Foreign Language Anxiety in Virtual Classrooms during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Turkey

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study investigated Foreign Language Anxiety in virtual English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic in Turkey. The Turkish EFL university learners' anxious feelings in traditional and virtual classrooms were compared. Then, the reasons for their feelings were explored. Data were gathered from 212 online learners via a questionnaire including both open-ended and close-ended questions. A large number of the students felt less stressed in a face-to-face classroom. Comparing the activities, a larger number of the respondents felt less stressed to participate in face-to-face classroom language activities than in online classroom activities. Over half of the respondents felt anxious thinking that others might see their home settings or hear the voices in their homes, recorded for every activity, physical and mental health due to long-time use of technology. The online classroom setting made a large number of the participants feel more suffocated and isolated. The existence of live interactions in face-to-face environments were mentioned as an effective factor. The other reasons included individual differences and preferences, lack of technological knowledge, and the technological infrastructure problem. In terms of the benefits of the online classes, several learners felt comfortable with answering questions while others are not looking at them, and that others do not see their physical appearance. The direct presence of eye contact with the teachers in face-to-face classrooms made several students more nervous. Some also referred to the Covid-19 pandemic and that it is risky for their health to be in face-to-face classrooms.

1. Introduction

Foreign language learning anxiety (FLA) is defined 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, p. 128). Whether FLA can interfere with language learning has long been investigated (Botes et al., 2020; Chastain, 1975; Horwitz, 2010; Kleinmann, 1977; Kruk, 2018; Liu & Xiangming, 2019; MacIntyre, 1995; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Scovel, 1978; Sparks & Ganschow, 1995; Steinberg & Horwitz, 1986). It has been found as one of the main factors that can hinder effective teaching and learning a foreign language (Dewaele et al., 2008). Moreover, it can cause learning a foreign language an unpleasant experience for learners (Horwitz, 2001; Horwitz et al., 1986; Russell, 2020). Consequently, considering the importance of FLA, researchers have tried to understand the construct and have been searching for ways of decreasing levels of FLA (Kruk, 2018). As for the empirical investigations of the FLA, several researchers already explored the relationship between FLA and performance of language skills (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, 1994; Woodrow, 2006) as well as FLA and enjoyment in the language classroom (J.-M. Dewaele et al., 2018; J.-M. Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

According to the literature, there are various sources of FLA. For example, Young (1991) stated that FLA can be caused by: (a) personal and interpersonal factors; (b) learner beliefs about language learning; (c) teacher beliefs about language teaching; (d) teacher-learner interactions; (e) classroom procedures; and (f) testing. Furthermore, FLA can be caused by competitiveness among learners, harsh error correction and perfectionism (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). Moreover, Yan and Horwitz (2008) argued that parents' expectations, cultural and regional differences, class arrangement, learning strategies, comparison with classmates, motivation and interest in language learning can cause FLA.

In recent years online learning has increased (Grant et al., 2013). Virtual worlds have often been found as less stressful environments for learning (Broadribb & Carter, 2009; Huang & Hwang, 2013). Virtual language classrooms have found to improve communication skills (Al-Qahtani, 2019). In terms of the role of Computer-Mediated-

Communication (CMC) environments on FLA, research has shown that CMC media can be beneficial for shy students because they usually do not participate actively during a traditional class (Cooke-Plagwitz, 2008; Tudini, 2007). The learners in Majid, Nurul, Haslee, Luaran, and Nadzri (2012)'s study were not anxious about learning a language online. Grant et al., (2013) indicated although there were various sources of FLA in online multiuser 3D virtual world simulation and real-world classrooms, learners found the virtual environment less stressful regarding language use. Recently, Melchor-couto (2017) explored the FLA levels experienced by a group of virtual learners during oral interaction activities. The gathered data was compared to that of a group of learners in a traditional classroom. It was revealed that the FLA levels of the virtual learners were reduced as weeks passed. The virtual students knew the anonymity of the learners in virtual classrooms as the positive factor that could contribute to an increase in self-confidence level and the decrease of nervousness. More recently, Côté and Gaffney (2021) investigated the effect of typed synchronous CMC on FLA and output quantity of beginner French learners. They indicated that compared with traditional classrooms, the learners felt significantly less anxious and produced more conversation turns and words in online classes.

On the other hand, the lack of body language and non-verbal cues in virtual classes can cause higher anxiety levels in some learners (Hampel, 2003; Hampel et al., 2005). Moreover, virtual classes may be restricted for some learners (Hampel et al., 2005). First-time users of a virtual classroom may face a "pain barrier" because of the "public and potentially intimidating nature of this virtual world" (Carr et al., 2010, p. 19). The anxiety which language learners experience in a virtual class may be related to fear of using of computer and technology (Chua et al., 1999; Grant et al., 2013; Lewis & Atzert, 2000). As a result, some students may reject virtual classes (Childs, 2010).

In addition, recently, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, language learners have been studying under conditions of considerable stress because of being forced into remote learning (Russell, 2020). These students may experience significant levels of FLA and/or anxiety related to their use of new instructional technologies and platforms. It is also likely that these language learners experience higher levels of general anxiety related to the pandemic and their home situation, (Russell, 2020). In a more recent study, Liu and Yuan (2021) found that first-year undergraduate English as a foreign language (EFL) learners experienced high levels of FLA both at the beginning and end of a 16-week semester.

Given the above-mentioned point, whether foreign language virtual classrooms create or heal anxiety is under-investigated. Furthermore, the research studies that have been done on FLA in the online environment only explored learners who personally selected to take their language classes online, yet during the Covid-19 pandemic, a vast number of learners have been forced into online and remote learning. Therefore, more exploration is urgently needed to determine whether these students experience higher levels of language anxiety because they cannot select their learning environment (i.e., face-to-face or online) (Russell, 2020). To the best knowledge of the researcher of the present study, no study investigated this issue in Turkey. Therefore, the current study addressed the following questions:

1. How do the Turkish EFL university learners feel about traditional and virtual classrooms?

2. What reasons do the Turkish EFL University learners provide for their feelings?

3. Which type of education do the Turkish EFL university learners prefer: face-to-face or virtual? Why?

2. Method
2.1. Participants

The participants were 212 Turkish EFL university learners who experienced the online education during the Covid-19 pandemic. Table 1 provides a summary of participants' background characteristics.

Table 1. Participants' background characteristics

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	123	58.0
	Male	89	42.0
Educational Level	Prep (Preparatory) University	93	43.9
	Undergraduate	100	47.2
	Postgraduate	19	9.0
Age	Mean	24.77	
	SD	7.531	

2.2. Instruments

Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire, which was designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The questionnaire incorporated the adapted items which had already been developed by Kaisar and Chowdhury (2020). The author of the present study carefully thought about the original items in the questionnaire to improve them in terms of wording and clarity. Moreover, in order to pursue the whole aims of the research, the format of the questionnaire was modified. Further, three questions on the Likert Scale and five open-ended questions were added to the original questionnaire. Therefore, quantitative data were obtained via close-ended questions with responses in Likert-scale format. Qualitative data were acquired through open-ended questions.

The questionnaire included four sections. The 1st section provided biodata about the participants' gender, age, and educational level. The 2nd section incorporated seven open-ended items on the Likert scale and two open-ended questions mostly investigating the EFL learners' feelings in both traditional and online classroom environments. The 3rd section, including 13 open-ended and one close-ended questions, explored mostly the participants' reasons for their feelings. For the 2nd and 3rd sections, the participants needed to read the statements of the open-ended items and select one of

the options of 'Always', 'Often', 'sometimes', 'Rarely', and 'Never'. The 4th section, incorporating two open-ended and two close-ended questions, investigated the participants' personal preferences and reasons. The participants needed to read the open-ended statements and select one of the options of 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Neutral', 'Agree', and 'Strongly Agree'.

2.3. Data Collection Procedure

Before the study was carried out, the questionnaire was piloted with a similar group of ten learners. The reliability of the questionnaire, estimated via Cronbach Alpha, was .715, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency (Pallant, 2013).

The questionnaire was distributed to 253 EFL learners of online learning, studying at different universities in Turkey. Their participation was voluntary and solicited via online Google Form. Learners were informed that by completing and returning the questionnaire, they had consented to participate in the study. Learners responded to the questionnaire anonymously. Out of 253 learners, 212 students completed and submitted the questionnaire.

The quantitative data were analyzed by calculating frequency and percentages using SPSS 22 and the open-ended questions were analyzed thematically using MAXQDA 10.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Turkish EFL University Learners' Feelings about Traditional and Virtual Classrooms

Table 2. Learners' Feelings about Traditional and Virtual Classrooms

	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
I feel easy in a real (face-to-face) classroom environment.	80	37.7	59	27.8	55	25.9	11	5.2	7	3.3
I feel easy in an online classroom environment.	38	17.9	51	24.1	60	28.3	43	20.3	20	9.4
I feel more comfortable and less stressed in a face-to-face classroom than in an online classroom.	42	19.8	51	24.1	71	33.5	31	14.6	17	8.0
I feel easy to participate in language activities in front of teachers and classmates in a real (face-to-face) classroom.	59	27.8	66	31.1	56	26.4	22	10.4	9	4.2
I feel easy to participate in the language activities in a virtual (online) classroom.	30	14.2	49	23.1	70	33.0	49	23.1	14	6.6

I feel easier, more comfortable and less stressed to participate in classroom language activities in an online classroom than in a face-to-face classroom.	28	13.2	31	14.6	55	25.9	73	34.4	25	11.8
I feel easier, more comfortable and less stressed to participate in face-to-face classroom language activities than in online classroom activities.	41	19.3	43	20.3	47	22.2	64	30.2	17	

Table 2 shows the details of the learners' feelings about the traditional and online classroom environments. Very few students (8.5%) said that they rarely to never feel easy in a real (face-to-face) classroom environment, but the percentage of the participants who said that they rarely or never feel easy in an online classroom environment was higher, albeit not high (29.4%). Comparing the two types of environment, a large number of the students (77.4%) mentioned they feel more comfortable and less stressed in a face-to-face classroom than in an online classroom while a third of them (33.5%) mentioned 'sometimes' which implies a condition of under circumstances. The majority of the learners (85.3%) stated that they feel easy to participate in language activities in front of teachers and classmates in a face-to-face classroom. The percentage who said so for online classroom environment activities was lower, albeit not low (70.3%). Comparing doing the activities in the two types of environment, a larger number of the respondents (61.8%) said they feel easier, more comfortable and less stressed to participate in face-to-face classroom language activities than in online classroom activities (53.7%).

3.2. The Turkish EFL University Learners' Reasons for their Feelings

Table 3. Learners' Reasons for their Feelings

	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
I feel uneasy thinking that teacher or fellow students might see my home setting or hear the voices in my home.	39	18.4	21	9.9	79	37.3	38	17.9	35	16.5
I feel anxious (worried and nervous) about being disconnected during online classes.	37	17.5	48	22.6	60	28.3	46	21.7	21	9.9
I feel anxious thinking that the teacher does not see my seriousness and careful listening during the online classes.	27	12.7	48	22.6	61	28.8	43	20.3	33	15.6
Because I do not have to answer questions while others are looking at me, I feel comfortable during the online classes.	34	16.0	32	15.1	77	36.3	34	16.0	35	16.5

Because others do not see my physical appearance in an online class, I feel comfortable and relaxed.	35	16.5	45	21.2	73	34.4	34	16.0	25	11.8
I feel anxious thinking that the teacher does not see my non-verbal response, such as the way I look, my nodding or shaking head during the online class.	30	14.2	33	15.6	75	35.4	34	16.0	40	18.9
I feel anxious about being recorded for every activity during online classes.	28	13.2	37	17.5	64	30.2	36	17.0	47	22.2
The direct presence of eye contact with the teachers in face-to-face classrooms makes me more nervous than in a virtual (online) environment.	21	9.9	32	15.1	65	30.7	67	31.6	27	12.7
I have techno-phobia (i.e., fear of using technological instruments).	6	2.8	10	4.7	48	22.6	33	15.6	115	54.2

Long-time use of technology during the online classes makes me anxious about my physical and mental health.	32	15.1	57	26.9	61	28.8	40	18.9	22	10.4
I feel isolated (i.e., feeling unhappy because of not seeing or talking to other people) during virtual (online) classes.	38	17.9	50	23.6	57	26.9	30	14.2	37	17.5
The online classroom setting makes me feel more suffocated than a real (face-to-face) classroom.	13	6.1	48	22.6	91	42.9	40	18.9	20	9.4
I feel much involved during face-to-face classes.	53	25.0	52	24.5	39	18.4	55	25.9	13	6.1

Table 3 shows the details of the learners' reasons and feelings. However, here the percentages of the positive answers are explained regardless of the frequency of them. As for the drawbacks of the virtual/online classroom environments, about two-thirds of the respondents (65.6%) stated that they feel uneasy thinking that teacher or fellow students might see their home settings or hear the voices in their homes while below half of the Bangladeshi students in Kaisar and Chowdhury's (2020) research were concerned about this issue. Above two-thirds of the participants (68.4%) feel anxious about being disconnected during online classes. 64.1% feel anxious thinking that the teacher does not see their seriousness and careful listening during the online classes. About two-thirds of the students (65.2%) feel anxious thinking that the teacher does not see their non-verbal response, such as the way they look, their nodding or shaking head

during the online class. 60.9% feel anxious about being recorded in every activity during online classes. Although below One third of the learners (30.1%) stated they have technophobia, 70.8% of the respondents said that long-time use of technology during the online classes makes them anxious about their physical and mental health. 71.6% of the participants stated that the online classroom setting makes them feel more suffocated than a face-to-face classroom while below half of the Bangladeshi students in Kaisar and Chowdhury's (2020) research felt so. 68.4% feel isolated during virtual/online classes, his figure is two times higher than the number found in Kaisar and Chowdhury (2020) as for Bangladeshi learners' opinions. 67.9% of the learners feel much involved during face-to-face classes. Nevertheless, similar results were found by Kaisar and Chowdhury's (2020) as for the other points.

Regarding the responses to the open-ended questions, the students who stated they always, often, or even sometimes feel easier, more comfortable and less stressed when participating in face-to-face classroom language activities than in a virtual/online classroom one, were asked to elaborate on their reasons other than those they specified through close-ended items above. Students mostly referred to the presence of live interactions in face-to-face environments as a positive effective point. The same problem was stated by Bangladeshi students in Kaisar and Chowdhury's (2020) research. The following are some of the Turkish EFL learners' responses in the present study:

Because in real-life class environment you have more warm relationships with friends; you can be like a family, but in a virtual class, you don't feel relaxed.

In a real face-to-face classroom, interaction is more intimate and friendly, which reduces my stress and anxiety level.

I like eye contact and direct speech. This way is natural. I can also get a quick and understandable feedback.

Research has emphasized the importance of interaction in the online learning environment (Kauffman, 2015; Kuo et al., 2013). It has also been criticized that interaction is not at desired levels in online environments, which can be problematic (Zhu, 2012). Interaction and collaborative activities can increase motivational level of the learners (Ozkara & Cakir, 2020), which consequently leads to a decrease in the

foreign language anxiety level, thus improving learners' performance in English (Liu & Huang, 2011).

Moreover, several responses were related to individual differences and preferences, corroborating Aydın's (2018) argument. Below are some of the responses.

I feel more comfortable when I talk with my teachers and my friends in a real classroom. Talking in front of a screen is more stressful for me.

I always get palpitations when I speak in the online class. Interaction in face-to-face activities is by far better and I can easily convey my points in real classes.

Because when I don't have eye contact with others in class, I feel confused. Confusion in online classes is stressful and tiring for me.

Some also mentioned their lack of technological knowledge as troublesome in online classes. Aydin (2011) also stated that Internet familiarity can be a factor considerably affecting the anxiety level.

Those who are not good with technology in online education have problems, but there are no problems when they are trained face to face.

Because not every person is good with technology and these people are afraid of making mistakes, but in face-to-face learning, this problem disappears.

Some mentioned the problem of technical infrastructure, such as power outage or low internet speed or non-existence of internet connection.

Communication is stronger in face-to-face education because there are no problems, such cutting off of internet etc. There is no problem with internet in face-o-face classes, so students can listen carefully and the lesson is not disrupted.

Nevertheless, in terms of the benefits of the online classes, 67.4% of the students said that because they do not have to answer questions while others are looking at them, they feel comfortable during the online classes. Even more of them (72.1%) mentioned that because others do not see their physical appearance in an online class, they feel comfortable and relaxed. Above half of the students (55.7%) stated that the direct presence of eye contact with the teachers in face-to-face classrooms makes them more

nervous than in a virtual/online environment whereas a little above one third of Bangladeshi students in Kaisar and Chowdhury's (2020) study got stressed because of this issue. Nevertheless, similar results were found by Kaisar and Chowdhury's (2020) as for the other points.

As for the open-ended questions, the participants who stated they always, often, or even sometimes feel easier, more comfortable and less stressed to participate in classroom language activities in a virtual/online classroom than in a face-to-face classroom environment were required to explain their other reasons in addition to the ones they mentioned in close-ended items. Some referred to the current pandemic and stated that it is risky for their health to be in the classroom right now. Nevertheless, the majority of other responses were pertinent to the individual differences and preferences. The following are some of their responses:

I find it simpler and more comfortable to attend classes online, I do not have to leave home every morning and come to school every day. I prefer online education even if face-to-face lessons are more efficient because I love the comfort. I do not have any hesitation in participating in classes. I speak whenever I want in online classes.

It is a personal attitude. I cannot be comfortable among people. I feel more comfortable because I am not in the same environment with teachers and friends. I think this helps me understand the lessons better in online lessons.

Nobody sees you; I can speak comfortably. In a real-life social environment, I am more stressed and anxious in front of the public. Online world is more comfortable for me due to the thoughts such as if I mispronounce or if I cannot express myself well, making mistakes is not a big problem.

I usually feel more comfortable when I am alone. In real classroom, when you speak, people stare at you. This is stressful for me, so I am good at and happy with online classes.

In real life I get very stressed in front of people. I feel like I am constantly in an exam due to the classroom environment, but I have not experienced such pressure or anxiety in online classes.

The mentioned reasons can be pertinent to general foreign language anxiety or foreign language oral interaction as well as low-self-confidence, too. As Pichette (2009) maintained, general FLA can make learners unwilling to interact with their peers in the classroom, and it is probable that some students resort to virtual learning for such reason because they seek security and comfort in anonymity. Moreover, the current study found that there were students who misused the virtual classroom environment. The following is an example of what one of them said:

I sometimes feel more comfortable in virtual classes because nobody is looking at you while you are speaking and to be honest you can trick others when you can't speak or you don't know the answers; for example, you can say your internet connection has gone, but in real classes you don't have a chance like that.

The students who felt much involved during face-to-face classes were inquired to elaborate on their attitudes. The followings are some of their reasons:

When I see everyone face to face, I feel more active because almost everyone in the class plays an active role, but this isn't the same when it comes to online classes. Some people are always absent.

It's because I can ask any question easily in the face-to-face classes and also the teacher can create various activities like presentation and role-plays. We can also show the teacher what we've learned and get feedback.

When I am in a real class, I am generally more interested in the lesson, but in a virtual class, I'll definitely be distracted easily. I can focus more easily in a real-life classroom.

A lot of things distract my attention in online education. I can eat while the lesson is being taught. I can look at the phone and even do my hair. I think it's natural. From time to time, people's attention may be distracted and it can be difficult to focus for a long time.

In face-to-face classes, I can give my attention directly to the teacher or subject, but I can't do it in a virtual class at home. I don't feel myself in a classroom. Instructors and other people can't see me or do not talk to me, so this situation gives me the feeling as if I'm sitting alone in a room with a TV.

In the virtual class, most students neither start their webcam nor turn their microphones on, so I feel like I am talking either to myself or the machine. Also, eye contact, showing feelings, and understanding others' emotions make the class activities more interesting.

3.3. The Turkish EFL University Learners' Preference and Reasons

Table 4. Learners' Preference and Reasons

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
A face-to-face classroom is more suitable for me than an online language class.	14	6.6	38	17.9	68	32.1	50	23.6	42	19.8
An online class is more suitable for me than a face-to-face classroom.	31	14.6	64	30.2	71	33.5	27	12.7	19	9.0

Based on Table 4, regardless of the 'neutral' answers which show the respondent may still be on the fence about the required point, 43.4% of the participants stated that a face-to-face classroom is more suitable for them than an online language class while 21.7% said that an online class is more suitable for them than a face-to-face classroom. Comparing Turkish learners in this study with Bangladeshi students in a similar research done by Kaisar and Chowdhury (2020), similar results were found as for the number of participants who stated online environment is more suitable for them than face-to-face classrooms. However, below half of the Turkish learners stated that a face-to-face classroom is more suitable for them than an online language class whereas the majority of the Bangladeshi students declared so.

Using open-ended questions, students were asked to explain their own reasons for what they prefer. Most of the reasons were repetitive, but the following are some of the reasons for preferring face-to-face classes:

The only technological device I have access to is my small smartphone and sometimes I have problems in the virtual classes and exams. Face-to-face education doesn't involve these kinds of problems.

Although I am a rather introverted type of person, I think that the most important part of a successful education is direct and easy access to teachers which is lacking in virtual learning programs. It is hard to understand lessons and even explain oneself from such a 'distance'.

As a human being, I prefer to be in face-to-face and social environments. I could enjoy myself with my friends while we were in a real class. I could make a lot of fun and of course do some activities with my friends. I can't live without really talking to people; it makes me happier and more confident.

In a class environment, I can concentrate more and I believe that we can develop ourselves more and I also strongly think that university and class environment prepares us for working life and we should know how to express ourselves without any hesitation, but in online environment, we don't know how to talk with people and I think this will affect us in our future working life.

Additionally, what follows is some of the reasons for their preferring virtual classes other than the previously mentioned ones. Like what Pichette (2009) already mentioned, the most commonly stated reasons were the place they live, their work schedule, the life costs, life roles, commuting difficulties, and individual differences.

I work during the day, so it will be difficult to go to school in the evening. I am also married and I have a son. I have a lot of responsibilities, so I choose distance education because I can take lessons from my home comfortably.

I do have to work in order to pay my tuition and expenses both for school and for my home. Virtual classes are giving me opportunity to support myself financially.

Online education is flexible. It gives me more free time. Otherwise, it would not be possible for me to attend any other classes because of lack of time and not being in a bigger city.

Because lessons are recorded, when the lessons are over, I feel better. I'll have a chance to watch the lessons again.

4. Conclusions

In short, this study, using a mixed-methods design investigated FLA in virtual EFL classrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic in Turkey. It was found that a large number of the students in Turkey felt more anxious while doing the activities in online classrooms during this crisis. Their reasons were various, including individual differences and preferences, lack of technological knowledge, and the technological infrastructure problem Over half of the respondents felt anxious thinking that others might see their home settings or hear the voices in their homes, about being recorded for every activity, and about their physical and mental health due to long-time use of technology. The online classroom setting also made a large number of the participants feel more suffocated and isolated. Lack of live interactions in online environments were mentioned as a downside, too. However, there were several learners who felt more comfortable with answering questions in online classes because others do not look at them. Some also referred to the Covid-19 pandemic and that it is risky for their health to be in face-to-face classrooms. It can be concluded that although it is normal that many learners experience some degree of FLA when attending a language course in person or online (Russell, 2020), appropriate pedagogical interventions can help to reduce learners' perceived levels of FLA (Russell, 2018). Considering that language learners are likely to experience significant levels of general anxiety due to the current global pandemic, it is therefore necessary to implement techniques and activities that can alleviate and reduce FLA during online and distance learning to provide learners with some level of comfort during this difficult time (Kaisar & Chowdhury, 2020; Russell, 2020).

5. Recommendations

This study presents the following recommendations for future researchers who are interested in this issue.

First, future studies can recruit larger number of participants from diverse populations, so they will be able to present a more complete profile of FLA in pandemic online learning contexts, which contributes to higher generalizability of their findings.

It is also recommended that future researchers investigate the possible mediating effects of demographic factors, such as gender, age, language proficiency, and educational level on the FLA of the EFL learners in online classes amid this pandemic.

Additionally, a longitudinal study can examine the effects of FLA on students' English or any other foreign language proficiency over a semester in this crisis.

Finally, researchers can follow this study's recommendations and explore changes in the effects of online instruction during this crisis on FLA of the EFL learners over a semester in the Covid-19 context.

This study also has some recommendations for the practitioners and stakeholders. The following are the mentioned suggestions, which can be adopted not only in Turkey but also in other countries. These suggestions are offsprings from the study at hand.

a. Some simple techniques, such as asking learners to express their fears or discuss their problems regarding language acquisition process either orally or via journal writing can be helpful (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; Russell, 2018; Russell & Curtis, 2013). In an online platform, this can be done through written discussion boards or through oral voice boards (Russell, 2020).

b. Instructors may frequently send encouraging messages to learners in course announcements and/or discussion forums to reassure them that their anxiety will diminish with time and practise using the language (Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2020).

c. Since part of the anxiety that online language learners currently perceive is the result of the use of new instructional technologies, it is recommended that language learners' digital literacy be analysed at the beginning of the course, Russell which could help instructors determine the types of support learners need to be successful in the online learning environment (Goertler, 2011). Additionally, instructors are recommended to support learners' language learning needs through online tutoring (Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2020), as learners who are new to online or distance learning are likely to need additional instructor support to be successful (, 2020).

d. Online language learners can experience high levels of anxiety when they are required to post audio/video recordings and/or interact in the foreign language

with their peers (Pichette, 2009); therefore, providing practice activities through planned role-plays, think-pair share conversations, and small group discussions, before requiring the students to post audio and/or video recordings or engage in synchronous interactions as compulsory assignments, help ease FLA level (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; Russell, 2020). As recommended by Payne (2020), such practice and assignments can also include sequencing activities with lower cognitive load requirements first.

e. Last but not least, the government and policymakers must also upgrade the internet network to ease such anxiety (Kaisar & Chowdhury, 2020).

In summary, due to the fact that online and distance language learning is currently widely used around the world during the pandemic, teachers are advised to select and implement various research-based pedagogical interventions that they believe are most appropriate for their learners and for their own teaching contexts to help reduce learners' perceived levels of FLA (Russell, 2020).

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