

overSEAS 2019

This thesis was submitted by its author to the School of English and American Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts. It was found to be among the best theses submitted in 2019, therefore it was decorated with the School's Outstanding Thesis Award. As such it is published in the form it was submitted in **overSEAS 2019** (<http://seas3.elte.hu/overseas/2019.html>)

Szakdolgozat

Kákonyi Sára

angol nyelv és kultúra tanára – történelem és állampolgári ismeretek tanára
osztatlan tanári mesterszak

2019

EÖTVÖS LORÁND TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM

Bölcsészettudományi Kar

Szakedolgozat

A nyelvtanulással kapcsolatos szorongás oldása

Alleviating language anxiety

Témavezető:

Uwe Pohl

egyetemi docens

Készítette:

Kákonyi Sára

angol nyelv és kultúra tanára –
történelem és állampolgári
ismeretek tanára

osztatlan tanári mesterszak

2019

Eredetiségi nyilatkozat

Alulírott **Kákonyi Sára FX0VC8** ezennel kijelentem és aláírással megerősítem, hogy az ELTE **angol nyelv és kultúra tanára és történelem és állampolgári ismeretek tanára** osztatlan tanári mesterszakján írt jelen diplomamunkám saját szellemi termékem, melyet korábban más szakon még nem nyújtottam be szakdolgozatként és amelybe mások munkáját (könyv, tanulmány, kézirat, internetes forrás, személyes közlés stb.) idézőjel és pontos hivatkozások nélkül nem építettem be.

Budapest, 2019. 04. 24.

.....

a hallgató aláírása

Témavezetői nyilatkozat

Alulírott **Uwe Pohl** ezennel kijelentem és aláírással megerősítem, hogy **Kákonyi Sára FX0VC8** osztatlan tanárképzésbeli szakdolgozata megítélésem szerint benyújtható, annak leadásához hozzájárulok.

Budapest, 2019. 04. 24.

.....

a témavezető aláírása

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
1. Introduction	2
1. 1. Background and aim	2
2. Literature Review	4
2. 1. Defining anxiety	4
2.2. Foreign language anxiety.....	4
2.2.1. Focus on emotion	4
2.2.2. Focus on source.....	5
2.2.3. Focus on function.....	5
2. 3. Intra-student factors: personality, self-image, and the role of the teacher.....	6
2.3.1. Personality: the perfectionist individual.....	6
2.3.2 Self-image and the L2 narrative	6
2.3.3. The role of the teacher.....	7
2. 4. Outside factors: peers, the teacher, previous experiences, expectations.....	8
2.4.1. Significant social contexts.....	8
2.4.2. The importance of authoritative figures	9
2.4.3. High or unrealistic expectations.....	10
2.4.4. Peer competition.....	10
2.4.5. Past learning experiences	10
2. 5. How to deal with language anxiety in the classroom	11
2.5.1. Perfectionism.....	11
2.5.2. L2 narrative	12
2.5.3. Learning experience	12
2.5.4. Classroom atmosphere	13
2.6. Summary.....	14
2.7. Implications for my empirical research	15
3. Empirical research design and method.....	16
3. 1. Research questions.....	16
3.2. Setting	18
3.3. Participants.....	19
3.4. Research tools and procedure	21
3.4.1. Student questionnaire	22
3.4.2. Teacher interviews	23

3.5. Limitations	24
4. Results and discussion	26
4.1. Language anxiety awareness	26
4.1.1. Signs of anxiety: How teachers can notice anxious students	26
4.1.2. Student awareness of anxiety	27
4.1.3 The role of the foreign language in student anxiety	28
4.1.4. Triggers of anxiety according to students and teachers	29
4.2. Dealing with student anxiety	32
4.2.1. Willingness to deal with anxiety	32
4.2.2. Student responses to anxiety	33
4.2.3. Teacher practices	37
5. Conclusion	41
References	44
Appendices	46
Appendix A – Questionnaire for students (Hungarian)	46
Appendix B – Questionnaire for students (English translation)	48
Appendix C – Teacher interview questions: Attila (mentor).....	50
Appendix D – Teacher interview questions: Lili	51

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the topic of language anxiety and what teachers can do to ease it. To have a better understanding of the topic, the relevant literature was consulted from various perspectives. Subsequently, empirical research was carried out with the help of a student questionnaire among thirty-eight learners and two teacher interviews in a Budapest grammar school.

The findings of the study showed that all of the students experience some form of anxiety, and many of them feel anxious in the foreign language classroom, especially when faced with oral communication and test situations. Students also reported several, both negative and positive, ways this unease manifested itself, which highlighted the presence of debilitating and facilitating anxiety. At the same time, most learners listed factors that could make an anxiety-inducing situation less daunting for them. These points almost fully coincided with the information derived from the teacher interviews. The most important themes were creating a supportive and authentic classroom atmosphere, working and being tested in pairs or small groups, as well as discussing anxiety and feelings of unease in class. Finally, with regards to the teacher's personality, the data suggest that he or she should be consistent, empathetic, helpful, and have good sense of humour.

1. Introduction

1. 1. Background and aim

This thesis is concerned with language anxiety, with special focus on its presence in particular in the English classroom and the way it can be alleviated as much as possible by the teacher. The inspiration for this topic came from previous personal experience; as a student and as a teacher during my short teaching practice three semesters ago.

As someone who has also experienced language anxiety and has been dealing with anxiety her whole life, I am curious to investigate how teenagers nowadays, and especially my students, might experience it, whether they are aware of it, and how they deal with it if at all. As these phenomena; that is, mental conditions, are unfortunately not often talked about openly in classrooms, it would also be interesting to see if awareness helps alleviating students' anxiety at least a little. In addition, I would like to find out if the knowledge that there are many other people experiencing the same issues aids individuals in dealing with their anxiety or at least reshaping it into a facilitating one instead of it being debilitating and constant.

Fortunately, I managed to overcome my feelings of stress over the years when it comes to language learning. However, this has also heightened my awareness of the problem and the burden it places on students. Especially as a teacher, a considerable amount of empathy is needed to be able to notice our students' struggles, problems, moods, needs and to be able to support them in any way they might need it. For this, I deemed it essential throughout both my short and my long teaching practice to create a relationship with my students which made them feel at ease during our lessons. Aside from language-related goals and learning processes, I was also hoping that, for my students, to talk about anxiety would become easier and that they would accept a helping hand, as well.

This is why, during my long teaching practice at a grammar school in Budapest I observed many English lessons, took notes during my own teaching, interviewed several teachers as well, and got the students to fill in a questionnaire regarding their potential anxiety. This was guided by a number of questions that the students could answer freely. First of all, I asked them about the feelings and emotions they generally associate with English lessons, their English teachers (me and my mentor), and the group. My aim with this was to see how students genuinely feel about these factors without me mentioning anxiety or any specific situations in which it might occur. Next, the questions turned more precise and students had to decide whether or not they ever feel anxiety or stress during English lessons, and if so,

what can provoke it. To observe the level of their awareness, I also asked them about how their anxiety manifests and whether or not they try to overcome it, if they have any tried-and-tested method to do so. Finally, students had the chance to describe what makes an anxiety-inducing situation less daunting for them, and especially in the context of our English lessons, what minimizes the amount of stress they may experience. This hopefully made them feel that they are understood, that they have a say in these things and that I aim to help them.

The two leading areas in which I wished to better my understanding and gain skills were regarding the students and myself, the teacher. Concerning the latter factor, I wanted to learn how I could first of all realise who the anxious students were from the class, and secondly how I could help alleviate their stress as much as possible. Regarding the students, I believed that first and foremost I had to create a bond with my pupils to be able to get to know them and their quirks, and to later on be able to discuss anxiety-related questions with them. Therefore, I set out to try different strategies to alleviate students' anxiety or at least turn it into a facilitating one.

In the first part of this thesis, the relevant literature that I consulted will be discussed along the lines of different aspects. The second part is concerned with the empirical research that I conducted and the results I obtained. Finally, on the basis of all this, I will also formulate some conclusions and implications for my future career as a language teacher.

2. Literature Review

In this review I shall first discuss anxiety and foreign language anxiety, with special focus on factors such as emotion, source and function of anxiety. The following sections discuss the characteristics of language anxiety concerning intra-student and outside aspects. Finally, I shall summarise the implementations for classroom practice with regard to dealing with foreign language anxiety based on the relevant literature.

2.1. Defining anxiety

Language anxiety is a term that seems to be rather difficult to define as, due to its nature, it can be quite elusive. It is something personal, therefore individual, which makes for a hard time when it comes to describing it in a general, concise way. Another reason why foreign language anxiety may be an elusive term for description is that it is often connected to *general* anxiety. On the whole, the term *anxiety* indicates the feeling of unease when one is faced with an unknown setting, or a situation the outcome of which is unsure. It is often questioned whether anxiety is a personality trait, an emotion, or it is tied to certain situations. It is also at times uncertain whether language anxiety can or should be investigated on its own. However, since the 1970s, many researchers and authors attempted to provide a definition that comes as close to its essence as possible, which shows its significance in the fields of psychology, linguistics and also foreign language education. Without the aim to mention all of them, here follows a compilation of some of the definitions of language anxiety that for this research were found to be the most relevant.

2.2. Foreign language anxiety

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been explained as a “distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz et al., 1986. p. 128.). Horwitz et al. (1986) related foreign language anxiety to three main areas of general, everyday life anxieties: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Categorisations tend to vary according to the different sources or effects of anxiety that researchers have focused on.

2.2.1. Focus on emotion

Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) state that if learners need to perform in a foreign language is when this feeling of nervousness appears. This ties in with what previously was described as test anxiety and communication apprehension, as usually the productive skills and especially speaking are affected by the anxiety students may experience in the foreign

language classroom. Young (1990) questions the fact that it would be the foreign language that is the source of the anxiety, rather it is speaking in front of the class that invokes the stress in students, drawing connections between other anxieties and FLA.

In a study conducted among Chilean university students who wanted to be English teachers, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) found significant correlation between participants' perfectionism and foreign language anxiety, thus highlighting it as a personality trait.

2.2.2. Focus on source

Tóth (2010), too, distinguishes between different types of anxiety. *Trait anxiety* refers to the fact that certain individuals experience anxiety in their everyday life, to some extent it is part of their personality. Therefore, the anxiety these individuals feel in the foreign language classroom is not "special", related to the use or learning of the specific foreign language. FLA according to Tóth (2010), falls into the category of *situation-specific anxiety*. This concept assumes that there are concrete situations that induce anxiety in certain individuals, such as taking a test or oral production in front of an audience.

2.2.3. Focus on function

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) look at language anxiety through a different lens. Instead of talking about positive and negative emotions, they discuss the functions of emotions. In terms of my own research, this point of view can be very interesting when it comes to the debilitating or facilitating effects of foreign language anxiety.

In relation to this, it has also been suggested that language learning is connected to motivation and the students' self-concept (Şimşek & Dörnyei, 2017), thus introducing an *identity* dimension to the examination of foreign language anxiety. As Piniel and Csizér (2013) put it, FLA has an influence on motivation in either of the following ways: if the anxiety is debilitating, it will result in lower motivation levels, whereas individuals experiencing facilitating anxiety will be more likely to be motivated as it has a positive effect on one's approach to language learning.

All of the above definitions of foreign language anxiety have a number of factors in common: the link between one's personality and the anxiety they experience, the manifestation of FLA in language production, and the clear effect it has on one's performance and self.

The following sections are given over to examining the intra-student and the outside factors of language anxiety, the different pressures that students may experience, and the suggestions in the literature for how to deal with FLA in the classroom.

2. 3. Intra-student factors: personality, self-image, and the role of the teacher

There seem to be three interrelated but distinct intra-student factors that influence how students experience language anxiety, I shall deal with each one in turn.

2.3.1. Personality: the perfectionist individual

In a paper that investigated language anxiety's ties to personality, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) point out that perfectionist students are more likely to be nervous in the language classroom. They draw parallels between the three main manifestations of language anxiety (communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety), which in general are all centered around a concern about how one is perceived by others, and perfectionist tendencies, that are also about appearances. They argue that as perfectionist students aim for a high standard in their work, it often results in reluctance when it comes to communication, as they are convinced that they should not talk until they can do so without any errors whatsoever. They also fear evaluation and judgement, they are constantly concerned with how others perceive them and their performance. Perfectionist individuals tend to berate themselves for any mistake they might make; on the other hand, they fail to appreciate their victories for what they are, therefore language learning for instance can be a rather negative experience for them.

It seems to be a recurring theme in the literature that language anxiety, as all types of anxiety, derives from one's personality. Therefore, it is assumed that certain people, perhaps genetically, are more prone to feeling nervousness for various reasons. According to the Big Five Theory (McCrae & John, 1992), which is a model that is quite widespread in the field of psychology, there are different personality dimensions, one of which is neuroticism. Goldberg (1993) suggests that nervousness as a general trait falls under this category, as opposed to emotional stability. Much of the literature that deals with FLA proposes that general anxiety is closely connected to language anxiety. Individuals who are emotionally unstable, in Goldberg's terms, are more prone to feeling nervous in the foreign language classroom, as well.

2.3.2 Self-image and the L2 narrative

The above-mentioned Big Five model does not include *state anxiety*, which is quite relevant in terms of language anxiety. Şimşek & Dörnyei (2017) mention McAdams's New Big Five model (McAdams, 2006), which looks at one's personality through three different levels that are in interaction with each other, and all in which language anxiety is represented. These are dispositional traits (more or less what the Big Five model describes), characteristic

adaptations (these are shaped by the different social situations and contexts), and integrative life narratives. The latter is especially important as it suggests that individuals, with the aim to define themselves, construct narratives from their experiences to process them. If this is true, then there is a specific identity narrative, which is the L2 narrative identity (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015) that is composed of the past experiences when it comes to learning a foreign language, as well as aims for the future in learning and using the target language. Therefore, it should be this narrative level where students also handle their potential negative experiences and anxiety; however, not everyone is capable of creating a cohesive, comprehensible narrative of their experiences without assistance. When it comes to dealing with their anxiety, individuals can follow a number of classic approaches. The so-called ‘fighter’ deems it absolutely necessary to weed out his or her anxiety and consciously makes an effort, as well. The ‘quitter’ chooses the opposite coping mechanism by escaping the anxiety-inducing situation, and they often yield to their nervousness, deeming anxiety as something constant that they are unable to change. Safe players fall somewhere in-between, by steering clear of performing in any way in class, avoiding eye contact, or sitting in the far end of the classroom (Şimşek & Dörnyei, 2017).

The reason why it is important that students have this L2 narrative identity in which they at least attempt to tackle their anxiety is the presence of what Şimşek and Dörnyei (2017) call the Anxious Self. According to them, the anxious state can be described as an unambiguous identity dimension, where the typical approaches to anxiety manifest themselves. It is important to note that anxiety, and therefore the Anxious Self is not something invariable, but rather dynamic. Therefore, there is a crucial need for a narrative to order one’s experiences when it comes to language learning for instance, so that one can make sense of their feelings and reach a sense of control and equilibrium.

The importance of the L2-self is further emphasised by Tóth (2017) when she discusses the intricate connection between language and self-expression. The strain one might experience when trying to communicate their thoughts and feelings in the target language may lead to anxiety. Since the individual feels like they cannot express their true self in the foreign language, they feel like their L2-self is limited, which leads to stress, a negative L2-image, and, as it were, an attack on one’s identity (Tóth, 2017).

2.3.3. The role of the teacher

The teacher has a paramount role in the creation of these learner narratives, in helping the students form their L2 identities. This process would help alleviate their anxiety somewhat

and shift their self-focused attention in an advantageous direction. As King and Smith (2017) claim in their study where they connect social anxiety to silence in the classroom, that individuals who have a tendency to develop anxiety in specific social situations also fear the possible negative evaluation of others, just as Horwitz et al. (1986) mention in relation to language anxiety. Other than the fact that this also proves the interconnection between different types of anxieties, King and Smith (2017) highlight that in such situations (when there is potential for negative evaluation) individuals tend to direct a significant amount of their attention inward. This serves the purpose of studying their self-generated image and how others might perceive it (King & Smith, 2017). Such behaviour is not only draining their attention from other aspects such as language, content, or style, which might result in them making mistakes that in turn will further the anxiety they feel and the negative emotions they associate with the situation. This self-focused attention also prevents them from objectively evaluating their performance and the feedback from their surroundings. Their fixation on their environment's opinion on them makes them hypersensitive to their peers' reactions; moreover, they magnify how much their anxiety symptoms (somatic or cognitive) are visible for others, which claims a lot of their attention from other things, as well (King & Smith, 2017). Once again, it is obvious that teachers should help such students reduce their anxiety. Regarding the nature of anxiety, this cannot be done by someone from the "outside" only, still, there are practices that teachers can follow to aid their students in overcoming their anxiety in the classroom. Such implementations will be discussed in a later section.

2. 4. Outside factors: peers, the teacher, previous experiences, expectations

As this study focuses on language anxiety experienced by high school students, it is important to point out that most individuals experience anxiety for the first time in their adolescence. It is when one is attempting to define oneself and discover one's place among peers. This is why outside factors, especially other people's opinions matter so much to anxious students or why their self-image is so fragile.

2.4.1. Significant social contexts

Individuals and their behaviour should always be looked at in their context. As Gkonou (2017) highlighted based on Bronfenbrenner's idea that the way one acts and behaves is influenced by the different spheres of context. These are similar to the ecological layers: social contexts have micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems as well (Gkonou, 2017). The microsystem is where the well-known anxieties attached to the language classroom may be

represented: apprehension of communication, fear of negative evaluation, negative image of the self, but also peer pressure or significant others (Gkonou, 2017). However, the classroom is only one social context the student participates in; the other contexts have a significant effect on students' behaviour, as well. These are represented by the other layers. The mesosystem can mean students' previous experiences related to language learning, or their loved ones' attitude towards learning and the specific foreign language. The overall beliefs about language learning and proficiency in the students' society, the school's profile, the education system itself, therefore the teacher's behaviour can appear in the exo- and macrosystematic level (Gkonou, 2017). Naturally, these layers are interconnected and dynamic, and different individuals will experience the different pressures in various amounts. Even so, it is essential for teachers to consider these factors when dealing with students' potential language anxiety in the classroom.

2.4.2. The importance of authoritative figures

The role of the presence of an authoritative figure is unmistakable when it comes to language anxiety. The most obvious authority in the classroom is the teacher. The source of the possible negative evaluation, which anxious students fear, is traditionally the teacher. It is greatly important how teachers give written or oral feedback and how they evaluate their students, especially as some of them might be hypersensitive to the reactions to their performance (King & Smith, 2017). Aside from being the one to evaluate students, teachers' personality also plays a role in the amount of anxiety students feel in the foreign language classroom. For instance, patience should be a trait that teachers possess. Most anxious students tend to turn to safety behaviours such as not initiating speech and not asking questions, resorting to short answers, or mentally rehearsing anything they might want to utter, which leads to an extended pause in communication (King & Smith, 2017). Tsui (1996) points out that the teacher's behaviour in such situations can be crucial, as the repetition of the question, although it might only be intended to make sure everyone understands the question or to fill silence, can cause anxiety in students who interpret the repetition as intolerance and impatience.

Another source of anxiety in relation to the teacher can be the different *learning styles* (Harmer, 2007). Certain students have low tolerance for the kind of ambiguity learning a foreign language poses to begin with. Sometimes the teacher's style and the learner's learning style is entirely different, and one might not tolerate the other (Rubio-Alcalá, 2017).

As Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) point out, in numerous cases perfectionist teachers are likely to push their tendencies onto their students as well, creating anxiety in the learners.

2.4.3. High or unrealistic expectations

FLA is often connected to lower levels of proficiency; however, as for instance Tóth (2017) highlighted in a study, advanced students can experience language anxiety, too. Since the learning environment is more challenging linguistically and the expectations are also higher, students feel more pressure to do well. They might question their competence in the target language and start to have doubts if they make any mistake, and feelings of anguish might arise that all those years they invested in learning the specific foreign language were in vain.

As a study conducted by Tóth (2017) also shows, students can also feel pressure in the presence of a native speaker. Not only do they experience struggles to understand the native speaker, their L2 self-image is also damaged as they feel less competent and eloquent, unable to get their ideas across, and all in all not as interesting a person as they want to be (Tóth, 2017). As this study was conducted in a Hungarian context, I feel that the idealisation of the native speaker is quite relevant for my classes, too.

2.4.4. Peer competition

Additionally, in more advanced groups students might feel that the competition is more serious with their peers (Tóth, 2017). Usually at this point students start to almost compete with each other in terms of who is the most proficient either by the level and type of language exam they have, or even with potential experience in a native environment. This again links back to the idealisation of the native speaker, and in today's age, when most of the characteristics of a native environment can be duplicated even in a classroom thanks to the internet, the role of this phenomenon is surprising.

2.4.5. Past learning experiences

Finally, students' previous experiences when it comes to language learning might also have an impact on the potential anxiety they feel in the classroom. If they had several negative experiences in the past connected to the specific foreign language, such incidents will affect how they feel about not only the target language, but the language learning and classroom as well. These are again attacks on one's self-esteem and self-image, which should be taken into consideration when the teacher would like to aid in alleviating the language anxiety his or her students feel.

2. 5. How to deal with language anxiety in the classroom

In this section, the relevant implications will be summarised regarding what a teacher can do to alleviate, or at least ease language anxiety in the foreign language classroom. First of all, it is stated clearly in the literature I consulted that the level of proficiency and the presence of language anxiety are not related. Therefore, language anxiety should be considered and dealt with in groups of any level.

Moreover, anxiety is not necessarily a negative phenomenon in the classroom. The literature distinguishes between *debilitating* and *facilitating* foreign language anxiety. Facilitating anxiety is a “healthy amount” of feeling of nerves and stress, a rush of adrenaline, which keeps motivation levels high. It does not hinder the preparation for class or the participation in it, even in an evaluative situation. In addition, facilitating anxiety is said to enhance one’s performance and focus (Moyer, 2008). In other words, facilitating anxiety can positively affect language learning (Piniel & Csizér, 2013). Thus, while completely erasing is not a goal because it is not feasible, moulding it into a facilitating one might be.

2.5.1. Perfectionism

Concerning perfectionism, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) suggest that these tendencies stem from irrational self-beliefs. Perfectionists tend to picture this ‘perfect’ version of themselves that they wish to achieve but because of its irrationality, they are never satisfied with themselves, thus entering a vicious circle. It is advised that in order to readjust this way of thinking, students need to become aware of the fact that these expectations are unrealistic and reframe them to be more reachable. This can be helped by students actually discussing the perceived expectations of others with them: for instance the teacher, family, or friends (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002).

In addition, teachers themselves might be prone to being perfectionists. In this case, it is essential to avoid berating students for potential mistakes or flaws and presenting every situation as an opportunity for evaluating performance. Instead, teachers should create a friendly, comfortable atmosphere in the classroom and portray themselves as facilitators, as opposed to representations of authority; who acknowledge and appreciate students’ improvements. Mistakes should be treated as a natural part of language learning and students must be reassured that they will get all the necessary help they need in order to achieve their (more realistic) goals (Brophy, 1999).

Another reason why it is highly important to establish that mistakes are acceptable and natural is that many anxious students get fixated on them, which causes struggles in

communication, further heightening their feelings of stress. Instead, students should focus on fluency, the pleasure of the conversation itself. It should be emphasised that “the classroom is not merely for demonstrating knowledge and skill, but also for gaining it” (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002. p. 570.). The preference of fluency over accuracy also affects students’ self-efficacy beliefs in a positive way, thus minimising the level of debilitating anxiety and making pupils feel more motivated (Piniel & Csizér, 2013).

2.5.2. L2 narrative

As Şimşek and Dörnyei (2017) state, although not all students create a narrative to process their language-related experiences and goals, they should be supported to do so. Learner narratives are essential for students to organise their emotions and thoughts, to establish their sense of identity, therefore helping them feel a sense of control and stability (Şimşek & Dörnyei, 2017). Narratives can in a way force students to take a more analytic look at their behaviour and experiences, thus reflecting on them and hopefully re-evaluating their Anxious Selves as well.

In positive psychology, narrative therapy has been used for several years to help patients face their problems by externalising them (Morgan, 2000). Narrative therapy’s techniques can be useful for classroom settings, as well. For instance, guiding questions help students create their narratives and externalising their issues related to anxiety. These can be done by means of classroom or pair discussions or home assignments.

2.5.3. Learning experience

Improving the learning experience not only helps students enjoy themselves in the foreign language classroom but will also have an effect on their anxiety and self-image. Here are four ways which might be helpful in this respect.

Use of authentic situations

An obvious enhancement can be the use of authentic situations in class (Tóth, 2017). This way students feel at ease as it is always easier to talk about oneself. They might think that the situation is close to a “real” conversation they would have with a friend, and the familiarity reduces the anxiety they would otherwise experience. Another way to ease students’ discomfort and shift their focus from inward to out (King & Smith, 2017) is by discussing topics they feel a personal involvement with (Tóth, 2017). The process of learning becomes more relevant and a source of enjoyment, thus increasing their motivation and efficiency (Piniel & Csizér, 2013).

Oral production

One of the main areas where foreign language anxiety presents itself is in the productive skills, especially speaking. In order to reduce the amount of anxiety students feel, learners themselves would most likely suggest minimising the amount of oral production in the classroom. However, as it is not acceptable from the perspective of learning a foreign language, other approaches are favoured. Other than the above-mentioned practices of using authentic and personalised topics, a certain amount of time should be dedicated for in-class discussions in small groups (King & Smith, 2017). This way, students can feel more relaxed as their stage fright, their fear of performing in front of a considerable audience, is reduced. It should be noted that even the small groups in which pupils can talk freely, should be swapped and mixed regularly.

Use of video feedback

A further method to help students overcome their anxiety in communicative settings is the use of video feedback (King & Smith, 2017). By recording learners' performance during for example a presentation, they have a means to look at themselves from an outside point of view to examine the possible signs of their anxiety. However, I reckon that in such a situation students may experience heightened levels of stage fright or anxiety, which would turn the whole opportunity into a daunting situation. Also, this would only make participants feel like it is an evaluative setting, thus furthering their feelings of anguish. They would not focus on how to improve, on the signs of their anxiety or the lack thereof, but on all the ways they were incorrect, wrong, and inept. Therefore, I would avoid using this method when dealing with anxiety in the classroom.

2.5.4. Classroom atmosphere

A positive, supportive, relaxed, and engaging classroom atmosphere where quality work gets done is coveted in all contexts, not just when dealing with language anxiety. Nevertheless, the classroom atmosphere may have an especially important influence on making learners less anxious during lessons. There are a number of components that I feel can help achieve the ideal atmosphere aside from some of the examples that have already been mentioned.

Decreased evaluative nature of the classroom

Firstly, it should be emphasised that lessons are not necessarily constant evaluative situations. Anxious students tend to feel that whenever they are asked to answer a question or speak in class, it is an opportunity for them to be tested (Tóth, 2017). With the combination

of the treatment of mistakes as natural parts of language learning, the teacher's encouragement and positive feedback, or the careful filtering of the topics that are discussed in class, the presumed evaluative nature of the classroom can be decreased. Additionally, perhaps letting learners know about the following day's topic so that they can look it up or prepare for it might help diminish the amount of stress students feel.

More peer support, less competitiveness

In connection with this, the competitiveness within the group should be kept to a minimum. Especially at high levels of language proficiency and in competitive schools, students look at their peers as potential rivals (Tóth, 2017). Instead, teachers should promote acceptance towards fellow pupils and people in general. It must be highlighted that although people are imperfect, positive feedback is necessary, which teachers can do by serving as an example. This can for instance be done by reducing the amount of error correction in class and by favouring fluency over accuracy. Small group-discussions serve as a great platform for students to interact with each other and it ought to be stressed that these are a wonderful opportunity to learn about one another, instead of judging each other (King & Smith, 2017). However, individual differences have to be respected and taken into consideration in the management and arrangement of activities, as such factors can also cause distress. Teachers should carefully manipulate the dynamics of the group in order to encourage peer support as opposed to negative competition between students (King & Smith, 2017).

2.6. Summary

The teacher's role in dealing with language anxiety is undisputed. A friendly, calming, and comforting teacher personality will be more welcomed by all learners, but especially anxious ones. Embracing mistakes and the use of personal, authentic topics encourage students to participate actively in the classroom. If the teacher is a facilitator, he or she is supportive, informal, and friendly, students feel more at ease during lessons, as well (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013). Moreover, teachers should not overlook the fact that while some students might be unwilling or unable to cope with their anxiety, perhaps talking openly about anxiety itself and how to deal with it might be helpful for everyone (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013). Acknowledging such mental distress as valid and offering ways to overcome it can be a very comforting and helpful experience. The opportunity to share personal stories, thus creating narratives about their anxiety is highly important as students have the chance to not feel alone in their experiences with such emotions.

2.7. Implications for my empirical research

After having consulted a selection of the relevant literature, I acquired an adequate amount of knowledge on the topic of language anxiety. I feel that the lines between general anxiety and foreign language anxiety are quite blurred. But that does not negate the relevance of the presence of anxiety in the language classroom. Hence, teachers should be aware of it and the ways in which they can help lessen students' feelings of unease.

Based on the literature, it is also obvious that – contrary to my initial desires and basic instincts it is close to impossible but perhaps unnecessary – to completely eliminate anxiety from the classroom. Rather, our task as teachers is to make sure that the potential anxiety students experience is anticipated, acknowledged and, where possible, students are helped to transform its debilitating effect into a facilitating, motivational one.

In the following chapter, I will report how I set out to try a number of different approaches to facilitate students' coping with their anxiety in the classroom. I will also draw on insight from actual, practicing teachers with several years of experience about their tips and tricks when it comes to handling learners' FLA.

This will also allow me to consider the relative practical value of suggestions from the literature, for instance regarding the video feedback technique or classroom atmosphere.

3. Empirical research design and method

Having become more knowledgeable in the field of language anxiety after reading so much about it, I had the desire to learn more about this topic in practice. As a prospective high school teacher, I naturally wanted to focus on this age group, and not least because most of the literature focussed on university students. But from personal experience I know that the phenomenon of language anxiety was not exclusive to learners in higher education.

In this part I shall first summarise the questions that guided me through my empirical research. Then, the setting where the research was conducted, as well as the participants will be described. Finally, the research tools and procedures will be explained and I will also touch upon the limitations to my research.

3. 1. Research questions

The aim of my research was to investigate language anxiety in the context of Hungarian high school education. Aside from the signs of potential language anxiety, I also wanted to focus on how teachers can alleviate the feelings of such unease in the classroom, which would be useful for my future prospects as a language teacher. The following questions guided me in the empirical part of this research:

To what extent are my students conscious of language anxiety?

During my high school years, I myself was not aware of my anxiety for what it was. Therefore, first of all, I was curious to see whether my students are conscious of their language anxiety and whether they can pinpoint what causes it and how it can be lessened. Nowadays young people may be more informed about mental health issues such as anxiety by virtue of transparency on social media platforms and a growing acceptance in society that is slowly recognising mental health to be as important as physical condition.

Is any anxiety my students experience language-based?

This question has come up frequently in the literature, as students who show perfectionist tendencies or who experience “general” anxiety in their day-to-day life are more prone to develop language anxiety at some point in their studies as well. It is also a relevant question as the groups I have been teaching during my teaching practice are advanced or at least at an upper-intermediate level in English. In such language groups, one would assume the higher level of proficiency reduces the possibility of the presence of language anxiety in students, yet this may not necessarily be the case. As it has been shown in numerous involving students

with advanced language skills (cf. Tóth, 2017) the level of proficiency does not correlate with the amount of anxiety one feels.

How do students respond to feelings of anxiety induced by English lessons?

This is related to the question of what coping mechanisms students have implemented in their lives during their years of schooling. This naturally was essential for me to know so that I could facilitate their work in the classroom; both in academic matters and when it comes to easing their language anxiety.

If anything, what triggered students' anxiety?

Potential triggers might be connected to the English lesson as a whole, their peers, the teacher, or only certain settings such as written or oral tests, maybe specific topics that are raised in class; alternatively, to particular language skills (namely reading, writing, listening, or speaking). As a teacher, it is important to be aware of students' triggers and therefore have a certain amount of empathy (Irishkanova et al., 2003) to deal with these in the classroom appropriately.

To what extent were these students interested in alleviating or easing the anxiety they experienced?

As mentioned in the literature (Şimşek & Dörnyei, 2017), certain people tend to give in to their feelings of stress and discomfort and deem it a constant factor in their lives that cannot be changed. I wondered if that was the case with any of my students, too, since this way of thinking could impact the response to my efforts toward mitigating their anxiety.

How important is the classroom atmosphere with regards to language anxiety?

Personal experience and the literature strongly suggest that the teacher's personality, kindness, patience, and the group's dynamics, the relationships between the peers matter a lot. However, these might be personal factors and rooted in the nature of one's anxiety. Similarly, I wanted to find out how comfortable these students are in their English group, whether they feel at ease during our lessons and how they could be helped in this regard.

Do certain task types, group work management and specific materials or equipment play a role in easing or increasing language anxiety?

Though not everyone enjoys all aspects of language learning, I wondered whether there are certain tasks, activities or aspects of classroom management that students feel would make an anxiety-inducing scenario potentially less daunting.

How do experienced teachers notice that students are anxious?

Although luckily there is much research and literature out there regarding language anxiety, I found it profoundly important to ask for some advice from some English teachers who have been practising their profession for many years, therefore they might have some valuable insight into how to ease students' anxiety in the English language classroom.

Thus, I was curious to learn how teachers realise that a pupil is anxious rather than just showing signs of general teenage awkwardness and shyness. It would also be interesting to compare the teachers' responses to that of the students when it comes to physical and behavioural indications of anxiety.

What techniques do experienced teachers use to ease student anxiety?

Furthermore, I naturally wanted to know about the different techniques my colleagues use to ease their students' potential discomfort and stress in their classrooms. Here I was looking for answers concerning the way they behave, the types of tasks they set, the feedback they give, the way they deal with assessment and so on. Also, any piece of advice they might be able to give to a beginner teacher with regards to creating a comfortable, inclusive, and supporting classroom atmosphere was welcomed.

3.2. Setting

To better understand the circumstances of the research, I shall now describe the setting in which I conducted said investigation.

This year, I have been doing my long teaching practice as part of my six year-long teacher training course. The school I was assigned to is a grammar school in the centre of Budapest, Madách Imre Gimnázium. This institution has done quite well in various surveys and rankings that looked at the main competences of Hungary's students. Hence, the school is rather selective regarding the children that can attend it. This means that the majority of the student population is from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Aside from their academic achievements in school, most of the learners participate in extracurricular activities such as various sports, theatre, music or arts. A lot of these students take part in these esteemed occupations at professional levels. Although this means they are dedicated, hard-working,

and enlightened, pupils of Madách Imre Gimnázium often experience immense amounts of pressure to do well and little free time to enjoy being young.

My long teaching practice started in September 2018, when a group of tenth graders was assigned to me by my mentor. We were working together for 5 months, but at the end of the first term I and another fellow trainee were offered a part-time job at the school. From the second term we took over some of the English groups of a colleague who went on maternity leave. This meant that from the end of January, I had to say goodbye to my previous group and get to know two new ones: a group of ninth graders in their intensive language learning year, and a group of eleventh graders.

Although the change was both challenging and an honour, I did not let it get in the way of my research. By that time, I had gathered a fair amount of information from the experiences with my first group, who I had spent a lot of time with and a bond was evidently created. Still, I thought it to be a great opportunity to widen my scope into more age groups, keeping in mind not to overwhelm myself at this point in time, but that maybe for a future research my observations could prove to be useful.

3.3. Participants

The participants of this research will also be discussed in more detail, as I believe that is important in terms of the findings. In total, thirty-eight students and two teachers participated in this present research.

10.cd

The first of group I taught, and thus examined in terms of language anxiety along the lines of my research questions, were a class of tenth graders who had five English lessons a week. In this particular school, students are streamed based on their abilities in English during their first week upon starting in the institution. Hence, several English groups are created within one year, with groups ranging from elementary to advanced levels. This particular one that I started my teaching practice in, was the advanced group of their year; so, in CEFR terms, they are somewhere around B2 plus - C1 minus level. However, as anyone teaching in classes that are differentiated in such a way would be able to tell, it does not mean that each and every student in the group is on the same level.

This group, which I shall refer to as 10.cd, consisted of nineteen students, all of whom were around the age of 15-16. There are seven boys and twelve girls from two different classes in their year, but as they have been a group from the beginning of their high school studies,

they are all familiar with each other and get on well. Most of the students have their intermediate language exams and two of the students are actually preparing to take the school leaving exam early (and have good chances of passing it with flying colours), whereas a few students are struggling with certain aspects of the language as basic conceptions are absent from their knowledge.

11.cd

From the second school term, I started teaching in a group that should be referred to as 11.cd, an advanced group of nineteen students as well. Here, there are eight guys and eleven girls who are 17-18 years of age. They are all very good in English, however when it comes to oral production, some are more enthusiastic than others in expressing their opinions. Similarly to the 10.cd group, 11.cd is also made up of students from two different classes, but it is almost impossible to tell who belongs to which, as these classes are mixed in quite a few subjects. The students are open to working with each other, moreover, they were very welcoming and keen on working with me despite having to say goodbye to their beloved former teacher in the middle of the schoolyear. Such an experience is never easy for students.

Most of the learners in this group had done their B2 or even advanced language exams and they are pretty confident in the level of their knowledge; furthermore, for their future plans English is not as essential as for instance history or chemistry. Therefore, they only have three English lessons a week, as those who would want to learn it more intensely would have chosen it as their elective advanced class. This means that they are not necessarily all motivated to for instance work with a coursebook (some of them even altogether refused to buy one).

The other group I took over was 9.nya. However, as they only just started studying at Madách Imre Gimnázium and they are on a special 5-year long course, doing their intensive language learning year during which they basically only have English lessons, I deemed it unfitting to include them in this particular research.

The teachers

I found that the educators working in the school are all very knowledgeable in their respective subjects and are well-prepared in pedagogic terms as well. What is more, they are all very much aware of their students' backgrounds, situations, and potential achievements or struggles.

One of the teachers, whom I shall call Lili, who sat down for a semi-structured interview was an English and Hungarian literature and grammar colleague, who has been teaching in the school for over a year and is in her late twenties. Although she is relatively at the beginning of her career, she is not unfamiliar with the challenges that teachers face every day.

The other interviewee was an experienced teacher of English and also my mentor. I chose him because Attila has several years of practice not only as an English teacher but also in mentoring prospective language teachers, so he is highly observant, critical, but has great advice to offer.

3.4. Research tools and procedure

For the empirical part of my research, I used different types of qualitative research methods (cf. Hitchcock & Hughes, 1992). First of all, I made my own observations in the classes I taught. At the beginning of my long teaching practice I had the opportunity to observe 10.cd in their “natural habitat”; that is, with my mentor teacher who had been teaching them for two years. Once I took over and got adjusted in the situation, I continued making my own reflections on the students’ behaviour.

Additionally, these learners were asked to fill in a short questionnaire that contained open-ended questions regarding their potential anxiety and coping mechanisms (see Appendices A and B). The query was worded in Hungarian in the hopes that students would feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts. I chose using open-ended questions in the questionnaire rather than for instance a scale with pre-worded sentences because I desired to see the reasons behind their answers and I did not want to put any words into their mouths that might not be completely true.

When it came to the teachers, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with both (cf. Hitchcock & Hughes, 1992). I prepared some broad questions (see Appendix C) but let the flow of the conversation guide our discussion with my colleagues. I chose this method as I was aiming to get answers I could not or did not necessarily want to predict. It was essential that the interviews have a casual ambience, so that the participants felt at ease talking about their practices and that they could give their own advice untainted by any indications of my own or the literature.

3.4.1. Student questionnaire

The questionnaire for both groups of students consisted of six open-ended questions and was distributed in class. The questions were worded in Hungarian, as I felt that talking about such matters would be easier for students in their mother tongue. However, they were given the chance to write their answers in either English or Hungarian, as both groups were fairly advanced. Except for two students, everyone chose Hungarian in their replies. The questionnaire and the answers were later translated for discussion in this study.

In the 10.cd group, the questionnaire was distributed and filled in in class in October 2018, after receiving permission from my mentor as well, whereas the 11.cd group did so in March 2019. By October and March respectively, I felt that we got to know each other quite well with both groups and a certain bond had been created, so I could ask them to answer more personal questions.

In both cases, a fifteen-minute long window was left at the end of one of our lessons, when students were informed about the topic and nature of my research. Beforehand, I also disclosed the importance of the questionnaire in terms of my thesis to the students, especially in the latter case where the deadline was a little more pressing. I also promised them that their data and answers would be treated confidentially and that participation was voluntary. Fortunately, all the students were more than willing to help, and gave suitable and proper answers.

The questions were as follows:

- 1. How do you usually feel during English lessons? What emotions do you associate with the group, the teacher, the lessons themselves?*
- 2. Do you ever feel anxious/stressed during English lessons? What situations can provoke it?*

The first two questions were aimed to find out whether students felt any anxiety especially in the context of English lessons. Their answers should hopefully also reveal what triggered their unease in class. In the first question I purposefully avoided mentioning any specific emotion (anxiety, stress, or even positive ones), whereas the second one was more targeted towards my specific topic.

- 3. How does this anxiety manifest itself (both positive and negative consequences)?*

Here I was curious to see learners' experiences with debilitating or facilitating anxiety. Moreover, students' recounts on the manifestations of their anxiety might prove to be useful for the teacher to recognise the signs later on as well.

4. *If you feel anxious/stressed, do you try to overcome it? How (should you)?*

Regarding the fourth question, I was looking for answers to one of my research questions, namely how interested students are in dealing with their anxiety appropriately. However, it also sheds light upon how much learners know about anxiety in general.

5. *What makes an anxiety-inducing situation less daunting for you?*

6. *In the context of English lessons, what do you think would help you minimize the amount of stress you feel, what would make you feel more comfortable?*

The last two questions both sought answers for how students deal with anxiety or wish to ease their feelings of discomfort. Here I wanted to make a distinction between general and language anxiety. My predictions were that the answers would be quite blurred, as often times there is no clear contrast between the two.

3.4.2. Teacher interviews

As mentioned above, semi-structured interviews were used with the two interviewees. The purpose of these interviews was to gather answers to my two last research questions: how do experienced teachers notice anxious students in the classroom, and what advice they can give in terms of facilitating language anxiety.

The two interviews were conducted in the school after lessons, and each lasted for approximately fifteen minutes. Both participants were more than willing to answer my questions and provide further stories and advice, and both approved my recording our conversations on my phone.

Since I had been working with the teachers for several months (also, one of them was my mentor teacher), I knew them fairly well, but I still deemed one or two warmer questions necessary for the participants to ease into the conversation:

What made you want to become a teacher? What is your "policy" or approach as an English teacher?

Before the interviews, the topic of my research was made clear, so the fact that both of the participants were aware of language anxiety was clear. As mentioned before, although I had

some initial guidelines for questions, further ones came up during the conversations. Nevertheless, here are the questions that both teachers answered.

1. *How do you notice students who are anxious, especially in terms of the language classroom? What are the tell-tale signs usually?*
2. *Can you recall any student in particular who you teach and is clearly suffering from FLA?*

The first question was asked in the hopes that it would give me more insight into my similarly worded research question. The second one was an opportunity for a possible anecdote where the teachers would explain anxious students in their own words and give more information about the potential reasons, explanations, consequences, etc.

3. *Do you consciously try to ease students' potential discomfort and stress? How do you (the way you behave, the types of tasks you set, feedback you give, other)?*

Here I was looking for more specific answers, as the bracketed prompts suggest. The sought answers were in the realm of classroom and methodology practices, as well as pedagogical ones.

4. *What advice can you give for a beginner teacher when it comes to creating a comfortable, inclusive, supportive classroom atmosphere?*

The fourth question was concerned with creating the coveted classroom atmosphere that was often described in the literature. As a teacher trainee, any advice was greatly appreciated.

Being that I had the opportunity to observe several of my mentor's lessons, I was more familiar with his classroom's atmosphere. Therefore, I had a specific question for him, the aim of which was to gather any practical piece of advice that I might be able to implement in my own classes as well:

Based on my observations and feedback from the students, they feel more at ease in your lessons than other ones. Why do you think that is?

3.5. Limitations

Before moving on to the discussion of my findings, certain limitations of this research design should be mentioned. First of all, thirty-eight fairly advanced students (and two teachers) from only one specific school constitute a fairly limited research. To draw more extensive

conclusions, similar research should be conducted in a variety of types of schools, involving more teachers and students at all proficiency levels.

Furthermore, the depth of reach of the data is also limited. While some students seemed conscientious in answering a questionnaire, others just wrote a few words in answer.

What is more, language anxiety is a fairly intricate and not very accessible area of investigation. For example, students might not be that ready to state that their teacher provokes their anxiety or that they do not feel comfortable in their group. They might also find it difficult to identify specific factors or articulate their impact.

4. Results and discussion

In this section I shall discuss the findings of my empirical research. To facilitate the ease of reading this part, I am going to divide the research questions into two broad groups. One of them is concerned with teacher and student *awareness*, the other with teacher *facilitation* of anxiety issues. These wider themes will be analysed based on both the answers to the student questionnaire and the teachers' responses in the interviews. For the purpose of illustration, I have translated all student responses quoted here that were originally given in Hungarian.

4.1. Language anxiety awareness

In this section, I will deal with a number of my research questions related to noticing and being aware of anxiety in the educational context. The questions that are discussed here are:

- how can teachers notice anxious students in their classrooms,
- to what extent are students aware of their own anxiety,
- whether any of this anxiety is language-based,
- what triggers their feelings of unease in the context of English lessons.

4.1.1. Signs of anxiety: How teachers can notice anxious students

In answer to my question about how *teachers* can pinpoint anxious students in their class, the two interviewees listed quite a few signs that draw a teacher's attention to the possible anxiety his or her students feel. Several of these coincided with what can also be found in the literature: blushing, avoiding eye contact, being reluctant to answer questions or talk in front of the whole class, taking too long to form their answer, and so on. Furthermore, Attila pointed out the students' writing, for instance. Without the aim for an in-depth analysis of students' handwriting, Attila mentioned that it is intriguing to see that anxious students tend to make multiple corrections in their essays or tests. It also relates to the fact that language anxiety is more likely to manifest itself in the productive skills: anxious students fear speaking in the foreign language as they want to avoid making any mistakes and it is the same in writing. They often make multiple corrections in the same sentence, crossing out the different solutions multiple times. The end result is sometimes quite messy, and one can only imagine that learners' minds sadly may metaphorically look similar when it comes to language production.

A thought-provoking point that came up in Lili's interview was regarding how to decipher if a particular student is anxious or only showing possible signs of teenage shyness in the presence of a figure of authority; that is, the teacher. Lili highlighted that empathy as a

teacher trait is absolutely essential. She mentioned that teachers tend to forget what it was like to participate in a classroom as a student and how they might have felt some reluctance or anxiety themselves. In her view,

“it is hard to remember why talking in front of a group was such a disastrous experience, even though I know I thought the same thing.”

However, we should strive to at least acknowledge that it is the case for our students just as much as it was for us at some point.

It is important to treat pupils as human beings even if not entirely equals. Teachers should consider their students’ problems, they should accept their opinions and the learners as such as they are, and should have a connection with them. As Lili said,

“If you shut out students, or if you do not treat them as human beings, then you might not be able to see that they are suffering.”

Moreover, in Lili’s opinion, it is crucial for teachers to have an adequate relationship with themselves, too.

“I think it is important to be connected with yourself. So, do not show something that is not you, do not put up some kind of a role. You have to be honest and just be yourself.”

Authenticity and honesty are crucial in establishing a relationship with students, especially in the language classroom where certain topics may be raised that require a level of openness from the participants. If teachers pay attention to their pupils, notice the teenagers’ struggles instead of fixating on their own, they will be more aware of who is anxious for instance. In the long run, this trusting relationship can also help facilitating students’ anxiety as well, as it will be discussed in the following subchapter.

4.1.2. Student awareness of anxiety

When it comes to the *students’* reports on how the feelings of unease manifest themselves in class, they described *positive* and *negative* signs and consequences. Several students mentioned that they perform better under stress, thus validating the presence of facilitating anxiety in the classroom. It is also worth noting that some of these students do various sports at a professional level, so they might be more used to feeling stress. However, this does not mean they are immune to it.

Six eleventh graders mentioned that the anxiety they feel can be motivating (and, as the literature refers to it, *facilitating* (Moyer, 2008)). These students make sure to study harder

and prepare more for tests to avoid lagging behind within the group. Also, they feel that if they make a linguistic mistake, they will be sure to remember the correct form or word and thus prevent possible future frustrations. This means that certain students feel that error correction is a must for their knowledge to improve, not to mention for their anxiety to ease.

Unfortunately, the list of negative “symptoms” is much longer. In terms of *physical* manifestations, most of the students reported trembling, stuttering, feeling hot, their hands being cold, nausea, and; in extreme cases, nosebleed. Two of the girls from 10.cd reported the following:

“There are no positive effects of my anxiety. I can get terrible headaches, which does not help with concentration at all. It is usual that I am very nervous.”

“When I am anxious I get this feeling of powerlessness and impotence. It is almost suffocating and I have trouble sleeping, as well.”

On the other hand, there are also a lot of *psychological* or *mental* signs that they stressed. The students’ answers coincide with the literature in that they mention jumbled words, unintelligible speech, feelings of discomfort and self-consciousness, or having difficulties remembering what they wanted to write or say.

I should emphasise, though, that the majority of these students associate English lessons with positive emotions: they like the pace of the lessons, they appreciate the good atmosphere, they enjoy their respective groups and they cherish the opportunities to discuss diverse topics in a variety of ways. Learners mentioned emotions like joy, comfort, excitement, described English lessons as fun, calm, a place to experience success and feel no pressure.

4.1.3 The role of the foreign language in student anxiety

What came up in both some of the tenth and eleventh graders’ answers is that they feel awkward when making a *language* mistake in front of the entire group. Instead of considering the possible ways to grow in such a situation, some students experience it in a negative manner and feel a loss of motivation. Some of these learners did point out that the chances for this happening in the English classroom specifically is not as high, but rather in their third or fourth foreign language groups. Nevertheless, it is clear that these students are concerned about their peers’ opinions, and it may be for a reason. That is, if learners feel that their classmates judge them, their anxiousness might be heightened. This is one of the reasons why it is highly important to create a classroom atmosphere where students feel accepted but also where they respect and appreciate each other.

Interestingly, four students from 11.cd also elaborated that they are more prone to feeling anxiety in connection with their L3, i.e. a second foreign language. Most of them concerned the reasons why they feel anxious in that specific foreign language classroom:

“In Spanish lessons I stress a lot more when the teacher asks me to speak, because in Spanish I find it more difficult to figure out what tense and conjugation to use than in English. It takes more time for me, so, from my point of view, I talk slower than the others.”

“In my second foreign language classes I feel anxious because the teacher piles an immense amount of material on us that we should learn and I cannot keep up with her pace. I do not feel like she teaches the different language points well enough before she expects me to know something.”

However, one of them associated especially negative feelings with her L3 that she could not really find a reason for. This to me means that although she is aware of the unease and stress she feels in this foreign language classroom, she is not entirely conscious of what causes it and therefore how to overcome or deal with it. This is especially unfortunate regarding her answers that revealed that, in her words, before these specific L3 lessons she would rather be anywhere else other than in that classroom. What is more, according to this student, she does not enjoy anything about this language even in out of school contexts. She said that whenever she hears this language that she did not name, an undesirable amount of feeling of discomfort overcomes her.

All in all, although some students may not be aware of what causes their anxiety in all cases, they are conscious of its existence and its debilitating and facilitating effects. They might not think about it explicitly, though when they were asked they could articulate their thoughts and feelings, as well as their desire to discuss such matters in class.

4.1.4. Triggers of anxiety according to students and teachers

Based on students' answers, only few of them experience solely language anxiety in their day-to-day lives, and only six who felt this kind of anxiety in relation with English. However, this does not mean that student do not experience unease or stress in the classroom.

Student perspectives

Asked about the factors that potentially trigger their anxiety in a classroom context, students provided a variety of responses. It was fascinating to see the differences between the 10.cd and the 11.cd group, who, although they are only a year apart, gave different reasons for their feelings of unease.

While 15 out of 19 students from 10.cd blamed their anxiety on evaluative productive settings; that is, written or oral test situations, only two 11.cd students mentioned tests at all in their answers. The rest of the 11.cd group, at least those who feel any anxiety at all in English lessons, highlighted situations involving speaking. For the most part, they feel anxious when they cannot find the right words or the appropriate way to express their opinions. Aside from linguistic reasons, half of them also get stressed in situations when they do not have an opinion or enough knowledge about a certain topic and they are called upon to speak. This appeared in the literature as well, where it was discussed that anxious students are apprehensive towards tests and frustrations can arise from a mismatch between the eloquence of their thoughts and their linguistic abilities in a foreign language (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002).

Four students from 10.cd and 2 from 11.cd, although did not mention tests as such, attributed their anxiety to situations when they had to “perform” in front of the class. These include presentations or even games or activities that are based on improvisation. Most of these learners added that this kind of anxiety of theirs is not exclusive to the language classroom however. To me, it was interesting to read these answers, as the vast majority of the students (32 out of 38) from both groups answered to the first question that they associate positive emotions with English lessons because they enjoy the different activities and games:

“I always look forward to English lessons, because this is the most ‘colourful’ thanks to all the different activities. I especially enjoy the creative tasks.”

“The lessons are really good, I love the games and the warmers we do.”

Here it became obvious that some students do not like speaking activities and games involving improvisation. One girl from 11.cd, who wrote that she did not like speaking in front of the whole class but was fine in smaller groups, is especially reluctant towards activities involving a bit of role play or improvisation.

On several occasions when they have such an activity in groups, she has told me that “she is just not creative at all”, so she does not even try to complete these tasks. In these cases I try to give some prompts and ideas for Jázmin, which she does appreciate, but she is more comfortable with listening to the others and being told exactly what to do. This showed me that it is important to have a variety of activities in my lessons, and it is perhaps useful to differentiate between instructions regarding such activities as well, so that students who do not feel as comfortable with improvising can have some crutches to lean on during these

tasks. Gradually, however, it would be beneficial for them to learn this skill as well. Potentially Jázmin and students like her might get more comfortable in improvisational situations by giving advice to others with their speaking tasks, so that the pressure is removed and they themselves do not feel like they need to come up with something creative on the spot, they are just pitching ideas to help their peers.

Teacher perspectives

From the teacher interviews it also became clear that most students feel anxious before and during oral and written tests in class. A common theme in both Attila and Lili's answers was to make sure that students know in advance what they will be tested on. They both said that they tend to tell the students what topic, vocabulary items, or grammar point will be included in the test. What is more, they often give them the exact sentences they practiced in class, or give the beginning of the words in a vocabulary test for instance. This way, students know what the test will include, their success only depends on whether or not they prepare for it, which is their own responsibility, it is something they can work on or if they do not, the consequences should not come as a surprise. Lili said:

"I only ever test them on the material that we agreed on. Even in the lessons, in the case of anxious students, I try to only call them to speak when it is something that we have already discussed or that I have provided for them previously, so that they have no chance to mess up."

In the case of oral tests, Attila mentioned that he usually conducts these in pairs, which not only prepares students for similar settings in language exams, but it also reduces students' anxiety to know they are not alone in the situation. They also do not have to perform in front of the whole group, as the others have their own tasks to work on in the meantime. He also always makes it clear what the oral test will be based on.

All in all, the most often mentioned triggers for students were quite prevalent in the literature as well: evaluative situations and productive skills, mainly speaking. Based on the learners' answers, these situations often affected their confidence, and their fear of negative evaluation can be attributed to the high expectations from the competitive school environment, their teachers, parents and even themselves, as they have all been learning English for about a decade. Moreover, as both 10.cd and 11.cd are advanced groups, some learners set high expectations for themselves and feel defeated when they do not reach those standards or that of some of the other students in their respective groups, at all times.

4.2. Dealing with student anxiety

This section is concerned with the following research questions:

- how do students respond to their feelings of anxiety,
- to what extent are students interested in dealing with their anxiety,
- how important are classroom atmosphere, task types, feedback, or teacher behaviour,
- what experienced teachers do to ease students' anxiety.

4.2.1. Willingness to deal with anxiety

As the students' answers revealed, they are very much aware of their potential anxious feelings. So, I was curious to see if they were more "fighters" or "quitters" (Şimşek & Dörnyei, 2017).

It was evident from the majority of responses that students attempt to rationalise and process their feelings appropriately. Most learners also have some tried-and-tested methods and practices to try and ease the anxiety they experience.

"I try to give myself a pep-talk and make sure to have some me-time before the tests to focus and relax a bit."

"What helps me in anxious situations is to be with my friends and reassure each other or divert our attention from the anxiety-inducing situation."

"Music and drawing, taking deep breaths."

"I try to ask for help from my peers or a family member."

"I have read about a certain breathing technique where you breathe in for four seconds, hold it for seven, then breathe out in eight seconds. Also, it can help to squeeze something (a pen or a pencil, etc.)."

Especially the two latter responses from 11.cd students caught my attention. Zsuzsi mentioned asking for help, which is very important when it comes to dealing with anxiety, and not many seventeen-year-old adolescents would choose this path. Although many students replied that letting groupmates know about the stress they experience is helpful for them, they only raised this point in the sense of being reassured that they are not alone in a stressful situation, that the knowledge that others are also suffering eases their anxiety. Zsuzsi was the only one who mentioned getting help to move forward in a more positive manner. Secondly, the fact that Misi, based on his response quoted above, took the effort to look into ways to deal with anxiety shows a clear sign of a will to "fight" his nervous feelings.

Unfortunately, not every member of the two groups felt that they had control over their anxiety. Jázmin has already been highlighted as someone who does not necessarily like to make an effort, she just accepts that she is “not creative at all”, and she does not try to challenge herself. Apart from Jázmin, in the student questionnaires several other students replied in a very defeatist manner:

“I try to revise as much as possible and practice the language, but even if I know the material quite well I am super stressed. My anxiety has no positive effects, I am always very nervous.”

“Before tests I repeat in my mind that there is not that much at stake, but my stress does not ease, only when the situation is over and done with.”

“I deal with my anxiety by practicing grammar points over and over. However, there is nothing I can do about stress before oral tests. I do not know what would make anxiety-inducing situations less daunting for me. I think I will always be like this.”

“I do not really try to deal with my anxiety, I do not know how.”

While these responses are fairly upsetting to read as a teacher, it is also motivating to work on the students’ growth mindset and turning their anxiety into a facilitating one, rather than endorsing a ‘quitter’ attitude. In any case, on a brighter note, out of the thirty-eight students only six seemed to reply with such resignation.

4.2.2. Student responses to anxiety

Having analysed the responses to the student questionnaire, I drew the conclusion that the students I teach tend to prefer four main ways to ease their anxiety or turn it into a facilitating, motivating one.

Discussing their feelings

Based on my students’ descriptions of the consequences of their anxiety, it is obvious that both groups are aware of their feelings of unease for what they are. Most also seem to realise that they are not the only learners experiencing stress. In fact, twenty students from both 11 and 10.cd mentioned in response to the final questions that it makes a situation less daunting for them if they feel that they are not alone. This means that classroom atmosphere in the sense of a good relationship among the students matters a lot to these teenagers.

“I mainly feel anxious before tests, so I think it would help me to talk about it with the others beforehand.”

“My friend Emma is also very nervous all the time, it makes me feel better in a way to know that I am not the only one.”

“I feel less anxious about a test or my bad results if others do not do well, either.”

“It helps if there are others who are in the same boat as me. Usually that is the case, so we can talk about it.”

Furthermore, as it was demonstrated in additional informal feedback I got from students in both groups (exit tickets, feedback sheets, casual conversation) and my own observations, learners deem it valuable to discuss such matters in class on some level. As it has been mentioned in the literature, as well, students value authenticity in the classroom (Tóth, 2017), and it is relevant for them to talk about issues that concern them in their day-to-day lives. Several students from both groups highlighted it in their answers that they appreciate the fact that important topics are raised in English lessons:

“I really love English lessons because I like the fact that we can discuss serious subjects without any restriction.”

“I enjoy English lessons because we can freely talk about real life issues.”

On the other hand, as has also been mentioned before, certain students feel anxious when topics they do not know enough about are brought up in class. Therefore, it is essential that, as teachers, we always provide the basic background information on every topic, even if we, and perhaps the majority of the class, feel that it is or should be common knowledge. This can be done by one of the students in class, as well.

The discussed topics can and should also include issues such as anxiety, to make sure that students realise that their feelings are valid and they are not alone. Furthermore, their stress and anxiety are not something that they should accept in resignation but they should work on easing it and turning it into something positive and productive.

Activities, classroom organisation

Connected to the above-mentioned desire to have someone to talk to, students also mentioned a number of factors related to classroom work organisation and the type of tasks that help alleviate their anxiety.

Both age groups were fairly articulate about the kinds of activities they prefer and some of the recurring answers are: *watching videos or TV series, no individual assessment, continuous work for all forty-five minutes, role play activities, listening to music in the background, games and warmers, listening to and singing songs, using dictionaries.*

In terms of work organisation, the arrangement of the classroom was mentioned, and all but two students highlighted pair and groupwork as essential in easing their anxiety:

“For me, speaking activities in pairs is very relaxing.”

“I feel that working in groups minimises the amount of stress I feel. I like the fact that I can discuss different matters with people who I see every day and I can learn their point of view. If I focus on the others and our conversation, I do not fixate on negative feelings.”

“I absolutely love when we sit in a big circle and just share our thoughts. It is a lot more personal that way.”

“I like the good company of our class, but when we work in pairs or smaller groups, everyone has the time to think, which helps gather our thoughts and eases the stress we feel to speak.”

I found the latter response especially valuable, as I think teachers themselves tend to get a bit anxious or stressed when there is no immediate answer to a question they raised. In response to the silence from the class, teachers sometimes start calling upon students or repeating the question, which might further agitate some learners. It would be important not to fear silence and let students think about the teacher’s question a little longer.

Another point to keep in mind are individual differences. From some written feedback I asked for after about one month of working with both 10.cd and 11.cd, it very quickly became obvious that one cannot please everyone all the time due to individual differences. While some students preferred games and warmers during lessons, others insisted on working in their coursebook more often. In October, almost all of 10.cd highlighted that they liked pair and groupwork, whereas a couple months later a few of them reported that they would rather work individually from then on. Keeping all this in mind, I believe that variety is essential in any, but especially the language classroom.

The teacher

A fairly prominent factor in students’ answers that came up repeatedly was the role of the teacher in alleviating learner anxiety. Altogether seven pupils from 10.cd and nine from 11.cd highlighted different characteristics or practices that their teachers do or should do in order to lessen their anxiety. Here are some that got mentioned:

“I appreciate when teachers kindly help and support us. English lessons are fine, but it is true for numerous other teachers that they are not very empathetic towards us.”

“In English lessons we get a lot of support, positive feedback, and we are motivated. For me, it has helped a lot that when I felt success in connection with a language the teacher also noticed and appreciated it.”

“The teacher’s kindness, advice, help, humour, and easy-going personality make any stressful situation less uncomfortable for the whole group.”

“Personally, I am not anxious in English classes, because the teacher has fair requirements and there is a mutual respect in class.”

It was interesting to see that some of these qualities were also mentioned in the teacher interviews. Lili emphasised that she strongly believes that teachers should provide as much support for their students as possible so that they do not get anxious. Lili highlighted positive feedback as essential, even in Hungarian in the case of beginner or lower-level groups to make sure that students know that they are cared for.

Attila’s pieces of advice were especially intriguing as he used to teach 10.cd (and now teaches them again), and it was apparent that what he set out to establish in his classes was appreciated and welcomed by his students, as they were all reflected in the questionnaire answers.

“In order to ease students’ anxiety, the teacher’s personality is of utmost importance. Consistency is essential but it is also good to be flexible and empathy is key. Teachers should be supportive partners in the classroom, not some figure of authority. Last but not least, natural humour can be a life saver, I think it definitely has its place in the classroom.”

Personally, I also agree with the outstanding role of the teacher’s personality in establishing rapport between him or her and the students. Being myself, that is, authentic with my students helped in getting to know all my groups fairly quickly and in creating an adequate relationship with them.

The atmosphere

Lastly, several students mentioned the atmosphere of the classroom as an anxiety-inducing, or, fortunately in their cases, an anxiety-reducing factor.

“English lessons are one of the few classes that are stress-free for me thanks to the good company, the great atmosphere, loads of fun, free speech.”

“It would be better if the group was smaller, but we get on well, so it is fine. The ambience in class is always light and fun and I know that if I make a mistake, the teacher will not bite my head off.”

“It is really motivating to work in such a well-organised and quick-paced class.

“In my opinion a generally friendly and casual atmosphere helps in avoiding stressful situations. It may even make me speak up when otherwise I would not.”

Based on these responses, it is clear that the classroom atmosphere does play an important role in alleviating students’ anxiety. Some of the key themes that students highlighted and can be useful for teachers are: *good relationship between students and the teacher and students, acceptance, support, variety of tasks and activities, humour, kindness.*

4.2.3. Teacher practices

4.2.3.1. Evaluative situations

In response to the fourth question (cf. Appendix A), the vast majority of the students mentioned that they try to reassure themselves that one bad grade is not the end of the world, thus rationalising their situation.

“I try to tell myself that if I do not do well in a test, nothing will happen.”

“I usually admit to myself that I overstress the situation, so I take a short break from revision.”

“I tell myself that it is just one grade from a myriad of them, I just need to get it over with.”

“If I fail a test, I will always have the chance to do better in the next one, or to resit said test, so I try not to worry too much.”

This importance that they attribute to the marks they get makes it obvious that there is an immense amount of pressure on students at this school to do well. The atmosphere in the institution can be quite competitive, but deriving from learners’ sociocultural backgrounds, parents may also have expectations from their children that they might find more difficult to live up to.

In the teacher interviews, Attila, who is 10.cd’s teacher, pointed out when asked about his techniques to ease students’ anxiety:

“I think it is essential that a teacher is consistent in his or her requirements. If students know exactly what is expected of them, there is less chance for them to be anxious about the test. Also, I always provide an opportunity for them to rewrite the tests if they are not satisfied with their mark. Therefore, along with the fact that in my groups students have quite a lot of marks, their grades do not reflect a momentary state of mind. Everyone can have a bad day or something can come up that prevents them from adequately preparing for a test. This way, students are reassured that they can always prove their knowledge or skills again.”

Based on 10.cd's responses, his efforts to alleviate students' anxiety seem to be working. The fact that students can always rewrite a test makes the evaluative situation less daunting for them. Fortunately, they also seem to be aware of the fact that it also helps if they prepare for tests appropriately:

"I make sure to practice and revise enough, so that I know that I did my best to prepare."

"If I studied more, I would not have the reason to stress about it."

"I always try to practise the grammar points that I am unsure of but the anxiety I feel before oral tests is impossible to get rid of."

4.2.3.2. Oral production

Other than the fear of negative evaluation, the other major aspect of language anxiety is communication apprehension. This was quite a prevalent theme in students' responses, as well. There was a marked difference, though, between students from 10.cd and learners from 11.cd regarding stressing about oral production. While the younger students mentioned *oral tests* as the source again, eleventh graders highlighted the *opinion expression* aspect.

"Before and during oral tests I often feel anxious because I hate talking in front of others and I am afraid of forgetting what I have to say." (Károly from 10.cd)

"I do not really feel stress in English lessons, except when I cannot express myself or I cannot find the right words to elaborate on my opinion." (Piri from 11.cd)

One of the teachers, Attila, brought up oral tests himself, as generally anxiety-inducing situations and explained how he usually conducts these in order to ease the amount of stress students may experience.

"It is different with every group of mine, but with advanced ones and therefore with 10.cd as well, we dedicate one lesson of the week for a so-called 'topic day'. This is a class where we discuss various topics based on TED-talks or other thought-provoking videos or readings. Students also get an excerpt with the most useful points, expressions, and vocabulary, and learners are regularly tested on these topics in oral tests. I am aware that these situations are very stressful for them, so I conduct these tests in pairs, not only because that is how it usually is in language exams, but also so that students do not feel like they are alone in the stressful situation. In addition, I always begin by asking them what they personally found the most interesting about the topic. It is always easier to talk about personal aspects."

Although I only quoted one student, I would like to point out that fourteen out of the 19 students from 10.cd mentioned oral tests and/or topic days as an anxiety-inducing setting. This shows that oral tests can still be fairly anxiety-inducing for learners as speaking tasks

usually are, regardless of the familiarity of the topic or the presence of another person. It still seems likely that Attila's practice of asking students a few personal questions might help. These can include some lead-in or warm-up questions that are not part of the testing itself, such as how their day has been so far or what they had for lunch.

In response to the fifth and sixth questions (cf. Appendix A) in the questionnaire, students admitted that having someone else who is in the same boat there with them in stressful situations eases their anxiety. They prefer working in pairs and doing oral exams with a partner, too.

"I experience a great deal of debilitating anxiety with regards to speaking tasks. However, I feel a lot more free if I can work in pairs or small groups, or even if I only have to speak in front of the teacher."

"Having my friend Rita, who I know feels the same as I do, sitting next to me definitely helps."

Additionally, in an interview for a case study for one of my university courses it was highlighted that, in oral testing situations, if the teacher asks for a personal opinion, it does ease student anxiety. This might mean expressing their overall opinion on a certain topic, or for instance what they found most interesting regarding the subject at hand. This way, even if certain learners did not prepare enough for the test, they can still come up with an answer that might give them a boost of confidence and a way to showcase their skill and knowledge.

4.2.3.3. Classroom organisation

As became evident from the students' answers in the questionnaires, classroom work organisation, too, plays a major role in easing anxiety. Accordingly, Lili and Attila also brought up the way they organise classroom work in response to my question about practices they do in their classes to alleviate learners' anxiety as much as possible.

Corresponding to current trends in language teaching, they seem to prefer pair- and groupwork in their respective English classrooms. Lili and Attila both mentioned the importance of mixing pairs and groups up regularly.

"Besides the fact that it is much more effective and time-efficient, working in pairs or small groups significantly reduces students' anxiety. It definitely facilitates their work when they do not have to talk in front of the whole class, for instance. The only problem is that pupils who already spend a lot of time together want to work in their friend groups, too. Therefore, it is essential to have a multitude of techniques to mix up students and create new groups, such as using numbers, playing cards, and so on. If by accident such students get paired together who are very close with each other

and cannot focus on the work they are supposed to do, I have to monitor them a lot more closely. In addition, I also set a strict time limit and tell them to keep an eye on the clock or I set an alarm on my phone myself as a reminder for everyone.”

In my experience, it is especially the speaking tasks that require work in smaller groups or pairs. But it is sometimes also easier with advanced students to check a grammar or vocabulary task by having students compare their answers between each other. When it comes to discussions, learners fortunately love to get to know others' point of view, so it is beneficial to have a variety in the pairs or groups that are created.

On the other hand, when a topic or question is raised for a whole class discussion, certain students tend to have private conversations among themselves or simply do not pay attention to those who are speaking. Perhaps, although a group of nineteen students is not necessarily ideal for a language classroom, students should learn to respect each other and listen to those speaking, as it would be also expected from them later in life.

What I found to be working to get students to consider each other's opinion and be attentive of their classmates is to reconsider the structure of lessons in several aspects. With 11.cd, we dedicated one class each week to the students' "presentations", something they themselves had suggested. In these regular lessons, students took turns in bringing up an issue or topic that they found especially intriguing or thought-provoking. We reorganised the classroom by pushing the desks aside and sitting in a circle. Students seemed to absolutely enjoy these occasions, which became apparent in the questionnaire answers as well (cf. page 31.) and they articulate it in class, too.

Perhaps this was because the learners had the chance to choose the topic they want to talk about, which they did for about ten minutes. This was followed by a group discussion which lasted for the whole lesson, because everyone took part and the conversation flowed from one aspect to the next. Some of the subjects that students presented included *anti-vaccination groups*, *the fermi paradox*, or *interesting names and the process of naming things*. Lessons like these seemed to help with staying authentic and to create an appropriate atmosphere and relationships between the students and rapport between the teacher and the group.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was three-fold: to further my understanding and knowledge of language anxiety, to gain an insight into how students experience it and how teachers can help alleviate the students' feelings of unease or at least turn them into a facilitating anxiety.

The review of a selection of the relevant literature showed that language anxiety is a complex set of beliefs, self-perceptions, and feelings that influence individuals' work in the classroom. The presence of foreign language anxiety is perhaps displayed strongest in the *productive* skills, where test anxiety, the fear of negative evaluation, and communication apprehension are ever present. However, contrary to what one might suppose, language anxiety is not exclusively experienced by learners of lower proficiency levels. As it was revealed in the consulted literature, often even university students of foreign languages are highly anxious.

Therefore, as a prospective secondary school teacher, I set out to conduct an empirical research in the setting of a Hungarian grammar school to discover whether advanced teenagers also felt any anxiety in the classroom.

Based on my findings, I can conclude that a majority of high school students feel anxious in the language classroom. Fortunately, everyone that participated in this study was aware of their anxiety for what it was and of its debilitating as well as facilitating effects. Despite being advanced students, their anxiety still prevailed in written and oral evaluative situations, in improvisational, quick activities, or in speech when learners felt their background knowledge was not adequate enough or they could not express their true thoughts in the specific foreign language. Only a few students could not pinpoint what triggered their unease in a foreign language lesson. According to the teachers who were interviewed, in order to notice anxious students in one's classroom, teachers should focus on the rapport that ought to be established with their learners and pay attention to the characteristic of each student.

It can also be concluded that although there were six students who seemed to follow a 'quitter' attitude, the rest appeared to be willing to deal with their anxiety and offered methods to do so. Based on their reports, students appreciate being able to discuss their negative feelings, whether with their friends, or even in class. Thus, authenticity is highly important in language teaching in the sense of dealing with issues that truly concern our students. Additionally, teachers who have also experienced anxiety in their lifetime can use their experience and empathy to help alleviate students' own anxiety.

Aside from articulating their feelings, classroom work organisation seemed to play an essential role in easing students' feelings of unease, especially when it comes to oral production. In this regard, students prefer if there is a variety of activities and they would much rather work in pairs or small groups comfortably. It may also ease student anxiety and facilitate engagement if the seating in the classroom is rearranged, for instance into a circle instead of rows of desks. From a teacher's perspective, working in pairs and small groups should be mediated by mixing students who work together regularly, as well as setting a time limit for their mutual work so as not to distract each other from focussing on the lesson.

Concerning test anxiety and the fear of negative evaluation, it is clear that completely erasing it is close to impossible. However, this stress can be alleviated if a teacher is consistent with requirements, lets students know what will be included in a test and allows them to retake a test if they deem it necessary. In the case of oral evaluation, testing students in pairs can further reduce the amount of anxiety they feel. In addition, asking personal questions to facilitate the flow of the conversation may help, too.

An anxiety-reducing factor that every student mentioned was the role of the teacher. Based on the students and teachers' answers, the ideal teacher, or facilitator, should be consistent, supportive, kind, have a good sense of humour and a great deal of empathy. Such a teacher can create a suitable classroom atmosphere, i.e. where students feel at ease because of the support and acceptance they feel from both their peers and their teacher, the good relationships among the groupmates and the rapport between the teacher and the learners. Variety in the work that gets done in the lessons, also helps learners to get personally involved in terms of the material that is covered. What is more, they tend to feel a certain amount of agency with regards to what happens in class, which, in turn, makes it less likely that they will experience debilitating anxiety.

Considering my future career plans to become a high school teacher, I could also draw some further conclusions in terms of the kind of teacher I would like to be. It is essential to work on building an adequate relationship with students. Therefore, listening to learners' needs, interests, questions, ideas, worries, and successes is a must. For a language teacher, I also think a level of openness is appreciated among the students. It communicates that teachers are humans students can relate to, trust, and rely upon. Finally, teachers should not forget what it was like to be an adolescent and have the types of problems this age group tend to have.

Although language anxiety is a complex area, it is one that should not be disregarded. I believe that there is not one way that can be taken as gospel and can be applied to every individual when it comes to alleviating anxiety, therefore a constant review of the relevant literature and reflection on our own work is needed.

References

- Brophy, J. (1996). *Working with perfectionist students*. ERIC Digest. Retrieved April 11, 2019, from <https://www.ericdigests.org/1997-2/students.htm>
- Dewaele, J.-M. & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* 4(2), 237-274.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015). *The psychology of the language learner revisited*. New York: Routledge.
- Gardner, R. C. & MacIntyre, P. D. (1993). A student's contribution to Second Language Learning: Part II, Affective Factors. *Language Teaching*, 26, 1-11.
- Gkonou, C. (2017). Towards an ecological understanding of language anxiety. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications* (pp. 135-155). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Goldberg, L. R. (1993). The structure of phenotypic personality traits. *American Psychologist* 48(1), 26-34.
- Gregersen, T. & Horwitz, E. K. (2002). Language learning and perfectionism: Anxious and non-anxious language learners' reactions to their own oral performance. *The Modern Language Journal*, 86(4), 562-570.
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Hashemi, M. & Abbasi, M. (2013). The role of the teacher in alleviating anxiety in language classes. *International Research Journal of Applied and Basic Sciences*. 4(3) 640-646.
- Hitchcock, G. & Hughes, D. (1992). *Research and the teacher. A qualitative introduction to school-based research*. London: Routledge.
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132.
- Irishkanova, K., Röcklinsberg, C., Ozolina O. & Zaharia I. A. (2003). Empathy as part of cultural mediation. In G. Zarate, A. Gohard-Radenkovic, D. Lussier & H. Penz (Eds.), *Cultural mediation in language learning and teaching* (pp. 101-131). ECML Publications. Retrieved April 13, 2019, from http://archive.ecml.at/documents/pub122E2004_Zarate.pdf
- King, J. & Smith, L. (2017). Social anxiety and silence in Japan's tertiary foreign language classrooms. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications* (pp. 91-109). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- McAdams, D. (2006). The role of narrative in personality psychology today. *Narrative Inquiry* 16(1), 11-18.
- McCrae, R. R. & John, O. P. (1992). An introduction to the five-factor model and its applications. *Journal of Personality* 60(2), 175-215.

Morgan, A. (2000). *What is narrative therapy? An easy-to-read introduction*. Adelaide, South Australia, AU: Dulwich Centre Publications.

Moyer, K. H. (2008). Debilitating and facilitating anxiety effects on identification. *Journal of Undergraduate Psychological Research*. Vol. 3. 6-10. Retrieved April 11, 2019, from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.537.414&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Piniel, K. & Csizér, K. (2013). L2 motivation, anxiety and self-efficacy: The interrelationship of individual variables in the secondary school context. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*. 3(4). 523-550.

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

Şimşek, E. & Dörnyei, Z. (2017). Anxiety and L2 self-images: The 'anxious self'. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications* (pp. 51-69). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Tóth, Zs. (2010). *Foreign language anxiety and the advanced language learner: A study of Hungarian students of English as a foreign language*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.

Tóth, Zs. (2017). Exploring the relationship between anxiety and advanced Hungarian EFL learners' communication experiences in the target language: a study of high- vs low-anxious learners. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications* (pp. 156-176). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Tsui, A. B. M. (1996). Reticence and anxiety in second language learning. In K. M. Bailey & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Voices from the language classroom* (pp. 145-167.) Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Young, D. J. (1990). An investigation of students' perspectives on anxiety and speaking. *Foreign Language Annals*, 23(6), 539-553.

Appendices

Appendix A – Questionnaire for students (Hungarian)

Név: _____

Kérdőív

1. Hogy érzed magad általában az angol órákon? (egyéni, csoportban, tanárral kapcsolatos érzések) Milyen érzésekkel asszociálsz?

2. Van, hogy szorongsz/stresszelsz angol órán? Milyen helyzet, szituáció váltja ki?

3. Milyen következményei vannak ennek a szorongásnak (pozitív és negatív: fizikai, lelki, teljesítménybeli...)?

4. Ha stresszelsz/szorongsz, megpróbálsz valahogy leküzdeni? Hogyan (kéne)?

5. Mi az, amitől egy szorongást kiváltó helyzet kevésbé lesz “ijesztő” számodra?

6. Kifejezetten angol órán mi az, ami segít (vagy segítene) a stressz minimalizálásában, a megnyugtatóban?

Appendix B – Questionnaire for students (English translation)

Name: _____

Questionnaire

1. How do you usually feel during English lessons? What emotions do you associate with the group, the teacher, the lessons themselves?

2. Do you ever feel anxious/stressed during English lessons? What situation can provoke it?

3. How does this anxiety manifest itself (both positive and negative consequences)?

4. If you feel anxious/stressed, do you try to overcome it? How (should you)?

5. What makes an anxiety/inducing situation less daunting for you?

6. In the context of English lessons, what do you think would help you minimize the amount of stress you feel, what would make you feel more comfortable?

Appendix C – Teacher interview questions: Attila (mentor)

What made you want to become a teacher?

What is your “policy” as an English teacher?

You’re obviously aware of language anxiety. How do you notice students who are anxious, especially in terms of the language classroom? What are the tell-tale signs usually?

Based on my observations and feedback from the students, they feel more at ease in your lessons than other ones. Why do you think that is?

Do you consciously try to ease students’ potential discomfort and stress? How do you (the way you behave, the types of tasks you set, feedback you give, other)?

What advice can you give for a beginner teacher when it comes to creating a comfortable, inclusive, supportive classroom atmosphere?

Appendix D – Teacher interview questions: Lili

What made you want to become a teacher?

What are the principles along which you teach, as a language teacher?

You are obviously aware of the existence of language anxiety. Do you notice who are anxious in your classrooms? What are the tell-tale signs usually?

You mentioned teachers' personality. Do you think it also play the role if the teacher him- or herself has experienced anxiety?

Is there anything you consciously do to ease students' anxiety or to facilitate their dealing with their anxiety?

Can you mention any specific types of tasks you set, ways you behave, or the kind of feedback you give?

What advice can you give to a beginner teacher when it comes to creating a supportive classroom atmosphere?