

The Impact of Hybrid Learning on Foreign Language Enjoyment and Anxiety

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Abstract

This paper presents an investigation of the relationships between foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) among learners (n = 493) in a communicative English course at a Japanese university, focusing on the effects of a move to a hybrid learning environment in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Analyses indicate that learners experienced more enjoyment than anxiety and this was linked to positive attitudes towards English as well as higher self-reported proficiency relative to peers. In comparison to pre-pandemic data, learners' emotional responses were somewhat muted, however not to the extent found in studies conducted on students in a fully online learning environment. This suggests a hybrid learning environment may have been effective at mitigating the loss of emotional resonance which has been associated with screen mediated learning. Sources of enjoyment and anxiety reported by learners as well as the pedagogical implications of the study are also discussed.

Key Words : Foreign language enjoyment; Foreign language classroom anxiety; Hybrid learning; Online learning; Communicative English

1. Introduction

Research into affective factors in language learning is well-established, with foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) among the most prominently studied emotional factors. In their seminal study, Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) which measures an individual's tendency to experience feelings of anxiety in a foreign language classroom. More recently, research has focused on positive emotions in language learning contexts in addition to negative emotions. Such research has shown foreign language enjoyment (FLE) to have a facilitating effect on learning a foreign language (Botes et al., 2020). Anxiety and enjoyment have both been studied in a variety of geographic and educational contexts (e.g., Jiang & Dewaele, 2019; Uzun, 2017; Saito et al., 2018) and this research has shown that FLCA tends to hinder language learning while FLE may enhance learning in all contexts.

However, with the sudden pivot to emergency remote teaching (ERT) and subsequent increase in non-emergency online and hybrid-online learning due to the continuing Covid-19 pandemic a new educational reality has emerged. This transition to ERT as well as an increase in online learning and decrease in face-to-face interaction could be expected to have

significant and complex effects on language learners' emotional states. Resnik and Dewaele (2021) examined the effects of this transition in a European context, finding that "virtual classrooms dull students' emotions" and suggest that online classes may have less "emotional resonance" than traditional face-to-face classes leading to a muted experience of both positive and negative emotions (Resnik and Dewaele, 2021, p. 21). Their research also raises the question of changes in the emotional resonance of screen mediated learning, calling for further research to "explore whether learner emotions in an ERT context might grow stronger as it becomes more established practice" (p. 24).

This paper uses data gathered one-and-a-half academic years into the pandemic, when online teaching and social distancing within the classroom had become a well-established practice, to examine the emotional states of English language learners enrolled in a compulsory communicative English course at a Japanese university. With a particular focus on FLE and FLCA, it aims to elucidate some of the effects that a hybrid learning environment brought about in response to the Covid-19 pandemic had on the emotions of these learners. Thus, this study could be considered an answer to Resnik and Dewaele's call for further research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 FLCA in Language Learning

Affect and individual differences, such as motivation, aptitude,

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and personality have long been recognized as factors in language learning outcomes (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). For many years, research into the roles emotion plays in second language acquisition (SLA) focused on inhibiting factors, with particular attention given to the negative impact of FLCA (Gkonou et al., 2017). It has been argued that FLCA is a situation-specific form of anxiety which leads language learners to associate the L2 classroom with anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). In a review of the research, Horwitz (2017) notes that factors such as low test scores, self-perceived lack of proficiency compared to peers, and a negative attitude toward the target language increase the amount of anxiety language learners feel over the long-term, with such negative emotions having a negative impact on L2 achievement in almost all language learning contexts. More recently, FLCA has been studied in tandem with positive emotions, such as enjoyment, in a variety of contexts, including various countries and educational institutions (e.g., Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Uzun, 2017), as well as in particular kinds of curricula, for example content and language integrated learning (CLIL) vs. non-CLIL (De Smet et al., 2018), and remote vs. face-to-face environments (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021).

2.2 Positive Psychology and FLE

Following Mercer and MacIntyre's (2014) introduction of positive psychology to the field of SLA there has been an increase in interest in the power of positive emotions, such as joy or pride, as enabling factors in language learning contexts. Such interest follows a broader movement within psychology towards the study of positive psychological factors which allow people to flourish (Seligman, 2011). Positive emotions in a language learning context have been found to enhance learners' abilities to notice language input (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017) and this may lead to a greater cognizance and understanding of the L2 (Dewaele et al., 2017). Positive emotions also encourage learners to take risks, explore, and play, which in turn helps to build social bonds, increasing cohesion between class members (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017).

Enjoyment within the foreign language classroom, in the form of FLE, is one area of positive psychology which has received considerable interest (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; 2016; Uzun, 2017; Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). This emotion and its impact on language learning has been studied in a range of cultural contexts, e.g., England (Dewaele et al., 2017), Saudi Arabia (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018), Kazakhstan (Dewaele et al., 2019), and China (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019).

There have, as of yet, been few studies of FLE within a Japanese context, however (see Saito et al., 2018 for an exception). FLE has been linked to positive outcomes for language learners, such as a willingness to communicate (Dewaele, 2019), increased motivation, and language development (Saito et al., 2018). In addition, FLE has been linked to several "classroom variables" (Botes et al., 2022, p. 209), such as academic performance (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018), level of English proficiency (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), and attitude towards English (Dewaele et al., 2017), as well as demographic variables such as age, gender, and multilingualism (see Botes et al., 2022 for a review of the literature in this area). However, it has also been noted that as FLE is a relatively new area of research within applied linguistics it is difficult to draw conclusions about the impacts of such variables and considerable further research is required to do so (Botes et al., 2022, p. 208).

2.3 Positive and Negative Emotions in ERT

There is an emerging body of research on the implementation of ERT, the effects of online teaching, and the Covid-19 pandemic more generally within Japanese higher education (e.g., Lafleur et al., 2021; Yanase et al., 2021; Bollen et al., 2022). These studies have focused primarily on the impact of the pandemic in terms of teaching and classroom practice rather than on its effects on the emotional states of learners. There has, however, been research into the effects of ERT on learners and their emotions conducted outside of Japan. Resnik and Dewaele (2021) compared learners' experience of enjoyment and anxiety in ERT and in-person contexts. Learners in this study experienced stronger emotions when actually present in the classroom, reporting not only higher levels of enjoyment, but also higher levels of anxiety as well. Resnik and Dewaele suggested that the lower levels of emotion reported in online classes was due to the fact that "that disembodied classes have less emotional resonance" than in-person classes, with a resultant "dulling effect" of emotional responses during online learning (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021, p. 21).

Within Japan there is limited research into the impact of ERT or online classes on learners' emotions, and no research into the changing emotional profile of learners as remote teaching becomes a more established practice, as suggested by Resnik and Dewaele (2021). This study aims to address such a gap in research by examining learners' emotions with reference to FLCA and FLE in a post-ERT environment combining both online and socially distanced face-to-face classes within a Japanese university. The study's focus on Japanese higher

education can also inform a wider discussion of the impact of demographic and classroom variables upon FLE, as suggested by Botes et al. (2022).

The current study examines the learning experiences and emotional states of learners during the fall semester of 2021 following the establishment of a hybrid learning environment system of classes (HLE; explained further in section 3.1 Context and Participants) over the previous three semesters. The study also compares the levels of enjoyment and anxiety reported by these learners to that of a similar group of learners who were learning under pre-pandemic, fully face-to-face conditions.

2.4 Research Questions

This study is framed by the following four research questions:

Research Questions (RQ) 1: What is the relationship between FLE and FLCA among Japanese university learners in an HLE, and what levels of enjoyment and anxiety do they experience?

RQ 2: What are the relationships between learners' attitudes toward English, their self-reported level of English proficiency, FLE, and FLCA?

RQ 3: What are sources of enjoyment and anxiety reported by learners in an HLE?

RQ 4: How do the emotions of learners in an HLE compare to those of learners in a face-to-face context?

3. Methodology

3.1 Context and Participants

This study took place at a private university in Japan which primarily focuses on STEM education, with compulsory communicative English courses for all first- and second-year students. Prior to the pandemic these communicative English courses were completely classroom based and consisted of two 90-minute face-to-face class periods per week. This, of course, was disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. Following an initial period of fully online ERT, an HLE system was developed. For this HLE system class sizes were halved, from an average of 30 to an average of 15, and the two 90-minute class periods per week were split into one 90-minute socially distanced face-to-face class, and one asynchronous class which students were expected to complete online at any point within a one-week timeframe. All learners involved in this study were enrolled in this HLE system of classes.

Data collected from 493 Japanese university EFL learners during the fall semester of 2021 was used to answer RQs 1 through 3. All of the learners were second-year students at the

same university in western Japan and all were enrolled in the compulsory English course under the hybrid learning conditions outlined above. On the basis of an internal placement test, the majority of respondents corresponded to CEFR A2 and B1 levels. Most respondents joined the university in 2020 and so their entire university experience had been under various social distancing restrictions. It is notable that the social distancing requirements of the fall semester were more relaxed than those of the preceding spring semester and face-to-face classes included more interaction between students, albeit with social distancing measures in place.

This dataset can be meaningfully compared (RQ 4) with that collected from a group of learners ($n = 598$) enrolled in the same compulsory English course at the same university during the fall semester of 2019 and reported on in an earlier study concerning FLCA and FLE in Japanese university (Xethakis et al., 2022). Table 1 outlines the demographic information (gender and faculty) collected from each group of learners. From this we can see that the two groups are quite similar: in both there is a roughly 2:1 ratio of males to females, and learners enrolled in STEM majors make up about 90% of each sample.

Table 1. Comparison of HLE Group (2021) and Face-to-Face Group (2019) in terms of Gender and Faculty

	HLE ($n = 493$)	Face-to-Face ($n = 598$)
Gender		
Male	325 (65.9%)	408 (68.2%)
Female	166 (33.7%)	189 (31.6%)
Not reported / Other	1 (0.2%)	1 (0.2%)
Faculty		
Engineering	147 (29.8%)	208 (34.6%)
Computer and Information Sciences	86 (17.4%)	124 (20.7%)
Pharmaceutical Sciences	85 (17.2%)	127 (21.2%)
Biotechnology and Life Science	128 (26.0%)	104 (17.4%)
Art	47 (9.5%)	35 (5.9%)

Note. HLE = hybrid learning environment.

3.2 Instrument

The questionnaire was administered online using a Google Form with two sections. In the first section of the questionnaire, the purpose of the study was explained, and learners were provided with an informed consent form, which clearly stated in Japanese that those who did not wish to participate could do so by responding that they did not wish their responses to be included

in the study. Respondents were then asked to provide their gender and department. The second section began with one item asking learners to evaluate their attitude towards English (ATE) on a five-point Likert scale, from very unfavorable to very favorable ($M = 3.75$; $SD = 0.76$), and one item asking learners to self-report their perceived level of English proficiency (PLP) compared to their classmates, again on a five-point scale, from far below average to far above average ($M = 2.56$; $SD = 0.75$). Both were chosen as they have been significantly related to both FLE and FLCA in past research (e.g., Dewaele et al., 2017; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

3.2.1 Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale

To measure learners' positive emotions, 12 items from the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016) were used. These items were chosen to reflect the two dimensions of enjoyment, private and social, found in the exploratory factor analysis conducted by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016). The items relate to feelings of private enjoyment, such as interest and a personal sense of achievement, (e.g., *I've learnt interesting things in my English class; In class, I feel proud of my accomplishments*) and enjoyment coming from the social atmosphere (e.g., *I feel like there is a positive environment in my English class; We laugh a lot in my English class*). A six-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*) was used. In this study, reliability, as measured by Cronbach alpha, for the FLES (.911), and each of its two subscales, Private Foreign Language Enjoyment (PFLE; .860) and Social Foreign Language Enjoyment (SFLE; .829) was good ($> .7$; Hair et al., 2019).

3.2.2 Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

To measure learners' negative emotions, six out of eight items were selected from the shortened version of the FLCAS (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). The two omitted items were both reverse-scored items as such items have been shown to affect the scoring of self-report scales (e.g., Rodebaugh et al., 2007). This scale also employed a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). Internal reliability for the FLCAS (Cronbach's $\alpha = .814$) was good.

3.2.3 Open-ended Questions

Each scale was followed by an open-ended question that asked learners to describe positive and negative classroom experiences, adding a qualitative dimension to the research. The first concerned enjoyable experiences, and was stated, "*In as much*

detail as you can, write about an enjoyable learning experience in your English Communication class, and how you felt about it."

The second concerned anxiety-provoking experiences, "*In as much detail as you can, write about an anxious learning experience in your English Communication class, and how you felt about it.*"

All items and questions on the questionnaire were presented in Japanese. Translation into Japanese was conducted by a specialist with experience in scale development, then back-translated into English by two bilingual English professors, which led to the restatement of some items. Ethical approval for this research study was received from the review committee of the authors' university.

3.3 Data Analysis

As an initial step, average scores for FLE ($M = 4.16$; $SD = 0.77$), PFLE ($M = 4.06$; $SD = 0.77$), SFLE ($M = 4.29$; $SD = 0.87$), and FLCA ($M = 3.84$; $SD = 0.91$) were calculated. Examination of quantile-quantile plots for each variable as well as those for ATE and PLP revealed that scores fell primarily on the diagonal of the respective plots, suggesting that each variable followed a normal distribution to a reasonably close degree (Field, 2018), with the exception of the extreme low end of scores for ATE (Figure 1). For this reason, parametric tests (Pearson correlation, t-tests and ANOVA) were employed in this study.

Qualitative data (i.e., learner responses to the open-ended questions concerning sources of enjoyable or anxiety provoking experiences) were categorized taking a concept-driven approach (Gibbs, 2007), where the coding of responses was guided by categories that emerged from a previous study on pre-pandemic learners (Xethakis et al., 2022), with multiple rounds of coding to increase intra-coder reliability (Revesz, 2012). All responses were in Japanese, with over half of the 493 participants (275, or 55.7%) answering the first open-ended question on an enjoyable experience and slightly fewer (252, or 51.1%) answering the second open-ended question on an anxious experience.

4. Results

4.1 Relationship Between FLE and FLCA and Levels of Enjoyment and Anxiety

Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationships between the dimensions of FLE and FLCA (RQ1), with the results shown in Table 2. The overall pattern of correlations between positive and negative emotions is similar to past research, that is, a degree of negative correlation between these

two emotional valences. However, similar to the findings in Resnik and Dewaele (2021), there was no statistically significant relationship between FLCA and either FLE, PFLE or SFLE, and the findings of this study lend further support to their suggestion that online classes may affect learners' emotions in a complex manner, possibly contributing to the decoupling of enjoyment and anxiety in less traditional learning contexts.

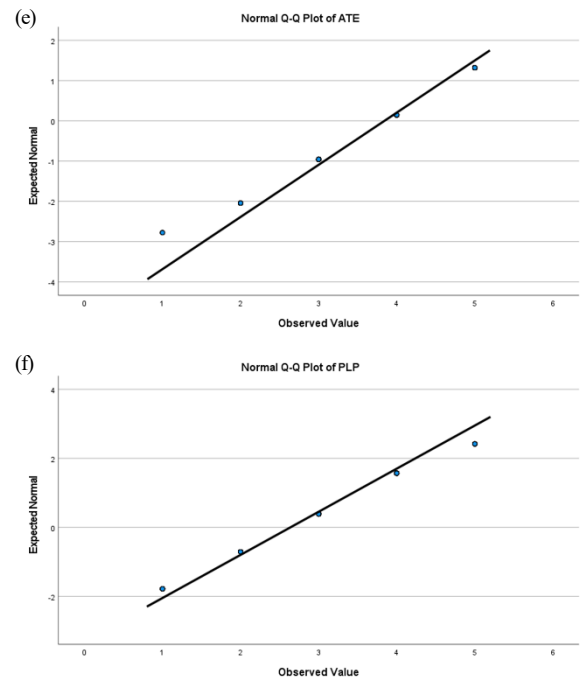
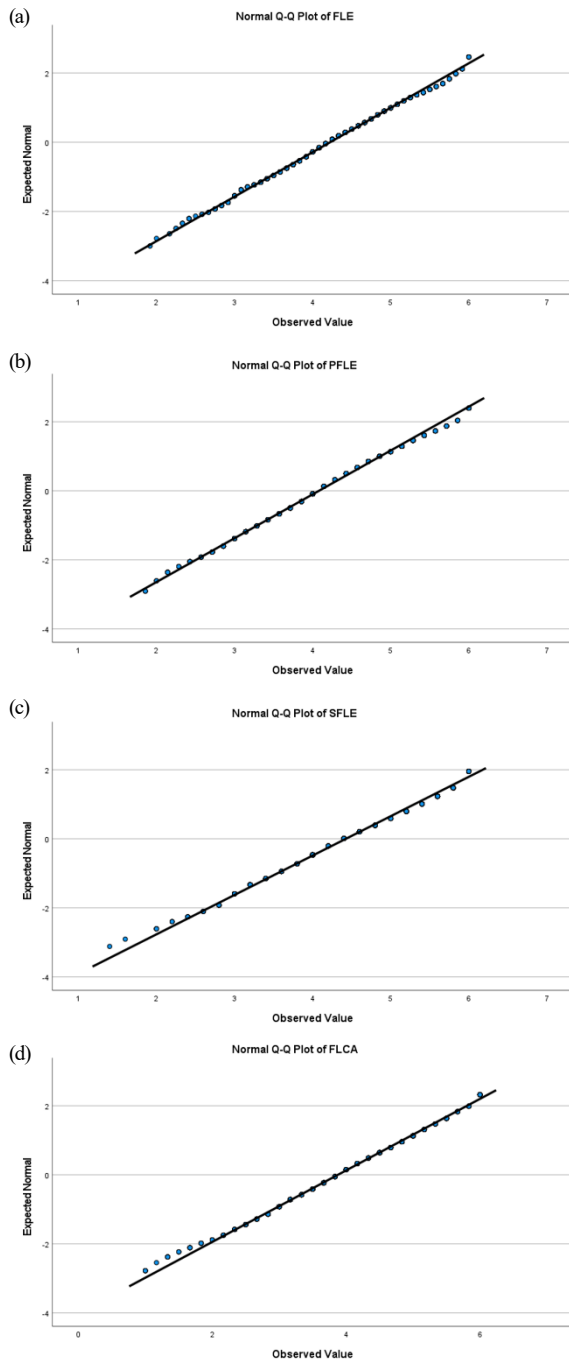


Figure 1. Quantile-Quantile Plots: FLE (a), PFLE (b), SFLE (c), FLCA (d), ATE (e), and PLP (f)

Note. FLE = Foreign Language Enjoyment; PFLE = Private Foreign Language Enjoyment; SFLE = Social Foreign Language Enjoyment; FLCA = Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety; ATE = Attitude towards English; PLP = Perceived level of English proficiency.

To determine differences in learners' experience of positive and negative emotions in an HLE (RQ1), a series of paired t-tests was conducted. Learners experienced more overall enjoyment than anxiety ($t[492] = 5.718, p < .001$; Cohen's $d = 0.38$), albeit with an effect size that can be considered small on the basis of Plonsky and Oswald's (2014) recommendations for effect sizes. Furthermore, learners in an HLE experienced both greater private ($t[492] = 3.957, p < .001$; Cohen's $d = 0.26$) and social enjoyment ($t[492] = 7.740, p < .001$; Cohen's $d = 0.51$) than anxiety, though again with a small effect size in both cases. This differs from a study by Jiang and Dewaele (2019), where Chinese university students were found to experience more anxiety than enjoyment, and in Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), where Asian learners (primarily Chinese respondents) similarly expressed greater anxiety. While the respondents in this study are all from a single university thus making it problematic to generalize too broadly, this finding would seem to suggest that at least some Japanese and Chinese learners have different emotional experiences in their language learning environments, with Japanese learners more closely resembling those from Europe and America (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

4.2 Relationship between FLE, FLCA, Attitude towards English and Perceived Proficiency

A series of Pearson correlations with a Bonferroni correction applied ($p = .002$; Table 2) showed that both ATE and PLP were positively linked to FLE and its private and social dimensions (RQ2), albeit with relatively small percentages of shared variance in each case (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014). Learners' attitudes were more strongly linked to the private aspect of FLE than its social aspect which suggests that the social aspects of FLE have less of an influence on a learner's feelings about learning a foreign language, being more centered on the other learners in the class.

These two variables were both negatively correlated with levels of FLCA, though neither correlation was statistically significant. Notably, the shared variance between anxiety and learners' attitudes was much smaller than that for either social or private enjoyment. FLCA and self-reported level of proficiency relative to peers had slightly more shared variance, perhaps suggesting a link between feeling less skilled in an L2 and experiencing greater anxiety.

Table 2. Correlations between FLE, PFLE, SFLE, FLCA, ATE and PLP

	PFLE	SFLE	FLCA	ATE	PLP
FLE	.956** (93.1%)	.932** (86.7%)	-.065 (0.4%)	.522** (30.5%)	.291** (8.5%)
PFLE		.786** (61.8%)	-.056 (0.3%)	.516** (26.6%)	.313** (9.8%)
SFLE			-.069 (0.5%)	.465** (21.6%)	.229** (5.2%)
FLCA				-.191** (3.7%)	-.328** (10.8%)
ATE					.349** (12.2%)

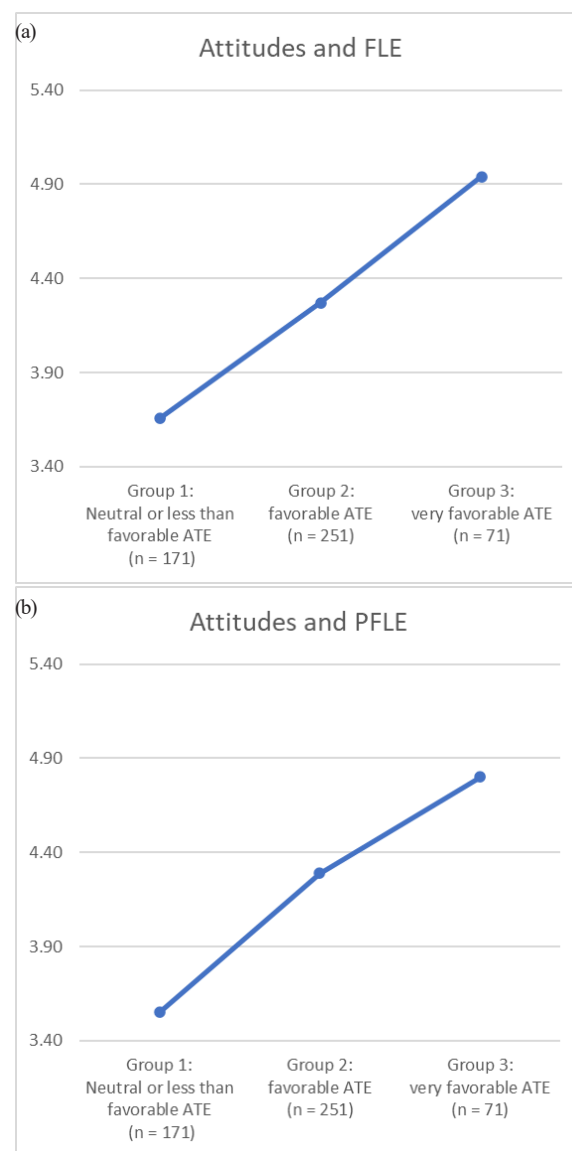
Note. FLE = Foreign Language Enjoyment; PFLE = Private Foreign Language Enjoyment; SFLE = Social Foreign Language Enjoyment; FLCA = Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety; ATE = Attitude towards English; PLP = Perceived level of English proficiency.

Numbers in parentheses indicate the percentage of shared variance

** indicates significance at $p < .002$ (Bonferroni correction applied)

To more fully examine the relationships between FLE, PFLE, SFLE, FLCA, ATE, and PLP (RQ2), one-way ANOVAs were carried out. As only a very small number of learners (22) reported either very unfavorable or unfavorable attitudes, these learners were grouped with those reporting a neutral attitude, resulting in three groups: neutral or less than favorable, favorable, and very favorable. These three groups were used in the analysis.

The results of the ANOVA revealed significant differences between groups for FLE ($F(2,490) = 109.78, p < .001$), PFLE ($F(2,490) = 103.95, p < .001$), SFLE ($F(2,490) = 83.17, p < .001$) and FLCA ($F(2,490) = 9.27, p < .001$). The Games-Howell test was employed for post-hoc comparisons due to differences in group size and unequal variances (Field, 2018). This showed that overall learners with more favorable attitudes experienced greater enjoyment and less anxiety (Figure 2).



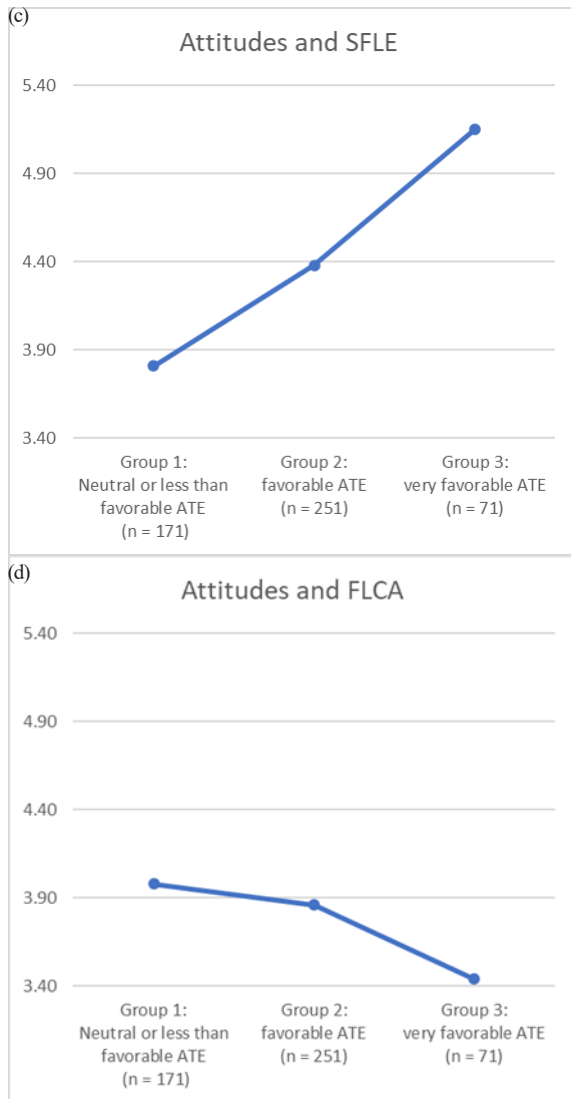
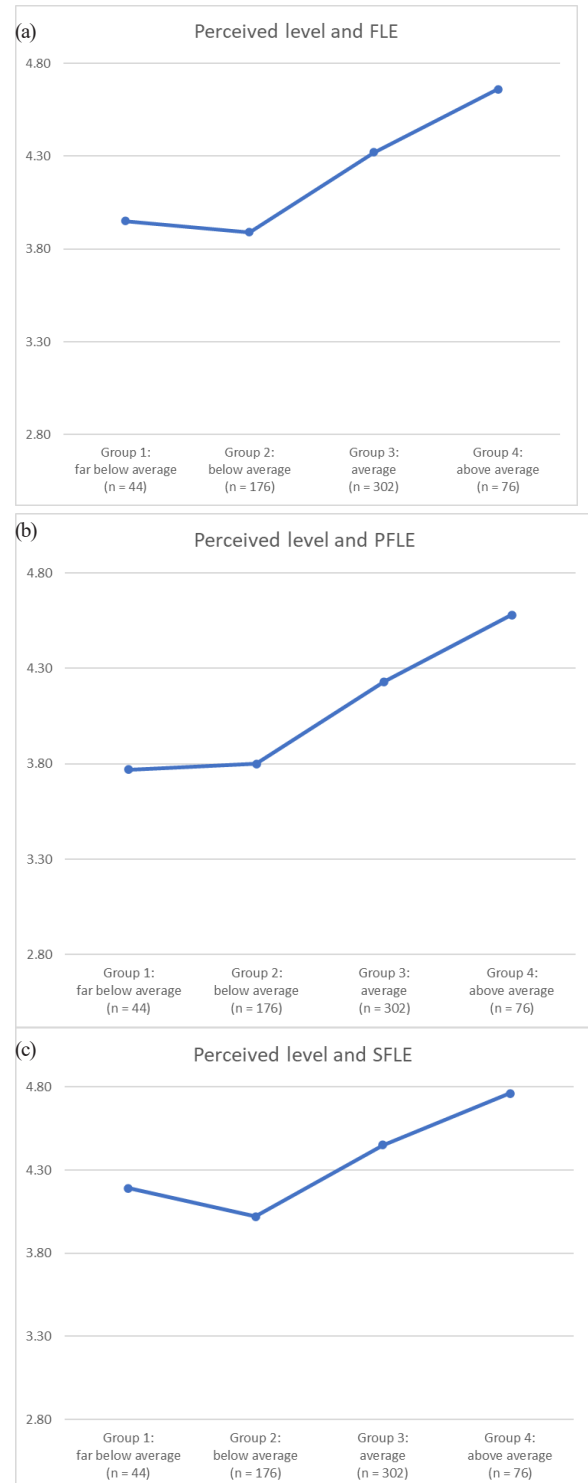


Figure 2. Differences in FLE (a), PFLE (b), SFLE (c) and FLCA (d) in terms of ATE

Note. FLE = Foreign Language Enjoyment; PFLE = Private Foreign Language Enjoyment; SFLE = Social Foreign Language Enjoyment; FLCA = Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety; ATE = Attitude towards English.

In terms of PLP, a mere four learners considered themselves to be far above the average student in their class, and so these were grouped with learners reporting above average proficiency, making a total of four groups (Figure 3). Analysis revealed significant differences between the groups in terms of FLE ($F(3,489) = 18.35, p < .001$), PFLE ($F(3,489) = 19.75, p < .001$), SFLE ($F(3,489) = 12.79, p < .001$), and FLCA ($F(3,489) = 22.31, p < .001$), however Games-Howell post-hoc tests revealed that while in general learners with higher perceived proficiency experienced more positive emotions and less anxiety, the differences between the two highest groups or between the two lowest groups was not significant, and only when comparing

these two larger groups was there a significant difference.



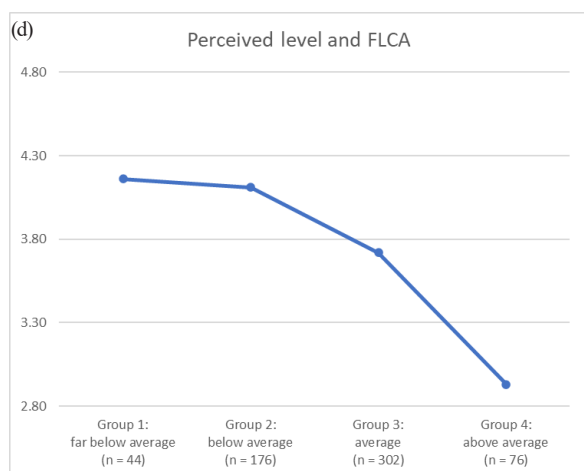


Figure 3. Differences in FLE (a), PFLE (b), SFLE (c) and FLCA (d) in terms of PLP

Note. FLE = Foreign Language Enjoyment; PFLE = Private Foreign Language Enjoyment; SFLE = Social Foreign Language Enjoyment; FLCA = Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety; ATE = Attitude towards English; PLP = Perceived level of English proficiency.

4.3 Comparison of Levels of Emotions for Learners in HLE and those in a Face-to-face Context

Independent t-tests (with Bonferroni correction applied) were used to compare learners in a HLE with those in a pre-pandemic, face-to-face learning situation in terms of FLE, PFLE, SFLE, FLCA, ATE, and PLP. The results of these tests are shown in Table 3. As was the case with the learners in Resnik and Dewaele's (2021) study, learners in a face-to-face situation reported higher levels of enjoyment and more anxiety. However, for the learners in the current study, only the difference in social enjoyment was significant, and there was only a small effect size ($d = .27$). In fact, the levels of private enjoyment differed by only .03 for the two groups of learners. This differs greatly from Resnik and Dewaele (2021), where the differences between the in-person and ERT contexts were all significant with large effect sizes. This may be evidence for the notion that a well-planned hybrid learning environment could provide positive experiences similar to those in fully in-person classes, and that while the social aspects may suffer slightly, the more personal aspects, such as a sense of accomplishment will remain.

The learners in the face-to-face situation reported more favorable attitudes towards English than those in the HLE, and this difference was significant, although the effect size was small ($d = .22$). It is interesting to note a downward shift in the percentages of students making up each of the three groups among learners in an HLE. Those reporting a highly favorable attitude made up 22% of respondents in 2019, but this declined

to 14% in 2021, while those reporting neutral or less favorable attitudes increased from 27% of respondents in 2019 to 35% in 2021. The percentage of respondents reporting a favorable attitude was the same in both groups at 51%. It is possible that this trend stems from the reduced emotional resonance and resultant dulling effect of online learning (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021).

Table 3. Differences in FLE and FLCA between Learners in a Face-to-Face and HLE contexts

	Face-to-face (<i>n</i> = 598)		HLE (<i>n</i> = 493)		<i>t</i> (1089)	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
FLE	4.27	0.783	4.16	0.768	2.530	.012	.15
PFLE	4.09	0.799	4.06	0.771	0.767	.443	.05
SFLE	4.52	0.868	4.29	0.869	4.453	.000**	.27
FLCA	3.90	1.007	3.84	0.910	1.086	.278	.07
ATE	3.92	0.771	3.75	0.764	3.664	.000**	.22
PLP	2.71	0.831	2.56	0.754	3.091	.000**	.19

Note: FLE = Foreign Language Enjoyment; PFLE = Private Foreign Language Enjoyment; SFLE = Social Foreign Language Enjoyment; FLCA = Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety; ATE = Attitude towards English; PLP = Perceived level of English proficiency.

** indicates significance at $p < .002$ (Bonferroni correction applied)

A similar pattern can be seen in perceived proficiency as well. Here too the difference between the two learning contexts was significant, but with only a small effect size. Those reporting proficiency above their classmates declined markedly from 12.7% in 2019 to 6.9% in 2021, while those who saw themselves as less proficient than their classmates increased from 29.4% in 2019 to 37.1% in 2021. One possible explanation for this is that reduced interaction between learners gave little opportunities for them to gauge average proficiencies within the class. It may be the case that learners judge themselves to be less proficient than unknown peers. This could have implications for classroom enjoyment during remote teaching, as higher proficiency relative to classmates has been shown, amongst many other factors, to be indicative of higher FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

4.4 Qualitative Analysis: Sources of Enjoyment and Anxiety

In addition to the quantitative data, respondents were asked to describe an enjoyable experience during the course and also an

anxiety provoking one. The quantitative data presented above reveals the relationships between learners' attitude, their self-perceived level of proficiency, and the positive and negative emotions they experienced in the course. The qualitative data is important for providing insight into the lived experiences of learners and thereby into the classroom events which learners themselves saw as sources of positive and negative emotions. Responses were optional, and roughly half of respondents chose to comment on these aspects of their learning experience. While many learners wrote only very short answers, such as the name of activity they enjoyed, others provided longer responses describing their experiences in some depth, and these help to inform recommendations for classroom practices to increase classroom enjoyment and lessen anxiety. The categories outlined below were not intended to be exhaustive. Many of the responses mention sources from different categories, and it is assumed that there are many other factors behind FLE and FLCA which are not mentioned, however the categories are useful in uncovering those aspects of classes which are considered enjoyable or anxiety inducing by the learners themselves.

4.4.1 Sources of Enjoyment

A total of 275 respondents gave a written response indicating aspects of their English classes which had been a source of enjoyment. During initial analysis, 8 responses were removed as they were considered too limited to be properly categorized and the remaining 267 responses were assigned one or more categories according to the sources of enjoyment which they identified. These categories were based on similar categories used in the earlier study on pre-pandemic data (Xethakis et al., 2022). As shown in Table 4, the categories were: *Specific Classroom Activities*, *Social Interaction*, *Mastery/Improvement of English Skills*, *Learner Agency*, *Teacher Skills/Teacher Recognition*, *Authentic Use of English*, and *Classroom Atmosphere*.

Specific Classroom Activities and *Social Interaction* were the two most cited sources of enjoyment, in common with past research (Xethakis et al., 2022). Similarly, gamified activities such as vocabulary study using *Quizlet Live* featured strongly, some responses noting that games allowed students to enjoy studying through competition and overcome feelings of nervousness when talking to unknown students:

I'm very nervous when I have to talk to an unknown student suddenly, especially if they are from other

departments. When playing games, you can compete with some people and chat so you can enjoy studying. Sometimes I feel bored working alone in front of my computer for a long time.

As can be seen in this response, gamified activities may be an effective way of increasing socially distanced classroom interaction and the enjoyable, competitive aspect may help to lower feelings of anxiety for some students. Further they can be a means to combat feelings of boredom and lack of enjoyment which may arise due to the increased presence of computer screens, both within classrooms and during online learning. In addition to gamified activities, responses suggesting socially distanced pair or group work is a source of enjoyment seem to have greater prominence in responses from learner in an HLE than in those of the previous study. Some comments explicitly contrast the face-to-face component of English class with the fully remote classes of other subjects: *Most other classes were remote, so conversation practice was enjoyable*. As suggested by the quantitative data, such responses may point to a renewed significance that English class played as a social space for students and some benefits of the hybrid model of classes.

Table 4. Sources of Enjoyment Reported by Learners (n = 275)

Category	Number of Tokens
Specific Classroom Activities	184
Social Interaction	85
Mastery / Improvement of English Skills	35
Learner Agency	31
Teacher Skills / Teacher Recognition	29
Authentic Use of English	13
Classroom Atmosphere	13

4.4.2 Sources of Anxiety

Slightly more than half (n = 252) of respondents chose to write a comment specifically addressing classroom anxiety. Of those 252 comments, 65 indicated that there was nothing in particular that caused them anxiety, leaving a total of 187 comments for analysis. As with the FLE comments described above, the majority of the comments were very brief and did not provide much detail into why a particular aspect of language learning caused anxiety. This is quite similar to the response profile of learners in the face-to-face context, as detailed in Xethakis et al. (2022). In that study, three categories were found to be

particularly anxiety-inducing, namely *Speaking*, *Listening*, and *Grammar/Accuracy*. In the current study, *Speaking* was once again by far the most often cited cause for anxiety as shown in Table 5. In fact, in terms of the number of tokens for each category, the results are quite similar between learners in each context. Grammar and accuracy are mentioned often in comments from both studies, and a perceived lack of knowledge or English skill also figures prominently: *My English is poor so I am afraid my partner can't understand me*. One stark difference between the two groups was that the learners in an HLE reported much less anxiety connected to *Listening* (16 tokens) than those in a face-to-face context (44 tokens), which could be attributed to less time in the classroom trying to understand English being spoken in real time.

Table 5. Sources of Anxiety Reported by Learners (n = 252)

Category	Number of Tokens
Speaking	107
Social Interaction	47
Grammar/Accuracy	44
Lack of knowledge/English skill	33
Specific Activity	31
Listening	16
Teacher issues	16
Assessment	10
Writing	8
Pronunciation	5

5. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the emotional states of English learners at a Japanese university one-and-a-half academic years into the Covid-19 pandemic, when online teaching and social distancing within the classroom had become a well-established practice, and further to examine the effects of HLE on the emotions of these students through comparison with a similar group of learners from a previous study carried out in 2019 (Xethakis et al., 2022). In regard to levels of enjoyment and anxiety (RQ1), the learners in this study reported more enjoyment, both private and social, than anxiety. This is line with previous research on positive and negative emotions in more traditional learning contexts (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019). Also paralleling previous research, learners' attitudes toward English and their self-reported level of

English proficiency had a positive relationship with feelings of enjoyment, while a negative one with feelings of anxiety (RQ2). Sources of positive and negative emotions reported by learners in an HLE were also quite similar to those in face-to-face classrooms (RQ3). High on the list of enjoyable aspects were specific classroom activities, particularly gamified activities encouraging interaction, feelings of mastery or improvement of English skills, and importantly, the opportunity to interact with other classmates. Anxiety inducing aspects included worries over making mistakes, experiencing a lack of knowledge or skill, and speaking or interacting with classmates.

When compared to learners enrolled in the same course prior to the pandemic (RQ4), the learners in this study expressed lower levels of both enjoyment and anxiety. In their study examining the effect that ERT had on learners' emotions, Resnik and Dewaele (2021) found there to be a dulling effect on emotional responses when courses are moved completely online, with learners reporting lower levels of positive and negative emotions in online classes than they did in in-person settings. While it is perhaps beneficial for language learners to experience lower levels of anxiety, that must be weighed against the loss of enjoyment in these contexts. The results of the present study also reflect the complex nature of learner's affective states in an online or hybrid learning environment. Similar to Resnik and Dewaele (2021), this study found no significant correlation between enjoyment and anxiety in a non-traditional learning environment whereas previous research has shown these two emotions to be negatively correlated. This decoupling may be related to the reduced emotional resonance found in both Resnik and Dewaele (2021) and in the present study, and is an aspect of the HLE and other online learning environments which warrants further study.

Without a doubt, the emotions of the learners who took part in this study were muted to an extent, with learners expressing less enjoyment and less anxiety than similar learners at the same university in a fully face-to-face, pre-pandemic setting. It is important to note, however, that the declines in enjoyment and anxiety in this study were smaller than those found by Resnik and Dewaele (2021), and only the decline in social enjoyment was statistically significant. One likely explanation for this difference is that the present study focuses on the impact of an HLE approach to socially distanced communicative classes rather than an ERT approach. Citing Hodges et al. (2020) in reference to the challenges of ERT, Resnik and Dewaele (2021) make the point that it can take from six to nine months to develop and implement a meaningful online course at tertiary level. The

HLE context in which this study took place was not a fully online course and cannot be described as ERT. Rather it grew out of the experience of ERT, leading to a carefully planned and well-implemented HLE course, which may have aided in limiting the reduction in learners' emotional responses. More research is required to draw firm conclusions, but this suggests that any such dulling effect, and perhaps other negative effects associated with fully online learning, can be effectively mitigated through the implementation of a hybrid model including limited face-to-face (or socially distanced, but not-screen mediated) class time.

One further interesting finding of this study concerned the relationships between the social and private aspects of enjoyment and learners' attitudes. While the differences were small, Pearson correlations revealed a stronger relationship between ATE and PFLE than between learners' attitudes and social aspects of enjoyment. This finding suggests that one effective means of improving learners' attitudes in the present circumstances where social interaction with classmates may be limited would be to provide them with more opportunities to experience a sense of accomplishment or authentic use of the L2, two aspects of PFLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). The resulting improvement in attitudes could lead to a greater willingness to communicate, as more favourable attitudes toward learning an L2 have been linked to a greater willingness to communicate (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018).

While there may have been a slight dulling effect for learners in the HLE context, the kinds of activities which students cited as either enjoyable or anxiety-inducing mirrors that of the learners in the more traditional face-to-face context. In other words, students may have felt comparatively less enjoyment and less anxiety in the HLE classes, but their feelings about the sources of these emotions, such as certain activity types, remained consistent. For many students, doing group work and interacting with their peers or even their teacher is the most enjoyable part of class, while the same kinds of activities are clearly quite anxiety-inducing for other students. Learners in both contexts cite concerns about grammatical accuracy and a lack of English knowledge as causing them to feel anxious when communicating in English. It would appear that no matter the context (face-to-face or hybrid), learners at this university in Japan (and perhaps others like it) are going to be concerned about their less-than-perfect English. The one area where learners in an HLE reported experiencing slightly less anxiety than those in a traditional context was with listening, which could be explained by the reduction in the amount of time they were required to listen to and comprehend English in real-time.

In addition, learners in this study expressed less favourable attitudes towards English than learners in a face-to-face context prior to the pandemic. There was a notable downward shift in the number of learners reporting a highly favourable attitude and a concurrent increase in the number of unfavourable attitudes, while the number of students reporting a generally favourable attitude remained similar. While this effect may be due to the more general reduction in emotional intensity found in an HLE, it may also be due to the more limited nature of learners' interactions with their classmates. It may be that learners in a HLE have fewer opportunities to perceive their language learning successes than when interacting in a traditional classroom. Learners' levels of self-perceived proficiency exhibited a similar downward trend, and the reason for this trend may be similar. Learners may have much more difficulty perceiving their classmates' levels of proficiency in an online or hybrid learning environment. As they have had little experience working with classmates, they may see themselves as less proficient because they haven't been as exposed to the true ability of their peers as in a traditional classroom. This is particularly noteworthy in that learners who saw themselves as less skilled than their peers tended to experience more anxiety and less enjoyment. It may be that if such learners were able to gain a more accurate perception of their own level of language proficiency, they would come to enjoy language learning more as a result.

Perhaps one practical implication that can be taken from the results of this study is the renewed importance of having students interact with each other, even if it is for short durations in a socially distanced manner. Comparing learners in a traditional classroom and those in an HLE revealed a downward trend in the number of students reporting feelings of anxiety, enjoyment, favourable attitudes towards English and self-perceived language proficiency in the latter. Each of these factors may be due to the reduction in face-to-face social interaction that comes with an online or hybrid environment. However, this effect is not as pronounced as that found in Resnik and Dewaele's (2021) study of emotional responses in ERT. This may suggest that any dulling effect on learners' emotional responses can be reduced by the inclusion of even a small amount of in-person interaction in a well-planned hybrid environment. As noted above, learners' responses pointed towards a renewed significance that English class played as a social space for students and some benefits of the hybrid model of classes. For this reason, any form of social interaction teachers can create between learners can be seen as a positive which may to increase the emotional content of the

learning process. In addition, teachers should consider means of providing learners with more personal positive experiences such as feelings of success, achievement, or authentic language use regardless of the mode of instruction. These experiences can help to increase learners' feelings of enjoyment, which in turn can lead to more favourable attitudes and greater willingness to communicate.

While the results of this study appear to confirm, and perhaps add to, some of the findings in Resnik and Dewaele (2021), there are some limitations to the current study. First, while the current study found a less pronounced dulling effect than in the Resnik and Dewaele (2021) study, it is possible that this can be explained by the novelty of experiencing face-to-face classes for the first time. It should be noted that the learners' discussed in this study had not experienced face-to-face interaction in their first year of English classes at university. The higher level of enjoyment they reported in comparison to other ERT environments could simply be attributed to learners' feeling that any amount of interaction is better than none. In addition, the current study also found that these learners reported lower self-perceived proficiency compared to their peers, which could have affected their self-reported levels of FLCA and FLE. Other studies have shown that learners feeling less proficient than their peers has a negative impact on the level of enjoyment they feel and increases the amount of anxiety they feel. Therefore, the data collected from this group could be impacted by this factor.

In addition to these contextual factors, there were methodological limitations as well. First, learners were not asked to compare their emotional responses to the two aspects of the HLE – face-to-face and online. They were only asked to report their responses to the course in general. It is therefore difficult to tell which part of the course they were referring to when responding to the survey questions. Relatedly, in regards to comparing emotional responses across different contexts, it may have been better to ask a single group of students their feelings about HLE vs face-to-face, rather than trying to compare two different groups of students as we have done. Finally, it should be noted that both datasets employed in this study were gathered from students at a single university and, while the sample size is large and contains responses from students enrolled in a variety of majors, this fact lessens the generalizability of this study's results.

6. Conclusion

While the emotions of the learners in this study do seem slightly

muted, similar to the dulling effect described in studies of language learner emotions in ERT environments, they also bore a strong resemblance to the emotions of learners in studies conducted in more traditional face-to-face contexts. The learners in the present study expressed greater enjoyment than anxiety overall; those with more favourable attitudes toward English, in general, expressed greater enjoyment; and those who felt they were not as proficient as their peers expressed greater feelings of unease. As such, these findings broadly align with those in Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014) original study on FLE, as well as most other studies on enjoyment in traditional classroom contexts (e.g., Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Saito et al., 2018; Uzun, 2017). This is a heartening finding as language learners are faced with continuing restrictions on face-to-face learning or social interaction in response to the pandemic and may be so again in future. While the dulling effect on learners' emotions is not entirely insignificant, it seems apparent that a well-planned HLE can act as an effective middle-ground between traditional face-to-face classrooms and online only provision of language classes. Further, the role of social interaction in the language learning classroom should not be understated. The results of this study suggest that providing a space where learners can interact and develop their language ability in tandem with peers remains of significant value and merits deliberation when designing socially distanced curricula.

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