

Affective Aspects of English Language Learning Experiences

Exploring the views of High School students



A study by: Alexa Virág Hídvégi
Mathematics and English Teacher Studies, 2nd Year
ELTE BTK

Leader Teacher: Ágnes Albert PhD Senior Lecturer
ELTE BTK, Department of English Applied Linguistics

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1. Introduction

What makes a good English lesson?

In today's globalized world, English is one of the languages we use the most often in our everyday lives. Some may try to avoid it as much as possible due to their difficulties with the language, whilst others have no issues using it whenever necessary, and can benefit immensely from that knowledge. If one knows how to communicate well in English, they will likely have more career options, since they can also work internationally. English also gives one access to further knowledge outside of the research made in their mother tongue, since most languages only have a fraction of research done compared to all the research done in English in each topic.

Teachers who introduce and practice the language with their students must be aware that they may or may not enrich their scholars lives by the manner they are teaching English. If taught well, English is a tool they can use for the rest of their lives, let that be engaging with foreigners during a vacation, finding a job in a foreign country or simply watching a movie in the original language. However, if the years spent studying English were spent rather ineffective, they can leave the students with a feeling of inferiority - to those who can speak English without an issue – and potentially several other difficulties in their lives (for example doing research that has more sources and studies done in English). Therefore, it is needless to emphasize the responsibility English teachers have for their student's development in English. The question is: How can an English teacher be the most effective and successful in their teaching? Moreover, how can this be achieved without causing any harm, e.g., emotional damage and immense fear of saying a grammatically incorrect sentence.

This question is getting more and more pressing in the Hungarian educational system. The general problem is that many find the educational system ineffective. Several Hungarian news pages (Eduline 2018; Szülöi Hang 2019; Qubit 2019) have claimed that not only do we have a problem in the whole country with language teaching and learning but compared to other European countries we stand significantly low by how many people are studying English or another foreign language. Over the years this has become a more and more pressing issue.

In 2019, the *Szülőí Hang* Community (Parent's Voice Community) conducted a survey with 6358 parents answering questions about their opinions on foreign language teaching in Hungary. Parents believe the main reason why this is an issue is the current lack of teachers – resulting in frequent teacher changes which makes it hard for the students to study effectively; they must adjust to another teaching style often - and the language learning materials and techniques being outdated. However, these are not the only reasons for the low efficiency of teaching languages in Hungarian schools. Those who decide to become teachers may have a very hard (and long) time mastering the job on their own, and when they finally have that will not be of any help to those who studied in their classrooms whilst they were still just learning how to teach. Even if a school luckily – even though it is quite sad to have to add the word luckily – has enough teachers for the school, we face the problem of improper pedagogy that is difficult to deal with because many times it may go unrecognized or even – unfortunately – accepted as *normal*. Currently many students do not find their high school education good enough to succeed in a language exam which is a requirement to go to a Hungarian university. Nevertheless, it must be also mentioned that there are still plenty of extraordinary and good teachers who do their best and succeed at teaching languages.

Therefore, a real insight to what students experience during their language learning lessons can be very instructive primarily for the future teachers to come. They can learn from other teachers' mistakes and/or incorporate the good techniques into their own teaching. It can also be an eye-opener to those who have not yet faced the situation we are in as a nation. The situation that unfortunately the Hungarian school systems fail to teach English through 4-12 years of scholar language education well enough for students to attend (and succeed) language exams and communicate well in the given language. To help solve this issue, I wanted to investigate the emotions of students during English classes. This affective aspect of language learning has already been widely researched over the past decades, however in Hungary there is a paucity of qualitative studies about high school English classes. Thus, this study will give great insight into the parts of language education that work well and what needs immediate improvement. The improvement could also realize in the form of the upcoming generation of teachers already having a better view of the needs of their students – for example with the help of research similar to these.

2. Literature review

Motivation, foreign language anxiety, positive and negative emotions as well as other factors all influence second language acquisition. These factors are all related to affective states. Arnold and Brown (1999) described the effect of language learning with the metaphor of blind men touching parts of an elephant. If they touch the legs they will compare it to a column, whilst if they touch its ear, they will think it is like a carpet. They are both right, however, neither of them truly gets the idea of what an elephant is. The researchers mentioned above have described quite well how language acquisition can have similarly different aspects and how it is advisable to examine not only one of them to get a better understanding of how to teach or learn foreign languages more efficiently.

Observing the affective aspects of studying a language is important as for successful SLA one must not only consider the student's cognitive capabilities (Arnold 2011); the emotional and physical aspects should be examined as well. Thus, there is no question whether to focus on cognition *or* affect but rather to deal with cognition *and* affect. Horwitz (1987) claims that a teacher is advised to observe and acknowledge the scholars' anxiety levels and lower those if possible. Elaine Horwitz also claimed that the teacher should provide tools for the students on how to deal with their anxiety. For a successful class, a "...low anxiety atmosphere" is necessary (Arnold 2011, p. 2). A great number of factors can contribute to a student's success in SLA. The student's independent personality traits can play a big role in the learning process as well; the way they feel about themselves and about what they are capable of can either benefit their learning or hinder that. Raising the student's confidence is a key point as language learning is a subject that involves a great amount of performance by a generally insecure person may have extra difficulties whilst expressing themselves in the given foreign language.

Foreign Language Anxiety

Due to the complexity of learning a language, many studies have been conducted about the emotions influencing the effectiveness of learning a language, however, they were first all focused on negative emotions (mostly anxiety) (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner 1994). The issue of foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been widely researched and discussed for the past decades. The main issue with the very first studies conducted was the misconception that foreign language anxiety (FLA) is not a special type of anxiety, it is only the general types of anxieties

being transferred into language learning. The studies which advocated this view often had contradictory result, with positive, negative, or close to zero correlation between the anxiety measured and the language learning performance of student (Chastain 1975). The theory of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) claimed that FLA is rather a situation specific anxiety and should not be considered as a state-trait anxiety type. Since language learning has “more potential for students to embarrass themselves, to frustrate their self-expression, and to challenge their self-esteem and sense of identity than almost any other learning activities” (MacIntyre 1999 p. 33) it should not be measured the same way as the anxiety one might experience in other classes. To create an adequate measure tool for FLA, they invented the 33 item Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FCLAS 1986).

The FLCAS contains 3 types of anxieties, related to performance, such as test anxiety, communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. It has been argued that out of these three only two are strongly related to FLA and the third one – test anxiety – is much rather a general anxiety that transfers into language learning as well. This discussion eventually led to Horwitz’s clarification (2010) that the three anxiety types mentioned above are related to language anxiety, however, are not composed of these three, as it has been misunderstood by several researchers.

One of the impeding effects of FLA is that it creates a vicious circle that is so difficult to break. If a student is anxious to perform in front of the class and/or the teacher, this emotional state they are in will likely end in poor performance which will probably lead to more anxiety and so on. The cycle is rather challenging to break since even if the anxiety is treated already and seems to be resolved, one might experience anxiety flashback that can cause frustration. If one experiences anxiety, it can make learning difficult from another aspect as well. Since anxiety is a sort of worry and in most cases regarding SLA it is the fear or negative evaluation, it takes up a good amount of energy from the student, leaving them with little energy to focus on the task.

For a good teacher, it is also advisable to question whether the students are introverts or extraverts. The stereotype is that extroverts are more talkative and open, like participating in group activities more and that introverts tend to be more anxious in group activities and oral exercises therefore are bound to have poorer performance than their extrovert classmates. However, there is no evidence supporting that extraverts may have better chances at learning a language (Arnold, 1999). What the teacher should keep in mind is that some introverted students may find it stressful

to participate in drama and role play whilst it may be beneficial for extraverts. Of course, the cultural backgrounds should be considered as well whilst choosing a topic to discuss in class. Some students may find discussions or exercises rude or hurtful simply due to their familiar backgrounds.

Inhibition

Another part of learning a foreign language is the lack of inhibition that a young child has whilst learning their mother tongue. A small child does not worry about mistakes and is willing to experiment with the language without any expertise in it. Making a mistake as an adult can affect a person internally and externally as well: internally because the ego may suffer from not meeting the expectations that one has set for oneself, and externally because of the potential humiliation of saying something wrong. High school students tend to have inhibitions; they have the mindset that they shall not say anything in class unless they know how to form that sentence perfectly (Horwitz et al., 1986). It is only natural to make mistakes whilst learning new things (not only languages) and taking away the opportunity to learn from the mistakes one makes is actually hindering the learners from learning efficiently. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) listed some factors that can reduce anxiety levels in foreign language learning. The younger one starts, the less anxious one will be – this is because they lack inhibition - the more frequently they use the foreign language the more confident they will become. It is also helpful to socialize with others in the given language as frequently as possible. Talking to friends or even family regularly in the given language one is learning will significantly help with reducing anxiety levels. This may vary of course; if the given social circle is not encouraging and even negative about the mistakes one makes in the new language, they will most likely not reduce anxiety, and can even increase the level.

After many studies have been conducted about FLA, positive emotions started to be examined as well, since it might be more beneficial to strengthen the positive emotions than to work on reducing or eliminating the negative ones. “...much more attention is given to the question of negative emotions . . . [one] should not lose sight of the importance of developing the positive” (Arnold and Brown 1999, p. 2).

Broaden and Build theory

The Broaden and Build theory (Fredrickson 2001) claims that both negative and positive emotions carry adaptive significance. Negative emotions were associated with an urge in our

ancestors lives such as to flee or fight. These occur in emergency situations for example when one must react in a short period of time, and in moments like this, there is not much time to develop one's personality, only to focus on survival. The mind is narrowed down to the knowledge it possesses and uses it to cope with the situation as fast as possible. In contrast, when talking about positive emotions they provide us opportunities to investigate, gain further knowledge and to build new skills. Positive emotions provide adaptiveness over longer time scales which in an urgent situation could not be used – where one must act in an instant. Positive emotions have a great number of benefits; one can increase the coping results with difficult situations that is eventually useful in emergency situations, they can help gain skills to cope with difficult times, for example build resistance to depression, but they can also give greater social integration. With this knowledge, we must acknowledge how important it is to incorporate positive emotions into language teaching. According to the Broaden and Build theory, people can have great successes from a moment of experiencing a positive emotion, which brings us to a so-called “expanded awareness” (Fredrickson 2013, p. 815). In this expanded awareness, people can broaden their knowledge; this is something that can also be applied to second language acquisition. According to this theory if a person is in distress – that is experiencing negative emotions – one cannot flourish and develop skills. Consequently, stressful situations can make it very hard for students to develop their language skills. This is something teachers should take into consideration.

Motivation

The learning process should involve personal meaning and motivation. Augustine was forced to learn Greek in the 4th century and received severe punishment as well to do so. Augustine stated that “Clearly free-ranging curiosity leads to more successful learning than do pressure and fear” (Confessions, Book 1, Chapter 14) (As cited in Arnold 2011, p. 2) This gives a great insight into how intrinsic motivation can play a key role in SLA. As motivation is one of the key ingredients - as it has been already mentioned in the St. Augustine story – it is useful to know how to gain motivation and what sorts of motivational factors there are. Gardner and Lambert (1972) discuss a theory about how motivation can be divided into two parts. According to Gardner's work, motivation can be conceptualized as integrative motivation and as instrumental motivation. What they mean by integrative is that a student has an inner motivation to study the language to be integrated into the given language's culture and to connect with people speaking the given

language. The instrumental type of motivation has the goal to learn the language for a job promotion for example, or to have better chances at applying to certain Universities. Since both motivations are intrinsic (discussed later) there is not any concrete evidence whether one is more effective than the other.

Intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan 1980) is when the student has a personal goal to study the language and does not need much external reward since the learning process and progress itself is rewarding enough (Arnold 1999). Learners are interested in learning the given foreign language out of personal reasons and enjoy the process of doing it. In contrary, extrinsic motivation is connected to the student accomplishing tasks and goals in order to avoid punishment (from the teacher or at home even) and the desire to receive an award for the tasks completed. They possibly did not even want to learn the language in the first place, or even if they did, the extrinsic motivation to avoid punishment overwrote the intrinsic one and eventually the student views the learning process as a negative experience. Jim Borden (2020) wrote about Kohn's theory that extrinsic motivation – for example what teachers usually represent – can indeed reduce intrinsic motivation. Borden recalled a story where an old man was bullied every day by a group of children walking home from school. He one day announced that he will give each child money if they continue to say woeful things about him. After starting to reward them for their actions, each day he reduced the money he was giving to the children. After a certain reduction of the money reward, the children did not think it was worth it anymore and stopped the bullying altogether. This story is a great example of how intrinsic motivation can be reduced – or even eliminated – by extrinsic motivation. Consequently, if we apply this theory to language learning, it seems more important to help students build their own intrinsic motivation than trying to motivate them extrinsically. Both teachers and students have a better chance at succeeding whilst working together if motivation is present in both.

Whilst clarifying that intrinsic motivation undeniably more effective than extrinsic, one should not think to eliminate rewards completely from teaching, rather than using it mindfully whilst teaching. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) explained the theory of flow which is a state of mind that includes the person experiencing it to feel enjoyment. Some of the criteria to reach this flow state is that one is given tasks that they can achieve. A too high goal that seems unreachable can lead to demotivation and self-doubt. And another criterion is the constant and clear feedback of the

person's progress. This can be directly implicated into language learning; if the teacher adjusts the level of the material to the student's need and assists them with clear instructions and supportive comments, students can have a chance at experiencing flow which is a positive emotion. And as it has been discussed earlier, positive emotion enables us to broaden the palette of our skills. Csikszentmihalyi claimed that people who experience enjoyment – which is in the family of emotions related to the central emotion “joy” – experience a chance to succeed, to concentrate, and receive immediate feedback for their work. This means that if the teacher can provide a positive experience for those whom they are teaching, the students will more likely be engaged and successful during the lessons. He explains that if the task is far too challenging, then apathy and boredom will arise. Thus, it is important to keep an eye on whether the students are enjoying themselves throughout the tasks, experiencing anxiety or just not feeling anything at all, and to react in an adequate way to the situation. In summary, if the teacher only focuses on motivating the students in an extrinsic way, they may see less success than if they were to help the students build and strengthen their own intrinsic motivation. Some of the efficient ways to help students develop their intrinsic motivation is to assist them in developing and setting their personal goals, finding material that they can relate to and have a connection to, and rather than over-rewarding them, one should help them find self-satisfaction in a task they have done well (Brown 1994). This was discussed in Arnolds “The map of the terrain” work.

Assistance of the learning progress.

A teacher does not necessarily succeed in teaching if students learn the material from A-Z perfectly just as it is written in the course books. A teacher should primarily teach students how to learn. Arnold (1999) explains how a teacher should be an assistant to autonomous learning and help students create their own goals rather than forcing them to study immense and sometimes not very useful materials. Facilitation is when a teacher encourages their scholars to try and speak, reassures them that making mistakes is part of the process, and convinces them that they are ultimately learning for themselves. Building their confidence and courage will not only benefit them in language learning, but in other fields of their lives as well.

Based on the above literature review, there are a great number of affective factors influencing SLA. These will be investigated through the eyes of former high school students,

because as it has been stated earlier; the aim of this study is to examine the views of high school students. For this study, 2 main research questions have been closely examined:

1. What kind of experiences do students have from learning English in high school?
2. What would have they preferred for better and more effective English lessons?

These two questions will allow us to investigate what high school students have experienced, what they found useful or not useful and what they thought could have been done better. To gather information about this topic, I decided to do qualitative interviews with several students. This I have decided because with a qualitative interview, one can deeply investigate the thoughts and feelings of the participants in comparison to a fill out, multiple choice questionnaire that I could have done in quantitative research. Hence, this form of research was ideal to search for answers to these research questions mentioned above.

3. Research Method

Research design

Originally, I was primarily interested in exploring language anxiety amongst students. I wanted to find out the causes of language anxiety according to students and the exact situations they have experienced language anxiety in, what they found helpful and what they rather would have avoided. I was interested in this for several reasons: As a student studying to be an English teacher, I find it important to learn from other, more experienced teachers. This may be learning from their mistakes, but also learning from their effective teaching techniques. Besides this motive, I wanted to investigate the thoughts of students because I believe it is important to – even as one gets older and is more distant in age to the students that one teaches – view the lessons from a student perspective occasionally. After all, they are the ones that the teachers are trying to benefit. Believing a technique to be highly effective and neglecting that it may cause high levels of anxiety, or it just simply turns out to be useless, eventually leads to poor teaching. A teacher may think he is doing a great job, however without taking the feedback of the students into consideration a teacher may end up having boring lessons with little efficiency and not even being aware of it. The primary motive of teaching is to help scholars learn and provide them assistance and knowledge in the process. Thus, the whole process loses meaning if the needs of the students and the mindset of the teacher do not meet.

Keeping this in mind, I decided to learn from what students experience in language learning. As it has been already mentioned, I was primarily interested in language anxiety amongst students. I wanted to ask them about their emotional state during language classes and try to find those triggering situations that they have found stressful. The next big part of my interest was what they would have preferred otherwise in studying the language. This I found relevant because I think it can be demanding to motivate and bring out of an anxious state a large group of teenagers who very often do not have any motivation to participate in class, they are confused with their emotions and are resistant to do the tasks in class. For this I wanted to ask the students to look back at themselves and ask that whilst being in their teenage years, what would have they enjoyed more – of course while learning English as effectively as possible. I wanted to investigate this because in my opinion, the age gap is usually over 20 years between teachers and students and I have experienced that the older teachers may struggle to connect with the generations coming, meaning they will not be able to teach the way the students would need it. And although some teachers may not really be interested in this, I view it as important since the first and foremost interest is to help the students learn whatever they must. And to some point this should overwrite the teacher's beliefs and habits of effective learning – in the case that it is indeed not effective. Although my primary interest was foreign language anxiety, when starting the actual data collection, I realized how much can be learnt from what teachers have done amazingly and effectively and for more instructive results, I have eventually made the decision to investigate general affective experiences regardless of whether they were good or bad.

Participants

There were a few conditions on who could take part in the study. My first condition was that they must not be actively studying languages as part of their university studies, that is they should not be language majors. I decided to do so, since I assumed that those who are English majors may have had fewer difficulties and struggles throughout the years of learning English in high school, and therefore, those who have only studied English because they had no other choice may provide more insight into the struggles of English lessons. From the viewpoint of my primary interest, which was language anxiety, this was a condition that I found necessary to be able to study those who did not have a special connection or goal with the language big enough to study

it in their university years as well. In this case I assumed that language anxiety may play a bigger role in their high school studies of English.

The target participants were students who graduated 2 years ago or less. Since interviewing people above the age of 18 does not need any extra permission from the parents' side, it was more time efficient to ask students with ages 18 or older. The second reason why I chose this age group was because I also tried to interview 2 candidates from the ages 24-26, and it turned out to be quite difficult for them to think back to their school years of learning English, due to the simple fact that it was further away from them in time. To eliminate or at least reduce this issue, I have chosen to interview people who were closer to the experience in age. The issue of the students' difficulties to remember the English lessons did not completely disappear but was significantly reduced, enough to be able to work with effectively. Also because of this issue, I chose to study experiences from high school since those 4-5 years were also closer in time to the participants. An additional benefit from the end results of the conditions I have made (that is 18 years old or older, graduated 1-2 years ago) was that the candidates could have a good overview of their 4 or 5 year experience, and they already had time to process the positive or negative emotions related to those experiences, leading them to have a better chance at seeing things with a cool mind and realize some key points in relation to their emotional states that may have been more difficult to do whilst still being in the situation. They could have a better chance of seeing the bigger picture of those few years; the potential improvements or regressions they or their teachers may have made in the learning progress, and they can think through what could have been done better – in case there is something worth mentioning.

Finally, I have chosen to do interviews with students who went to high schools in Budapest but also in the countryside, with every student coming from different high schools and different teachers. In total there were 12 participants in the study, 6 male and 6 female to have an equal number of genders represented. 11 of them studied English as a first foreign language in high school, only one candidate studied it as a second foreign language. (The term first foreign language and second foreign language here refers to the hierarchy of the 2 studied languages in high school that must be chosen in Hungarian high schools.) 10 participants studied English and German in high school and the other 2 participants had Spanish and Russian as their other language besides English.

Instruments and procedure

As my primary interest was language anxiety and experiences with language anxiety in class, I started to do interviews with what I today call my “preliminary interview guide” with a great number of people outside of the 12 who I made the final interviews with thus comprising my sample for this study. During these first unstructured exploratory interviews that I have conducted, I realized several issues and improvement areas. Probably the most important thing I have realized during these first interviews is that exclusively observing the language anxiety of students would most likely be restrictive, since exploring student’s positive experiences is just as instructive. Therefore, after asking students with my preliminary interview guide, I made my final questionnaire which focused on their experiences including positive and negative ones rather than only their negative and anxious moments during English classes.

I created a questionnaire with 4 main parts related to affects in language learning. These included (1) their general experiences and motivation in English lessons, (2) the teacher’s personality and how it affected the learning process, (3) their emotions whilst doing reading, writing, listening and oral exercises as well as other exercises they explicitly would like to mention due to its emotional impact and last but not least (4) I asked them about the exams and tests they have had and how they felt during those. While talking about their experiences, students were encouraged to share their feelings be that anxiety, excitement, panic, frustration, stress and so on. The final interview schedule can be seen in the Appendix.

For every interview, I took advantage of today’s modern technology and its possibilities; I called the participants on the phone and after they gave me permission, I recorded the call whilst I was interviewing them. This gave me a good voice quality, since both me and the participant were able to talk close to the microphone. Some of the participants I knew myself. The ones I did not know personally I was able to interview with the help of one of the participants who helped me find ideal candidates in age and other criteria. After receiving their names, I contacted them via Facebook and asked them if they would be willing to participate voluntarily in this interview-study of mine. Those who said yes – luckily all of them - became one of the 12 final participants of the study.

All the interviews were in Hungarian to allow the Hungarian participants to express themselves in the easiest way possible. Every interview lasted around 40-50 minutes depending

on how much they were affected by their English lessons – the interview was usually shorter if the participant was more positive or neutral towards those memories since in that case, they were not deeply affected just either satisfied in a general way or if they were neutral, they did not have many deep emotions attached to those classes.

Data analyses

After recording the interviews, I typed all of them down into word documents, translated them to English for it to be ready for the study, gave codenames for each one of the participants and started examining them from different aspects. Even whilst typing down the interviews, I was already examining the participants emotions and what could have caused those if she or he failed to describe why they were feeling a certain way during classes. I also read several studies related to the topic of affective experiences in language learning, and I worked on finding the explanation of the phenomena that came to light during the interviews. While reading the interviews several times, I coded the relevant section, which I later grouped together into larger themes. There were some emerging themes that I did not think would come up so strongly in almost every student's interview – for example peer pressure and situations related to peer pressure – therefore the questionnaire's main themes and the themes of the results do not align completely with each other. The main topics that came to surface were:

1. How the teacher's personality affected the students
2. Experiences related to the teacher's teaching approaches
3. How the students perceived the social atmosphere in class and how it affected their learning.
4. Experiences during examinations and tests

With each emerging theme that has come up during the interviews, I will be usually combining students' experiences and what they wished would have been done otherwise. This way both research questions will be answered in connection with each theme.

4. Results and Discussion

The 12 qualitative interviews that were conducted resulted in several different experiences that the students have shared with me. In the following parts of the study, I will be talking about the emotions they have had, and I will also compare those to the studies that have been conducted in

connection with this topic. The experiences varied from phenomenal to horrible all due to the relationship between the students and the teacher, the personal motivation connected to the language, and the relationship the students had with them.

4.1 First impressions

First impressions and personal motivation

One of the first questions for the participants were to describe their English lessons in one word or expression, to give a very first insight into their relationship with the subject.

Table 1

Code name	Gender	Expression	Motivation	Budapest	Years of learning English
KAW	Female	“privileged”	9/10	No	12+
BCS	Female	“fun”	9/10	Yes	12
FAZ	Male	“phenomenal”	9/10	Yes	12
SIM	Male	“cr*p”	8,5/10	No	12
SSS	Female	“easy”	8,5/10	Yes	4
LZA	Male	“cool”	8/10	No	12+
HPF	Female	“Good afternoon”	7/10	Yes	12
WAZ	Male	“ineffective”	6,5/10	No	12
BER	Male	“unfair”	6/10	Yes	12
IGZ	Female	“trauma”	6/10	Yes	13
ILD	Male	“nightmare”	4/10	No	12
RCK	Female	“The British flag”	3/10	Yes	12

The data in Table 1 give a general overview of how the candidates perceived their English lessons. I had separated the students from Budapest high school and non-Budapest high schools – which is visible in the “Budapest” column. From that perspective, the students who did not go to

high schools in Budapest had a more negative experience (3 out of 5 disliked their English lessons overall). Moreover, one of the two participants with a positive experience (KAW) actually attended a bilingual school. Therefore, this participant claimed to have a very high-quality English education, which also showed in the Matura exam results of the class: “all of us wrote our Matura exams with a fl*pping high percentage” (KAW). From a gender perspective, it turned out that boys had more negative experiences in this sample, which of course should not be generalized to the population due to the qualitative nature of the study.

Another categorization that requires some explanation is that the years the students have spent studying English was categorized between four options. (1) If they started learning English in kindergarten, then continued with a regular 12-year education with primary, secondary, and eventually high school years; this meant 12+ years. (2) If they had an extra language-learning year before high school they studied English for 13 years, (3) if they only started learning English in high school, they have learned it for 4 years and (4) and 12 years if they learned English for 12 years in a regular educational path – that is without any extra language years added that is common in Hungary. Overall, the students came from relatively similar circumstances regarding the years spent studying the language.

I also asked students about how motivated they felt they were during their English lessons. Mostly the expressions they have said aligns with the motivation scores they gave themselves. However, there are some interesting combinations. If we take IGZ for example, she stated that her English lessons were traumatic for her, yet she still was motivated because she had this inner drive to learn English as best as she could. She told me that:

I went into English lessons with a great deal of anxiety, because my English knowledge wasn't that big yet as a lot of my fellow students'. And the same thing has applied in elementary school. But I really wanted to learn English and be good enough for myself and for my teacher. Therefore, I was very anxious because I thought about what if I say something wrong, what if they'll laugh at me, what if I mess up all the exercises... But the will to learn was strongly in me, and I did enjoy learning English, and I had a reason to do it, first and foremost for myself. It was only due to my anxiety that my motivation scored at 6. (IGZ)

This student has experienced severe anxiety during her English lessons and within FLA we can categorize it mostly as a fear of negative evaluation. She was very stressed whilst having to perform, which is quite a debilitating state to have, since according to the Broaden and Build theory (Fredrickson 2001) one can better learn new things and skills whilst having positive emotions.

Another contradictory result is SIM, who marked his motivation an 8.5 out of 10, even though he described the lessons with a very negative words “cr*ap”. He recalled the lessons often being very useless and ineffective, but since he had the inner motivation to study the language, he did not lose much motivation:

Well, if we weren't watching movies, I was quite motivated an 8 or a 9. I was motivated because I wanted to learn. I could not actually benefit from it back then, but I thought I will take advantage of it in the future. (SIM)

This shows how much power intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan 1980) can have even against outer circumstances. He had a rather demanding time studying the language, since the teachers he has had did not take his lessons seriously at all - this will also be discussed later. He found the process of learning a language – thinking he will benefit from it later – rewarding enough to keep his motivation on a high level. It is also rather remarkable that he had this inner motivation because at that time he did not even see the benefits yet; he only had the picture of the success in the future.

The third candidate who had a somewhat surprising motivational score was RCK, who only graded herself as a 3 for motivation. This was due to her severe anxiety in classes. The way she felt can be described as performance anxiety, however in an extreme quantity. She explained how she even had a deal with her language teacher that she will not express her thoughts and ideas in front of her classmates and only practiced speaking privately with her teacher in 1 on 1 sessions during lunch breaks. This indicates how much she did not feel welcome and accepted in the class, therefore had a difficult time practicing the language due to the negative emotions she was experiencing:

In English classes I spoke to the teacher that if there's a discussion in class that she should not ask me to participate because I don't want to tell my opinion. I don't want anyone judging me from class because of this or mentioning it afterwards or just to talk about what

I think about certain topics. Thus... I don't speak during English classes, and I practice with the teacher privately every Wednesday about the topics discussed in class. (RCK)

This story indicates at least 2 relevant things. One of them is how the candidate felt severely pressured because of her classmates, and this hindered her greatly during classes. The student explained how she thought the teacher could do nothing about this and that her fellow classmates would just be unable to change anyway, so she did not see a solution to the problem. The second remarkable thing is how much the teacher supported this anxious student. Maxwell (2002) in his book *Attitude 101* explained how much it counts in a teacher's success whether he gives his students love, attention and understanding, and how people will more likely remember the attitude a teacher has towards their students (and others) than what they have taught. Applying this theory to the RCK's situation, she was very fond of the teacher simply because she understood her and gave her the extra attention she was seeking due to her anxious behavior.

4.2 The teacher's personality and how it affected the learning process

Unless someone is self-taught, they usually have some relationship with their teacher or mentor that taught them what they know now. It may be good or bad, depending on whether the student is cooperative and if the teacher is able to adjust to the personal requirements of the student's learning process. Teaching is not only presenting the topic that is being taught, but also presenting oneself and this means that usually a teacher's personality comes to light as well. As a result, the different personality traits will also affect the students along the way of learning – in this case learning a foreign language.

4.2.1 The teacher's open mindedness

Several candidates have claimed that they enjoyed speaking in class due to the world view of their teacher. When their teacher was open to bringing in new topics to class and if she or he was interested in their opinions. One of the interviewed students explained why she thought this attitude of the teacher was very positive:

I enjoyed my English classes because we spoke about good topics. Not just...Where would you like to travel to... Or where you like to go on a vacation, these weren't the usual topics. We instead really spoke about topics that have helped me develop my world view. And the lessons were not only useful to master the language, but also in other fields of my life...My teacher was generally very open-minded, and it formed my views and my English

knowledge broadened as well. And because we spoke about various topics, I was not restricted to only be able to talk about topics that the conventional English coursebooks contain. (KAW)

This student clearly indicates how positive it was for her that the teacher was open to new topics, and that she found it very helpful. Other candidates have recalled similar experiences as well, LZA mentioned that his teacher was very open to public speech in class and helped more anxious students as well:

She was very motivated; she believed in us and encouraged us. She always made us step out of our comfort zone... There were for example some students who were not that sure of their English skills, and she encouraged them to speak up. She didn't force them or anything, just step by step made them get used to speaking in public, and I think that was very positive of her. (LZA)

Here, LZA recalled a very positive experience. It emphasizes how much it counts if the teacher can provide extra attention for those who may struggle to start speaking and stating their opinion in foreign languages, in this case English. The fact that the teacher believed in them is also a very great basis for a student. If there is someone encouraging and supporting the learning process, it gives the student higher chances. As the saying goes "Behind every child who believes in themselves is a teacher who believed in them first", which is the case here, as the teacher supported and believed in her students.

The third example is like the second one, explaining why they preferred to avoid doing everything as the course book indicates: "I enjoyed the classes, because... we not only focused on the course book but also practiced verbal communication. We didn't just sit over our books; we discussed different topics, and we then attached the grammar to those" (RCK). Another student recalled similar mindsets regarding using the language actively; she stated that whilst they were assigned to write essays for example, she felt that she improved more than if she had completed the fill-in the blanks tasks in the course books. Of course, from a teacher's point of view, correcting essays is a little more demanding; however, the student's development is the main thing to keep in sight. Altogether, this indicates how students tend to dislike following the coursebook completely and enjoyed discussing topics a little bit more liberally.

Overall, the results show how a teacher who was open to discuss topics outside of the course book, who was generally interested in the students' views of the world woke positive and welcoming emotions in the students. They enjoyed their lessons due to the interesting themes discussed and recalled how they stressed less because the teacher was very friendly.

4.2.2 Losing control of the class due to an overly friendly manner

Although the friendliness of the teacher was mostly perceived as a positive thing, some students recalled that it usually went too far and made it hard for the teacher to gain the student's attention and to control the class well.

I'd advise her to stay this cool... But she should keep in my that after all she's the grown up, and she's the one who's supposed to guide and somewhat control our group. She's the grown up and there are some comments that she shouldn't have let be said even whilst staying the 'cool teacher'. (RCK)

Another candidate also thinks that one can stay friendly but demand a certain respect and strictness as well:

I think she should keep her friendly and chill style, but she should work on bringing a little more strictness into the classroom and more serious expectations. I don't think being strict and friendly necessarily contradicts one another." (SSS)

Other candidates also recalled the issue that some of their fellow students often crossed a line, and the teacher did not want to appear in a negative way, so she or he stayed ignorant; however, this attitude eventually led to the English lessons being less controlled and effective. A rather amusing recalled experience was when the teacher got offended by that fact that the students refused to do homework or were not particularly enthusiastic about the exercises they were assigned to do:

She sometimes got offended if we weren't that enthusiastic about the lesson. At times like these she usually was grumpy, wasn't satisfied with anything we did basically. It's not that she didn't talk to us, she just wasn't that happy and didn't give us good exercises, she just said that okay do these in the book. ... if the students aren't that motivated and don't work hard enough during the lesson she shouldn't take it personally, she should rather focus on fixing the problem... She should think about that the scholars don't always act the way

they do because they mean bad, and she should take that into account before getting mad at us. And she should rather focus on the cause of the problem and not react to the consequences. (BCS)

Here, the students recalled being somewhat dissatisfied with the teacher's capabilities of controlling the group and multiple students felt like this could have been organized better from the teacher's part. Although they did not agree with their strictness, they had controversial answers since they wanted the teacher to be stricter, but they also enjoyed the teachers friendliness and laid-back manner.

4.3 Experiences related to the teacher's teaching approaches

There are several teaching methods that one can use whilst teaching English. Some may be better than others, but as discussed in the literature review, the students' individual needs that will most likely alternate with every group should not be neglected when choosing among them. Certain groups may dislike learning languages through music, and others can find it very easy to do and beneficial. As a result, it is important that the teacher takes note of the current groups' needs. The manner a teacher teaches the foreign language, in this case English, is sure to affect the students whether we are talking about giving explanations, grading or in class exercises.

4.3.1 Personal feedback

When a teacher gives personal feedback, it usually has a super motivating effect. Some students recalled that going through a bad day and struggling with the language, a simple praise made them very motivated again, it gave them a new wave of power and they appreciated it very much. This can be explained by Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow. To experience flow, one must be supported and given clear and manageable tasks. This student felt empowered again due to the encouraging words of the teacher who assisted her in her learning.

Talking about personal feedback and their effects: A student recalled that when the new teacher first came into their classroom she just "described us with prejudice... "Oh, I hear you're the class that doesn't know anything"" (ILD). It is simple to understand how much a single sentence like this negatively affected the class afterwards. A teacher should be the first person to believe in the capability of the student to master the subject, and if even the teacher gives up on the student, especially if this happens in the beginning already, it makes the learning journey far more difficult for both students and teachers.

Another negative part of feedback is when there are not any at all. A participant told me that they struggled to motivate themselves, and she said it was due to a lack of (personal) feedback for their work.

Maybe I disliked spending so much time with my essays because of the delayed gratification problem. I may have spent hours writing the letters we were constantly assigned to write with the order to have it done by the next day... He then collected them, corrected them and that was it. No comment, nothing, just red marks. Our gratification was that everyone had a very high percentage in their graduation exams. But throughout high school this sole long-term goal was not at all motivating. So, we had a very delayed gratification for our work. A simple “good job” would have already been much better!
(KAW)

Although many times teachers fail to give the ideal feedback at the ideal time, some of the participants recalled how much the feedback they received have helped them. A student had an interesting situation, where he excelled in all other subjects except for English. He recalled the experience very frustrating, because in all other subjects he passed with a fraction of the energy he was putting into language learning. He also said that although he had been struggling his whole life with English since elementary school, one of his private English teachers have helped him eventually overcome his difficulties.

During high school, my private teacher was the first one to point out my strengths. She told me so many times that my thinking was adequate for this language that in the end I believed it... And in the end, I only had to take classes from her for about a month and right after that I could pass my language exam. It helped me that they strengthened that I am good and that has made my confidence grow and it made my language skills grow.
(WAZ)

The experiences of this candidate were interesting for two different reasons. First, it points out how one can excel in most subjects with ease and have severe difficulties in the language learning process. This is also a great example of why foreign language anxiety is quite different from the general types of anxieties as it has been discussed above. Second, it indicates how he had no support in the school systems and struggled through all his classes, and then eventually found his confidence with a private teacher who has helped him believe in himself.

Another positive experience is with a student who recalled her teacher to be very attentive with their personal growth in language acquisition: “I found it very positive in her teaching that she was very attentive of all of us and our progress. She always gave us personalized feedbacks and told me in which areas I should be improving and gave me advice how to do that (HPF). The interpersonal relationship that this teacher built with her students also was very helpful in terms of motivation and supporting growth in the subject.

In general, the students felt the need to receive empowerment from their teacher in form of very accurate advice on their improvement areas but also in form of simple empowering words. If the teacher took the students’ personal development into account, they all felt very well understood and found the teacher someone who truly wanted to help them. They all felt like they could count on the teacher and in this case the role of ‘assisting the learning process’ has been positively reached.

4.3.2 Talking in English during classes

There were two or three candidates who recalled upsetting behavior from their English teachers because of the way they have taught English. First, one of the students explained how they found it hard to do the listening exercises and claimed that it was so unusual hearing English speech. This might be completely justified in a foreign language class; however, it turned out to be because the teacher hardly ever actually spoke in English during classes.

We really didn’t speak much English throughout the whole English lesson. There were of course some minor comments, but during the listening exercises the audio was suddenly turned on and you had to boost your brain for the sudden amount of English speech coming. And that was a big change usually. (WAZ)

It is questionable whether the English teacher should always stick to speaking English no matter what, since some students have recalled having found it useful to understand the grammatical structures in their mother tongue, but not using the language actively in class where the students are supposed to learn it, is indeed senseless. Another candidate has recalled possibly the worst experiences out of the 12 interviewed participants when asked about how much he has enjoyed his English classes:

... I didn't enjoy them because they were not serious at all. I didn't feel like I am improving in my English skills whilst being there. We had a teacher in 9th grade, who basically only came in to "be there" and made us watch movies and stuff like that. But the movies weren't even in English but in Hungarian... (SIM)

The main issue here was the teacher's attitude towards his or her subject. Teaching consists of motivating the students as well, but one can only transfer motivation, if one is motivated him or herself. Someone lacking this has little chance of success in teaching and their scholars have little chance of success in learning as well.

4.3.3 Exercises the students would rather have avoided

There were 4 candidates who could not mention anything useless. All the other candidates explained why they found the tasks they have mentioned ineffective. This can give an insight into what is already outdated in the educational system. With observing the tasks from the scholar's point of view we can truly identify what helped them get better at communicating English and what has simply wasted their time or was not as effective as it possibly could have been. And if there is a better solution why would one stick with the outdated one. Some of the suggestions of the interviewed candidates were the following:

A lot of times the teacher asked us all questions and we went around the whole class with this strategy. This technique is so ineffective, because you can calculate which phrase you will have to answer, you're only concentrating on that one, so you don't forget, and a lot of time has passed with this exercise. During this exercise you don't really improve either because you're just waiting for your turn and not listening to the others. I would just delete this from teaching, it makes no sense at all. (WAZ)

This indicates how time-consuming exercises were not only less interesting but also ineffective, since one is solemnly focusing on the thing they are going to say and does not improve by what the others are saying. Here appears the fear of negative evaluation, since the student explained how he was very much focused on what he was about to say and that he should say that correctly which made him less focused on what he should have been learning. Fredrickson's (2001) theory applies here as well; the candidate was more focused on his performance anxiety than he missed out on an opportunity to learn a new skill due to the negative emotions that he was facing.

As for the teacher, he or she should be aware of the effects of the exercises and tasks that they are making the students do and chose those wisely.

During my last year of High school, we only did Matura exams nonstop and I could have done those at home too, and we instead could have been practicing for the oral exam. And if I would have prepared myself alone for the oral Matura exam then writing the written part, I can do at home is completely useless and we just wasted 4x45 minutes per week. (IGZ)

Here, a participant recalled how she found the prioritization of the tasks rather ineffective due to their Matura exam that was approaching. This indicates that their teacher did not consider what his scholars needed during his lessons. As a result, came the poor teaching success as well. This again shows how a neglect of the personal needs and goals of the students lead to anxious and frustrated attitudes and situations.

Another student (BCS) suggested that she would have preferred more written tasks where she can actively use her grammatical skills. She claimed that although the exercises where one must insert the correct form of the verb are not useless, but she would only do them in a small amount and focus more on grammar development through active use. This indicates – as many students have agreed in the 12 interviewed ones – that when one uses the second language they study actively, as they do in speech or in writing essays or sentences: they can remember the worlds and grammar rules significantly better whilst incorporating them into their active use.

Lastly, there was a student who explained how they were forced to learn the definitions of the words by heart and the vocabulary tests consisted of them recalling the exact definitions of the words. He was very irritated by this and saw no real use in it altogether. "...I just wish we could have stopped doing those because learning the exact definition of a word wasn't helping me develop my skills very fast..." (BER). There is a chance that these methods that the BER candidate has found utterly useless has a great purpose, however, even if it does, the teacher failed to communicate this to the students leading them to be frustrated and their needs – to learn the language well - not feeling understood.

4.3.4 Teacher's adjustments to their pupils' needs.

There has already been several discussions about how some teachers adjusted their teaching style to the needs of their students. As Csikszentmihalyi has stated, it is important to keep an eye on how the students are feeling for successful teaching. A candidate recalled a recurring incident which describes a teaching method that failed to incorporate this method:

...when we saw it on her face that she doesn't want to come into class and takes a deep breath. And we took one too... That wasn't ideal. ... they wanted to do everything according to the course book, they just ordered the books and taught what the book told them to, and they didn't measure our level. We never repeated the topics, we just jumped all over the topics without any structure really. ... We were doing an exercise and it was obvious that nobody understood it and we even said it...and we just kept doing it. We never discussed it again or something like that. We sometimes asked about the grammar from last lesson, and she just said that yeah, she gets it that we don't understand but we must move on to the next topic. She sort of explained it in the theory part but never really put it into real-life use which made it a lot harder... (ILD)

This experience clearly indicates failed approaches to teaching. The teacher unfortunately failed to measure their level leading them to struggle with the topics and the comprehension of the language. Not only did the teacher explain things ineffectively, she also did not hear them out on their struggles which is also a great issue according to Csikszentmihalyi (1999) who stated that a too high level demanded that the students perceive as not reachable can lead to boredom and apathy and hopelessness as the next quote well shows:

...after about the first few weeks have passed, I stopped asking things because I didn't see a reason why to. I didn't feel like improving or getting a real answer. I didn't ask questions about grammar because even if I had asked something it wouldn't have been of any help. (ILD)

This is – unluckily – an example of poor teaching techniques that the teacher has presented, and this also gave an example of when the apathy arises in student due to them seeing the level demanded as unreachable and they see no chance of success which demotivates them greatly, in this case even to ask questions. The result also gives a good example of a situation where the

student did not feel heard or supported at all and it indeed has led to total demotivation and hopelessness.

4.4 How the students perceived the social atmosphere and how it affected their learning

Many times, people view difficult or tough times better than they are if they are surrounded by people they love or like. It is important to have a circle of friends and family to be content and working in an environment where this supportive circle is not available – or worse: the social circle is very criticizing and negative – it can make any job miserable easily. Similar it is to language learning. Since the process of SLA is one where a person must present themselves, their ideas, and beliefs, perform in front of their fellow peers it is quite demanding whatsoever. In this section of the study, there will be examples of how a group of students can work well or how they make their fellow students' lives difficult sometimes.

4.4.1 Bad examples, how peer pressure negatively affected the students

Out of the bad example of students negatively affecting each other, I differentiate 2 types of situations. One of them is when the student I interviewed had a fear of negative evaluation due to the behavior and woeful comments of his or her fellow students. An example of this type of peer pressure:

... I usually don't like to ask question because I was afraid, they would make fun of me. Like literally whenever the teacher asked someone from the group to answer a question, he made us face the possibility of the guys making fun of us or start to laugh amongst themselves... We had a lot of guys in our class, and they delayed the class a number of times because they were doing silly things, telling jokes and commented on people a lot.
(KAW)

Here the candidate recalled having a difficult time due to her mean and destructive mindset classmates who unfortunately made fun of those who spoke in class regardless of whether it was correct or not. More than one of the interviewed students claimed that their teacher should have set down ground rules first and then this issue would not have escalated this much. Another similar experience is indirectly from the interviewed candidate (FAZ). He explained that in his English group there were the mathematics major people who were basically viewed as the smartest of the smartest and they also acted upon that. He was aware of it and even though he claimed to not have had any anxiety in class, he added that he does believe that his other classmates who may not have

been that strong in the subject must have had quite a lot of difficulties regarding anxiety. This he meant due to the social status of the mathematics scholars being the smartest and who looked down on the others. He did realize that they must have been a big source for anxiety.

This was the first type of peer pressure; the other type is when the student similarly has a fear of negative evaluation but could not recall any moment where he experienced judgement. Meaning that only the thought of potential humiliation was big enough for anxiety levels to rise. The first example will be a student who struggled with perfectionism and as a result did not ask any questions in class. She also made some recommendations for the teacher on how she would have felt more open and safer to ask questions in class:

...this is basically an expectation for myself that I should be good enough to not have to ask. I am generally someone who doesn't really ask questions mainly due to this reason. I think if the teacher would have shared similar experiences of when she didn't dare to ask questions... I think teachers should represent the issue of asking questions as a common thing and to make it clear that not only that one student is struggling with it. With this one might perceive the situation as less weird or unusual or lame if they don't get the topic in class. Maybe even tell a whole story if needed for the students to loosen up... (BCS)

This candidate faces inhibition and has the false mindset that if she says anything that must be perfect. This does lead to anxiety since she did not speak up even if she has had questions. What she has wished for is the teacher to demonstrate the lack inhibition one must aim to have whilst learning a new language. If someone – in this case the teacher – had presented her that nothing bad will happen if someone makes a mistake in class, it would have helped her with her inhibition. A similar example is from another student who struggled with speaking in general in English, yet alone asking questions:

Speaking was always something I disliked, and I had difficulties with. And for a very long time, until today I face a lot of inhibition in myself if I must speak in English. Or any other language besides Hungarian. However, when I was in France for a while I usually spoke in English because my French wasn't that good yet and I had no inhibition at all. I think the problem in my English classes was that in that situation my fellow students could directly see me in the spotlight if I mess something up. (SIM)

Here, the candidate faced the interesting issue that he only had difficulties with FLA when he had to speak up in front of everybody else where everyone was listening to him and if he was making any mistakes. A focus shift would have been useful, because instead of making it a goal to speak perfectly in the given language – a goal which makes it unacceptable to make any mistakes – it would have been more helpful if the teacher had applied Brown's (1994) advice on how to build intrinsic motivation in the students and let them see that the goal of learning English is communication in the given language and not absolute perfection. At least at a high school level it is not.

4.4.2 What makes a good and supportive community in an English class

Some students were luckily able to recall positive group experiences where they felt welcomed and safe to ask questions:

I think I was one of the students who asked the most questions. Partially because of the laid-back manner of the teacher and partially because I liked how we were only like 10 people in our group, and we all knew each other well so I didn't have to worry about saying something wrong because I knew nothing bad would happen. I like small groups and I don't feel well around many people so at another lesson where we were 35 students in 1 classroom, I would surely not have asked anything. I don't know why, that's just my personal thing. (SSS)

This candidate explains well how a supportive and non-negative group can greatly reduce anxiety levels. Since one of the primary fears is that one will be negatively evaluated, if the person is sure that they must not fear humiliation, it gives them opportunity to build their skills. She mentioned how she did not understand why she disliked being in bigger groups; this is likely since in a larger group of people there are a more opportunities to be disliked and humiliated which she tries to avoid. The following quotation will also be about a group of students that felt very comfortable and familiar with each other:

...we never really had issues with daring to ask questions in class. I got together with a great bunch of people, and we became good friends. So even if someone said something stupid, we just laughed about it maybe. But since we became close as friends, we didn't laugh at each other but laughed with each other. (LZA)

Here is an excellent example of how a good and supportive group can reduce or even eliminate anxiety levels compared to a group full of people looking down at each other (FAZ, KAW,IGZ) and judging the others for false responses and making mistakes. The contrast that in the last example they were able to laugh at each other's mistakes without anyone getting hurt compared to how others really would have liked to avoid speaking in front of others just to not receive negative comments about their mistakes in the sentences they have said.

4.4.3 How much can a teacher influence peer pressure according to student's views

In some cases, the English teachers have failed to control the class well enough for the students to feel safe and empowered during their speaking tasks. Thus, in cases where peer pressure has escalated in the classrooms, asking whether it was the teacher's fault and responsibility to reduce or eliminate this is relevant, since if they think that the teacher did not do enough regulations for the scholars to behave positively in class, they might feel like their teacher was not looking out for their needs. The results were contradictory as most of the students claimed that there is no chance that the teacher could influence this situation and thought that the teacher was not strict enough with the problematic behavior of some scholars.

...she should have provided a safe place and make my other classmates and fellow behave properly so that there aren't people making fun of each other and there's not a lot of anxiety in class. I think it would have been best if she strongly made it clear that there is no stupid question, one can ask anything, and we shouldn't laugh at the other one if she asks something like that. Had she made that clear in the very beginning, I think everyone would have dared to ask. I do believe that she can influence this a lot if she makes it clear what she expects from the students in the first lessons already. (IGZ)

Yet multiple other candidates thought that the teacher does not really have power over a larger group of adolescents making fun of each other and they thought that at this age, one has already developed their personalities well enough to resist being changed in this way by a teacher. Comments like this were also related to the teacher being too friendly in their eyes and as a result had difficulties managing the class. These findings raise an interesting question whether there is a balance of the teacher maintaining an open atmosphere but being strict enough to control the negative behavior in class.

4.5 Tests and examinations

Examination in various forms is almost always a significant part of any class yet alone language learning where speaking in front of others is already some sort of performance as well. It is also part of the school requirements that the teacher grades their students and since there is no way of eliminating this – usually stressful – situation it should at least be useful and beneficial for one's studies. That is, the teacher should give insight into why completing certain tasks or learning the given content will benefit them and in what way that will. This will also enable the students to build their intrinsic motivation and the teacher can become the ideal assisting role in the learning process as Arnold (1999) has explained, which is supporting the student to reach their personal goals related to learning the given language.

4.5.1 Types of tests and exams they have had, and their emotional state related to those situations

Test anxiety is also part of FLA. The question is how a teacher can make it more convenient for the students to write tests and what are the factors that these 12 students have experienced that have made examination worse or better. The first thing that has made tests easier, more manageable and student friendly was if they knew what they could expect. Of course, on the other side, those who recalled situations (SIM, ILD) where the teacher had unexpected tests about topics, they never even discussed properly that was something making the situation much worse for them. This shows how much a teacher's preparedness can lead to success or ineffective teaching. Some positive experiences:

... we always had our tests design from the chapters' material from the course book and that contained all parts of the language: grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, everything like that, so I think those were correctly designed tests, because if you prepared for them well you could score well on them. (HPF)

Here is one of the key concepts represented that other students have mentioned as well; that the structure of the tests was either like a language exam paper – which they found useful – and some have recalled that they had only wished that their tests in high school had been more like the ones they had to face during a language exam in English.

I think our tests were not so well solved, we focused way too much on knowing which exact grammar rule we are using... I think it would be best if high school language tests

would represent the structure of language exams more. It has 4 parts that is necessary for someone who wants to speak the given foreign language; listening, writing, reading, and speaking and I would for example incorporate the new grammar rules and vocabulary in these 4 sections of the test. (BCS)

These preferences that the students have had shown how focusing on the intrinsic motivation of students – which in all cases was present: the will to learn English well – the teacher should have made the tests more like language exams and closer to everyday situations that the students can picture themselves in whilst using that language. Simply asking students to only use the grammatical structure they have learnt was not helpful for them.

Another test related experience is how over the course of the 4 years the anxiety levels in relation with writing tests went down in the student because he knew what he could expect in the exams and tests they had to write. “I started to have more and more routine in writing the tests and I knew what I had to expect, there weren’t many new types of exercises, so I had nothing to be anxious about.” (SIM) This experience also shows how a predictable teacher can make students less worried about what is to expect in their tests and exams. However, a teacher who did not have any structure to the lessons and to when and about what they will be asking the students, that has made the students quite anxious. Here is an example where the teacher failed to tell exactly what the students had to prepare resulting in poor teaching technique.

One of the teachers told us that they will be making us write vocabulary tests, sometimes she did make us write time, other times she didn’t and sometimes she asked different words than what she had made us study at home which made no sense at all and raised frustration and hopelessness. (ILD)

Another big factor to stressful tests is the lack of time the teachers provide. One of the participants recalled how they only received 15 minutes for 5 exercises, where she usually ended up jumping back and forth between the tasks and panicking because she felt like she did not have time to complete anything properly. Since we can only see the test from this student’s point of view, it is advisable to investigate further on what the ideal time for certain exercises may be during tests in school. Overall, students felt more relaxed if they knew what they could expect and they preferred the tests to be more structured as language exams are, since they thought that would benefit them more and help them learn the language better.

4.5.2 Did they feel like the tests they took were useful?

The first theme that came up during the interviews regarding the effectiveness of the tests was when they did not use what they have already learned and eventually just forgot it a couple weeks later. Two students recalled that this was often the case with their English lessons. “We learned it for the test and after about half a month we’ve already forgotten again. And we didn’t use the learnt material at all afterwards”. (ILD) And another similar experience of ineffective teaching that has occurred was when they had to learn for vocabulary tests with words that they “...could never use in real life...”(SSS) and claimed that after a week it completely vanished from their brains again. This is again explainable by Arnold’s (1999) theory of how teachers should not force their students to learn immense and rather useless material since it has no benefit neither for teacher nor for the students.

The rest of the students were in general satisfied with their tests and multiple participants have admitted that even though they have had nothing against the subject, they did tend to be a little lazy when it came to home assignments and homework in general, so tests were the ones which made them study some words that they would otherwise have probably not learned on their own. This is somewhat a controversial thing, since according to the intrinsic-extrinsic motivational contrast, if the teacher relies on providing extrinsic motivation for the students (that is the rewarding feeling of a good grade) then they will eventually lose their intrinsic motivation. During the interview with this candidate (LZA) however, he still had no fall back in terms of his personal motivation. Hence, this phenomenon of balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for the best outcome for students requires deeper analyses and further research to be answered accurately.

5 Conclusion and Implications

This study has served with useful insight into an everyday English lesson of a high school student in Hungary. The collected data shows that although fortunately there are still numerous excellent teachers out there who try their best to suit their pupils need, there are also many teachers who do not put much effort into their teaching. Both ways show in their attitudes and in the way that their students see them – positively or negatively. The study has also revealed that although a negative experience related to this subject can usually be connected to the teacher, there were also some students who were not dissatisfied with their teacher’s methods or had only small things they would adjust on the teaching style they have received; however, they were still quite stressed

during the lessons, and that was due to the pressure they had from their fellow students. Some participants claimed that this could be changed, and that the teacher indeed can create a so-called “safe place” as RCK, IGZ and KAW mentioned, whilst others believe that the teacher is not someone who could interfere with the negativity going on between the students.

What also clearly came to light is how much the students appreciated the care and support they received from their teachers. If they received personal feedback, encouragement and in general attention for their needs and preferences for successful English learning; in that case, they all recalled their English teachers as someone they could count on and rely on. Usually in these positive cases they discussed whether the teacher could have been a bit stricter since due to their kind heart some students took advantage of the teacher’s soft heart and disturbed the lessons usually. It has not been clearly stated whether there can be a perfect balance between being nice and being strict enough to control the class.

Regarding the ineffective teachers, one of the obvious results is that one cannot teach with much success if they personally struggle to motivate themselves. It is also clear that learning and teaching a foreign language without using that foreign language in class frequently can make is very difficult for the students to master the subject. According to several participants it also became clear that putting the language into practice helps with learning and simple learning the grammar “raw” is not a very helpful way of teaching.

As regards the limitations of my study, I could have interviewed more candidates since every new participant I interviewed provided new information as well, meaning that data saturation has not yet been reached. And of course, the research could be extended to other fields related to affective aspects, for example examining the contrast of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors of students deeper than in this study. As for the potential implications: if one decides to become an English teacher, it may be worth looking at these results since these are the one firsthand from the students and if one has the will to make good English lessons, it is recommended that one learns from the mistakes and excellence of the elder and more experienced staff.

Further research could be conducted to decide to what extent a teacher can influence and regulate the negativity that the students produce against each other. Is it really someone one must live with, or can the teacher set strong enough ground rules for the group to stay at an ideal level of support or at least not harming each other verbally? Besides this, it would be fascinating to test

out the tips and advice the students gave their past teachers to see whether it would really be useful and could the scholars benefit from the new learning techniques. Last and perhaps most importantly, since my primary field of interest was FLA, it would be interesting to research the question whether FLA is removable from SLA in high school classrooms, or it is something one must live with to some extent. And if it can be removed from the classroom, it would be interesting to find out the conditions how to do so.

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Á.H.

B.H.

S.I.

D.A.P.

M.W.

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Appendix

Affective Aspects of English Language Learning

An interview guide for the qualitative study

Preliminary Information

With this study, I want to investigate the experiences of students whilst learning English in High School, what they would have enjoyed more, what disturbed them during classes, what they disliked doing and according to their point of view, what would have helped their teenager self to be more motivated in classes.

- May I record our interview?
- You are participating voluntarily.
- You may stop participating at any point of the interview.
- You may ask us to stop using your data at any point of the research.
- The received information will exclusively be used for research purposes in the study.
- Your data will be used in a way that you won't be identifiable.
- Any data that might reveal your identity will not be used in any way.

Introductory questions

1. When did you start studying English and how many years did you study English?
2. Was there any other language you have studied; how long did you study that for?
3. During high school, did you study English as a first or second language?
4. Did you have any extra English experiences, such as private teaching or living in another country or taking part in a student exchange program?
5. How many English teachers did you have throughout your high school years?
6. What is the first word that comes to your mind when you think of your high school English classes?

A - Questions related to motivation

- Why did you learn English?
- Did you enjoy being in English classes? Why?/ Why not?
- On a scale from 1-10, 10 being best, how motivated were you in classes, why?
- What could have motivated you more (you can even say getting a sticker end of class for participation...)
- Do you think you could use the knowledge from classes?
- Tell me about real-life experiences where you could use your English knowledge you've learnt in class
- Could you name some topics you're learned about in school which you find completely useless?

B - Questions related to the student-teacher relationship and the teacher's personality

- Tell me a positive or a negative personality trait of your English teacher and explain how that affected your English lessons
- Did you feel comfortable asking questions? How did the teacher act / what did he do or say that made you feel (un)comfortable asking question?
- Did you ever not understand something but were too afraid to ask, so others don't judge you?
- Do you think there's anything the teacher (or anyone else) could do to help this situation?
- Is there any advice you would give your old English teacher?

C – Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking

- Out of these 4 which did you find most problematic and least problematic? Why?
- Name 1 – 2 positive or negative experiences with exercises in:
 - o Writing
 - o Reading
 - o Listening
 - o Speaking
- Could you tell me about some reoccurring exercises in English classes you enjoyed doing?
- Tell me exercises you did often in English classes, and you really did not enjoy.
- How did you usually learn new grammatical structures? Did you find this method effective?
- How did you usually learn new vocabulary? Did you find this method effective?
- How much did the teacher put emphasis on correct pronunciation? Was that an important thing for you?

D - Questions related to tests and exams in class

- What experiences do you have related to tests and exams in your high school English classes?
- Were you usually motivated to prepare for the tests? Why?
- How stressed were you during the tests?
- From the aspect of learning, did you find these tests useful?
- Did you think the material you had to learn was manageable to learn?

E – Anxiety in other classes

- Have you experienced anxiety in other classes?

Thank you for your participation!

Hungarian Summary - Magyar összefoglaló

Az angol egy világnyelv, ezért számos előnye vannak, ha az ember tud ezen a nyelven kommunikálni, mind a karrier és mind a személyes életének szempontjából. A magyar közoktatásban történő nyelvtanulással és annak problémáival kapcsolatban számos cikk jelent meg az elmúlt években (Eduline 2018; Szülői Hang 2019). Alkalmatlannak minősült a magyar közoktatás arra, hogy akár 12 év angoltanítás után képesek legyenek a diákok letenni egy nyelvvizsgát, és tekintve, hogy számos egyetemi felvételihez is követelmény legalább egy B2-es nyelvvizsga, így komoly hátrányból indulhat egy átlagos közoktatásban részesülő magyar diák. Fontos kérdés megvizsgálni, hogy miért ennyire gyenge a nyelvvoktatás Magyarországon, hiszen, ha feltárjuk a legfőbb problémákat, akkor már több esély van azok megoldására vagy legalább minimalizálására. Számos aspektusból lehet a helyzetet megvizsgálni, az egyik fő szempont, hogy milyen élmény volt a diákok számára a nyelvtanulás, hiszen, ha már önmagában szorongató volt a légkör és a diáknak küzdenie kellett negatív érzelmekkel, akár a tanár, akár diáktársai felől, akkor kevesebb eséllyel indul a sikeres nyelv elsajátításhoz. Kvalitatív kutatásokból eddig hiányt szenvedtünk, ahol magyar középiskolás diákokat kérdeztek meg, hogy hogyan érezték magukat a nyelvórák alatt, mi az, ami őket támogatta, és mi gátolta őket. Ezért döntöttem úgy, hogy feltáró kutatást végzek, ahol interjúkat készítek diákokkal, és a középiskolás angoltanulásokról kérdeztem ki őket.

Már számos kutatás készült arról, hogy milyen érzésekkel kell dolgozni egy nyelvi tanóra alatt mind diáknak és tanárnak. Felmerülhet nyelvi szorongás (Horwitz 1986), de számos pozitív élménnyel is találkozhat, ami a „Broaden and Build” (tágít és épít) elmélet szerint segít kibővíteni a képességek palettáját, ilyen élmény lehet a flow is (Csikszentmihalyi 1999). A motivációval kapcsolatban pedig az egyik fő elmélet, hogy a benső és személyes vágyhoz köthető motiváció erősebben hat a diákra és lelkesebbé teszi, mintha külső motiváció (szülők nyomása, tanár értékelése, iskolában szerzett jegyek) miatt tanulna. Sőt, amennyiben nem maga miatt tanul, a belső motivációt idővel ki is tudja iktatni a külső motiváció.

Az elsődleges érdeklődési területem a nyelvi szorongás volt, ámde ez hamar megváltozott és végül nem csak a negatív érzelmekkel foglalkoztam, hanem figyelembe vettem a pozitív érzelmeket is a nyelvi tantermekben. Azért döntöttem így, mert a jövőbeli tanárok szempontjából rendkívül fontos tudni milyen hatékony és milyen kevésbé hatékony tanítási módszerek léteznek. Ennek megállapításához elengedhetetlen feltétel az is, hogy a diákok szemszögéből megvizsgáljuk a helyzetet. A kutatás során 12 darab 40-50 perces interjúkat készítettem telefonon, ahol rögzítettem a beszélgetést. Azt végül legépeltem és elemeztem őket több szempontból, majd kategorizáltam őket négy nagy csoportba:

1. A tanár személyisége milyen hatással volt a diákokra
2. Milyen élményeik vannak a tanár tanítási stílusával kapcsolatban
3. Milyen volt az osztályban a szociális légkör, és ez milyen hatással volt a diákok tanulására
4. A számonkérésekkel kapcsolatban milyen élményeik vannak

Az eredmények számos részét meg lehetett magyarázni korábbi kutatások eredményeivel is, illetve felmerültek olyan kérdések is, ami egy másik, más fókuszú kutatással lehetne mélyebben megvizsgálni (például, hogy a tanár milyen mértékben tud hatni a csoportban kialakuló csoportnyomásra).

Az első kérdésre a legkirívóbb válasz a tanárnak a nyitottsága volt, és hogy ez nagyon pozitívan hatott a gyerekek közérzetére, felkeltette az érdeklődésüket is a sok új téma, amit behozott a tanár órákra. Arról számoltak be, hogy amennyiben a tanár nem ragaszkodott szigorúan a tankönyvben előírt témákhoz és feladatokhoz – amik sok esetben elavultak voltak és néha nem a leghatékonyabbak – akkor úgy érezték nemcsak az angoltudásuk fejlődött a témák átbeszélése által, hanem az általános világnézetük is. Ezt több diák is így vallotta. Ezt a jelenséget jól lehet magyarázni azzal az elmélettel, hogy hatékonyabb hozzáállás a tanár részéről, ha asszisztálja a diákok a saját tanulási folyamatában és nem kényszeríti hatalmas mennyiségű tananyag elsajátítására, amiből gyakran keveset fog tudni valóban saját célokra felhasználni (Arnold 1999). Ami felmerült a tanár személyiségével kapcsolatban, mint probléma, hogy néha „túl kedves” volt a diákok megfogalmazása alapján, azaz túl sok mindent engedett meg, és emiatt a csoportot nehezen tudta kontrollálni. A legtöbb diák úgy nyilatkozott, hogy lehetett volna arany középutat találni, tehát szigorítani a tanárnak úgy, hogy közben pozitív kép maradjon meg róla. Fontosnak

tartották, hogy tartsa meg a nyitottságát és jó kedélyét, de közben zavarta is őket, hogy néha túl sok mindent megengedett, például illetlen megjegyzéseket a diákok részéről.

A második kérdés a tanárok tanítási stílusairól szólt, ahol pozitív és negatív példák is előfordultak hasznos és kevésbé hasznos gyakorlatokról, amiket a tanár előírt, hogy teljesítsenek. Az első enyhén triviális probléma, amiről többen is beszámoltak, hogy az angoltanáruk kimondottan keveset beszélt angolul, és kevés szóbeli gyakorlatok voltak az órán. Az egyik diák azt is elmesélte, hogy neki ez a hallásértésben is okozott gondokat, ugyanis egész órán kevés angol nyelvű beszédet hallott – már csak a tanár részéről is – és ezért neki nehéz volt hirtelen a hallásértéses feladatoknál átváltani egy idegen nyelvre, főleg, hogy saját elmondása alapján gyenge is volt angolból. Tehát egy lényeges szempont, hogy a tanár ne magyarul, hanem az adott idegen nyelven beszéljen. Ezen kívül még szó esett arról, hogy a gyerekek mennyire érezték hasznosnak a feladatokat, amiket csináltak. Többen említették, hogy hatékonyabb volt, amiről saját maguk alkottak mondatokat és aktívan használták a nyelvet, mintha a tankönyvet kellett kitölteni az üres mezőket. Pár negatív példa, ami feljött a beszélgetés során, hogy úgy ítélték meg sok idő elment olyan feladatokkal (házi feladat ellenőrzése, aminek van megoldókulcsa, mindenkit egyenként felszólítani egyszavas válaszokért), amiknek alacsony volt a hatékonyságuk.

Olyan is sokszor előfordult, hogy a diákok számára hozzáférhető megoldókulccsal rendelkező feladatokat csináltak, ahelyett, hogy érettségi előtti hetekben a beszédet gyakorolták volna, és sokan ezeket haszontalannak tartották. A diákok ilyen helyzetben tehetetlenséget éreztek, mivel a tanár nem vette figyelembe, hogy mire lenne nagyobb szükségük, ezért úgy érezték nem igazán értette meg őket. Ez a jelenség magyarázható az elmélettel, miszerint egy vezető köteles éreztetni az embereivel, hogy megérti őket, és foglalkozik az igényeikkel (Maxwell 2002). A negatív tapasztalatok ellenére számos pozitív ellenpélda is felmerült a tanárral kapcsolatban, amikor sikeresen integrálta a diákok igényeit a tanításba. Több diák is alátámasztotta, hogy nagyban elősegítette őket az, amikor a tanár személyre szabott visszajelzéseket adott nekik, mert érezték, hogy figyel rájuk. Abban az esetben, amikor a tanárnak sikerült a tanulók szintjére szabni a feladatokat, és építő, illetve érthető visszajelzéseket adott, a diákoknak több esélyük volt a sikerre. Ez pedig összeköthető Csikszentmihályi (1990) elméletével a flow élményekről.

A harmadik téma, ami erősen szerepelt a diákok válaszában az a csoportnyomás volt. A negatív élményeket ebben a tekintetben két csoportba lehet sorolni. Az első, amikor valóban romboló

hatású volt a diákok környezete, ez legalább 3-4 diák csoportjában erősen megjelent, a második pedig amikor semmilyen valós negatív visszajelzés nem érkezett a diáktársak részéről, viszont mégis nagy szorongás tört rá a diákokra miközben szerepelniük kellett az osztály előtt. Az első esetben általában a válasz helyességétől függetlenül kritizálták az interjúztatott diákot a csoporttársai. A kérdésre, miszerint ezen a helyzeten lehetett-e volna segíteni elég eltérő válaszok érkeztek. Egyesek azt vallották, hogy a tanárnak a diákok közti csipkelődésre kevés befolyása van, ellenben voltak olyan javaslatok is, hogy az első pár órán érdemes lett volna a tanárnak letenni pár alapvető szabályt az órák menetéről, és hogy semmilyen szinten nem szabadott volna tolerálni a negatív kommentek a diákok között. A második csoport abban hitt, hogy a probléma a tanár beavatkozásával orvosolható lett volna. Ezen felül rendkívül rosszul érintette a diákokat, amikor diáktársaik által lettek kritizálva, és sokszor teljesen elvette a kedvüket attól, hogy megszólaljanak a tanórán, ami érthető okokból végső soron gátolta őket a fejlődésben.

A második esetben, amikor nem tudták pontosan megfogalmazni mitől szorongtak órák alatt, hiszen nem kritizálta őket a többi osztálytársuk, a diákokra inkább az általános szorongás tört rá, amikor tart az illető attól, hogy negatív színben tűnik fel mások előtt. Ez a fajta szorongás szorosan kapcsolható a nyelvi szorongáshoz (Horwitz 1986).

Pozitív élmények a nyelvi csoportdinamikán belül olyankor születtek, amikor kis létszámú csoport volt, de ennél fontosabb, hogy akár enyhe baráti viszony is kialakuljon a csoporttagok között. Ilyenkor nagyon jó érzéssel mentek angolórákra, nem kellett afelől aggódniuk, hogy kinevetik őket, hiszen jó kapcsolatuk volt a többi diákkal. A jó hangulat és laza környezet kialakítását többen ahhoz is köthették, hogy a tanárnak pozitív és nyitott volt a kisugárzása.

Az utolsó téma a számonkérésekkel volt kapcsolatos. Pozitív élményekről számolt be olyan diák, akinek nem kellett afelől aggódnia, hogy mi fogja várni a dolgozatban, hiszen a tanár tisztán és érhetően elmagyarázta, hogy mit fog számon kérni, kiszámíthatóak voltak a dolgozatok. Ilyenkor arról is beszámoltak, hogy szinte nullára csökkent a teszt-szorongásuk, mert tudták, hogy mire számítsanak. Ezzel ellentétben az előző eseteket alátámasztja, hogy amikor a tanár olykor még nem is abból az anyagból kérte számon a diákokat, amit feladott, az nagyon megnövelte a diákoknak a szorongását is, hiszen teljesen kiszámíthatatlan volt számukra a helyzet.

A dolgozatok hasznosságát illetően: a legtöbb diák arról számolt be, - független attól ez nála sikeresen teljesült vagy sem – hogy neki a leghasznosabb fajta dolgozat az volt, amikor a

nyelvvizsgák struktúráját képviselte a dolgozat felépítése, azaz volt benne hallásértés, olvasás, nyelvtan, íráskészség. Ilyenkor érezték azt, hogy a legjobban elősegítette őket a számonkérés, akár majd a később jövő nyelvvizsgájukra, akár a való életben a nyelv használatára. Amikor ettől eltért a dolgozat struktúrája – az sokszor szembement a belső motivációjukkal és végső soron úgy érezték nem haladnak megfelelő ütemben az anyaggal. Negatív élményként sokan említették a nyelvtani szerkezeteknek száraz elmagyarázását, példák nélkül; ilyenkor egyfelől nem sikerült sokszor megérteni sem, továbbá pedig saját maguk alig tudták alkalmazni. Ezért javasolták többen is a nyelv aktív használatát és gyakorlását azzal szemben, amikor túlságosan a nyelvtan elsajátítására koncentrálnak a tanárok.

Összességében vegyes volt a diákok véleménye a középiskolás angoltanulásról, a 12 résztvevőből nagyjából a fele pozitívnak, míg a másik fele negatívnak ítélte meg az élményeit és a tanulás sikerességét. A kutatás számos példát prezentált mind hatékony és kevésbé hatékony tanítási módszerekről a tanárok részéről, amiket jövőbeli tanárok is tudnak hasznosítani, tovább az egyetemi tanárképzés során érdemes volna megemlíteni. További kutatást és mélyebb elemzést igényelne többek között az a kérdés, miszerint a tanárnak milyen mértékben van befolyása a csoportnyomás megszüntetésére, illetve megelőzésére, illetve érdekes volna megvizsgálni, hogy a diákok által javasolt megoldások mennyire működnek a nyelvtanítás során.