

Foreign Language Anxiety in Distance Education: Finnish Secondary School Students'  
Experiences of Speaking Tasks on Online English Lessons

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## **Abstract**

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) has been recognized by previous research as a significant element in language learning with potential to cause various difficulties for learners of different ages and nationalities (e.g. Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Lucas et al., 2011; Radhia, 2016). While the manifestations, causes and effects of anxiety may be different for each individual, speaking tasks have been found to be among the most anxiety-provoking language learning activities (Young, 1990; Liu & Chen, 2013). However, studies remain scarce on FLA experienced on real-time online lessons held via videoconferencing, which is currently the learning context in many countries due to COVID-19 social distancing regulations. To allow teachers and learners to recognize FLA on online lessons and make efforts to reduce it, the present thesis examines Finnish secondary school students' experiences of anxiety related to speaking tasks on online English videoconferencing lessons during the first distance studying period under COVID-19 in spring 2020. The results from a survey conducted in this thesis bring insights into students' perceptions of the causes and effects of FLA on online videoconferencing lessons and traditional lessons as well as their suggestions of making new learning environments more pleasant. Survey responses are analysed with a descriptive approach comparing the reported elements of FLA with those found in previous research. The results suggest that some elements of FLA identified in previous studies, such as uncertainty, fear, distraction and reluctance to speak, emerge in both the traditional and videoconferencing context. However, the impact of peer pressure seems particularly strong on online lessons when students are unable to see each other's reactions. Differences between individuals in the forms and levels of FLA emerge in causes, effects and perceptions of learning situations. Anxiety-reducing factors and positive effects of FLA such as efforts to improve one's performance were mentioned only for traditional classroom learning, which suggests that students are more used to coping with FLA in face-to-face situations. While improvement suggestions ranged from omitting speaking tasks to forcing everyone to speak on camera, a relaxed and friendly atmosphere seems essential for making online English lessons more pleasant for every learner.

## Tiivistelmä

Vieraan kielen ahdistus (*Foreign Language Anxiety, FLA*) on tutkimuksissa tunnistettu merkittävänä kielenoppimisen elementtinä, joka voi aiheuttaa monenlaisia vaikeuksia eri-ikäisille ja eri kansalaisuuksia edustaville oppijoille (esim. Horwitz ym., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Lucas ym., 2011; Radhia, 2016). Vaikka ilmenemistavat, syyt ja seuraukset voivat olla erilaisia kullakin yksilöllä, puhumisharjoitusten on todettu kuuluvan eniten ahdistusta aiheuttaviin kielenoppimistehtäviin (Young, 1990; Liu & Chen, 2013). Reaaliaikaisilla, videoyhteyden kautta toteutetuilla verkko-oppitunneilla koettua vieraan kielen ahdistusta on toistaiseksi tutkittu vain vähän. Kuitenkin tällä hetkellä juuri tämä on oppimiskonteksti useissa maissa koronaviruspandemiaan liittyvien lähikontaktien välttämissuosituksen vuoksi. Tutkielmassani perehdyn suomalaisten yläkoulu- ja lukioikäisten kokemuksiin englannin videoyhteysoppituntien puhetilanteissa koetusta ahdistuksesta ensimmäisellä etäopetusjaksolla koronaviruspandemian aikana keväällä 2020. Tarkastelun tavoitteena on mahdollistaa opettajille sekä oppijoille vieraan kielen ahdistuksen tunnistaminen ja sen lieventämiseen pyrkiminen. Tutkielmaan kuuluva kysely tuo näkyviin oppilaiden käsityksiä videoyhteysoppitunneilla sekä perinteisillä oppitunneilla koetun vieraan kielen ahdistuksen syistä ja seurauksista. Lisäksi kysely kartoittaa oppilaiden ehdotuksia siitä, miten uusista oppimisympäristöistä voidaan tehdä miellyttävämpiä.

Tulokset analysoidaan deskriptiivisellä otteella verraten esiin tulleita vieraan kielen ahdistuksen elementtejä aiempien tutkimusten löydöksiin. Tulokset osoittavat, että tietyt aiempien tutkimusten tunnistamat vieraan kielen ahdistuksen elementit tulevat esiin niin perinteisillä kuin videoyhteysoppitunneilla. Näihin kuuluvat esimerkiksi epävarmuus, pelko, keskittymisvaikeudet sekä haluttomuus puhua. Ryhmäpaineen vaikutus vaikuttaa erityisen vahvalta verkko-oppitunneilla, kun oppilaat eivät näe toistensa reaktioita. Aiheuttavat tekijät, vaikutukset sekä kokemukset oppimistilanteista tuovat esiin yksilöidenvälisiä eroja ahdistuksen muodoissa ja vahvuusasteissa. Ahdistusta lieventäviä tekijöitä sekä positiivisia vaikutuksia mainittiin vain perinteisen luokkahuonetuntien osalta. Näihin kuuluivat esimerkiksi pyrkimys oman suorituksen parantamiseen. Tulokset viittaavat siihen, että oppilaat ovat tottuneempia käsittelemään vieraan kielen ahdistusta kasvokkain tapahtuvissa vuorovaikutustilanteissa. Parannusehdotukset vaihtelivat puhumisharjoitusten poistamisesta kaikkien puhumaan pakottamiseen, mutta rento ja tuttavallinen ilmapiiri vaikuttaa olevan keskeinen edellytys englannintuntien miellyttävimmiksi tekemiseksi jokaiselle oppijalle.

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## 1 Introduction

Speaking in a foreign language classroom appears an element of studying that can provoke strong feelings and reactions shared between different age and nationality groups. Many of these feelings may be considered unpleasant; language class participants in Von Wörde's (2003) study expressed "extremely negative experiences" (p. 4) while Cohen & Norst (1989) found intense anxiety and fear associated with speaking in front of the foreign language class. In their seminal work, Horwitz et al. (1986) establish Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) as a distinctive phenomenon peculiar to language learning in classrooms and associated with experiences such as being afraid to speak the foreign language, panicking, nervousness and confusion while speaking, and self-consciousness when required to speak in front of the class. FLA has been widely studied in classroom contexts, where researchers have found for example pedagogical practices and the pressure of evaluation to be some of its main causes. Arguing that FLA stems from "performance evaluation within an academic and social context" (p. 127), Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) based on three performance-related anxieties: communication apprehension, text anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Von Wörde (2003) connects FLA to the common fear of public speaking, and several studies have found speaking activities to be among the most anxiety-provoking tasks for language students (Pihko, 2009; Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Young, 1990; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Horwitz et al., 1986; Fergina, 2010).

So far, fewer studies focus on FLA experienced outside the traditional physical classroom. In the case of online meetings, the notion of public speaking becomes questionable as the way a speaker experiences an audience may differ greatly from that in a more common classroom setting. Pichette (2009) found no significant differences in university students' FLA between distance and classroom learning, while acknowledging that usually professors perceive higher levels of anxiety in the latter case. On the other hand, Huang and Hwang (2013) suggest that language learning assisted by multimedia and computers "creates a non-threatening, positive and relaxed English learning environment" (p. 32) which reduces FLA, while Meunier (1998) found that some students in computer-mediated language learning suffered from the lack of non-verbal information that is present in face-to-face communication and disliked the impersonal feeling of talking to a computer.

However, fewer studies focus on obligatory language lessons with synchronous video connection; this is a new teaching and learning context that was imposed also on Finnish secondary schools due to COVID-19 lockdowns in March 2020 as the government ruled that distant education will replace contact teaching until May (see Finnish National Agency for Education, 2020). However, as the situation was similar world over, some studies have already investigated the effects of COVID-19 distance education on students: Shahzad et al. (2020) found that although Pakistani university students enjoyed virtual teaching, they still preferred traditional contact teaching; the majority of participants agreed that students are scared of virtual teaching and that it brings changes to their emotions, learning behaviour and attitudes. Some of these changes were deemed positive, as students felt virtual teaching eased their worrying and frustration. University teachers in China indicated similar advantages of distance education during COVID-19, stating that there were more forms of teacher—student interaction and students were more eager to participate when showing their image was not obligatory (Gao & Zhang, 2020). However, Shahzad et al. (2020) mention lack of teacher—student and student—student interaction as disadvantages of virtual learning, along with problems of monitoring and discipline, the lack of other social activities, the dependence on internet connections and students' inequal access to online facilities. Thus, there is no consensus on the impact of distance education during COVID-19 on students and their FLA. Martin and Alvarez Valdivia (2017) conducted a study on the relationship between FLA and corrective feedback in online oral teacher-student interaction, but here the participants only had experience of student-student synchronous interaction on online language lessons, wherefore the learning context they evaluated was hypothetical. Thus, as Russel (2020) recognizes in his literature review on FLA in online learning, research on FLA in online meetings with a teacher and a group of students remains scarce. Different countries may have employed different methods of remote teaching during COVID-19 and cultural aspects overall play a role in experiences of language learning (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992; Horwitz, 2001), wherefore a study in Finland may bring new perspectives on the issue.

Numerous studies have focused on FLA in adult learners (e.g. Fergina, 2010; Altunel, 2019; Mohammadi et al., 2013). Dutra & Finger (2020) observe that findings about the effect of age on FLA are not consistent, which might partly result from the fact that it is often connected to other factors such as proficiency. A study on lower secondary school students' personal experiences will help young learners to recognize, conceptualize and overcome their anxiety. FLA has often been measured with quantitative methods, such as different scales and questionnaires (Král'ová, 2016). Indeed, FLA

research seems to have for long leaned on the FLCAS conceived in the 80s; thus, with learning environments changing rapidly due to advancing technology and new insights in pedagogical research, updates and improvements to the model might be recommendable. Moreover, Cohen and Norst (1989) suggest that research on FLA has tended to “regard students as experimental material” (p. 66) rather than individuals capable of contributing to research by considering their experiences and feelings in a meaningful way. An open-question approach will allow students to consider and voice their personal perceptions of FLA, providing an insider view on the topic. A qualitative analysis of learners’ accounts of their personal experiences offers a different perspective and might bring new insights to complement the older measurement models.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in particular and increased online learning in general, it is necessary to study FLA in new, modern frameworks to improve online studying and teaching. With its focus on Finnish lower secondary school students’ experiences of obligatory online English lessons during the coronavirus pandemic, the present thesis will help teachers and students prepare for the unpredictable future of the virus situation with improved teaching and learning techniques. Understanding the particularities of FLA on online lessons is crucial for designing future learning environments, which are likely to increasingly utilize the opportunities of technology. By contributing to the relatively scarce qualitative research on FLA and allowing for new perspectives not fitting into the existing model shaped by the FLCAS, the present thesis will approach FLA through students’ open descriptions of their personal experiences of speaking on online lessons as part of their obligatory English lessons. Thus, this inquiry seeks to identify the possible differences in FLA experienced in online versus in-person lessons by focusing on factors influencing FLA; effects of anxiety on students and studying; pleasant and unpleasant experiences of speaking situations; and ways to alleviate FLA on online lessons. Data is collected through an online survey mainly consisting of open questions. Responses are analyzed by comparing them with previous findings on FLA. Finally, implications and suggestions for improving online learning and teaching are proposed based on the findings.

## 2 Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

Spielberger (1983, as cited in Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 125) defines anxiety as “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system”. When these types of reactions are provoked specifically by the language learning context, they represent a specific anxiety reaction, as opposed to general anxiety occurring in various situations (Horwitz et al., 1986). This suggests that the language learning situation comprises some distinctive elements which may cause anxiety even for individuals who otherwise do not experience it. Thus, Horwitz et al. (1986) identify FLA “as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). Negative feelings such as nervousness and apprehension are detrimental to motivation and may make language lessons feel unpleasant and even cause one to avoid them altogether. Therefore, understanding FLA is essential for promoting and improving language education; Horwitz et al. recognize that teachers and students alike perceive anxiety as “a major obstacle to be overcome in learning to speak another language” (p. 125).

Horwitz et al (1986, p. 127) connect FLA to three anxieties related to performance: *communication apprehension*, *test anxiety*, and *fear of negative evaluation*. Communication apprehension is related to “difficulty in speaking in public, listening or learning a spoken utterance...derived from the learners’ personal knowledge that they will have difficulty understanding others and making themselves understood” (Lucas et al., 2011, p. 102). Speaking tasks are considered among the most anxiety-provoking elements in foreign language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1990). Test anxiety, in turn, stems from fear of failure and is related to formal exams but also other situations that involve evaluation, while fear of negative evaluation is anxiety caused by apprehension of being judged by others (Lucas et al., 2011).

To measure language students’ anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS) based on the experiences of a language learning support group. The scale consists of 33 statements which the participants rate on a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The different items of the FLCAS indicate communication apprehension, text anxiety



and fear of negative evaluation. Horwitz et al. (1986) specify that students who are anxious about speaking agree with statements mentioning panicking when having to speak without preparation in the foreign language class and feeling “very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students” (p. 129). According to Horwitz et al. (1986), communication apprehension is also related to fear of not understanding everything the other participant says, as anxious students feel they cannot comprehend the message unless they understand each word. FLCAS is widely accepted and used in research to measure FLA (Bárkányi & Melchor-Couto, 2017).

While researchers recognize that FLA can be experienced as facilitating or debilitating depending for example on learners’ personality traits and task difficulty (Ohata, 2005), identifying the negative effects of anxiety on language students and studying is crucial for improving teaching and learning environments. Horwitz et al. (1986) suggest effects of classroom FLA such as difficulty comprehending the foreign language, failing to fulfill one’s potential in test situations, overstudying, and skipping lessons. According to their theory, anxious students may experience worriedness, apprehension and fear as well as concentration difficulties. The manifestations of FLA are physical, verbal and psychological: some students start acting comically, others may freeze or reply in very few words (Young, 1992). Hentinen and Piskonen (1998) identified similar impacts in Finnish elementary school students: FLA was related to unsureness, lack of confidence in one’s language skills, and avoidance behavior such as not volunteering to answer in class unless completely sure of one’s answer. Forgetfulness and loss of focus have also been identified in FLA research on Finnish secondary school students, along with physical symptoms such as increased heart rate and shaking of voice (Kiviniemi, 2019). Anxiety may also cause situational problems of short-term and long-term memory (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991) and poor performance in tasks requiring quick responding (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Long term effects of FLA include loss of interest and motivation (Yan & Horwitz, 2008) and lower achievement (Chan & Wu, 2004) and problems with language performance (Pihko, 2009; Radhia, 2016; Tanveer, 2008). These findings show that anxiety related to foreign language classroom learning may manifest itself in various ways which may be very different for each individual.

Another important objective of FLA research is identifying sources of anxiety. As mentioned above, speaking tasks are often considered as the most anxiety-provoking classroom activities (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1990; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Radhia, 2016), Finnish studies have made the same finding (Pihko, 2009; Kyyrönen, 1997). However, Kiviniemi (2019) observes that students often feel anxious namely when speaking in front of the class, which suggests that anxiety

depends on who are listening; approximately half of her participants were not anxious in speaking tasks done in groups or with a partner. Many studies have found that teachers and their classroom practices are likely to influence FLA (von Wörde, 2003; Lucas et al., 2011; Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Horwitz et al., 1986; Aida, 1994). However, Chan and Wu (2004) found that some students were more nervous speaking in front of peers than in individual oral test situations, while approximately half of the participants in Kiviniemi's (2019) study were never or only rarely anxious when speaking with the teacher alone. Classroom arrangement and seating order (Yan & Horwitz, 2008), learning strategies (Biria et al., 2013; Yan & Horwitz, 2008) and difficulties of understanding or pronunciation (McCoy, 1979) have been suggested to have an impact on anxiety. Other studies have found evidence for the components of anxiety identified by Horwitz et al. (1986) as the sources of anxiety are often connected to communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation or test anxiety: Hentinen and Piskonen (1998) found that fear of negative evaluation was the most significant source of anxiety for her participants, as the fear of being inferior to others is strongly connected to all the other aspects of FLA, while other studies have found fear of failure (Liu & Chen, 2013) and feelings of being less competent than one's peers (Chan & Wu, 2004) cause anxiety in many students. These feelings may stem from competitive classroom activities, low proficiency, the pressure that students put on themselves (Chan & Wu, 2004) and low self-confidence in one's language skills (Young, 1991; Cheng et al., 1999; Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Liu & Chen, 2013; Kyyrönen, 1997). However, there may be great differences in experiences between individuals, as self-image, motivation, attitudes, personality traits and achievement shape learners' FLA (Hentinen & Piskonen, 1998).

Researchers and experts have suggested various methods for alleviating FLA, many of which stem from teachers' conscious efforts and thus require their recognition of anxiety in the classroom. Horwitz et al. (1986) state that the teacher's role is to make learning environments less anxiety-provoking for example by carefully considering their techniques when correcting mistakes and supporting students' developing confidence. Based on their study on Finnish pupils, Hentinen & Piskonen (1998) propose that teachers should avoid making sudden questions to students and instead allow them enough time to answer, as well as talk about FLA in the classroom to make students realize that it is nothing unusual. Furthermore, teachers should aim for a relaxed classroom atmosphere where mistakes are not taken too seriously (Hentinen & Piskonen, 1998; Hashemi et al., 2013) and be careful to offer constructive feedback instead of interrupting students to correct them (Tanveer, 2008). Experts interviewed by Young (1992) recommend that teachers work to build trust between themselves and the

students, establish a secure and friendly atmosphere and take students' individual differences into account. It was also suggested that anxiety may be reduced by allowing group work and open-ended answers instead of strict discrete-point testing that focuses attention on individual students. Thus, to reduce anxiety, the teacher must be aware of students' experiences and recognize manifestations of FLA in the classroom and in the context of particular task types. However, instead of avoiding anxiety-provoking tasks, it seems in the long-term more beneficial to help students to build a realistic understanding of language learning and related expectations, focus on speaking skills and include non-native pronunciation in listening tasks to help students overcome their communication apprehension (Tanveer, 2008). Hashemi et al. (2013) advocate for a communicative approach in teaching and opportunities for students to experience achievement and satisfaction. Despite the importance of the role of the teacher, studies recognize the positive influence of a common spirit and friendly atmosphere in the classroom (von Wörde, 2003; Yan & Horwitz, 2008). Language learning strategies have also been found to be a potential way to reduce FLA (Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Mohammadi et al., 2013).

## **2.2 Online environments in language teaching**

In the past decade, the role of technology and Internet in teaching and learning has rapidly grown in importance. This means not only increasing opportunities for independent study, but diversification of classroom activities and teaching contexts. In Finnish comprehensive schools, technology has become an essential tool, the use of which is promoted in the national core curriculum. The Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) considers information and communications technology a crucial part of diverse learning environments and encourages adoption of new technological solutions to promote and support learning (Opetushallitus, 2014). The possibilities of online environments in language learning range from free time chatting with native speakers and virtual worlds as international language immersion to games and discussions forums incorporated into language classes.

Computers and mobile devices have largely been utilized not as the essence but rather a part and a tool of teaching. Huang and Hwang (2013) found that multimedia, such as songs, videos, DVDs and computers, had a reducing impact on foreign language anxiety and were overall experienced positively by students. Thus, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) can help to motivate students and make them feel more relaxed (Huang & Hwang, 2013). Other benefits of CALL include access to

multimodal materials, opportunities for individualized and explorative learning and facilitating elements such as online dictionaries and writing software (Warschauer, 1998). The internet and online CALL allow access to authentic material and interaction with native speakers of the target language (Warschauer, 1998).

However, CALL is different from distance learning, where the teacher and learner do not meet physically and education may be textual or involve synchronous or asynchronous online communication (Donahoe, 2010). Virtual teaching is a form of education based on technology such as computers and the internet where learners and instructors are usually not in physical contact (Shahzad et al., 2020). Thus, virtual teaching delivered via the internet—that is, online teaching—describes the situation in Finnish secondary schools during COVID-19 lockdowns, when the Government decided on distance education replacing contact teaching from March 2020 until May 2020. According to EDUFI (2020), studies, teachers and students have indicated that in Finland distance education has been very successful (p. 2) under the COVID-19 circumstances, due to “the high professional skills of teachers and society’s investments in education and digitalization” (p. 3). In a 2018 PISA survey, the percentage of Finnish students agreeing that an online education platform was available and that they have a computer available for schoolwork was higher than the OECD average (OECD, 2020). Thus, Finnish students are likely to have enjoyed some of the benefits of online learning and CALL indicated by research, such as excitement, impartiality (Shahzad, 2020), increased confidence, courage to participate (Gao & Zhang, 2020), and independence (Kyppö, 2015).

Nevertheless, studies also indicate that teachers and students have suffered from increased workloads and stress (EDUFI, 2020). The impartiality of online education is not always realized; in Finland, the percentage of students from lower-income families who did not have a computer for schoolwork was higher than the OECD average (OECD, 2020). Finnish studies have suggested that technological elements may become a distraction for learning (Zhelezovskaia, 2016), and students may be reluctant to employ new technologies as they are used to the traditional practices and not eager to take responsibility for their own learning as the use of some applications may require (Koivisto, 2013). During the COVID-19 distance education period, research has found approximately half of general upper secondary school students reported lack of motivation and poorer quality of teaching (EDUFI, 2020). Virtual education may bring difficulties of monitoring and keeping discipline for the teachers (Shahzad et al., 2020), while it also requires increased self-discipline (Montiel-Chamorro, 2018) and responsibility from students (Kyppö, 2015).

Another downside of distance learning is insufficient social interaction (Shahzad et al., 2020; Gao & Zhang, 2020) and the lack of nonverbal cues (Meunier, 1998) in conversations without video connection. Coman et al. (2020) suggested that using videoconferencing in distance learning facilitates understanding and information processing as it substitutes physical social interaction. Arnold (2007) found that asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) may not be ideal for interactive conversation practice, while synchronous CMC helps some students gain confidence in speaking a foreign language. The European Schools highly recommend live interactions especially for secondary education during emergency distance education (Schola Europaea, 2020). Thus, it is noteworthy that the number of real time lessons provided during COVID-19 school lockdowns in Finland seems to have been quite low (EDUFI, 2020).

### **2.3 Foreign language anxiety and online learning**

While online learning may be exciting and interesting for learners due to its flexibility and novelty (Kyppö, 2015), not all students are comfortable or familiar with using technology. Kráľová (2016) suggests that foreign language learning outside a classroom environment may cause even more stress, while Pichette (2009) notes that, although professors often perceive higher levels of FLA in distance students, it might be due to the students expressing these feelings more freely because of the of the experienced anonymity and intimacy. Anxiety may be more difficult to address in online teaching than in the traditional classroom, as teachers cannot see students' physical signs of anxiety, and anxiety related to the use of computers or technology may be confused with or exacerbate FLA (Donahoe, 2010).

Studies have found that young students in particular generally have a positive attitude towards technology; online environments and other technological elements seem to reduce learners' stress levels and foreign language anxiety and in turn increase motivation. Warschauer (1998) observes that using computers often is enjoyable for students, while Ushida (2013) found that students on foreign language courses consisting of online as well as in-person teaching expressed a positive and motivated attitude towards learning and studying. In Beauvois' (1998) study, participants on university language classes involving real-time written online discussions "agreed that working with a computer was unstressful and facilitated self-expression" and described the computer room "as much less anxiety-producing than the regular classroom" (p. 101). According to Huang and Hwang (2013), CALL "creates

a non-threatening, positive and relaxed English learning environment and tends to help reduce learners' language learning anxiety and to motivate their learning." (p. 32). The online environment may promote more personal teachers—student relationships as students are able to ask questions privately, as opposed to the traditional classroom situation, where going to the teacher to ask for help may be hindered by peer-pressure (Donahoe, 2010). In Meunier's (1998) study, participants experienced only low levels of anxiety during written CMC and felt that online conversations were more open and relaxed than the traditional classroom, while Gao & Zhang (2020) found that students were encouraged to participate when they did not have to show their faces on online lessons. Tanis & Postmes (2007) found that the lack of cues to identity in online communication may contribute to a unified group feeling. Thus, it seems that the anxiety-reducing effects of online learning are strongly related to lower levels of self-exposure—the feeling of being the focus of attention which often makes language learning activities anxiety-provoking (Young, 1990; Kyyrönen, 1997). Language students have indicated that online courses make them less anxious as there is no public criticism, competition or peer pressure (Hauck & Hurd, 2005).

Consequently, it is worth noting that much of the anxiety reducing effect of technology-enhanced environments may stem from the independence they traditionally allow for students; that is, often the incorporation of technological devices into teaching means more independent work, which naturally eliminates the anxiety provoked by the presence of a group of peers. Arnaiz (2012) observes that "the illusion of anonymity" (p. 51) experienced in online language learning is crucial for alleviating anxiety. Thus, the relationship between FLA and distance learning remains ambiguous; however, in *The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery*, language anxiety is defined as "students' anxiety reaction to situations in which they might make use of the target language" which might occur in classrooms as well as "in any context where they are called upon to speak the target language" (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993, p. 2). In addition, many studies on language learning focus on students who have voluntarily opted for online learning as an alternative to complete course work (e.g. Ushida, 2013; Isenberg, 2010), which may be the reason for lower anxiety, as students taking language classes voluntarily for their own enjoyment and not due to requirements have been found to experience lower levels of FLA (Aida, 1994).

Thus, real time videoconferencing language lessons are a different and less researched environment for FLA. Arnold (2007) found that discussion practice through synchronous CMC had a stronger positive impact on language learners' self-confidence than asynchronous discussions, which suggests that the real-time aspect might be the benefit of videoconferencing, not only the video feed. Moses (2020) observes that online lessons with video connection may cause anxiety and stress due to the

potentially threatening feeling of constant eye contact while seeing every classmate's face on the screen. Furthermore, the videoconferencing format requires more effort and focus than face to face communication as students try to pay attention to many people's nonverbal cues at once (Schola Europaea, 2020). However, Wang (2004) suggested that oral-visual synchronous CMC is form of interaction not only more authentic than synchronous oral or written CMC but also richer than face to face communication, explaining that the visual aspect may be even more important for distance language learners as it can alleviate feelings of anxiety and isolation. In the study by Xiao et al. (2010), the majority of the language learner participants felt less anxious in online videoconferencing than face-to-face interaction. They stated that seeing the other person on camera helped them relieve tension when starting a conversation and make it more fun and playful; shy students in particular saw benefits in videoconferencing, as looking at the person on the screen while knowing they really are far away felt less threatening than actual eye contact. Eslit (2017) suggested that some objections to videoconferencing may stem from the belief that the activities in such an environment will not bring any new benefits as they can be brought into the traditional classroom as such; however, participants in his study felt their stress reduced and confidence increased for other language learning situations as they got used to videoconferencing.

Nevertheless, the dynamics of FLA in online environments are not entirely different from those in classroom learning. The videoconferencing format is seen as closely resembling authentic real-life communication (Loranc-Paszylk, 2018; Xiao et al., 2010), wherefore feelings similar to those typical for traditional classroom learning may emerge. The influence of online environments on FLA seems dependent individual traits, for example being introvert or extrovert (Meunier, 1998); therefore, it is recommended that teachers allow students to choose whether they want to have their camera on during lessons (Schola Europaea, 2020). The experience is also shaped by what methods and tasks are employed in online learning and how; learners are more confident talking about some topics than others (Chen & Lee, 2011) and flexibility and freedom contribute to a relaxed classroom atmosphere, while overly controlled tasks as well as the instructors' lack of confidence may reduce students' motivation (Meunier, 1998).

### **3 Methods and data collection**

#### **3.1 Methods**

The present thesis utilizes mainly qualitative data, which is analysed with a descriptive approach. To gain insight into students' personal experiences of FLA, the data was collected through an online survey. Since studies show that FLA is often difficult for teachers to perceive unless physical symptoms are seen (Chan & Wu, 2004; Ohata, 2005; Hentinen & Piskonen, 1998; Donahoe, 2010), students' descriptions of their personal experiences may provide a more accurate understanding of the phenomenon. Surveys with ready-made alternatives only provide answers to questions that the researcher has asked, wherefore this format may leave out something essential about the respondents' experiences of anxiety (Almonkari, 2007). Self-evaluative descriptions are considered appropriate for studying topics such as anxiety, as the individual knows their personal experience best, and a qualitative approach reveals the process nature as well as the dynamic and individual aspects of anxiety (Almonkari, 2007). Thus, open questions were chosen for the present survey to allow students to freely express themselves in their own words.

The material was approached in an open, descriptive manner, that is, instead of seeking to test hypotheses or theories, the goal of the analysis was to gain new insight into students' personal experiences of foreign language speaking anxiety on obligatory online English lessons. As foreign language anxiety of secondary school students on obligatory English lessons involving video connection remains an unexamined case, the present thesis provides a description of students' experiences, aiming for an inside perspective by hearing the personal sentiments and interpretations of participants. Descriptive research aims "to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics...concerned with what rather than how or why..." (Nassaji, 2015). Thus, to build an understanding of FLA in the present context, the data is analyzed by finding similarities and differences with experiences and theories of FLA indicated in previous research.



### 3.2 Data collection

Data for the present thesis was collected with an online questionnaire (see Appendix A). Finnish lower and upper secondary school teachers provided the link to the questionnaire for pupils during English lessons. Twenty-four participants comprising of ninth graders and upper secondary school students (approx. 15—18 years old) completed the anonymous online Google Forms questionnaire on their English lessons. The questions were in Finnish and mostly collected qualitative data, that is, participants answered open questions which asked them to reflect on their own experiences in writing. Students were asked to describe their feelings regarding speaking situations on online English lessons under the distance study period made obligatory due to COVID-19 in the spring of 2019 and to compare these experiences with traditional classroom studying. Before passing the questionnaire to students, it was confirmed with the teachers that their online English lessons had included real-time videoconferencing with the class. However, it should be noted that the answers showed that not all teachers had followed this instruction as respondents referred to classes with only audio connection instead of video. Still, this is not a problem for the analysis: on the contrary, considering audio-only conferencing allows new insights into FLA, and it is indeed more common that only the teacher has their camera on during real-time online lessons. In the beginning of the question form it was made explicit that the answers will remain anonymous and confidential and be used as material for the present thesis. In addition, the questionnaire included a short text defining foreign language anxiety and speaking situations on online lessons.

The first two questions gathered quantitative data, as respondents were asked how often they experience anxiety on English lessons in classroom lessons and then on online lessons, on a scale of *never* to *always*. The six following questions were open and focused on the respondents' unpleasant and pleasant experiences on online English lessons as well as the perceived factors influencing anxiety and the effects anxiety of anxiety on learning and studying in classroom and online environments respectively. The last question allowed participants to voice additional thoughts or comments on the topic.

## 4 Findings and analysis

In this section, I will present findings obtained from answers to the questionnaire and analyse these with regard to previous FLA research. The questions and answers are translations from Finnish to English. The analysis is divided into sections corresponding to the six questions of the questionnaire.

### 4.1 Frequency of FLA experienced by students

The first two questions collected quantitative data as respondents were asked to evaluate how often speaking English makes them anxious in the classroom and on online lessons. Figures 1 and 2 represent the findings. Due to an error in the design of the questionnaire, three respondents had chosen two answers each in question number two regarding contact teaching: one respondent chose both *always* and *often*, and two other respondents chose both *rarely* and *never*. This was addressed in the analysis by interpreting the first individual's answer as *often* and the two other individuals' answers as *rarely*, as the extreme answers can be presumed less likely than the less extreme answers on the scale of frequency. The percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

The responses indicated differences in the prevalence of anxiety on online and classroom lessons. It seems that the experiences of anxiety are very different for different individuals, as each of the options was chosen by at least one student. Regarding online lessons, *rarely* was the most popular option, chosen by 10 students (42 %). Four students (17 %) chose the option *always*, and the same number chose the option *often*. Three students (13 %) answered *sometimes*, and the same number of students answered *never*. Thus, there seems to be a larger group of students who feel FLA only rarely, while the rest of the respondents divide into groups experiencing differing degrees of anxiety. Figure 1 demonstrates the results.

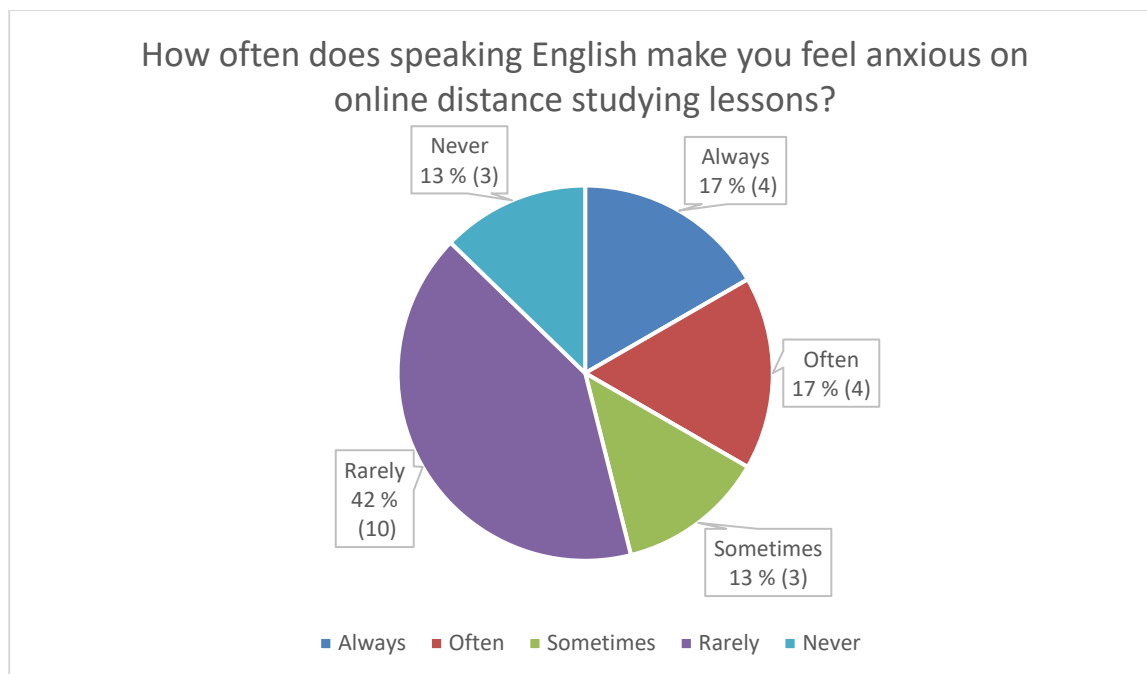


Figure 1. Frequency of anxiety experienced on online lessons.

The fact that the distribution of the answers is quite equal suggests that experiences of anxiety differ greatly between individuals, which supports findings of previous research; as FLA is shaped by factors such as personality traits (Hentinen & Piskonen, 1998; Chan & Wu, 2004; Chen & Lee, 2011), learning strategies (Yan, 2008; Biria et al., 2013) and level of proficiency (Ohata, 2005; Kyyrönen, 1997), the experience is unique for each learner. Previous experience may also influence FLA (Garner & MacIntyre, 1993), which may be especially important for online learning, as some individuals are more familiar with technology than others depending on personal interests and hobbies but also sociocultural background in terms of what technology has been affordable for one's family. Meunier (1998) found that learners who were not familiar with or did not have positive experiences of the type of technology used in computer-mediated language lessons were nervous about using it.

It is noteworthy that more than 40 % reported speaking on online English lessons causes anxiety only rarely (Figure 1). This may suggest that today internet and technology are highly present in the life of Finnish youth, and therefore not an anxiety inducing factor for many of them Pihko (2009) and Kiviniemi (2019) found in their studies that speaking situations were particularly anxiety-provoking for Finnish upper secondary school English learners. Thus, the finding that a large number of students were only rarely anxious in speaking situations online suggests that the online environment, rather than other

factors such as a different cultural context or age, may account for the differences between the findings of the present survey on online lessons and those of previous international research on FLA in traditional classrooms.

For FLA in traditional classrooms, the most popular option was *often*, chosen by eight students (31 %). Five students (22 %) chose the option *sometimes* and one student (4 %) answered *always*. The option *rarely* was chosen by six students (25 %) and the option *never* by four students (17 %). As with online lessons, the distribution of responses is quite equal. However, there does not appear to be such a large majority with a similar experience, as the difference between the number of students choosing *often* and *rarely* is not very large. Fewer students chose the option *always*, but the option *rarely* was also less popular. Roughly the same number of students chose the option *never* for traditional and online contexts, and many respondents chose the option *rarely* or *never* in both questions. Figure 2 demonstrates these results.

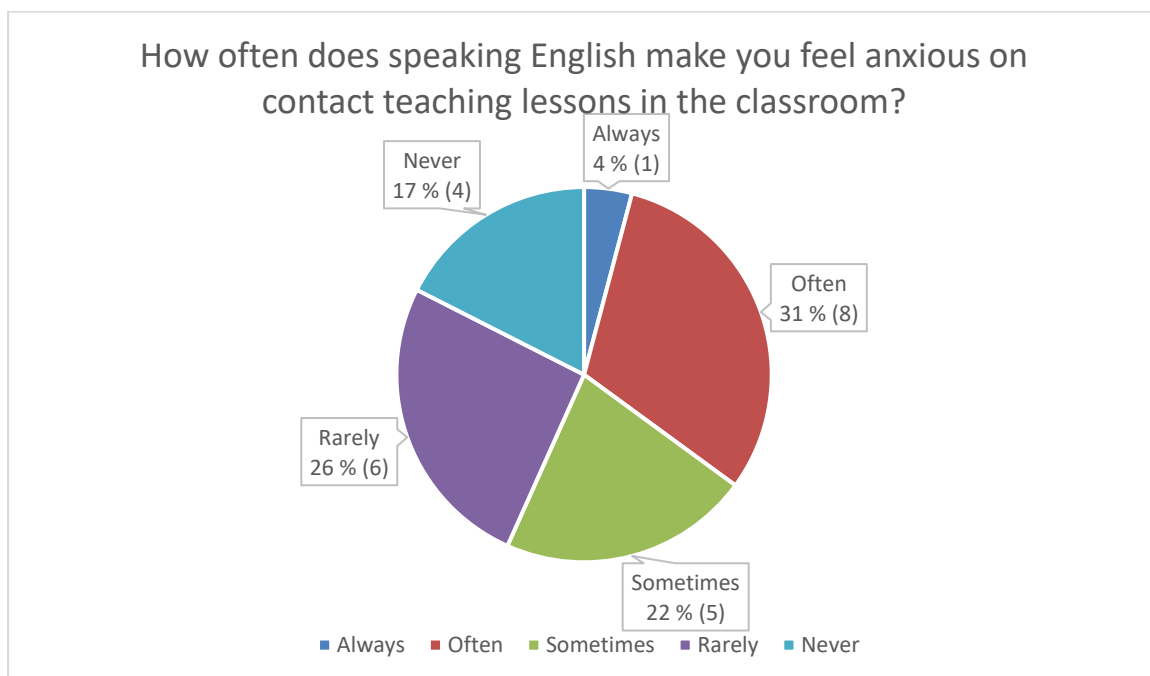


Figure 2. Frequency of anxiety experienced in contact teaching.

Overall, the quantitative results from the first questions do not reveal much of the differences in FLA in online versus traditional contexts. However, the fact that the most popular option was *rarely* for online

lessons and *often* for traditional classrooms suggests that videoconferencing lessons involve potentially anxiety-reducing elements. One possible explanation for the result that more students chose *always* for online than for classroom lessons is that the distance learning environment aggravates the anxiety of learners who experience FLA only occasionally in the traditional learning context. Horwitz et al. (1986) suggest that there are learners with debilitating FLA who can be identified as they share some common characteristics indicated in the FLCAS. Thus, as individuals experience different levels of anxiety depending for example on proficiency, personality (Meunier, 1998) and task type (Hentinen & Piskonen, 1998), the effects on students' FLA caused by the shift from traditional classrooms to online learning may contrast with each other.

#### **4.2 Factors influencing FLA on online lessons**

In the second question, students named factors that may have an impact on whether speaking English feels pleasant or distressing during online lessons. Respondents mentioned various causes of FLA, most of which have been identified in previous research. Nearly half of the responses were related to the presence of others; students cited factors such as “classroom atmosphere”, “classmates”, “attitude of the class”, “audience”. This suggests that peer-pressure has a major influence on FLA. One respondent wrote, “being judged by others for the way one speaks English”, while another referred to “the others’ opinions on my pronunciation or on answers that go wrong”. These answers show that students are afraid of other people’s negative reactions. Some participants wrote that the number of people on the lesson is important, which suggests that smaller group size can make speaking feel less intimidating by establishing a more familiar and relaxed atmosphere. Indeed, peers seemed to play a more important role than the teacher, which was mentioned as a factor by only one student. In addition, students mentioned factors arising from personal beliefs, such as the correctness of one’s pronunciation, the degree of difficulty of the tasks or whether one “knows all the words”.

The factors related to pronunciation support the notion that speaking is an especially anxiety-provoking element in language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1990). Task difficulty is related to one’s perceived level of proficiency and self-confidence, which have been found to have an impact on FLA (Saghafi & Shirvan, 2020). The influence of peers is supported by previous FLA research: in Garner & MacIntyre’s (1993, p. 8) “socio-educational model of second language learning”, the socio-

cultural environment is the most important aspect. The reported importance of the classroom atmosphere reflects the performance-related anxieties of test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation which Horwitz et al. (1986) connect to FLA. The results support the notion of Lucas et al. (2011) that due to fear of negative evaluation, peer pressure is a potential cause of anxiety in the foreign language classroom – which thus seems to apply to online learning as well.

It is noteworthy that only one student mentioned the teacher may influence FLA on online lessons. Studies on FLA in traditional classrooms highlight the role of the teacher for alleviating anxiety in foreign language classrooms (Cohen & Norst, 1989; Mohammadi et al., 2013; Ohata, 2005; Cheng et al., 1999). Previous research (Donahoe, 2010; Martin & Alvarez Valdivia, 2017) emphasizes the teacher's potential for increasing or reducing anxiety also online in terms of personal approach and classroom procedures – however, the lessons in these studies did not involve real-time spoken interaction. This suggests that the influence of peer pressure might increase on videoconferencing lessons, while the teacher may play a less significant role. One possible explanation is the hierarchy established in traditional classrooms by the physical settings: usually, the teacher is in front of the class, behind their own desk and chair different from those of students, often the only person standing up and speaking while others sit and listen. In contrast, while the teacher might be the only one with their camera on, on online lessons the teacher's authority is not established by elements of space to the same degree as in traditional classrooms, wherefore students may feel them as closer and less intimidating. Furthermore, Gao and Zhang (2020) recognize that online environments change the teacher's role from organizer or knowledge distributor to resource provider and supervisor as the context requires increased learner autonomy. The facilitator role is perceived necessary for successful integration of technology in language learning (Alresheed et al., 2015). Thus, this change brought by the online context seems a positive development, as research has suggested reducing FLA requires teachers to become facilitators instead of knowledge imparters (Mohammadi et al., 2013; Ohata, 2005).

While many of the mentioned factors have been previously identified in research on FLA, be it online or in class, some answers revealed elements particular to the real-time videoconferencing context. One student wrote, “I was very nervous about the audibility of my voice, for example whether my voice will cut in and out because of the internet etc.” Another student mentioned not knowing whether their answer is right because they cannot see the others' reactions. A third student wrote, “I think a lot about whether the others are laughing at me at their homes without me knowing”. Several students had a similar experience, mentioning the lack of eye contact and not knowing what their voice sounds like

on the microphone; one person wrote that it makes them anxious when they cannot see the others' reactions and feel like they are alone in the situation. This illustrates the increased impact of peer pressure on videoconferencing lessons. One respondent commented that the functioning of devices places students in unequal positions. Gao & Zhang (2020) made a similar finding as an interviewee remarked that regional imbalance in network devices caused inequality between students during COVID-19 distance education. In the study of Shahzad et al. (2020), university students mentioned internet connection problems and lack of technology skills as disadvantages to English studies during COVID-19.

The results imply that students with lower-quality devices and equipment may experience additional anxiety caused by their insecurity about whether for example their internet connection or microphone will work properly, which in turn aggravates general foreign language speaking anxiety. Thus, the fact that more students chose the option *always* for FLA on online lessons than traditional classroom lessons could be in part explained by inequality caused by outer circumstances, that is, the availability and quality of equipment for each student. Presumably, a student not experiencing significant FLA in the traditional classroom might be very anxious about speaking on online lessons due to worrying about whether devices will work properly or make them sound or look comical or unable to hear and understand the others. In the online context, anxiety is influenced by students' perceptions of their own skills not only in the language but also in the use of technology. As a result, there may be more factors shaping FLA on online lessons than in the traditional classroom, which leads to greater differences between the experiences of individual students.

### **4.3 Factors influencing FLA on traditional classroom lessons**

The third question focused on factors influencing FLA on traditional classroom lessons. Students named many of the same factors as for online learning, such as level of difficulty and whether one is sure of one's answers, as well as other students' reactions and being judged by peers; one student answered, "the same things". Respondents also mentioned classroom atmosphere and attitudes. The teacher, however, was not mentioned, which highlights the impact of fellow students on FLA, whether the class takes place online or in person. However, unlike in the first question, here students specified more peer reactions which cause anxiety:

*“It makes me anxious when I say something wrong and others start mimicking me.”*

*“Speaking English makes me anxious if classmates are whispering among themselves when I’m giving an answer.”*

*“For example, in my class people make comments on wrong answers (right answers too) and otherwise exceptional behavior is pointed out as well, so I don’t want to answer.”*

Renko (2012) made similar findings; Finnish lower secondary school students reported that their anxiety about speaking English in the classroom resulted mainly from the fear of being laughed at, judged or negatively evaluated by peers. They indicated anxiety-provoking behaviors in the classroom such as “comments, bored looks, or mockery” (p. 54). The peer pressure indicated by respondents supports the notion of communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation as crucial components of FLA as suggested by Horwitz et al. (1986). The answers above also corroborate Chan and Wu’s (2004) finding that anxious students tend to anticipate negative evaluation from their peers.

However, positive influences were indicated as well: students wrote, “seeing the others properly” and “speaking English feels nice when the atmosphere is not too strict but comfortably relaxed.” One respondent felt that speaking in front of the class causes “VERY much anxiety, especially speaking English, but I think it is easier when you’re not alone.” It thus seems that the positive classroom spirit that students deem so important for levels of FLA might be more easily conveyed and felt by the students in traditional classrooms, as students are able to identify positive factors, whereas for online lessons most of the responses referred to negative influences or to general factors that might either provoke or reduce anxiety.



#### **4.4 Descriptions of pleasant and unpleasant situations on online lessons**

For the fourth question, students described situations from online classes that they had experienced as especially pleasant or unpleasant. Both kinds of experiences were indicated in the responses, which supports the finding that various individual differences in the level and form of FLA emerge in online learning environments. One respondent felt that “speaking was alright”, whereas another stated, “all speaking situations were equally unpleasant.” The negative experiences reported corroborate findings from the previous questions on factors causing FLA; students were anxious about how their voice will sound like to their classmates, whether the others will laugh at them, and whether they will understand the teacher’s question if asked to answer. The latter was mentioned only by one student, which supports the notion of Hentinen and Piskonen (1998) that fear of incomprehension is not a major cause for FLA in Finland as teachers usually speak clear and comprehensible English. One student felt that on online lessons it is not possible to get help from fellow students in the same way as in the classroom. This suggests that the online environment may bring new contributors to FLA.

Positive experiences included being able to pronounce something fluently and feeling that answering to a question was easy. Positive evaluations of one’s responses indicate confidence in one’s language skills, which is known to be an important factor in FLA (Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999; Ching-Yi, 2018). One student mentioned being praised by the teacher as a positive experience. This indicates that the importance of teachers’ support for reducing FLA emphasized in earlier research on traditional classrooms (Horwitz, et al., 1986; Tien, 2018; Fergina, 2010) as well as distance studying (Donahoe, 2010; Gao & Zhang, 2020; Kyppö, 2015) is present also on online videoconferencing lessons, although the respondents seemed not to feel it as strongly as the influence of classmates. The social aspects of learning were highlighted, as one student wrote that it was nice “to talk about what we had done”, which presumably refers to informal conversations about class activities or topics. Meunier (1998) found that students preferred computer-mediated discussions that were not too controlled and structured, which suggests that a relaxed atmosphere in speaking situations is essential for reducing FLA. Allowing time for informal conversation might be one way to overcome the lack of other social activities identified as a disadvantage of virtual learning by Shahzad et al. (2020). One student indicated that it was nice to be able to write the answer, which supports the findings of previous studies on distance studying that the

anonymity offered by online learning contexts not requiring video connection may reduce anxiety and encourage student participation (Gao & Zhang, 2020; Beauvois, 1998) as many learners are more comfortable communicating in a foreign language through a computer than face-to-face (Bárkányi & Melchor-Couto, 2017).

Nevertheless, several students answered, “I don’t know”, while many also commented that they never had to speak English on distance lessons. It remains unclear whether this was because of the design of the lessons or the software; however, considering that teachers were asked to provide the questionnaire only to students who have participated in videoconferencing lessons, it might be that students were disinclined to speak or that speaking was not required by teachers. This might be explained by Montiel-Chamorro’s (2018) finding that students were more reluctant to speak on online classes as compared to traditional classroom lessons. It is understandable that teachers might assign fewer speaking tasks or ask fewer oral questions on online lessons as COVID-19 has put teachers under pressure to design suitable activities and learn various technology skills in a short time. Coman et al. (2020) found some teachers lacked technology skills and were not able to adapt their teaching practices as quickly as required in the COVID-19 circumstances. In 2018, survey results found Finnish teachers’ preparedness “to support student learning through the use of digital technology” to be lower than the average of OECD countries (OECD, 2020, p. 2). Studies have also suggested teachers’ negative attitudes, insufficient ICT training (Alresheed et al., 2015) and problems of maintaining control or discipline (Shahzad et al., 2020; Bárkányi & Melchor-Couto, 2017) might hamper online teaching. Thus, as some teachers may be reluctant to do the extra work required to learn online teaching (Coman et al., 2020), oral assignments may not be successful or even attractive for the teacher to try. The effect might be reciprocal: Meunier (1998) found that students’ motivation in computer-mediated foreign language communication decreases when the teacher is not confident in using the technology. As teachers might adjust their teaching procedures in ways that they consider anxiety-reducing (Ohata, 2005), perceived online speaking anxiety may encourage teachers to assign more written than spoken tasks. The lack of speaking activities on online classes reported by respondents resonates with the finding of Coman et al. (2020) that some students felt their teachers did not much require their attention or interaction on online lessons.

#### 4.5 Effects of FLA on students and their studying on online lessons

The fifth question asked students to describe the effects that anxiety related to speaking on online English lessons had on them and their studying. Again, the responses highlighted the differences between individuals; some experienced no effects at all, while some identified specific effects on their studying. This supports the previous finding that individuals are affected differently by the components of FLA (Cheng et al., 1999) and different task types and language learning areas cause anxiety for different individuals (Hentinen & Piskonen, 1998). Eight respondents said that FLA did not have any effects, while some students answered, “I don’t know” or “no difference to classroom lessons.” One student reported feeling “only a small amount of anxiety before speaking”. Five students mentioned worrisome impacts of FLA on their studying and use of English; one student wrote, “I don’t have the courage to speak English on distance lessons”, while another stated that “If I’m anxious, I can’t study properly.” This suggests that speaking anxiety might inhibit learning and have a self-reinforcing effect: if students avoid speaking situations due to anxiety, they will not have the opportunities to improve their oral skills and increase their confidence in speaking English. Students suffering from FLA easily begin to feel reluctance toward language learning, which in turn shows in their learning results and finally weakens their confidence as language learners and users (Pihko, 2009).

Lack of courage was implied also by another student, who wrote, “I don’t dare to speak English to everyone.” This suggests that the effects of online speaking FLA might extend beyond the virtual classroom; if the student cannot build speaking confidence during their studies, then perhaps the anxiety experienced on online lessons will be replicated in contact situations. Fear or apprehension was mentioned also by a third student, who felt that although the effects were not many, the fear of having to answer a question bothered them all the time online as well as in the classroom. This supports the theory of Horwitz et al. (1986) listing “apprehension, worry, even dread” (p. 126) as potential effects of FLA, as well as B ark anyi and Melchor-Couto’s (2017) finding that “FLA is present in online courses and it can have inhibitory effects” (p. 28). Another student indicated that FLA prevents them from concentrating on lessons. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) discovered that the apprehension related to FLA may have a negative impact on the ability to concentrate, which in turn may cause difficulties of comprehension and acquisition of the studied language.

Effects of FLA such as overstudying, skipping lessons (Horwitz et al., 1986) and physical symptoms such as rapid heart rate (Kiviniemi, 2019) found in previous studies on FLA in classroom learning were not mentioned by respondents. However, the effects of FLA that respondents felt in online learning do not seem to greatly differ from those that previous research has identified in traditional classroom learning. The presence of these problems caused by anxiety on online lessons is contrasting to previous suggestions that computer-assisted communication environments may be less anxiety-provoking than traditional classrooms (Beauvois, 1998; Arnold, 2007; Huang & Hwang, 2013), and in line with Pichette's (2009) remark that FLA is not very different in distance learning as compared to classroom learning. However, none of these studies focused on online learning via synchronous videoconferencing, which suggests that FLA may function differently in this type of environment as compared to independent online courses or computer laboratories, for example.

#### **4.6 Effects of traditional classroom FLA on students and their studying**

The sixth question was the same as the fifth but for traditional classrooms. As in the previous question, answers indicated different experiences of FLA for different individuals. Seven students felt that FLA in traditional classrooms had few to no effects on their studying, while a number of students answered, "I don't know." Five students – the same number as in the previous question – specified negative effects of FLA.

Apprehension or fear are associated with anxiety also in traditional classrooms, as the following responses indicate:

*"I'm shy to speak English in front of the class because I easily get anxious."*

*"Before the lesson, I'm afraid that I will have speak on the lesson and I'm in panic when we are checking homework or when you have to speak otherwise."*

*"I get very anxious when I think about whether I'm making mistakes."*

Previous studies recognize that language anxiety may manifest itself not only in the speaking situation but before it as well; Horwitz et al. (1986) include in the FLCAS statements such as "I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class" (p. 129) and "When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed." (p. 130) Panicking in the speaking situation is also

an effect recognized by Horwitz et al. (1986). Furthermore, the students' responses show that FLA is experienced when one is required to speak in front of the class but also from one's own seat in the classroom. This suggests that while some studies have found tasks performed in front of the class to be among the most anxiety-provoking (Young, 1991), experiences of anxiety are not necessarily dependent on space. This supports the definition of communication apprehension as a fear related to communicating with people in general; the anxiety that some individuals experience about group communication may be reinforced when required to use a foreign language due to an experienced lack of control and the feeling of being constantly monitored (Horwitz et al., 1986).

One student wrote that they do not really feel anxious about speaking in the classroom and that the only moment they experience anxiety is when they are not "100% sure of the answer." This suggests an inhibitory effect: if even the smallest insecurity provokes anxiety, the student might only volunteer when they can confirm knowing the answer, which might not occur very often. MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) found that anxious students were less likely to take risks such as guessing an answer, which may cause them to avoid responding in class. The behavior described by the respondent shows the relationship between FLA and confidence, implied by being sure of one's answers. Cheng et al. (1999) found that students' levels of FLA had a higher correlation with their self-perceived proficiency than their actual language performance. Students have suggested that high self-confidence can help reduce their anxiety (Saghafi & Shirvan, 2020). As FLA may in turn have a negative impact on learners' confidence (Ohata, 2005), the effect might be self-reinforcing.

Some students seemed to experience only low or moderate levels of FLA as they described less severe effects. Another student mentioned not being sure of the correct word or sentence, and a third student wrote, "I'm able to study, but sometimes it's hard." This shows that FLA has effects on classroom behavior, studying and learning. While the described insecurity about the correct answer may be an underestimation of one's skills resulting from the low self-confidence related to FLA, it may also imply the problems of short-term and long-term memory which are considered to limit the language learning abilities of students suffering from FLA (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

One respondent wrote, "I'm quiet for a while, but eventually it gets better." Going silent for a moment when experiencing foreign language anxiety is one coping method identified in previous research (Fergina, 2010), which suggests that some students recognize their anxiety and may have developed effective ways to overcome it. Interestingly, two responses indicated positive effects of FLA. One student wrote, "Well, of course I try to improve my language skills if things go wrong." This student

seems to perceive anxiety as a sign of poor performance, which might be overcome by studying more or better. Another respondent wrote, “I just make it better”. While it is not completely clear what this refers to, perhaps this student has found effective ways to cope with their FLA. The answer might also imply that improving one’s speaking skills is a method to avoid anxiety in the future. MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) found that while anxious students avoided using complex structures in production tasks and performed more poorly in tasks involving a time limit, eventually the extra studying typical for anxious learners led to improved results. Fergina’s (2010) interviewee for whom speaking tasks were especially anxiety-provoking received better results in speaking than in other skill areas. Nevertheless, coping with anxiety by overstudying is recognized as a potential negative effect of FLA (Horwitz et al., 1986). Teachers interviewed by Ohata (2005) recognized that depending on individual traits, FLA may have either positive or negative effects, noting that the pressure of anxiety may be even necessary to encourage learning and studying.

While the same number of students identified negative effects of FLA for online and traditional classroom lessons, it is noteworthy that positive effects and coping methods were mentioned only in the case of traditional classrooms. As students are used to the physical classroom environment and the teaching and studying practices there employed, it is possible that they have learnt to recognize and know their personal anxiety reactions and thus developed ways to overcome its negative effects. With the COVID-19 regulations of spring 2020, obligatory secondary school teaching in Finland was organized totally online for the first time ever, which brought a completely new teaching and learning context for students and teachers. Thus, it is possible that the online environment made it impossible or difficult for students to employ the methods they had developed for overcoming FLA in the traditional classroom.

#### **4.7 Students’ suggestions for making speaking situations on online lessons more pleasant**

The seventh question asked students to think of ways to make speaking situations on online lessons more pleasant. Again, the answers show that FLA is more problematic for some students than others: while one respondent felt that there is no need to make speaking situations on online lessons more pleasant, another stated that such lessons should not be held at all.

Students' answers support the finding that classroom atmosphere and peer reactions have a great impact on FLA. Individual differences in experiences of FLA are clear: while one respondent suggested that it would be better if one did not have to speak when everyone can hear, another wrote that everyone should have their cameras and microphones on all the time. One student felt that there should be more speaking on lessons instead of just writing the answers, while another suggested that it would be more pleasant if you could only write. One respondent wrote that it should not be mandatory for everyone to answer, while another stated the opposite, writing that everyone should be required to speak. Although these responses seem contrasting, they may stem from the same desire of equal requirements for every student. However, suggestions for omitting speaking tasks from online lessons demonstrate avoidance behavior related to severe FLA (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Thus, the generalizing of speaking tasks on online lessons is a recommendable approach, which would allow students to practice speaking and thus improve their skills; in Young's (1990) study, students reported that practicing more would increase their confidence in speaking the foreign language.

Establishing a friendly group spirit seems crucial, as one respondent wrote, "If I knew that no one will make fun of me or anything like that, it would be easier." Another student wrote felt that speaking situations would be more pleasant if everyone else had their microphones off and no one was allowed to comment on other students' speaking. These responses are related to concerns of bullying in the classroom, which may be more difficult for teachers to address online than in person due to problems of monitoring and maintaining discipline in a virtual environment (Shahzad et al., 2020). The responses indicate that in addition to kind and friendly, the classroom atmosphere should also be relaxed and casual: one student suggested that it would be good to chat more, start with greetings and "then go on little by little." Another respondent felt that talking with friends would be more pleasant. One student mentioned that voluntary responding would be better, instead of the teacher deciding that one must answer. Research has shown that students are particularly anxious when made the focus of attention (Young, 1990) and suggested that teachers should avoid calling on students randomly and suddenly during the lesson (von Wörde, 2003). In Radhia's (2016) study, none of the participants chose small group talks as an anxiety-provoking activity, only a small number chose voluntary responding, while the majority chose being required individually to answer. The present thesis suggests that voluntary responding is a recommendable basis for questioning students also on online lessons.

The requirement for everyone to have their cameras and microphones on is a complex issue, involving concerns of privacy and the ability of families to pay for the necessary technology (Moses,

2020). Students seem to have differing opinions on this too, resulting among other things from different experiences of FLA. Thus, the online context seems to add to the challenge of maintaining a balance between encouraging every student to participate and recognizing the impact of personality traits, competence and FLA on how individual students feel about speaking on lessons. It seems that a casual and relaxed classroom atmosphere reduces FLA, while common rules are still necessary to ensure fair treatment for students.



## 5 Discussion

In summary, the findings of the present thesis indicate that Finnish secondary school students' experiences on online lessons and in the traditional classroom support the results of previous research on the causes and effects of FLA. The qualitative data provided more significant findings than the quantitative, which suggests that the differences in experiences of FLA are more closely connected to its sources, effects and manifestations rather than frequency. Due to the small number of participants, the quantitative results on the frequency of FLA should not be used to draw conclusions. The distribution of the answers was quite equal for online as well as traditional lessons, and the differences that emerged were in part contrasting. As more students chose the option *always* for FLA on online than traditional lessons, a possible implication is that in the former context, for example due to uncertainty related to technology skills and functioning of devices, anxiety is aggravated for students who experience it only rarely in traditional classrooms. On the other hand, the fact that more students experienced FLA rarely or never on online lessons suggests that the latter context may have anxiety-reducing effects.

There emerged some differences in the factors influencing FLA online as compared to the traditional classroom. While anxiety-provoking elements were identified for both contexts, respondents specified more negative factors for traditional classrooms, such as classmates' mimicking or commenting. However, unlike for online lessons, students found also positive influences in the traditional classroom, such as being able to see the others and not feeling alone. This suggests that students are more familiar with the speaking situations in traditional classrooms and perhaps used to coping with FLA better in this context. Students mentioned negative impacts arising from the elements of online videoconferencing, such as worrying about one's internet connection or about how one's voice will sound on the microphone. The dynamics of peer interaction differ from traditional classrooms especially when students cannot see each other. Peer pressure and anxiety may be exacerbated when students cannot see each other and thus are left to imagine classmates' reactions. Students prone to FLA are likely to have low confidence in their language skills (Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Cheng et al., 1999), and thus their beliefs about peers' reactions are likely to be negative, which may result in a vicious cycle of FLA when students lack the support of positive feedback and feelings of achievement. This seems to contrast the finding of Tanis & Postmes (2007) that not seeing the conversation partner contributes to a stronger group feeling and enjoyment and instead support their remark that computer-mediated environments may cause high uncertainty in communication.

The answers suggest that the impact of classmates on FLA may be more important than that of the teacher in online as well as traditional classroom learning. In contrast, previous studies have found that students experience more anxiety when the teacher is present as compared to group or pair work (Renko, 2012; Young, 1990) and emphasized the teacher's role in reducing FLA (von Wörde, 2003; Chan & Wu, 2004; Horwitz, et al., 1986). However, Yan & Horwitz (2008) found that teacher characteristics had only an indirect influence on FLA through their impact on comparison with peers and learning strategies, and Renko (2012) found that students were less anxious when talking to the teacher in private rather than in the presence of peers, and very few students indicated the teachers' comments or reactions as a cause for their anxiety. Responses indicated that classmates are crucial to FLA or the lack thereof on online as well as traditional classroom lessons. As previous research has found the unequal positions between teacher and students to be a potential cause for anxiety (Tanveer, 2008), the role of the teacher may be less significant in online contexts due to the absence of hierarchy established by spatial elements in the traditional classroom where the teacher stands in front of the class.

The students' reported experiences support the notion of previous research that student-student interaction is lacking in online learning (Shahzad et al., 2020) as individuals may be uncomfortable with the impersonal feeling of computer-mediated communication (Meunier, 1998). Overall, the present thesis corroborates earlier findings on the significant influence that social dynamics may have on online FLA (Arnold, 2007; Cristòfol Garcia & Appel, 2018). Respondents mentioned feeling alone when speaking on an online lesson and feeling judged by peers. One possible explanation of the insufficiency of positive social interaction in online learning is the lack of other social activities that take place in traditional learning institutions (Shahzad et al., 2020). That is, students are not in contact with each other during breaks or lunchtimes, which is why building and maintaining friendships between classmates might be very difficult if distance studying continues for a long period. However, a similar effect may be seen on online lessons in the short-term as students may not feel the supporting presence of others to the same extent as in traditional classrooms and thus experience more FLA. Furthermore, the interaction itself may lack some crucial aspects, in particular if online classes do not involve video connection; it is also impossible to communicate privately in the same manner as in the traditional classroom, for example by whispering to a classmate to ask for help. This is in line with Vurdien's (2019) finding that some students prefer face-to-face communication on English lessons to videoconferencing as the presence of peers offers support and the traditional context feels more natural.

While Kyyrönen (1997) suggests that FLA manifests in part differently in Finnish students, who do not usually experience effects such as forgetfulness and avoidance behavior identified as indicators of anxiety by Horwitz et al. (1986), the present thesis found effects of FLA highly corresponding to those in previous research in other countries. On both virtual and contact lessons, students felt their anxiety caused reluctance to speak, uncertainty, shyness, apprehension and studying difficulties. Thus, FLA may hinder learning if the fear of being suddenly required to speak on a lesson becomes a distraction for students. This supports previous research that has discovered FLA to have inhibitory effects in online courses (Bárkányi & Melchor-Couto, 2017). Fear and panicking were recognized as effect of FLA both online and in the classroom, which supports the anxiety indicators identified by Horwitz et al. (1986). The link between self-confidence and FLA is evident as respondents implied the influence of perceived task difficulty and uncertainty about one's skills. This supports previous research recognizing the link between low self-confidence and FLA (e.g. Liu & Chen, 2013; Cheng et al., 1999) and adolescence as a vulnerable time for linguistic self-confidence (Pihko, 2009).

The present thesis suggests that the effects of FLA are largely similar on online and traditional lessons, in contrast to previous studies indicating that the anonymity provided by online environments makes speaking less stressful for students (Hauck & Hurd, 2005; Arnaiz, 2012) or that students feel less worried and frustrated and more confident in the virtual learning context during COVID-19 (Shahzad et al., 2020; Gao & Zhang, 2020). However, while the same number of students specified negative effects of anxiety for both contexts, positive effects and were implied only for the traditional classroom as students reported responding to feelings of anxiety by trying to improve their skills or performance. However, this may also indicate that anxiety causes excessive pressure to perform better, or overstudying, which Horwitz et al. (1986) identified as a potential consequence of FLA. The fact that FLA on online lessons did not encourage students to improve their performance suggests that their anxiety may stem from factors that the students feel unable to control, such as devices or internet connection. Studies show that the use of technology may exacerbate FLA in computer-mediated learning (Cristòfol Garcia & Appel, 2018; Donahoe, 2010) and that pupils may feel uncomfortable when expected to adopt technology-based methods that require self-direction as they are used to teacher-led practices and traditional means (Koivisto, 2013). Practical issues such as mastering the use of software and devising tasks suitable for online lessons along with the potential fear and stress caused by the pandemic may have prevented teachers from making pleasant learning experiences a priority, wherefore online

learning may have exacerbated the problems experienced by anxious students in the traditional classroom.

The experiences of anxiety-provoking or enjoyable situations on online lessons corroborate the overall finding that there are many differences in the levels and forms of FLA experienced by individuals. Some students felt anxious as they could not get help from peers in the same way as on traditional lessons, and many felt self-conscious. However, positive experiences indicated feelings of achievement when pronouncing something well or answering effortlessly. The influence of classroom atmosphere and social factors was reasserted as students reported enjoying informal talking on lessons. Praise from the teacher was mentioned as a positive experience, which shows that the influence of teachers on FLA is present on online lessons as well. Some participants felt that speaking on online lessons did not make them anxious at all, while others experienced anxiety regularly on online lessons and saw their learning affected in various ways. This supports the notion that FLA may have positive or negative effects depending on individual traits, self-perceived proficiency, task difficulty and cultural differences (Ohata, 2005). Cheng et al. (1999) recognize that the components of FLA are experienced differently by individuals; some may be particularly anxious about speaking and others about writing, for instance. This may explain some of the differences between individuals, as respondents reporting little to no FLA related to speaking may experience it more strongly with other types of tasks.

The individual differences were yet more evident in students' suggestions for making online environments less anxiety-provoking. Some felt that there should be more speaking, and that camera and microphone should be mandatory for all, while others suggested that everyone should not be required to speak or that there should be no speaking tasks at all. While FLA may cause students to avoid speaking, previous research suggests practicing oral skills more on lessons can alleviate FLA (Young, 1990; Tien, 2018). Students stated that they would not be so anxious if they knew no one will make fun of them and if the classroom atmosphere was relaxed. Responses calling for opportunities to talk with friends and answer on a voluntary basis support previous suggestions that working with friends (Kyyrönen 1997) or doing pair or group work (Kiviniemi, 2019; Renko, 2012; Radhia, 2016) in a friendly and accepting environment (Hentinen & Piskonen, 1998) with a relaxed, informal atmosphere (Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Tanveer, 2008) reduces FLA, wherefore teachers should cultivate common spirit and cooperation in the classroom (Hashemi et al., 2013; von Wörde, 2003). Thus, instead of omitting anxiety-provoking tasks, teachers should recognize FLA and individuals' personalities and needs while planning lessons (Altunel, 2019). While accounting for everyone's individual traits is a challenge, teachers with

creativity and knowledge on FLA can build methods to address the issue online as well as in the classroom. Stark differences between individuals together with the strong influence of group dynamics on anxiety suggest that interaction between students might be key to reducing FLA. In Young's (1990) study, the majority of respondents felt that "they would not be so self-conscious about speaking in class if it were commonly understood that everyone makes mistakes" (p. 545). Thus, discussions on FLA, spreading awareness of its characteristics and effects and helping students see that they are not alone with their problem might promote an anxiety-reducing class atmosphere. Moreover, students with little to no FLA, or students who have developed effective methods to cope with FLA and enjoy its positive effects, may provide support for students with severe harmful FLA by talking about their experiences and recommending methods to overcome the negative effects of FLA.

However, much of earlier research, for example the FLCAS, does not separate speaking anxiety from the other potentially anxiety-provoking elements of language studying, which should be considered while making comparisons with the findings of the present thesis. Nevertheless, many studies have found speaking and listening tasks to be major causes of FLA (Horwitz et al. 1986; Young, 1990; Fergina, 2010), wherefore the results of research focusing on speaking anxiety can be expected to reflect overall FLA. It is problematic to compare the results with previous research on FLA in online contexts, as real-time videoconferencing lessons have yet to be examined on larger scale. The responses also indicated that speaking was not often required on all online English lessons, wherefore some students found it difficult to answer the questions. This may imply that teachers were reluctant to assign speaking tasks on videoconferencing lessons, which rises questions of teachers' experiences and feelings of real-time online lessons as an important area for future studies. The findings of the present thesis suggest that real-time online lessons may bring new aspects to the dynamics of FLA, wherefore students' experiences of online studying are a crucial subject for future research.

## 6 Conclusion

Overall, the present thesis encourages researchers to increasingly employ qualitative methods in FLA research not only with adult students but younger learners as well: secondary school students seemed very aware of their feelings regarding anxiety or enjoyment on foreign language lessons and were eager to describe their experiences in writing. Future studies on videoconferencing lessons for different age groups in different countries will be essential for developing online teaching to prepare for exceptional circumstances such as COVID-19, but also to improve independent free-time online language learning. As the present thesis found that experiences of online FLA were very different for different individuals, future studies might gain new insights by first identifying students suffering from severe FLA and then focusing on their personal experiences. In the same vein, interviews with students experiencing only low levels of FLA in online contexts might give new ideas on how to develop less anxiety-provoking learning environments.

The present thesis indicates that uncertainty, apprehension and avoidance behavior may be core elements of FLA that are similar regardless of context. However, it is noteworthy that respondents identified anxiety-reducing factors and positive effects of FLA only for traditional lessons. This suggests that the unfamiliarity of the context may account for some of the anxiety felt on online lessons as anxiety-alleviating circumstances such as immediate help and support from peers are absent. Thus, a broader understanding can be recommended of the theory of Horwitz et al. (1986) describing FLA as a phenomenon peculiar to the language classroom. Instead, speaking a foreign language seems to provoke anxiety with perhaps even more various causes and effects on online videoconferencing lessons. However, the fact that coping methods and ways to turn anxiety into an advantage were implied only for traditional classroom learning suggests that the latter is a unique environment where students and teachers have over the years developed ways to cope with FLA. Thus, to alleviate English speaking anxiety in the online context, it is necessary to study and understand elements absent from the traditional classroom which may not have been considered in previous research on FLA.

To address FLA on real-time videoconferencing lessons, we must recognize the influence of classroom atmosphere and classmates. Students' remarks regarding the lack of eye contact on online lessons emphasize the influence of the social environment and peer interaction on FLA. Seeing that one is understood by peers adds to students' confidence in their language skills (Meunier, 1998), wherefore nonverbal communication such as facial expressions and gestures might play an important role in

students' confidence during speaking tasks as they search for confirmation and support from peers. As teachers gain experience in online teaching and become more familiar with the dynamics of online lessons, they must develop new ways to address improper behavior and ensure respectful relations between students.

Although adapting to new learning contexts involves many considerations for example related to technology and designing suitable learning activities, addressing FLA should not be forgotten as some learners may feel even more anxious on the online lesson than the familiar classroom. While previous research suggests that refining teachers' error correction practices is crucial to creating non-anxiety provoking learning environments (Horwitz et al., 1986), the findings of the present thesis indicate that the main sources of anxiety may be related to peers and class atmosphere rather than teacher characteristics or teaching techniques. Thus, in order to reduce foreign language anxiety, it is necessary to create a friendly and relaxed group feeling between students, be it in the traditional classroom or online.

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## **APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS (Finnish original)**

### **Englannin puhuminen etäoppitunneilla – katastrofi vai helpotus?**

Olen Johanna Kylén ja opiskelen englannin kieltä Oulun yliopistossa. Kandidaatintutkielmani aiheena on oppilaiden kokemukset vieraan kielen puhumiseen liittyvästä ahdistuksesta englannin etäoppitunneilla. Olisin erittäin kiitollinen, jos auttaisit minua kertomalla omista näkemyksistäsi aiheeseen liittyen! Kyselyyn vastaaminen vie 5-10 minuuttia.

Kysely on tarkoitettu oppilaille, joille on koronavirusaikana järjestetty englannin etäoppitunteja netissä videoyhteyden kautta. Vastaamalla tähän kyselyyn hyväksyt vastauksiesi käytön aineistona tutkimuksessani. Kysely on anonymi ja täysin vapaaehtoinen. Vastaukset käsitellään luottamuksellisina ja nimettöminä kaikissa tutkimuksen vaiheissa.

Otathan yhteyttä, jos sinulla on kysyttävää!

Johanna Kylén

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\*Pakollinen

### **Englannin puhumiseen liittyvä ahdistus etäoppitunneilla**

Pohdi vastatessasi kokemuksiasi koronavirusaikana videoyhteyden avulla netissä järjestetyistä englannin etäoppitunneista ja vertaa niitä aiempiin kokemuksiisi lähioppitunneista luokkahuoneessa. Keskity nimenomaan puhumiseen liittyviin tilanteisiin. (Esim. opettajan kysymyksiin vastaaminen, tekstien lukeminen ääneen, ryhmä- ja parikeskustelut jne.)

Kyselyssä ahdistuksella tarkoitetaan vieraan kieleen puhumiseen liittyvää epämiellyttävää hermostuneisuutta, jännittyneisyyttä tai pelkoa. Kyseessä on normaali ja hyvin yleinen kokemus. Tutkimukseni tarkoituksena on ymmärtää tätä ahdistusta paremmin, jotta tulevaisuuden kieltenopetuksessa voitaisiin pyrkiä sen negatiivisten vaikutusten minimointiin.

Pyydän sinua vastaamaan omin sanoin omien kokemuksiesi ja tulkintojesi perusteella. Muista, että väärää vastauksia ei ole. Kaikki kommenttisi ja pohdintasi ovat arvokkaita!

1. Kuinka usein englannin puhuminen tuntuu ahdistavalta etäoppitunneilla netissä?\* (Vaihtoehdot *aina, usein, joskus, harvoin, ei koskaan*)

2. Kuinka usein englannin puhuminen tuntuu ahdistavalta lähioppitunneilla luokkahuoneessa?\* (Vaihtoehdot *aina, usein, joskus, harvoin, ei koskaan*)

3. Mitkä asiat mielestäsi vaikuttavat siihen, tuntuuko englannin puhuminen ahdistavalta tai mukavalta etäoppitunneilla netissä?\* (Avoin kysymys)

4. Mitkä asiat mielestäsi vaikuttavat siihen, tuntuuko englannin puhuminen ahdistavalta tai mukavalta lähioppitunneilla luokkahuoneessa?\* (Avoin kysymys)

5. Kuvaile jotain englannin etäoppitunnilla kokemaasi puhumistilannetta, joka oli erityisen miellyttävä tai epämiellyttävä. Voit esimerkiksi kertoa, mitä tilanteessa tehtiin ja miksi se tuntui mukavalta tai ahdistavalta.\* (Avoin kysymys)

6. Mitä vaikutuksia englannin etäoppituntien puhumistilanteisiin liittyvällä ahdistuneisuudella on sinuun ja opiskeluusi?\* (Avoin kysymys)

7. Mitä vaikutuksia englannin lähioppituntien puhumistilanteisiin liittyvällä ahdistuneisuudella on sinuun ja opiskeluusi?\* (Avoin kysymys)

8. Miten etäoppituntien puhumistilanteista voitaisiin tehdä miellyttävämpiä? Voit pohtia esimerkiksi opettajan toimintaa, työskentelytapoja tai oppimisympäristöä yleisesti.\* (Avoin kysymys)

9. Muita ajatuksia/kommentteja aiheeseen liittyen? (Avoin kysymys)



## **APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS (English translation)**

### **Speaking English on distance lessons – catastrophe or relief?**

I am Johanna Kylén and I study English at the University of Oulu. The topic of my Bachelor's thesis is the experiences of students of anxiety related to speaking a foreign language during distance English lessons. I would be very thankful if you would help me by sharing your own views related to the topic! Answering the questionnaire will take 5–10 minutes.

The questionnaire is meant for students for whom have been arranged distance English lessons online with a video connection during the COVID-19 period. By answering this questionnaire, you accept the use of your answers as data for my thesis. The questionnaire is anonymous and completely voluntary. The answers remain confidential and anonymous in all stages of the study.

Please contact me if you have questions!

Johanna Kylén

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\*Mandatory

### **Anxiety related to speaking English on distance lessons**

While answering, reflect on your experiences of distance English lessons arranged online via video connection during the COVID-19 period and compare those to your previous experiences of face-to-face lessons in the classroom. Focus in particular on situations related to speaking. (For example answering the teacher's questions, reading texts out loud, discussions in groups and pairs etc.)

In the questionnaire, anxiety refers to unpleasant nervousness, tenseness or fear related to speaking a foreign language. This is a normal and very common experience. The purpose of my study is to understand this anxiety better, so that in future language teaching we could aim to minimize its negative effects.

I ask you to answer in your own words, based on your own experiences and interpretations. Remember that there are no wrong answers. All your comments and thinking are valued!

1. How often does speaking English make you anxious during distance lessons online?\* (Alternatives: *always, often, sometimes, rarely, never*)

2. How often does speaking English make you anxious during face-to-face lessons in the classroom?\* (Alternatives: *always, often, sometimes, rarely, never*)

3. What factors, in your opinion, have an influence on whether speaking English feels anxiety-provoking or pleasant during distance lessons online?\* (Open question)

4. What factors, in your opinion, have an influence on whether speaking English feels anxiety-provoking or pleasant during face-to-face lessons in the classroom?\* (Open question)

5. Describe a particularly pleasant or unpleasant speaking situation that you have experienced during a distance English lesson. You can tell about for example what you were doing in the situation and why it felt pleasant or made you anxious.\* (Open question)

6. How does anxiety related to speaking during distance English lessons affect you and your studying?\* (Open question)

7. How does anxiety related to speaking during face-to-face English lessons affect you and your studying?\* (Open question)

8. How could speaking situations on distance lessons be made more pleasant? You can for example think about the teacher's practices, working methods or the learning environment in general.\* (Open question)

9. Other thoughts/comments related to the topic? (Open question)