmaan, sekä mahdollisesti tulevaisuudessa myös maisterintutkielmaani. Aineistoa säilytetään Jyväskylän yliopiston tietosuojaohjeistusten mukaisesti. Vastaamalla kyselyyn hyväksyt kyselyn tietojen käyttämisen mainitsemallani tavalla. Mikäli sinulla herää jälkikäteen kysyttävää, minuun voi ottaa yhteyttä sähköpostilla osoitteeseen anni.vm.torvinen@student.jyu.fi.

Osio 1: Suljetut kysymykset. Valitse vaihtoehto, joka kuvailee parhaiten omaa kokemustasi.

1. En yleensä tunne oloani kovin itsevarmaksi puhuessani englantia tunnilla

- 1. täysin eri mieltä
- 2. osittain eri mieltä
- 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
- 4. osittain samaa mieltä
- 5. täysin samaa mieltä

2. En jännitä tai murehdi tekeväni virheitä tunnilla

- 1. täysin eri mieltä
- 2. osittain eri mieltä
- 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
- 4. osittain samaa mieltä
- 5. täysin samaa mieltä

3. minua ahdistaa, kun tiedän opettajan pian pyytävän minua vastaamaan jotain englanniksi

- 1. täysin eri mieltä

- 2. osittain eri mieltä
 - 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
 - 4. osittain samaa mieltä
 - 5. täysin samaa mieltä
4. minua ahdistaa, kun en ymmärrä mitä opettaja sanoo englanniksi
- 1. täysin eri mieltä
 - 2. osittain samaa mieltä
 - 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
 - 4. osittain samaa mieltä
 - 5. täysin samaa mieltä
5. ajattelen jatkuvasti muiden oppilaiden olevan minua parempia englannissa
- 1. täysin eri mieltä
 - 2. osittain eri mieltä
 - 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
 - 4. osittain samaa mieltä
 - 5. täysin samaa mieltä
6. olen yleensä rauhallinenenglannin kokeiden aikana
- 1. täysin eri mieltä
 - 2. osittain eri mieltä
 - 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
 - 4. osittain samaa mieltä
 - 5. täysin samaa mieltä
7. panikoin ja stressaan, jos joudun puhumaan englantia ilman mahdollisuutta valmistautua siihen etukäteen
- 1. täysin eri mieltä
 - 2. osittain eri mieltä

- 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
- 4. osittain samaa mieltä
- 5. täysin samaa mieltä

8. saatani olla englannin tunnilla niin hermostunut, että unohtelen asioita, jotka tiedän osaavani

- 1. täysin eri mieltä
- 2. osittain eri mieltä
- 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
- 4. osittain samaa mieltä
- 5. täysin samaa mieltä

9. minua hävettää puhua englantia muiden kuullen

- 1. täysin eri mieltä
- 2. osittain eri mieltä
- 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
- 4. osittain samaa mieltä
- 5. täysin samaa mieltä

10. jännitän englannin tunteja silloinkin, kun tiedän valmistautuneeni huolellisesti

- 1. täysin eri mieltä
- 2. osittain eri mieltä
- 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
- 4. osittain samaa mieltä
- 5. täysin samaa mieltä

11. usein englannin tunneille meneminen stressaa niin, etten haluaisi mennä tunnille ollenkaan

- 1. täysin eri mieltä
- 2. osittain eri mieltä
- 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
- 4. osittain samaa mieltä
- 5. täysin samaa mieltä

12. pelkään, että opettaja korjaa välittömästi kaikki mahdollisesti tekemäni virheet

- 1. täysin eri mieltä
- 2. osittain eri mieltä
- 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
- 4. osittain samaa mieltä
- 5. täysin samaa mieltä

13. mitä enemmän luen englannin kokeeseen, sitä enemmän pääni menee sekaisin

- 1. täysin eri mieltä
- 2. osittain eri mieltä
- 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
- 4. osittain samaa mieltä
- 5. täysin samaa mieltä

14. tunnen oloni englannin tunneilla hermostuneemmaksi, kuin muiden oppiaineiden tunneilla

- 1. täysin eri mieltä
- 2. osittain samaa mieltä
- 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
- 4. osittain samaa mieltä
- 5. täysin samaa mieltä

15. kun olen menossa englannin tunnille, tunnen oloni yleensä rennoksi ja rauhalliseksi

- 1. täysin eri mieltä
- 2. osittain samaa mieltä
- 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
- 4. osittain samaa mieltä
- 5. täysin samaa mieltä

16. pelkään muiden oppilaiden nauravan minulle, jos puhun englantia ääneen

- 1. täysin eri mieltä
- 2. osittain samaa mieltä

- 3. ei samaa eikä eri mieltä
- 4. osittain samaa mieltä
- 5. täysin samaa mieltä

Oasio 2: Avoimet kysymykset. Vastaa kysymyksiin oman sanoin, ja mielellään konkreettisten esimerkkien avulla.

17. Voiko opettaja mielestäsi toiminnallaan vaikuttaa siihen, pelottaako/jännittääkö/ahdistaako sinua kielten tunneilla vai ei? Jos voi, miten?

◀
▶

▲
▼

18. Millaista käytöstä toivoisit opettajalta esimerkiksi virheiden korjaamisen suhteen?

◀
▶

▲
▼

19. Miten opettaja voi mielestäsi vaikuttaa rennon ja mukavan ilmapiirin syntymiseen kurssilla/oppitunneilla?

◀
▶

▲
▼

20. Mitkä opettajan toimet aiheuttavat ilmapiiriä, jossa esimerkiksi ääneen puhuminen ja opettajan kysymyksiin vastaaminen pelottaa tai ahdistaa?

◀
▶

▲
▼

APPENDIX 2

TABLE I FLCAS Items with Percentages of Students Selecting Each Alternative (Horwitz et. al. 1986: 129-130)

| SA* | A | N | D | SD |
|-----|---|---|---|----|
|-----|---|---|---|----|

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.

| | | | | |
|------|----|----|----|---|
| 11** | 51 | 17 | 20 | 1 |
|------|----|----|----|---|

2. I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.

| | | | | |
|----|----|---|----|----|
| 11 | 23 | 1 | 53 | 12 |
|----|----|---|----|----|

3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.

| | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|----|
| 5 | 16 | 31 | 29 | 19 |
|---|----|----|----|----|

4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.

| | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|----|
| 8 | 27 | 29 | 20 | 16 |
|---|----|----|----|----|

5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.

| | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|
| 15 | 47 | 12 | 16 | 11 |
|----|----|----|----|----|

6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.

| | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|----|
| 7 | 19 | 31 | 32 | 12 |
|---|----|----|----|----|

7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.

| | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|
| 13 | 25 | 20 | 28 | 13 |
|----|----|----|----|----|

8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.

| | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|----|
| 5 | 35 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
|---|----|----|----|----|

9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.

| | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|---|
| 12 | 37 | 19 | 28 | 4 |
|----|----|----|----|---|

10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.

| | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|
| 25 | 17 | 12 | 29 | 16 |
|----|----|----|----|----|

11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.

| | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|---|
| 5 | 17 | 36 | 37 | 4 |
|---|----|----|----|---|

12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.

| | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|---|
| 9 | 48 | 11 | 25 | 7 |
|---|----|----|----|---|

13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.

0 9 19 57 15

14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.

5 12 17 51 15

15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.

1 31 28 37 3

16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.

5 37 17 24 16

17. I often feel like not going to my language class.

19 28 19 23 12

18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.

1 28 24 43 4

19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.

0 15 31 40 15

20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.

5 27 19 37 12

21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.

4 12 8 48 28

22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.

3 12 19 44 23

23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.

12 19 25 31 13

24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.

3 25 19 47 7

25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.

16 43 11 28 3

26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.

13 25 19 31 12

27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.

5 28 28 31 8

28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.

5 27 40 24 4

29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.

3 24 24 43 7

30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.

9 25 32 32 1

31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.

3 7 20 53 17

32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.

5 23 20 41 11

33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.

5 44 17 31 3

*SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neither agree nor disagree; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree.