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Special Issue
Studies in Language Education 1

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Affect, cognition and ideology in language pedagogy. Introduction to the special issue *Studies in Language Education 1*

This first special issue of *Crossroads. A Journal of English Studies* dedicated to English language education is intended as the beginning of a series of volumes that will be devoted to various aspects of language teaching and second language acquisition. The special issues aim to create a platform that welcomes both experienced scholars and aspiring researchers, including MA and PhD students. In this way, we strive to form an egalitarian community where all members are able to share their research findings and receive recognition that may contribute to their further advancement in the field.

The studies presented in this special issue demonstrate a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods, such as semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and aptitude tests. The volume comprises articles that focus on learner individual differences, specifically motivation and language aptitude, as well as English teachers' resilience and critical perspectives in higher English education.

Motivation has been firmly established as one of the most robust indicators of success in learning foreign languages (Dörnyei & Ushioda 2021; Dörnyei & Schmidt 2001). However, the challenge of initiating and maintaining motivation remains a significant matter that warrants attention in both research and classroom practice.

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In recent years, research has concentrated on the dynamic nature of motivation and methods to apprehend a range of elements that are at play in sustaining motivation (Dörnyei & Ryan 2015). Consequently, new constructs of directed motivational currents (DMCs) and sustained flow (SF) have been introduced. A DMC is defined as a "unique period of heightened motivation that is set into motion by the combination of a number of factors in the pursuit of a specific goal or vision" (Dörnyei, Ibrahim & Muir 2015: 97). DMS and SF are interrelated terms, which may lead to ambiguity regarding the difference between them. In general, sustained flow also encompasses a sense of complete absorption, which involves the pursuit of a goal in an organized fashion, and the subsequent feeling of contentment (Ibrahim & Al-Hoorie 2019).

In motivation research, in addition to learner-induced motivation surges, significant emphasis is placed on motivational interventions carried out by language educators. The purpose of these interventions, referred to as motivational strategies, is "to consciously generate and enhance student motivation, as well as maintain ongoing motivated behaviour and protect it from distracting and/or competing action tendencies" (Dörnyei & Ushioda 2021: 103).

Aptitude, which is a cognitive learner variable found within major classifications of individual differences (Ellis 2008), constitutes another factor that strongly predicts future success in language learning. The relevant research concentrates on the relationship between language aptitude and both general language ability and specific elements of linguistic performance. While most studies reveal that aptitude is a strong predictor of general language proficiency, the levels of its predictive validity vary for particular language skills and elements (Li 2016).

Teacher resilience is another theme addressed within the volume. The conceptualisations of resilience are diverse; however, in simple terms, it may be apprehended as "what sustains teachers and enables them to thrive rather than just survive in the profession" (Beltman et al. 2011: 11). Different viewpoints on teacher resilience have spurred research on both theoretical and practical levels. These include perspectives that centre on individuals, processes, systems, and contexts (Beltman 2021). The last framework is of particular importance as, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the field of teaching underwent heightened complexity, which involved, first of all, the challenges of the transfer of classroom learning into virtual environments.

The final issue discussed in the volume revolves around critical approaches to English Philology studies. According to McGroarty (2017: 230), three trends can be identified as pervading language education at various levels: employing language as a recruitment instrument to increase student numbers, implementing restructuring and privatization in language instruction as a means to attain enhanced institutional flexibility, and perceiving "language learning as self-realization, often directed toward professional or occupational ends, but admitting selected other goals in some circumstances". As with

other domains of public and higher education, language learning embraces a "corporate-based ideology" that involves standardizing programmes, hierarchical management structures, and a focus on job-related training (Giroux 2020: 9). Within this neoliberal framework, the higher educational environment "at its worst abhors academic exploration and intellectual self-development as ends in themselves" (Di Leo 2020: 10). To counter these tendencies, the implementation of critical pedagogy-based methodology is often viewed as an effective means of promoting critical thinking and raising self-awareness among university students.

The volume opens with **Arkadiusz Pietluch's** investigation into negative emotions experienced by language learners undergoing sustained flow. Since the flow is usually associated with positive affect, the study seeks to contribute to scarce data showing negative emotions within the phenomenon. Following semi-structured interviews, the author employs thematic analysis to categorize the nature of emotions experienced by adult language learners. The following three sources of adverse emotions are identified: preoccupation surpassing SF requirements, inner pressure to engage in SF routines, and a prolonged sense of loss. Although the study shows that negative affect is not common, negative emotionality experienced in the SF phenomenon may lead to premature cessation of certain experiences, and its negative consequences may extend beyond the timeframe of SF. The author suggests that caution should be recommended with respect to inducing SF in the classroom context due to the unpredictable short- and long-term consequences of the phenomenon.

The second paper in the volume, by **Agnieszka Dudzik** and **Agnieszka Dzięcioł-Pędich**, presents the results of a quantitative study of English teachers' resilience in the era of remote learning. The authors examine difficulties faced by language educators in online learning environments and the strategies that teachers use to alleviate stress. They also investigate students' adjustment to the conditions of remote learning and its impact on teaching practice. The paper concludes with implications for teacher education and learner training, including a demand to provide sufficient preparation for online learning and teaching, and highlighting the need to reconceptualise learner autonomy in virtual classrooms.

The ***Work in Progress*** section commences with an article by **Urszula Sawicka**, in which the author examines the findings of an observational study on teacher motivational behaviour within the English classroom setting. A modified observational sheet adapted from Dörnyei and Guilloteaux (2008) is used to record both teachers' motivational strategies and students' motivated behaviour. The outcomes reveal the limited use of motivating strategies and the lack of impact of teacher motivating practices on learners' engagement in the lesson.

The purpose of **Grażyna Gorbacz-Dailida's** preliminary study is to investigate a potential link between language aptitude and overall phonetic ability among students of English

philology. The study utilizes the Polish adaptation of the Modern Language Aptitude Test (Rysiewicz 2008) and a test of phonetic skills developed by the author on the basis of the programme of BA studies and the syllabi of phonetics courses at the University of Białystok. Although no significant correlation has been found between the students' level of aptitude and their general phonetic ability, the author enumerates a number of factors that may have contributed to the lack of correlation in the study.

The special issue concludes with an article by **Marcelina Kalinowska** concerning English philology students' perceptions of the incorporation of contentious subjects in literature courses. The study, grounded in critical pedagogy, employs qualitative methods to collect and analyse data. The results indicate students' readiness to engage in discussion of sensitive issues as long as the classroom environment ensures impartiality and inclusiveness, and there is an effort to raise awareness of cultural differences between the home and target communities.

It is our sincere hope that the diverse issues covered in the present volume will attract the attention of scholars representing different fields within the realm of language education. We would like to express our thanks to the authors for their contributions and the reviewers for their effort to increase the quality of submitted papers. We are particularly grateful to Daniel Karczewski, the *Crossroads* editor in charge of linguistic articles, for his invaluable assistance and support.

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Negative affect in sustained flow: An investigation into adverse consequences of prolonged engagement

Abstract. Sustained flow (SF) is a motivational phenomenon characterised by long-term, heightened engagement in pursuit of personally meaningful goals (Dörnyei et al. 2014). As SF experiences allow individuals to produce exceptional accomplishments, it was initially conceptualised that positive emotionality is the only type of affect associated with the flow. However, a closer analysis of former studies revealed that negative emotions, such as frustration or anxiety, are not uncommon for the phenomenon at hand (Ibrahim 2016; Muir 2020; Sak & Gurbuz 2022). Considering the scarcity of prior efforts to scrutinise SF experiences for the presence of negative affect, the present study was initiated to fill the gap in SF-related research. Following the sampling phase, which sought to identify prospective SFs amongst 163 adult individuals learning foreign languages, thematic analysis was applied to elucidate the nature of the affect experienced by the respondents. The final sample consisted of 4 participants who reported experiencing severe negative emotional stimulation associated with their SFs. Based on these accounts, three major sources of negative affect were identified, i.e., preoccupation beyond SF requirements, inner coercion to perform SF routines, and a prolonged sense of loss. While instances of negative affect associated with SF are relatively rare, it was found that this type of emotionality may cause some experiences to cease prematurely, and some of its potential consequences may exceed the lifespan of SF.

Keywords: sustained flow, negative affect, second language motivation, prolonged engagement, positive emotionality

1. Introduction

Motivation has long been considered a valid predictor of learners' success in learning a foreign language (FL) (Dörnyei & Schmidt 2001). Yet, no consensus has been reached

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as to why some individuals are more skilful in maintaining their dedication over time. In efforts to partially remedy this dilemma, Dörnyei, Muir, and Ibrahim (2014) put forward the concept of sustained flow and postulate that SFs[2] are motivational surges of extreme intensity that emerge when a number of personal, contextual, and temporal factors come together to help an individual discover an opportunity to pursue personally meaningful goals. The construct bears similarities to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of *flow*[3], which depicts short-term, yet complete absorption in intrinsically rewarding tasks. However, contrary to their mother construct, SF experiences are believed to cover timescales of months or even years (Pietluch 2022). Additionally, while engagement in flow stems from sheer pleasure generated by a task itself, those affected by the SFs regularly perform tasks that may not be intrinsically enjoyable in contexts other than that of an SF experience (Muir & Gümüş 2020). The unique motivational qualities of the phenomenon are believed to stem from the combination of tangible, personally meaningful objectives (such as improving one's language proficiency to match the requirements of a study abroad programme) with a facilitative structure (including goal-centred routines and frequent progress markers), allowing individuals to successfully sustain their dedication. Although individual SFs vary in intensity, focus, and length, the phenomenon is typically characterised by the presence of three distinguishing characteristics, namely goal/vision-orientedness, salient facilitative structure, and positive emotionality (Dörnyei et al. 2014).

1.1. Goal/Vision-orientedness

The directional nature of SF experiences makes them qualitatively different from random motivational pursuits and, while experiencing the flow, individuals navigate through the path leading towards their personally meaningful goals (Muir 2016). However, in the case of more demanding endeavours, even a firmly anchored desire to accomplish may not suffice in producing the desired achievement. Thus, although emotionally gratifying and personally meaningful objectives are central to the phenomenon at hand, the initial scholarship on SFs sought to explain their atypical intensity and permanence in the presence of the vision element (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova 2014; Dörnyei et al. 2015). Cox (2012: 12) explains that "vision operates within the constraints of reality so that the human brain perceives an experience as a genuine opportunity for action". On top of providing cohesion and direction to one's efforts, vision is believed to transform abstract, cognitive goals into tangible images of goal achievement. For instance, the vision of becoming

2 As suggested by Ibrahim and Al-Hoorie (2018), the term SF is used throughout the paper to acknowledge the contribution of the '*flow*' construct to the conceptualisation of Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs) and avoid terminological proliferation.

3 For more information on the concept of flow see Csikszentmihalyi (1990).

a teacher goes far beyond obtaining adequate qualifications; individuals whose goals are infused with a strong sensory element of vision would most typically conjure up the images of performing the actual profession, enabling them to experience the corresponding joy prior to goal accomplishment. While the presence of the vision element has been frequently used to discriminate between SFs and standard cases of motivated behaviour, it was recently postulated by Al-Hoorie and Al Shlowiy (2020) that vision may not necessarily be a prerequisite of an SF experience. A closer analysis of SF studies to date seems to corroborate this view, as some SF accounts described in the relevant literature indeed did not involve conjuring up mental images of future achievement (Henry et al. 2015; Ibrahim 2020). Although there may be no solid basis for considering vision as the major driving force behind all SF experiences, adding the visionary quality to a personally relevant goal may contribute to inducing prospective SFs and maintaining the motivational qualities of the phenomenon (Sak & Gurbuz 2022).

1.2. A salient facilitative structure

The structure of SF experiences is characterised by three hallmark features which, combined, create somewhat of a facilitative motivational scaffolding for those experiencing the phenomenon. Dörnyei et al. (2014) allege that SFs do not magically drift into being but are consciously launched when individuals find themselves in the right personal, contextual, and temporal circumstances to pursue concrete and meaningful future identities. This auspicious alignment of factors is believed to generate an influx of motivational energy that ongoingly fuels an experience (Dörnyei et al. 2014). Additionally, those affected by the phenomenon typically develop behavioural routines that allow them to stay connected to their desired accomplishments. As such behaviours are conducive to one's future identity, not only do they not require constant volitional control (Dörnyei et al. 2016), but also the lack of possibility to perform them may evoke feelings of discomfort or guilt (Pietluch 2021). This leads those affected to select SF-related behaviours at the expense of other activities that may potentially impede accomplishment. Lastly, a typical SF account involves the development of certain measures that would allow those affected to assess their efforts. This is achieved through setting various sub-goals which divide challenging endeavours into more manageable chunks and offer tangible feedback on progress (Safdari & Maftoon 2017). Importantly, although the presence of a salient facilitative structure was initially viewed as an indispensable element of an SF experience, a recent review carried out by Jahedizadeh and Al-Hoorie (2021) reveals that some SFs may follow their unique trajectories, and the lack of certain structural properties does not necessarily rule out the existence of the phenomenon.

1.3. Positive emotionality

Positive emotionality that spreads throughout an experience is the final defining component of the SF phenomenon (Dörnyei et al. 2014). This overall positive affect stems from the very heart of SF, namely the ability to pursue a personally meaningful vision. Henry et al. (2015: 330) indicate that "the enjoyment projected from the overall emotional loading of the target vision permeates each step along the way, even including engagement in activities that normally could seem tedious or boring". By transforming often mundane activities into tasks contributing to the accomplishment of one's desired vision, SFs provide cohesion to one's actions and give rise to an unremitting sense of happiness and growth (Pietluch 2022). The positive emotionality while experiencing SF is believed to take two primary forms: (i) *eudaimonic well-being,* with positive affect stemming from an abundance of opportunities to self-actualise, and (ii) *anticipatory emotions,* allowing individuals to experience the rewarding consequences of their end goals prior to their accomplishment (Ibrahim 2020).

2. Research rationale

The initial studies on the SF phenomenon sought to generate confirmatory evidence for the presence of the tripartite model put forward by Dörnyei and his associates (2014) by examining the experiences of adult learners from different backgrounds, including migrant learners of Swedish (Henry et al. 2015) or prospective teachers of English (Zarrinabadi & Tavakoli 2017). Due to its unique motivational properties, it was not long until the construct successfully captured researchers' attention, giving rise to more focused analyses. To enumerate a few, other studies investigated affective patterns in SF (Ibrahim 2016, 2020), motivational fluctuations while in the flow (Selcuk & Erten 2017; Sak 2020), and the impact of sociodemographic variables (including age, gender, and nationality) on the emergence of the phenomenon (Muir 2016; Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh 2017). Other researchers focused on learners' individual variables and linked SF experiences with higher autonomy and willingness to communicate (Zarrinabadi et al. 2019) or self-efficacy (Pietluch 2018; Pietluch 2021). At the other end of the spectrum, only a handful of studies have attempted to put the potential of the construct into practice. In his study conducted on 25 Japanese undergraduates, Watkins (2016) succeeded in inducing SF-like engagement through the application of a curriculum that targeted the core constituents of the construct. The intervention study carried out by Garcia-Pinar (2020) on four undergraduates indicated that personally fulfilling and clearly defined group projects have the potential to inspire SFs. Finally, Pietluch (2021) attempted to induce real-time SF experiences among 16 adult EFL learners, and the outcomes of the project corroborated the assumption that imbuing an SF-centred curriculum with efficacy-building techniques may increase the likelihood of SF emergence.

Despite the formerly mentioned investigative efforts, the research on SF experiences is still in its infancy, and some essential facets of the phenomenon remain severely understudied. One of such potential research avenues pertains to the nature of the affect experienced while in the flow. As the promise of overall positive emotionality is one of the core constituents of the construct (Dörnyei et al. 2014), SF experiences were primarily portrayed in a positive light, with their rewarding consequences outweighing any potential side effects. Regardless of this tendency to look at SFs through rose-coloured glasses and the fact that those experiencing the phenomenon usually recall their experiences in a rather positive manner, some research projects, although not always directly, suggested that functioning within the SF zone may entail the risk of being exposed to a whole spectrum of negative affective consequences. For instance, Ibrahim (2016) found that the lack of satisfactory progress en route to one's desired accomplishment may trigger temporary feelings of frustration and boredom. More severe instances of negative affect can be found in the study conducted by Muir (2020), who reported that some of those affected by the phenomenon were strongly unwilling to undergo a similar experience in the future due to the presence of subversive consequences such as stress, anxiety, and even depression. Furthermore, in the only study to date with a focus on the negative side effects of SF experiences, Sak and Gurbuz (2022) found that while experiencing the phenomenon, individuals are prone to feelings of inadequacy, mental distress, and sorrow. Considering the studies to date have focused primarily on positive affective patterns within SF (Ibrahim 2016, 2020), the following research questions were set out for the present investigation:

RQ1: Is positive emotionality indeed the only type of affect experienced by those undergoing the SF phenomenon?

RQ2: What are the sources of negative affect within SF?

3. Method

3.1. Participants and sampling

A call for participants was issued on several social media groups for language learning enthusiasts to compose a research sample for the present study; the hope was that reaching a more diversified audience would contribute to obtaining more in-depth insights on the nature of negative affect while experiencing the phenomenon under scrutiny here. During the study, demographic data of the respondents were collected. A total of 163 submissions were received (female: 94, 57.67%; male: 69, 42.33%), and the participants ranged in age from 19 to 64 (M=27.33; SD=4.36). In terms of the respondents' nationality, 132 were Polish (80.98%), 11 were Ukrainian (6.75%), 7 were German (4.29%), 6 were English (3.68%), 4 were Slovakian (2.45%), 2 were Czech (1.23%), and a single respondent indicated Estonia as his home country (0.62%). In terms of language learning experience,

18 respondents indicated that they had been studying an FL for less than three years (11.04%), 111 (68.1%) for three to five years, 26 (15.95%) for six to ten years, and 8 (4.91%) for more than ten years. The vast majority indicated English as their desired L2 (n=146, 89.57%). The remaining participants had been learning Polish (n=8, 4.91%), Spanish (n=6, 3.68%), and Italian (n=3, 1.84%). None of the respondents disclosed learning two or more languages at the time of their motivational experiences.

The questionnaire data were collected in an online format between February and April 2022 using the *DMC Disposition Scale* elaborated by Muir (2016) (see below). The scale was adapted to Google Forms and distributed to the participants' personal e-mail addresses. The methodology and aims of the study were explained in an introductory section of the survey. While responding to the questionnaire items, the participants were requested to focus on the periods of intense motivational engagement based in an educational context, preferably that of foreign language learning. An exemplary account of such an occurrence was also shared with the respondents (a person who developed communicative proficiency in Spanish over a short period of time to participate in a work-related training scheme). Importantly, the background information on the construct was limited to avoid the risk of leading the respondents to describe occurrences that would imitate SF. Following the collection phase, the dataset was screened to identify fully-fledged SF experiences based on the theoretical model elaborated by Dörnyei et al.[4] (2014). Additionally, as some accounts required clarification, follow-up email requests were sent to the respondents. Out of 163 submissions, 16 (female: 7, 43.75%; male: 9, 56.25%) SF accounts were identified.

In the qualitative phase, the 16 respondents who came forward were interviewed using online platforms (e.g., Skype, Zoom) on four separate occasions between March and June 2022. The interviews were conducted in English and lasted 40 minutes on average. Upon receiving the participants' consent, the interview sessions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. For the sake of confidentiality, the participants' names were changed. Written summaries were provided to the respondents to ensure the corresponding descriptions were factual.

Although SF experiences are primarily portrayed in a positive light, the analysis of the literature revealed that being caught up in the flow may also provoke adverse consequences (Ibrahim 2016; Muir 2020; Sak & Gurbuz 2022). Considering moderate negative affect may favour accomplishment by encouraging individuals to intensify their efforts (Strack & Esteves 2014), the decision was made to put the focus on episodes of significant

4 Although the original model proposed by Dörnyei et al. (2014) has been criticised, and the core constituents of SF still require further investigation, it remains the main reference point for distinguishing between SFs and standard cases of motivated behaviour (e.g., Başöz & Gümüş 2022; Sak & Gurbuz 2022).

severity. Consequently, the interview data were screened to discard the accounts where negative stimulation was only temporary and did not impair the self-reported life quality of those affected (in total, 9 participants reported experiencing moderate negative emotional stimulation). On this basis, four accounts were qualified for further analysis (female: one, 25%; male: three, 75%).

3.2. Instrumentation

3.2.1. DMC Disposition Scale

To identify potential SF cases for further qualitative analysis, the *DMC Disposition Scale* developed by Muir (2016) was used. The scale consists of 12 items arranged on a 5-point Likert continuum, with the possible answers ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). As each item in the instrument is descriptive of a particular facet of the phenomenon, the tool allows for relatively straightforward identification of SF accounts. At the same time, the inclusion of open-ended questions enables a researcher to gain in-depth insights into individual experiences. The questionnaire offers high internal consistency (with Cronbach's alpha of 0.84); considering the novel context of the present investigation, the internal consistency of the instrument was assessed and rendered a score of 0.89.

3.2.2. Semi-structured interviews

In-depth insights regarding the participants' experiences were collected through a semi-structured interview protocol designed for the present study. During the interview sessions, the respondents were requested to narrate their exceptionally intense learning experiences. In addition to the questions incorporated in the interview protocol (see Appendix A), a typical interview would also involve some follow-up questions to elicit the essence of each experience. The additional questions were primarily concerned with the respondents' affective states. As participating in an interview may generate tension and anxiety, a typical session would also involve several probing questions.

3.3. Procedure

As the novel context of the present study necessitated more elaborate interpretations, it was decided that inductive thematic analysis would best suit the purpose of the research. Nowell et al. (2017) indicated that in such an approach, an analysis does not concentrate on seeking evidence to validate some preconceived themes, but rather the themes are determined by the dataset. Consequently, the entire dataset was read several times so that a better comprehension of individual experiences could be developed, and a descriptive account was produced for each experience. In the next step, the essential aspects of the accounts were highlighted with different colours, providing the researcher with an

overview of common meanings present in the dataset (Braun & Clarke 2006). The extract below illustrates the procedure:

Table 1. Codes-sample

Interview extract:	Codes:
When I wasn't writing, I would spend hours looking for thesis resources or just reading forums with people sharing their PhD experiences. It was all a part of my process. I would easily spend at least 10 hours a day working towards achieving my dream, including weekends. It was so much fun! My husband was very supportive, especially at the beginning. He took care of everyday things like shopping, walking our dogs, cooking, etc.	• Unnecessary routine • Excessive time investment • Giving up typical routines

The labels were then reviewed to ensure they represented the dominant patterns in the data (Ibrahim 2017). Codes which were deemed unclear or overlapping were discarded. Two primary measures were employed to enhance the credibility of the study; in addition to providing the respondents with written summaries of their accounts, an external audit was conducted, and an expert in the field was requested to verify the veracity of the procedure and the corresponding interpretations. Both coding procedures yielded similar results; minor name alterations proposed by the auditor were discussed and then implemented by the author.

4. Results and discussion

Following the data analysis, the negative affect experienced by the participants was linked to three distinctive sources: (i) *preoccupation beyond SF requirements*, with participants exerting more effort than necessitated by the nature of their SFs; (ii) *inner coercion to perform SF routines*, with individuals struggling with the lack of balance between their SFs and other life engagements; and finally, (iii) a *prolonged sense of loss,* with individuals being unable to resume their normal lives due to the intensity of their experiences.

4.1. Preoccupation beyond SF requirements

Efforts of those affected by the SF phenomenon are constantly aligned towards goal-achievement, and to increase the odds of reaching their desired objectives, individuals experiencing SF are believed to intuitively avoid engagement in other, non-relevant activities (Dörnyei et al. 2014). The analysis revealed that such engrossment, although beneficial for producing significant accomplishments, may also push individuals to produce more effort than necessitated by their SFs and, in consequence, provoke negative affect. Take, for instance, the case of Kamila (female, 28, Polish), who experienced her SF in the final year of MA studies:

> Kamila: I wanted to enrol in a PhD programme, so I had to study twice as hard, attend conferences, and publish papers. When I wasn't writing, I would spend hours looking for thesis resources or just reading forums with people sharing their PhD experiences. It was all part of my process. I would easily spend at least 10 hours a day working towards achieving my dream, including weekends. It was so much fun! My husband was very supportive, especially at the beginning. He took care of everyday things like shopping, walking our dogs, cooking, etc.
>
> Interviewer: Only at the beginning?
>
> Kamila: It must have been very hard for him. I was always busy with my goal, so we stopped seeing our friends or doing things together. We would have terrible fights about this, but for a long time, I couldn't stop. I felt incredibly guilty for letting him down, but it was my dream, you know?
>
> Interviewer: So when did things change?
>
> Kamila: When he mentioned divorcing me for the first time. I was devastated, and it was a tipping point for me, I think. It took us months to work things out, and I had to give up my PhD aspirations. I was proud of my academic life, and every little success gave me extreme happiness, but it felt like it was too big of a sacrifice.

Although SF-centred routines consumed most of the respondent's time, each minor accomplishment would bring her a sense of joy, suggesting that she indeed experienced positive emotionality typical for the phenomenon. Ibrahim (2020: 9) indicated that, while in the flow, "effort loses its traditional connotation, and self-regulatory measures become unnecessary, allowing individuals to invest the maximum effort towards their desired attainments". However, it can be inferred from the above account that the lack of such self-regulatory mechanisms may also backfire, causing individuals to overestimate the amount of effort required to match the demands of their SFs. Whereas experiencing SF would most typically involve the development of new, goal-conducive routines, not all the activities the participant had so eagerly embraced (e.g., reading forums about PhD experiences) were absolutely necessary for a fruitful completion of her SF. The excessive preoccupation led the participant to completely neglect other life aspects, and the corresponding decline in the quality of her marriage provoked negative affect and rendered the entire experience much less satisfying. This coincides with the findings of Sak and Gurbuz (2022), who indicated that such an excessive and prolonged dedication towards goal achievement may provoke feelings of sorrow due to continuous neglect of one's significant others and other desirable activities. Notably, Kamila's SF experience ebbed

away not as a result of reaching her ultimate goal but rather as a conscious decision made by the respondent. It could be concluded therefore that negative affect while experiencing the flow may have a bearing on whether SFs are promoted or inhibited. Accounts of similar excessive preoccupation are present in the relevant literature (Muir 2016; Ibrahim 2020).

Just like individual SF experiences vary in strength, focus, or duration, it seems those affected also display various degrees of readiness to recognise the detrimental impact of their SFs on other life domains. Unlike the previous respondent, who was well aware of the negative consequences throughout her experience, another participant mentioned that he had not experienced any negative affect until his SF began to dissipate. Grzegorz (24, male, Polish) was offered a job in an Italian branch of his company, and to complete the transition to this new role he was obliged to improve his command of the language. This obligation soon evolved into his favourite occupation, enabling the launch of his SF experience. When asked about how this newly found passion changed his life, the participant commented:

> Grzegorz: I would normally spend plenty of time with my friends; we used to hang out almost every day. That summer was totally different, though. After the classes, I spent hours studying on my own, watching videos in Italian, or just searching for additional materials. I was so proud of myself for doing more than other people on my course. I would stay up late every day, and even though it was difficult to wake up in the morning, I loved every minute of it. I fell in love with the language!
>
> Interviewer: You mentioned your friends. Did you have the time to see them?
>
> Grzegorz: Not really, no. They would often invite me for their birthdays, barbeques, and other occasions, but I would make silly excuses not to go. Back then, it felt as if they were standing in my way. I couldn't be bothered to check in with them, I was busy studying Italian. Their calls and texts were just distracting me, so I ignored them most of the time.

When asked about his willingness to experience SF in the future, the participant commented:

> Grzegorz: I don't think I would. I managed to make up with some of my friends, but others haven't spoken to me ever since that summer. I got what I wanted, but it wasn't worth it if you ask me.

The participant's affective obsession with his new passion was intense indeed. Many of the language learning routines he developed were not necessitated by the course

requirements, and although these were undoubtedly beneficial for his language proficiency, they successfully overshadowed other life aspects that the respondent would consider essential prior to his SF experience. Contrary to the formerly discussed account, the respondent did not struggle with prioritising his SF, which partially explains why positive emotionality was the dominant affective pattern throughout his experience. Yet, his approach towards his significant others is somewhat surprising. Challenging and longitudinal undertakings are bound to provoke mental and physical exhaustion, and it is not uncommon for those experiencing the SF phenomenon to seek support and consolation in their friends and families (Pietluch 2021). In stark contrast, not only was the respondent uninterested in seeking external support while his experience lasted, but also he perceived others as adversaries separating him from reaching his ultimate goal. This observation is in line with the findings of Ibrahim (2016), who suggested that individuals affected by SF may perceive other life engagements, including the time spent with family, as barriers separating them from goal-accomplishment. While resuming most pre-SF routines would be seemingly straightforward and effortless, the above account seems to suggest that, in some cases, the potential long-term costs of such motivational endeavours may outweigh the value individuals assign to their accomplishments. This, in turn, may have a bearing on whether individuals would seek to pursue similar goals in the future. Similar conclusions were reached in the recent study by Sak and Gurbuz (2022).

4.2. Inner coercion to perform SF routines

Much of the facilitative power of SF stems from the fact that it enables individuals to pursue long-desired objectives, giving rise to unique feelings of self-fulfilment and growth. On top of focusing their energies on performing SF-conducive tasks, those affected are most typically characterised by a constant mental, emotional, and cognitive preoccupation with their SFs (Ibrahim 2020). While this unceasing link unquestionably supports individuals in sustaining their goal-directed efforts, the analysis revealed that it may also evolve into inner coercion to perform SF-related routines. Robert's (32, male, German) SF emerged in the final year of his PhD studies, and while pursuing his doctoral degree he was simultaneously working in a 24/7 environment. When asked about how he had been coping with such a demanding lifestyle, he commented:

> Robert: I can't say I was coping, really. I was totally drained, and yet I couldn't rest. Don't get me wrong, I dreamt about getting a good night's sleep or going out with my friends. But whenever I was not working on my thesis, my thoughts were racing, and I felt guilty. I would review my thesis over and over again. My supervisor kept telling me I was doing great, but I was never satisfied with myself. It was especially bad when I was working nights.
>
> Interviewer: What do you mean?

> Robert: After a night shift, I would normally sleep for two or three hours and then I would push myself to work on my thesis. I was barely standing afterwards, but it was better than being angry at myself for not working on my dissertation. I constantly felt the pressure to work, especially while I was supposed to rest. I was a complete mess!
>
> Interviewer: Was it like that all the time?
>
> Robert: Actually, I don't know when I stopped enjoying my PhD. I mean, the first two years were great. Looking back, this obsession was absolutely unnecessary. I mean, for a short time, I was more productive, but I can't say I was happier.

The nature of Robert's engagement was qualitatively different to the formerly discussed accounts; whereas the all-present preoccupation of other participants stemmed from a sincere desire to stay connected with their goals, the respondent, except for the onset of his experience, reported feeling internally pressurised to concentrate on his thesis. Pietluch (2021) indicated that while in SF, actions conducive to one's desired accomplishment enter a person's daily repertoire to the extent that the lack of possibility to perform them may evoke feelings of discomfort or guilt. Based on the above account, it is possible to conclude that this otherwise favourable urge to concentrate on one's desired pursuit may also occasionally assume a debilitative role. It seems much of the negative affect the participant experienced resulted from the respondent's inability to maintain a healthy balance between his SF and other life engagements. More specifically, the internal pressure the participant had been experiencing while his actions were not SF-conducive led him to impose limitations on other fundamental life aspects. This constant clash, in turn, led to a significant decline in his perceived life quality, which stands in stark contrast with the promise of positive emotionality that permeates an SF experience (Dörnyei et al. 2014). Additionally, even though Robert's SF experience initially displayed all the core characteristics of the construct, including progress markers and goal-centred routines, the participant was unable to fully savour his progress and reported being constantly dissatisfied with his performance. This, in combination with the constant internal pressure he had been experiencing, caused the respondent's SF to cease prematurely. Thus, it may be tentatively assumed that while structural properties of the phenomenon support individuals in sustaining their dedication, a fruitful completion of an SF experience may require some additional measures that would allow individuals to adapt their lives to the requirements of these atypically demanding and longitudinal motivational undertakings.

4.3. Prolonged sense of loss

Functioning within the SF zone may constitute a significant challenge on both mental and physical levels, and although ruminative thoughts and fatigue are not uncommon throughout the experience, the rewarding consequences of the phenomenon are believed to outweigh any potential side effects (Dörnyei et al. 2014; Henry et al. 2015). While this may be the case for the majority of SF experiences, one of the accounts suggested that the adverse consequences of prolonged engagement may not be limited to the SF lifespan. Endrik (25, male, Estonian) experienced his SF while simultaneously pursuing two degrees. Positive emotionality was the dominant affective pattern throughout his SF, and the participant recalls the experience itself in a rather positive manner:

> Endrik: It was intense, I had never experienced something like that before. I was doing two different degrees, so I barely had the time to do anything else. I was proud of myself, though. Of course, it wasn't easy—I had to give up some of my daily routines, and I would see my family rarely. I have never felt so great about myself, though, and I thought it was worth it at the time.
>
> Interviewer: Could you please elaborate?
>
> Endrik: I was really tired while it lasted, but it was normal, I think. It got much worse after I completed my degrees. It may sound weird, but at that time my life finally had some meaning. It felt like I was in the right place at the right time. So when I finished my degrees, it left this giant hole in my life. I was constantly obsessed with doing something meaningful. Instead of taking the time to catch up with my friends or do something pleasant, I felt this strong urge to do something productive, something that would make me feel good about myself again. This drove me crazy! I was so obsessed with finding a new goal that I started having panic attacks.
>
> I: And how did you cope?
>
> Endrik: After a few months, I saw a specialist, and I've been taking anti-anxiety meds ever since.

Ibrahim (2020) indicated that experiencing the SF phenomenon most typically involves continuous cognitive, mental, and emotional engagement. While in the previously analysed extracts individuals would experience negative affect stemming from excessive preoccupation throughout their SF journeys, with individual accounts varying as to the extent to which those affected were capable of recognising the detrimental consequences of prolonged engagement, the above account leads us to believe that negative side

effects of such immoderate determination to pursue one's long sought after objective may also manifest themselves after the experience ceases to exist. More specifically, the respondent disclosed that following the completion of his SF, he developed somewhat of an obsession towards finding a new objective that would once again provide him with a sense of purpose. Considering the nature of engagement within SF and the fact that even minor deviations from the SF trajectory may provoke mental distress (Sak & Gurbuz 2022), it comes as no real surprise that individuals may initially consider their post-SF lives as purposeless. This observation coincides with the findings of Henry et al. (2015), who indicated that not every SF will gradually ebb away as an experience nears its completion, allowing individuals to systematically resume their typical pre-SF routines. Whereas it may be hypothesised that most of those experiencing SFs will be quick to adjust by drawing on the sense of accomplishment, it seems that an abrupt end to a phenomenon of such intensity may render some individuals prone to experiencing a prolonged sense of loss. Although the reasons for this inability to resume normal life require further investigative work, the above account appears to suggest that this otherwise favourable inclination towards engagement may also have some long-lasting negative consequences.

5. Conclusions, limitations, and future research avenues

The positive emotionality that spreads throughout an experience is one of the most striking characteristics of the SF phenomenon; while in the flow, the actions of those affected are channelled towards the accomplishment of long-desired objectives, which gives rise to feelings of self-concordance and satisfaction (Ibrahim 2016). However, a closer analysis of the former studies indicated that this unremitting sense of fulfilment may not be the only affective pattern associated with the flow, and functioning within the SF zone may entail the risk of being exposed to a whole spectrum of negative consequences, including frustration, mental distress, anxiety, or even depression (Ibrahim 2016; Muir 2020; Sak & Gurbuz 2022). The results of the present investigation seem to provide further confirmatory evidence for this observation. Even though the SF experiences of the respondents varied in their focus, what all these accounts had in common was the significant decline in life quality provoked by the phenomenon under scrutiny here. Additionally, it was found that experiencing negative affect while in SF may cause some experiences to cease prematurely. Despite the fact that the frequency of detrimental affect within the SF zone is relatively low, its potential adverse consequences should not be underestimated, and any attempts to purposefully induce SFs should be approached with caution. Thus, prospective studies researching negative emotionality associated with experiencing SF could concentrate on developing a set of counteractive measures that would maximise the benefits of the phenomenon and, at the same time, limit the occurrence of potential side effects.

As far as the sources of negative affect are concerned, the negative emotional states of the respondents were linked to three distinctive sources, namely preoccupation beyond SF requirements, inner coercion to perform SF routines, and a prolonged sense of loss. To open with the first theme, it was concluded that the ability to pursue one's long-desired objective and the corresponding injection of motivational energy may lead to overt effort expenditure, frequently at the expense of other essential life aspects. Although the literature on SFs abounds with examples of individuals temporarily sacrificing typical routines to match the requirements of their pursuits (Henry et al. 2015; Ibrahim 2016, 2020; Sak & Gurbuz 2022), a typical SF experience does not usually connote the complete neglect of other life domains. This was the case for two of the participants, who, in their efforts to stay connected with newly found callings, consciously eliminated their regular routines instead of adapting their lifestyles to accommodate more time for their desired attainments. While focusing one's energies on a highly desired goal may increase the odds of accomplishment, the participants of the study were severely underperforming in other domains, which, in the long run, provoked a substantial amount of negative affect.

Those experiencing the SF phenomenon are mentally and affectively consumed by their experiences (Ibrahim 2020). While such an all-present willingness to stay connected to one's desired pursuit would most typically favour accomplishment, the analysis revealed it may also occasionally evolve into inner coercion to perform SF routines. As individuals struggle with maintaining a healthy balance between their SFs and other life engagements, they are unable to access the positive emotionality typical for the phenomenon. This, in turn, may cause some SF experiences to cease prematurely. Despite the fact that the literature on SFs consistently reports the existence of a salient, facilitative structure that aids individuals in maintaining their efforts (Dörnyei et al. 2014; Safdari & Maftoon 2017), a recent systematic review carried out by Jahedizadeh and Al-Hoorie (2021) indicated that the lack of such a structure may not necessarily rule out the existence of the phenomenon. Similarly, it was concluded that accomplishing SF objectives may require some additional, supportive measures that would allow for more effective incorporation of novel routines. In fact, the outcomes of the present research lead us to believe that the structural properties of SF should be reconsidered, and most definitely require further investigation.

Finally, it transpires that some of the negative consequences of SF may significantly exceed the lifespan of the flow. As SF experiences are atypically intense, it is not at all surprising that following their completion, individuals may experience feelings of emptiness or even a temporary sense of loss. While most of those affected by the phenomenon would be quick to overcome potential ruminative thoughts by tapping into the joy of accomplishment and resuming their pre-SF routines, the data gathered in the present research suggest that some individuals may experience acute difficulties adjusting to the post-SF reality despite a fruitful completion of their SF experiences. Henry et al. (2015:8)

indicated that while experiencing an SF "a totality of one's effort is directed to one's desired achievement so that it is not unusual thereafter that individuals may feel both mentally and physically drained and take time to adjust back to the everyday routine governing their lives before the SF was initiated". Although it is not exactly apparent why some individuals may be more prone than others to experiencing long-term consequences of prolonged effort, it can be tentatively assumed that this inability to resume one's normal life may stem from the very intensity of the motivational phenomenon. The acclaim SF experiences have gathered in recent years stems from their unique capacity to transform the way individuals function on cognitive, mental, and emotional levels (Dörnyei et al. 2014). With this in mind, it is not unreasonable to assume that an abrupt shift in the way individuals utilise their personal resources may provoke some adverse consequences. While this matter most definitely requires further investigation, it seems that the otherwise favourable potency of SFs may also assume a debilitative role and overshadow any potential benefits experiencing the phenomenon may yield. Additionally, while the relevant literature abounds with studies researching the conditions necessary for the emergence of an SF experience (Henry et al. 2015; Ibrahim 2017; Safdari & Maftoon 2017; Zarrinabadi & Tavakoli 2017; Başöz & Gümüş 2022), surprisingly little is known about how these experiences come to an end. As such knowledge could potentially contribute toward reducing long-lasting side effects of SFs, it should be postulated that this aspect of the phenomenon receives adequate attention.

Although experiencing the SF phenomenon may support individuals in producing outstanding achievements, the presence of negative side effects identified by the present study and former research endeavours (Ibrahim 2016; Muir 2020; Sak & Gurbuz 2022) renders attempts to consciously induce SF experiences ethically questionable. While the vast majority of SF cases emerge spontaneously rather than as a result of deliberate instruction, any attempt to induce SFs in a classroom setting should be executed with caution until we develop a better understanding of both temporary and long-term consequences of the phenomenon at hand. As functional counteractive measures are yet to be developed, it seems that much of the negative affect experienced by the respondents stemmed from the excessive preoccupation with their flow experiences and the lack of proper self-regulation mechanisms. Therefore, one practical recommendation to be put forward here is that efforts to purposefully generate SFs should involve careful planning that would ensure that those affected incorporate SF-conducive tasks into their lifestyles without the need to sacrifice other essential life domains. Additionally, as the efforts of those pursuing significant accomplishments are typically divided in time, the achievement of SF objectives should not be any different. Bearing in mind that potential side effects of SFs remain largely unknown, guiding students in adequate goal selection and progress assessment may ensure that they maintain a healthy balance and, consequently, contribute to the longevity of potential SF experiences.

The present study is not without its limitations. Firstly, the small size of the sample included in the present analysis may have a bearing on the generalisability of the results. Thus, further studies are required to verify whether the findings could be extrapolated to other contexts. Secondly, the present investigation focused on major manifestations of negative affect while experiencing SF. As negative affect in SF experiences is not as uncommon as previously thought, prospective studies could also analyse minor negative episodes typical for the phenomenon at hand, preferably on a more numerous sample. The potential insights could then be used to develop a set of counteracting measures that would be of extreme help for practitioners aiming to induce SFs, for instance, in a classroom setting.

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Appendix – Interview protocol

1. Can you describe your motivational experience?
2. How and when did it start?
3. What did you do to accomplish your goal?
4. How did you feel during the experience?
5. Was your motivation steady throughout the experience?
6. What did the experience change in your life?
7. Were there any problems?
8. How did you cope with difficulties?
9. Did you have any support?
10. Would you like to experience something similar once again?

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Teacher resilience and the challenges of remote learning: An analysis of perspectives from ELT practitioners

Abstract. It seems that the ELT[3] world is mostly focused on language learner resilience: students are encouraged to build their resilience to enhance the learning process and improve their mental health. The question arises, however, of what the importance of resilience for language teachers is, especially within the context of online education necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The aim of this article is to present the results of a research project conducted among an international group of English language teachers. The respondents were asked how they understand the concept of resilience, what challenges they had to overcome when they were teaching online, what strategies for dealing with stress they used, and how their learners' adaptation to online education affected their mental wellbeing. Based on the research results, some practical solutions are suggested that might be of use for educators teaching online.
Keywords: teacher resilience, online education, remote teaching

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1. Introduction

The Covid-19 global pandemic, also referred to as the coronavirus pandemic, originated in late 2019. Since then, it has reached almost every country in the world, resulting in devastating economic and social disruption, and causing health and socio-psychological impacts worldwide. Significantly, education has also become one of the unwilling victims of Covid-19. According to UNESCO (n.d.), more than 1.6 billion children and youth were unable to attend school for months. Despite the fact that schools and universities closed their doors to reduce transmission of the virus, teaching and learning processes continued in virtual learning environments. However, due to the lack of Internet connectivity and electronic devices, at least one third of students were excluded from pursuing remote instruction (UNESCO n.d.). Unquestionably, the shift to digital pedagogy marked the beginning of new challenges for teachers and learners, as they were expected to work and study in unfamiliar environments while having to deal with the impact of the pandemic on their daily lives and mental wellbeing (Moorhouse & Kohnke 2021).

MacIntyre et al. (2020) observe that the advent of COVID-19 multiplied the sources of stress for teachers. The rapid transition to online delivery, for which many educators had not been prepared, impacted their already substantial workloads. Teachers were suddenly expected, despite the lack of adequate preparation, to continue effective communicative teaching with the help of online resources. Moreover, with multiple online work-related activities outside their teaching time, educators found it difficult, if not even impossible, to set physical, temporal and/or psychological boundaries between professional and family lives. Petrie et al. (2020) indicate that teachers were also affected by their learners' loneliness, personal and academic anxiety, as well as parents' struggles to help their children with new educational tools and practices. Moreover, many teachers experienced difficulties maintaining positive student-teacher-parent rapport and encouraging cooperative learning and socialisation.

Covid-19 rapidly changed teachers' personal and professional lives. The challenges they confronted included the disruption of established instructional programmes, the rapid transition to virtual classrooms, the emotional toll of social isolation, and concerns about personal safety and health. Thus, they were forced to adapt to an uncertain and constantly changing work environment while also dealing with personal challenges posed by the coronavirus crisis. Nevertheless, most of them seem to have found the capacity to effectively respond to the emergency transition to virtual learning and to meet the demands associated with it. Many seem to have found solutions that allowed them to adapt to and even thrive in new challenging realities. One of those solutions was developing coping skills for resilience.

2. Teacher resilience and its dimensions

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines resilience as "the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands" (APA Dictionary of Psychology n.d.). Among the factors that contribute to how well people adapt to adversities the APA differentiates:

(1) the ways in which individuals view and engage with the world,
(2) the availability and quality of social resources,
(3) specific coping strategies, i.e., a series of actions, or a thought process used in meeting a stressful or unpleasant situation or in modifying one's reaction to such a situation (APA Dictionary of Psychology n.d.).

Mansfield et al. (2016) link resilience to quality teaching and learning, as resilient teachers maximise their professional capacities. Consequently, their learners are more likely to attain levels at or above those indicated in national testing programmes.

A review of the literature indicates that a relatively specific direction may be observed in the description of the qualities pertaining to a resilient educator. Therefore, in order to clarify the meaning of the concept of teacher resilience, it is first necessary to be explicit about the different abilities that might be subsumed under the term. The most important dimensions of teacher resilience include:

(1) the profession-related dimension, which concerns such aspects as organisation, preparation, use of effective teaching skills and reflection,
(2) the relational dimension, which recognises that both the professional and personal worlds of teachers are relational. The supportive relationships that are cultivated both in and outside educational institutions enhance teachers' wellbeing as well as their commitment to their profession. The relational dimension is also linked to collective responsibility, which is born when teachers collaborate and learn to trust and respect each other (Motteram & Dawson 2019: 4). This dimension is closely related and similar to what Mansfield et al. (2016) define as social resilience.
(3) the social dimension, which is about social interactions in the work environment, i.e., building and strengthening a support network, and asking for and giving advice,
(4) the everyday dimension, which is the agency that allows either individual teachers or groups of teachers to make choices, pursue goals, and sustain values despite potential adverse circumstances (Motteram & Dawson 2019: 4),
(5) the motivational dimension, which concerns such aspects as self-efficacy, awareness of the need and willingness to pursue professional development, persistence and perseverance,
(6) emotional resilience, a dimension which, according to Mansfield et al. (2016), is related to teachers' emotional responses to teaching experiences, as well as to emotional and stress management.

Resilience is, therefore, a multi-layered concept with manifold dimensions presented in a variety of models proposed by different scholars. Throughout this chapter the term resilience will be used to mean the ability to withstand the natural stressors and setbacks in teaching online.

3. Building teacher resilience

Teacher resilience has become increasingly relevant amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. It has also emerged as an important area of research in education, thus indicating its essential role in today's teaching and teacher education. As observed by Brunetti (2006), teacher resilience allows educators to sustain professional commitment to teaching in the face of challenges and adversities that they confront in providing meaningful education. It needs to be emphasised, however, that both understanding the practices of teachers in coping with unfavourable circumstances and learning the processes that allow them to become resilient are a long-term endeavour. Thus, educators wishing to develop their resilience should bear in mind that it is an ongoing and intentional process: "Resilience is built one thought and one action at a time. It's the slow and steady strengthening of our resilience habits that makes it easier for us to manage challenges and rebound after setbacks" (Aguilar 2018).

A review of the literature suggests that there are a number of approaches that can assist language teachers to increase their capacity for resilience. The strategies they could implement to become better able to weather and exploit hardships to their advantage include:

(1) anchoring in one's way. Resilient teachers are driven by a purpose. While working with students they should ask themselves why they are teaching and what they wish their legacy to be. As Aguilar (2017) observes: "Get clear on your why and use it as an anchor".

(2) knowing oneself. Educators should take time to reflect on their values, preferences, skills, aptitudes, etc. This reflection allows them to realise whether or not they are prepared for potential difficulties. Lang (2021) emphasises that self-awareness plays a vital role in understanding one's strengths and weaknesses, and their relationship to one's personal performance and growth.

(3) asking for help. Not only does intrapersonal reflection give teachers an understanding of their thought processes, but it also makes them realise when they should ask for help. Teachers might be afraid of seeking help for fear of being perceived as incompetent. However, contrary to popular belief, it is high performing educators who are more likely to search for support from their colleagues (Spillane et al. 2018). By seeking advice, high performers are able to recognise weaknesses and transform them into strengths. Aguilar (2017) advises teachers to ask for all kinds of help they might need and to persist until their needs have been met.

(4) joining a support group. A support group is similar to a self-help group in that its members share a problem and come together to provide help, comfort and guidance (APA Dictionary of Psychology n.d.). Support groups are safe spaces where teachers can obtain practical, constructive and helpful advice on ways of approaching their problems. Talking to others facing similar hardships can make teachers feel less alone in their predicament.

(5) building a community. Apart from joining a support group, teachers can build a community of colleagues, students, parents and administrators in their institution. It should be stressed, however, that communities are not immune to adversities. They adapt and grow stronger through the cooperation of their members (Brower 2020).

(6) being patient. Being a member of a community entails being patient with one's colleagues, supervisors and other members of the educational process. Patience does not equal being complacent, as effective communities embrace conflict and diversity (Brower 2020). Communities work through differences of opinion, while appreciating multiple points of view.

(7) holding a growth mindset. Regardless of the challenges teachers confront, they should ask themselves what they could learn from the hardships they are experiencing. Educators with a growth mindset are more likely to be high achievers, as they invest more energy in learning (Dweck 2016).

(8) focusing on what is within one's sphere of influence. Changes are inevitable, and teachers who effectively embrace them devote their time and energy to the things within their control. By acting within their sphere of influence, teachers take steps to make a positive difference.

(9) doing physical activities. Regular physical activity brings positive physiological and psychological benefits, e.g., preventing many chronic diseases and contributing to improved mood and cognition (Silverman & Deuster 2014).

The list of strategies is certainly not exhaustive, and it needs to be stressed that developing resilience is an individual process, as people vary in their perceptions of potential adversities and take different actions to manage a conflict or crisis. Hence, the choice of strategies should be dictated by the personal and professional needs, circumstances and preferences of a given person.

4. Description of the research project

Teaching through the pandemic triggered the need to operate in new modalities, where students were forced to adapt to distance education and the lack of social interaction in person. Educators, on the other hand, had to learn to engage students remotely, to establish and maintain human connections in virtual environments, and to respond to a high level of unpredictability in unfamiliar contexts. With the ELT world being mostly

focused on language learner resilience and students being encouraged to build their resilience to enhance the learning process and improve their mental health, the question arises of what the importance of resilience for language teachers is, especially within the context of online education necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The following sections of the article will attempt to investigate the impact of the pandemic on educators' mental health and wellbeing.

4.1. Research aim

The aim of the research project was to investigate how the challenges of teaching English online affected language teachers' resilience and what coping strategies they employed to reverse the negative effects of stress that accompanied their adaptation to remote instruction. The study sought to explore the following areas:

(1) the types and severity of challenges encountered by teachers in virtual classrooms,
(2) the types and effectiveness of stress-relief strategies employed by teachers,
(3) student adaptation to online learning and its impact on teaching practices,
(4) teachers' professional hopes and expectations for the forthcoming school/academic year[4].

4.2. Questionnaire

In order to investigate the influence of online teaching challenges, an online questionnaire was designed and developed using Google Forms. The questionnaire comprised 11 items, of which five questions were open-ended and six were multiple-choice. The first 4 items were aimed at obtaining participants' sociodemographic characteristics, i.e., their age, length of professional experience, teaching background, and the country in which they teach. The remaining items concerned the challenges of online teaching and their influence on teachers' resilience, the use of stress management techniques, the influence of students' adaptation to remote learning and its influence on teachers' wellbeing. The last questionnaire item invited comments regarding respondents' professional hopes and expectations for the forthcoming school/academic year.

The questionnaire was active from November 2021 until late January 2022. The respondents were recruited based on a snowball sampling technique using several channels, i.e., posting the link to the questionnaire to Facebook groups for language teachers, to social media websites for academic professionals, sending the link to researchers' in-service students majoring in English language teaching, as well as to researchers' personal

4 The school/academic year in which the research project was conducted, i.e., 2021/2022.

contacts[5]. Participants were made aware of the purpose of the research project and their participation was voluntary.

4.3. Participants

From November 2021 to January 2022, a total of 119 teachers participated in the research project aimed at investigating the challenges of online teaching and their influence on educators' wellbeing. Respondents came from 41 countries, with the most numerous group (51 participants) representing Poland.

Table 1. Countries the respondents teach in

Country	No. of participants	Country	No. of participants	Country	No. of participants	Country	No. of participants
A[6]	1	Georgia	1	Malta	1	Romania	1
All over the world	1	Greece	1	Mexico	1	Russia	1
Argentina	1	Iraq (Kurdistan)	3	Morocco	2	Spain	3
Austria	1	India	2	Nether-lands	1	Serbia	4
Bangla-desh	1	Ireland	1	North Macedonia	1	Slovakia	3
Brazil	2	Italy	5	Oman	1	Sri Lanka	1
Colombia	1	Jamaica	1	Pakistan	1	Tunisia	1
Croatia	1	Kuwait	1	Peru	1	Turkey	5
Egypt	2	Lithuania	1	Poland	51	UAE	1
France	3	Malaysia	1	Portugal	2	USA	3
						UK	3

5 Unfortunately, the response rate from members of different social media groups and websites was very low. The majority of responses were obtained through researchers' personal contacts.

6 Instead of giving the name of the country where they work, the participant only provided a single letter.

The distribution of the data, i.e., 51 respondents from Poland and 59 respondents from other countries, seems to invite a cross-case analysis. However, the group of study participants had not been purposefully selected to represent either any specific region or a representative overview of the world, which would indeed be impossible on this scale. Thus, the sample represents too diverse a group to be meaningfully analysed as a whole, even in comparison to the more homogeneous group of Polish participants. Furthermore, since there is, on average, only one participant from each of the remaining countries, the authors would have run the risk of tokenism if conducting such an analysis.

The majority of teachers participating in the research fell into the 31–50 age bracket, with the proportions of respondents aged 31–40 and 41–50 being identical (31% each). 24% of participants declared to be 51–60 and 5% of the sample population over 60 years old. Novice teachers, i.e., participants under 30 years of age constituted only 9% of the study sample.

Table 2. Participants' age

Age	No. of participants
Under 30	11
31– 40	37
41– 50	37
51– 60	28
Over 60	6

As regards the length of professional experience, the least numerous group was the one declaring more than 30 years of teaching (6.7%). 18% of study participants had 11–15 years of professional experience, and an identical proportion of the sample between 16 and 20 years, with only a slightly smaller group (16%) 11–15 years. Less than one third of respondents (29%) had been professionally active for up to ten years (17% declaring 0–5 and 13% indicating 6–10 years of professional experience).

Table 3. Length of professional experience

Years	No. of participants
0–5	20
6–10	15
11–15	19

Years	No. of participants
16–20	21
21–25	21
26–30	15
More than 30 years	8

Study participants worked in a range of educational institutions, including state and private primary schools, state and private secondary schools, state and private institutions of higher education, private language schools, and other private establishments, e.g., a film school and a private pre-school. Participants also included freelancers and private business owners. The majority of teachers worked in private language schools—46 individuals indicated those as either one of their places, or their primary place, of employment.

Table 4. Participants' teaching background

Institution	No. of participants
State primary school	20
Private primary school	11
State secondary school	21
Private secondary school	8
State institution of higher education	38
Private institution of higher education	15
Private language school	42
Other	freelancer (4 respondents), non-profit organisation, own companies, teaching academic writing to faculty in state and private institutes, autonomous online, my own business – I teach individuals, film school, Private Teacher Training Centre, freelance trainer, STO Primary and High School, private preschool

In the study, the investigators did not include questions concerning participants' sex, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation, as this was an introductory project devoted to broad and general perceptions of diverse challenges related to teaching English in virtual classrooms. The authors are fully aware of the fact that teaching and learning processes can be impacted by gender in multiple ways, and that gender adds a layer of specificity to data interpretation.

Current research recognizes that women and men have been impacted differently by the Covid-19 pandemic (Aldossari & Chaudhry 2021). The plight of content teachers, including those who work in institutions of higher education, has been no different (Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya 2020). However, there seems to be a paucity of research into how differently female and male teachers of English have been affected by the unexpected emergence of SARS-CoV-2 and the resultant Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, it seems that some investigators, instead of explicitly asking for information about the gender identities of their respondents, assume their cisgender identities. Hence, further research into the resilience of English language teachers by the authors of the current article will include inclusive gender[7] questions and the data will be profiled accordingly.

4.4. Results

4.4.1. Types and severity of challenges encountered by teachers in virtual classrooms

In item 5, which was a multiple-answer question concerning the challenges of teaching English in virtual classrooms, respondents were presented with a list of 22 potential difficulties related to online teaching and were asked to indicate the ones which applied to their teaching situation. The analysis of responses showed that the 10 most frequent challenges[8] were as follows:

7 In the new project gender will be defined as the socially constructed roles, behaviours and identities of prospective respondents.

8 The data concerning less frequent challenges are available from the authors upon request.

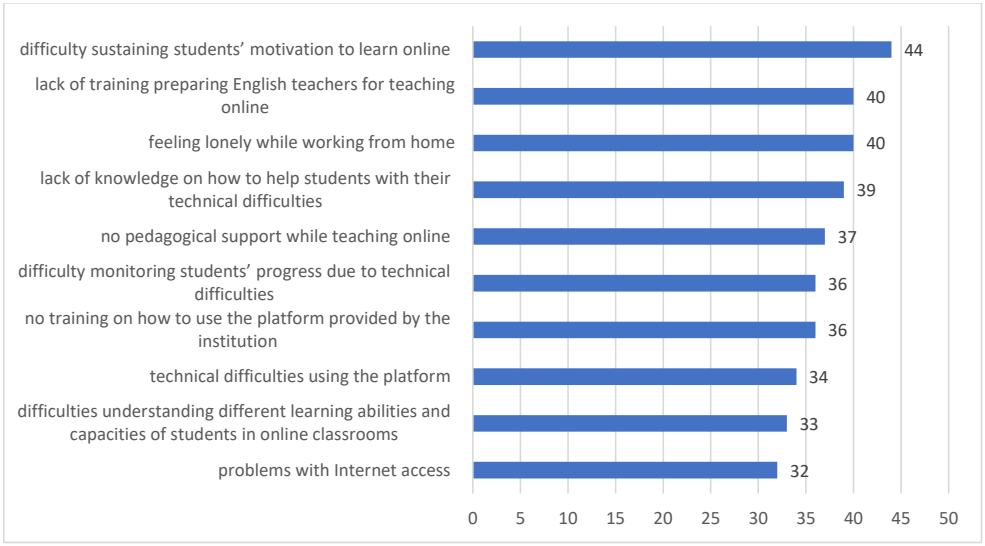

Figure 1. Ten most frequent challenges encountered by teachers in virtual classrooms

In item 6, which was an open-ended question, participants were invited to elaborate on the challenges presented in question 5. 116 participants of the study provided comments regarding the difficulties which they considered the most serious ones from their personal perspectives. The following ten challenges surfaced from the data, ranked from most to least impactful[9]:

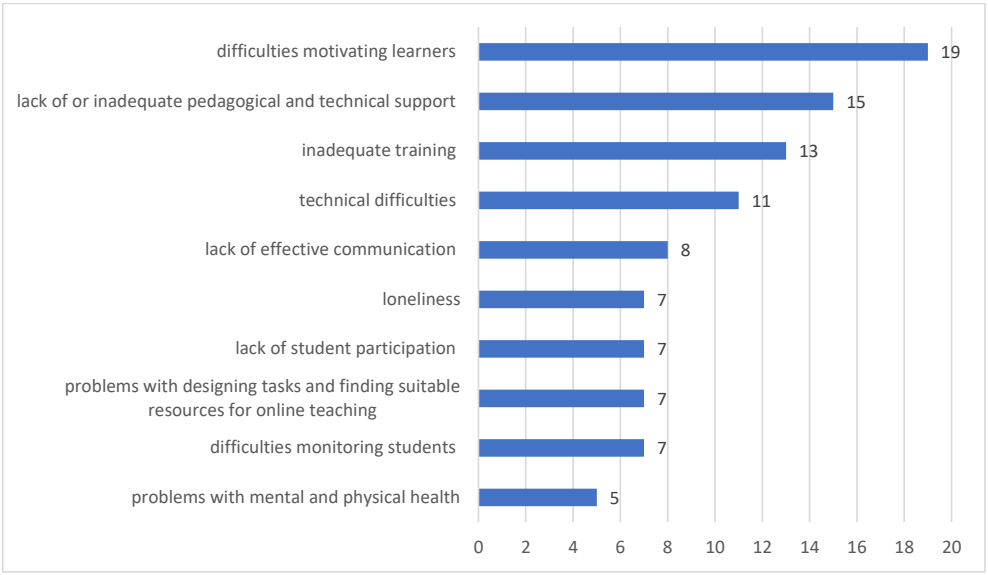

Figure 2. The severity of challenges encountered by teachers in virtual classrooms

9 The impact of the challenges was determined on the basis of the frequency for each of the listed problems.

4.4.2. Types and effectiveness of stress-relief strategies employed by teachers

Question 7, which was another multiple-answer item, offered a list of 15 stress-relief strategies from which respondents indicated the ones that they used to manage their stress levels. The data gathered in this part of the questionnaire show that the 10 most frequently indicated stress relievers were:

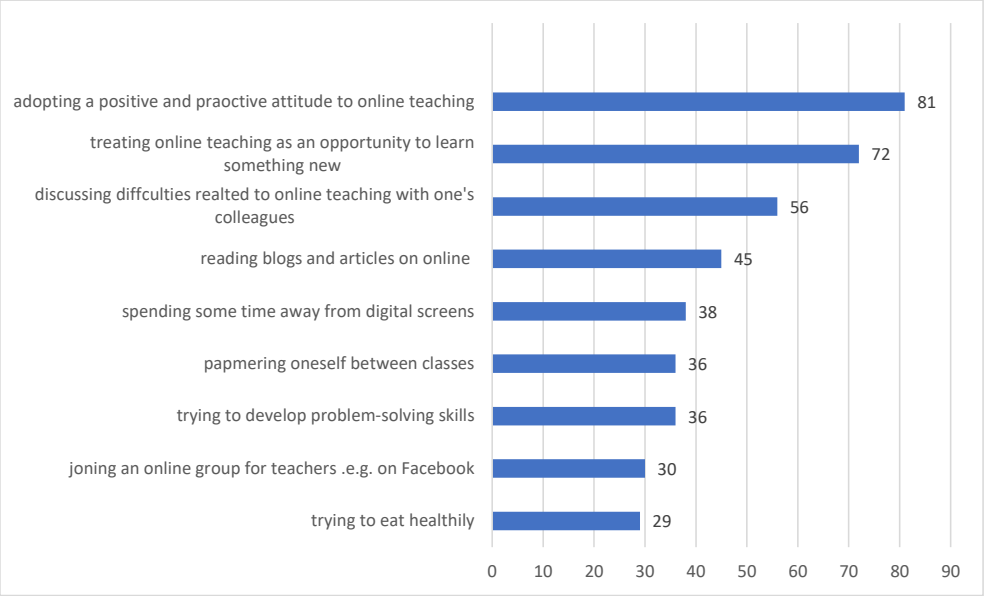

Figure 3. Ten most frequent stress-relief strategies employed by teachers

In item 9, which was an open-ended question, respondents were asked to elaborate on which of the stress management techniques were the most effective. According to study participants, the stress relievers that worked best were:

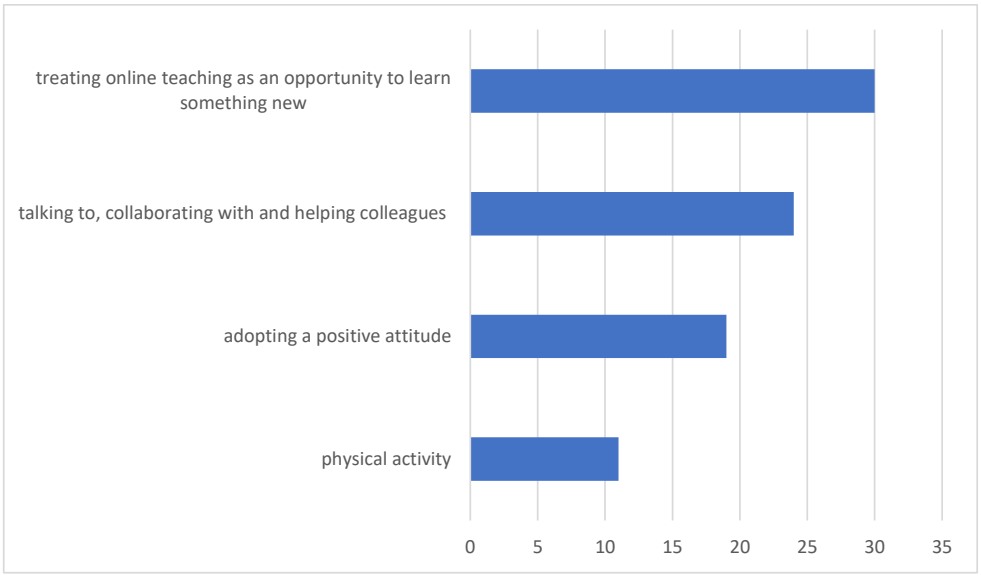

Figure 4. The most efficacious stress-relief strategies employed by teachers

Some teachers observed that their stress levels were so high that none of the stress-relief techniques presented in question 8 were truly effective. Interestingly, a few respondents emphasised that they enjoyed working online and that the transition to remote teaching provided a springboard for opening their own business activity: *'(...) and now I feel I am an expert in what I do, so I also train others'.* [10]

4.4.3. Student adaptation to online learning and its impact on teaching

Since the beginning of the pandemic language teachers have accumulated considerable levels of stress. One of the reasons for it was the need to adapt, in record time, to provide online classes in unexplored environments and with the help of unfamiliar tools. Additionally, teachers' wellbeing and functioning were affected by students' difficulties related to and caused by online teaching. In order to determine the students' problems which impacted respondents' teaching practices most severely, in question 9 the authors of the research project devised a list of 20 potentially disruptive student behaviours. Similar to questions 5 and 7, respondents were requested to indicate the ones that had the most serious effect on their wellbeing during online lessons. The analysis of the findings reveals that the 10 most problematic challenges[11] were as follows:

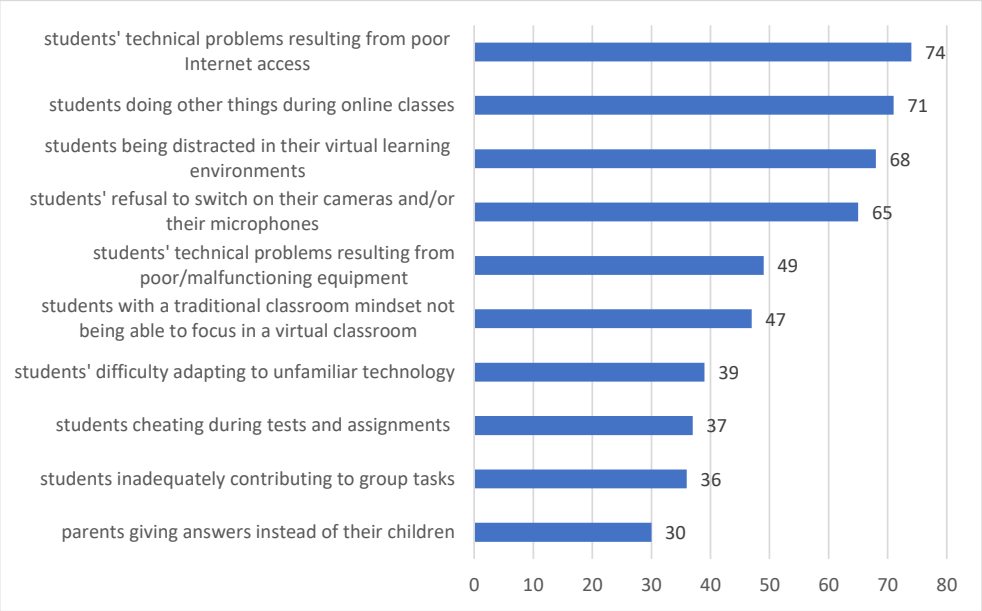

Figure 5. The most frequent students' problems which impacted respondents' teaching practices

10 All citations from research participants included in this article are presented in their original version.

11 The data concerning less frequent challenges are available from the authors upon request.

In item 10 which, similar to questions 6 and 8, was an open-ended question, respondents explained which of the student difficulties were the most bothersome. According to study participants, the most acute problems were:

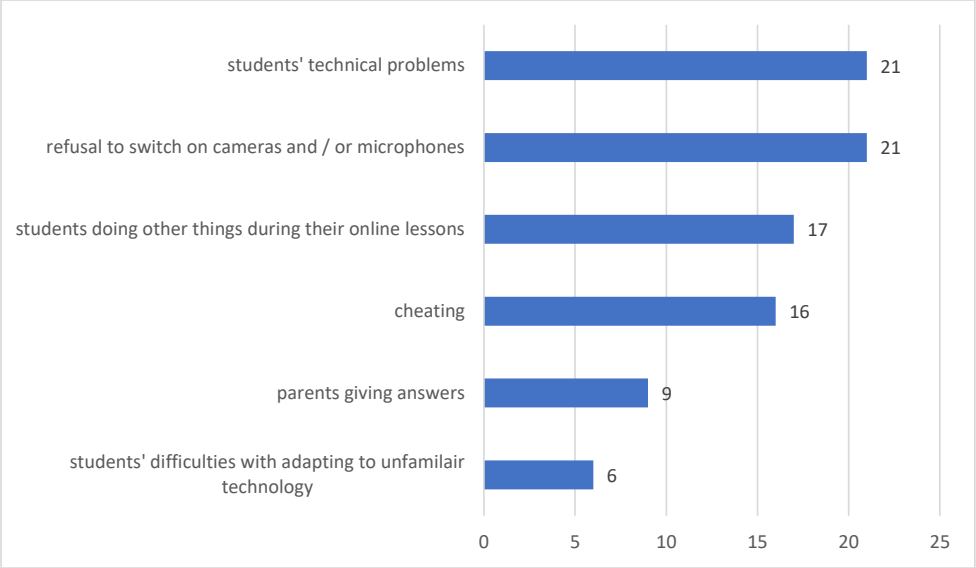

Figure 6. The most acute students' problems which impacted respondents' teaching practices

4.4.4. Teachers' professional hopes and expectations for the following school/academic year

In the last item of the questionnaire, which was an open-ended question, respondents were invited to share their professional hopes and expectations for the new school/academic year. Their responses can be grouped under the following categories:

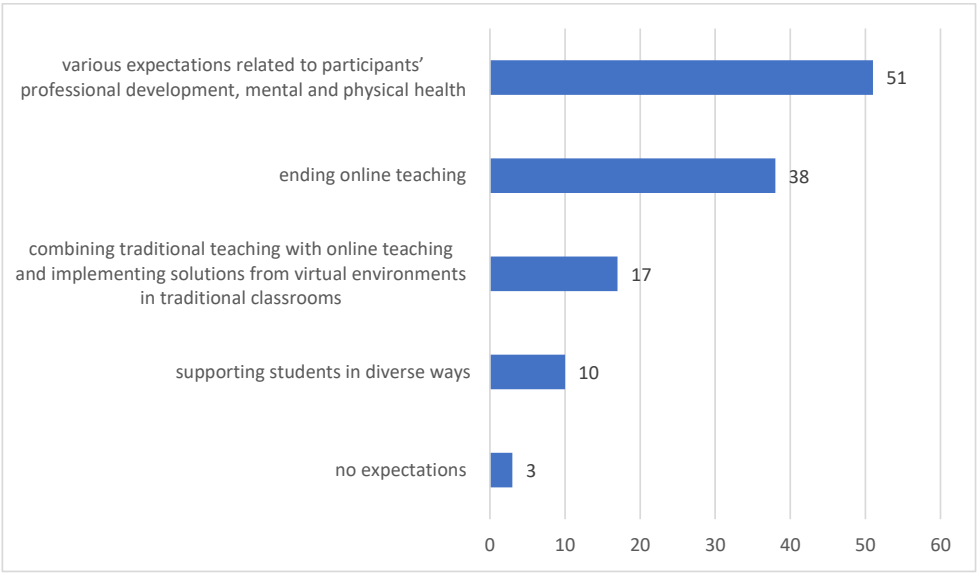

Figure 7. Respondents' professional hopes and expectations

5. Discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic and global school closures forced students from every corner of the world to learn from home. Research investigating how learners cope with remote learning (e.g., Dong et al. 2020; Parczewska 2020; Mælan et al. 2021) has revealed that school-aged children struggle to maintain motivation in virtual classrooms. It has been suggested that leaners' dwindling motivation is caused, to a large extent, by the fact that for many students the transition was their first experience of remote learning (Rahiem 2021), inadequate social support from peers and instructors (Tan 2020), poor academic achievements prior to the transition, the lack of reliable Internet access and necessary equipment (Mak 2021), or insufficient technological skills. It is therefore unsurprising that difficulty motivating students to learn online was the most frequently indicated challenge of remote education. It was also regarded as the most serious one. As one of the participants observed: '*I think sustaining my students' motivation was the most serious because I think some students did not like that form of the lessons. Sometimes they were very shy to say something in front of the group, they did not like to have their cameras on. Some students had problems with internet access and could not participate in activities, which was demotivating*[12]'. The respondents observed that it was difficult to motivate students due to the following reasons:

(1) lack of interest on the part of students,
(2) students' shyness,
(3) students' connectivity and technical problems,
(4) no physical contact and no eye contact,
(5) students becoming depressed,
(6) students feeling isolated and lost,
(7) teachers' inability to monitor students' progress,
(8) students' inability to ignore the distractions of virtual environments.

Interestingly, the analysis of respondents' answers to question 10 points towards possible reasons behind students' low motivation. One of the participants observed that students who were not interested in learning in traditional classrooms would not learn in online environments, either. Other teachers argued that students were discouraged by the limited number of peer-to-peer interactions: '(...) *all of a sudden their school, classes and friends turned to virtual and they have lost human interaction and consequently motivation*'. One respondent concluded that students who had a '*traditional classroom mindset*' would not be able to focus in a virtual learning environment because '*online classroom is not real'*. Moreover, students also found it difficult, according to the respondents, to adapt to new learning styles, and they frequently had no one at home who would help them study: *'there is no one on the other side of the screen to make child focus'*.

12 The respondents' spelling and grammar has been preserved in the quotes.

It is generally believed that many children and teenagers are 'digital natives', a term describing individuals who grow up under the constant presence and influence of the Internet and digital media. Prensky (2001: 2) emphasises that today's learners are "all 'native speakers'" of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet'. However, a striking finding to emerge from the data is that some respondents reported being startled to discover that '*many students did not know how to deal with technical problems online although they seemed to be tech savvy as most youth are*'. This unfamiliarity with online learning technology was yet another factor leading to a decline in student motivation, especially when learners' parents were unable to help them with technological issues. Additionally, one of the respondents observed that '*Although many school-aged students were accustomed to working with their computers, they were doing this all day before joining our after-school classes'*. This indicates that many learners were unwilling to participate in online lessons (and when they did, they '*struggled to concentrate'*) because they had already spent a lot of time in front of a computer screen. The observation is unsurprising in light of the fact that an excessive amount of screen time can lead to poorer concentration, weaker memory, and slower information processing (What are the … n.d.).

Other challenges of online teaching included issues that teachers had very little or no influence over. The issues included Internet access, which had cost implications that teachers were unprepared for: *'(…) there was not internet service provided in my community so I had to purchase data plans. (…)Teachers are not that highly paid. I made the sacrifice because of the students but I could not maintain that as a monthly add on to my budget. The government neither the school subsidized that cost so it was financially draining*'. Similarly, inadequate equipment and limited access to online tools and teacher training often contributed to teacher frustration. Thus, the question arises of whether teachers can be expected to bear the costs of the transition to remote teaching: '*I had to pay for course on online teaching, platforms and other online resources as well*', '*I had to pay for equipment, zoom, other resources, training courses, etc.*', especially when no training opportunities, and subsequently no pedagogical and technological support, were offered. It seems that adopting a positive and proactive attitude to online teaching was indeed the most effective way to proceed in such circumstances.

Positive thinking is one of the factors that enhances resilience, as positive individuals are characterised by faith in themselves and their ability to face and overcome challenges. They also perceive setbacks as temporary and modifiable, and treat them as a learning opportunity (Richardson 2020). Significantly, this is how the majority of the respondents reacted to the transition: '*Viewing it* [online teaching] *as something new and challenging to be done to the best of my ability (and accepting that it wouldn't be perfect) helped this 60+year-old'*, '*Online teaching was a big challenge but I treated it as an opportunity to learn something new, especially that I have feared new technologies. Now, I am happy that I have learnt so many new solutions'*, '*Enjoying finding ways to use the technology to do things*

I couldn't face to face – I enjoyed the challenge'. Interestingly, the proactive attitude and perceiving the sudden transition as a learning opportunity opened up new professional opportunities for some teachers: '*I put a lot of effort into learning how to teach online and turned it to a business opportunity and started giving private lessons to adults online. I got better really quickly and now I feel I am an expert in what I do, so I also train others'*.

On the one hand, respondents attempted to adopt a positive and proactive attitude to online teaching in order to treat it as an opportunity to develop new skills. However, their comments expressing their unwillingness to continue teaching in virtual classrooms indicate how difficult the period had been for many of them. This seems to reinforce the observation by Besser et al. (in: Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. 2021), who emphasise that educators have been severely affected by stress resulting from having to adapt to online teaching with no time to prepare. Many respondents felt the transition had been rushed: '*Moving into a new teaching reality without being prepared for it*' and insufficient support was provided: '*Maybe the lack of training and support from my employer was the most serious because it was frustrating to see how, after 15 years working for the organisation, they didn't even think I might need support. They took it for granted that I knew how to do things'*.

The data collected in the study suggest that the most serious obstacles to effective participation in online lessons from learners' perspective included unstable Internet: '*Poor internet access is definitely the worst – students get kicked out of zoom meetings or cannot see the shared screen*', the lack of adequate equipment: '*bad quality microphones',* frequently resulting from a difficult financial situation at home: *'(...) not all of the students afford adequate equipment (...)*'. Consequently, the feelings of frustration and helplessness seem to be the direct effect of those challenges: '*Technical problems because there was nothing I could do and I felt helpless and powerless to help my students. I could feel them disengaging and it was hard for me*'.

Significantly, teachers' frustrations increased with students' refusal to switch on the cameras and/or microphones: *'Students not turning on their camera. It's really distracting and demotivating for me. I'm talking to black boxes not real people. It's difficult to conduct the lesson when I can't see my students'*, '*Talking to the initials instead of faces was surreal and annoying (...)*', '*I felt deceived* (...)'. It needs to be emphasised, however, that in some cases the refusal was the result of low bandwidth, while in others teenager learners were too self-conscious about their identity and how they looked on camera to let others see their face. Furthermore, it can be hypothesised that students turned off their cameras because they benefited more by processing the lesson auditorily. In virtual classrooms, with their cameras turned on, many students are prone to scanning their own faces in addition to observing the facial expressions of their peers, which is mentally exhausting (Miller 2018). Other issues, such as embarrassment about one's home environment or the fear of screenshots being used to bully and ridicule, discourage learners from showing their faces in online contexts (Miller 2018). Regardless of the reason behind learners'

cameras and/or microphones being switched off, respondents felt frustrated, as teachers generally need to see students' faces to assess how learning is progressing: '*Monitoring* [was a challenge] *because you can't really see what the students are doing*'.

A number of respondents reported irritation caused by students doing other things while participating in online lessons: '*Doing other things was the worst. They were always distracted and could not focus on anything'*. They also indicated difficulties with monitoring students and designing effective tasks for online learning: *'problems with designing tasks for it. It was hard to get feedback from students what they like and what they don't like*' as well as students' physical conditions at home: '*The biggest issue is the distractions, especially young learners struggle concentrate on the lesson while other things happening in their house*'.

A major cause of exasperation for teachers was dishonesty on the part of the students. Not only did they cheat during tests assignments, but they also '*cheated during participation',* i.e., they refused to switch on their cameras which allowed them to avoid active participation in classes. Consequently, '(...) [students] *did not bother to do their in-class activities with quality'*. It is nevertheless cheating during tests that seemed to be the ultimate source of frustration for participants: '*Students cheating during tests – it was so irritating when weak students started getting much better grades than those really good ones*', '*cheating was, to put it mildly, horrible! There was simply no way I could have stopped it!*', '*Cheating during tests and assignments was the most worrisome concern, as it prevented us from judging students' performances and teaching results correctly and thus from maintaining the quality of teaching'*. Analysis of respondents' replies suggests that students were dishonest because teachers were unable to confront them effectively in virtual classrooms. Furthermore, parents were too invested in their children's education and often solved tasks for them: '*Parents whispering answers to their children was the problem which affected me most because it hindered my ability to make an adequate assessment of student learning. It made it harder to determine if the child actually learnt the concept or if they were regurgitating. I had to explain to parents that they were hindering their children rather than helping*'. Consequently, students started receiving better grades than they would normally get in traditional classrooms: '*I can see students are stressed and their grades are reflecting the year spent cheating on evaluations'*.

Moreover, it can be hypothesised that many learners cheated because, as one of the respondents observed, they were not willing to take responsibility for their own learning. This is echoed in the words of Little (1995: 175): "The basis of learner autonomy is that the learner accepts responsibility for his or her learning". However, autonomy is not simply a matter of placing learners in situations where they have to be independent (Sinclair 2000: 6–13), and the capacity for autonomous learning behaviour inevitably varies according to context and task (Rixon 2000: 70). The question thus arises of whether under the circumstance of sudden transition to remote learning students can be expected to be autonomous, especially when they struggle to adapt to unfamiliar technology and when

'Neither teachers nor students had knowledge or experience in online classes prior to pandemic. So everyone found themselves in the chaos at once'.

6. Conclusions

The sudden transition to remote teaching has been one of the most stressful experiences so far for the teaching profession. Participants of the project were left with no alternative but to adopt a resilient attitude, especially when a number of different factors were beyond their control. Analysis of the data also points towards the importance of emphasising various stress-management techniques during teacher training, as a relatively small number of the respondents resorted to stress relievers other than adopting a proactive attitude or seeking advice from colleagues. Proietti Ergün and Ersöz Demirdağ (2022) developed the concept of foreign language teaching enjoyment (FLTE), i.e., positive emotions that are crucially important in the profession of language educators. FLTE seems to be correlated with emotion regulation and psychological wellbeing. Emotional regulation involves, among other things, effective implementation of strategies that help individuals modify, exert control over, and manage their emotional state, so as to accomplish their professional and personal goals (Sutton 2004). The ability to regulate one's emotions is likely to lead to in-depth professional engagement and consequently enhanced efficiency, as well as a marked improvement in work-related and personal wellbeing (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak 2020). Mercer and Gregersen (2020) emphasize that, in fact, wellbeing is one of the factors affecting educators' pedagogical practices which might, in turn, be positively or negatively correlated with learners' willingness to pursue their language learning goals in the classroom. It seems reasonable then, in light of the results obtained in this research project, especially those revealing how burdensome language education in virtual classrooms has been, to urge for pre-service as well as in-service professional development courses to equip language teachers with the tools allowing them to cultivate positive emotions and manage heavy, difficult, or uncomfortable emotions.

Respondents' frustration could have been reduced if they had been trained to teach, monitor, design tasks, conduct assessment and work with new technology in virtual classrooms. That is yet another aspect that should be taken into account while designing contemporary teacher training courses. As it seems that Covid-19 is here to stay for some time and other outbreaks of infectious diseases are not unlikely, other forays into virtual education might be necessary. However, if teachers are to be truly resilient, they need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge enabling them to handle professional challenges effectively.

Furthermore, the research project also showed that learners cannot be expected, even though they are believed to be digital natives, to function effectively in virtual classrooms without any training or support. The lack of preparation led to students misbehaving, which consequently affected the respondents' psychological wellbeing.

The evidence of students' unwillingness to take charge of their learning also seems to urge us to reconsider, apart from teachers' resilience and wellbeing in times of hardship, the role of learner autonomy in the language learning process. The study participants work in a wide range of national cultures, and different cultures define learner autonomy in various ways. In other words, the type of autonomy stressed in a given educational context will be reflected in the practices employed to promote it. What is appropriate in one context may not be acceptable in another. For instance, British learners seem to prefer open-ended learning opportunities with vague objectives, broadly defined assignments, and hardly any timetables. German learners, on the other hand, might favour learning situations characterized by more structure, learning tasks with detailed requirements, and tighter deadlines (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010). As mentioned previously, in the study the respondents, regardless of their national background, implied several times that their frustration in virtual classrooms was further exacerbated by their pupils' refusal to take responsibility for the learning process. The participants were not diverse and numerous enough for their answer to suggest that the Western understanding of the concepts is now universally acknowledged and implemented, but they do seem to imply that, regardless of the national background, a certain degree of learner responsibility is necessary in virtual learning environments. The question remains, however, how to define what leaner autonomy during the virtual learning process in a given culture is, what differences between learner autonomy in brick-and-mortar as well as online classrooms there might be, and to what extent and in what ways precisely it affects the quality and effectiveness of language instruction and educators' resilience, depending on cultural background.

Apart from the need to reconceptualize learner autonomy in virtual classrooms, the transition to online education has revealed that cheating on the part of the students has become even more of a problem. Even though many possible sources of cheating can be identified, as enumerated by the respondents, high stakes examination practices stand out, as does the fact that teachers and the institutions they work for are held responsible for delivering great results, rather than great teaching. This has led to the emergence of educational cultures in which 'teach to test' has become one of the main teacher responsibilities and in which students are determined to exploit every possible advantage to obtain positive grades. In virtual classrooms cheating comes with ease as, more often than not, teachers cannot control what their learners are doing, especially if, for instance, they refuse to switch on their cameras and have access to other electronic devices that otherwise would not be permitted in traditional classrooms. This situation calls for, as in the case of learning how to manage difficult emotions, pre-service and in-service professional development courses during which teachers would be able to learn how and why to focus on what is within their sphere of control when it comes to teaching and testing languages. This would help individuals focus their time and energy on the things they

can change and influence, so that they can have a greater impact where it matters most. It is one of the pillars of professional and personal resilience. Furthermore, the sudden transition to virtual classrooms showed that the lack of adequate online teaching and testing tools, as well as training on how to use them, increased teachers' stress levels. However, it has also given rise to the following *ethical* question: should money and effort be invested in developing online testing tools that would procure more reliable testing outcomes, or should online and traditional testing be finally discontinued.

The data collected in the study lead us to believe that the participants' wellbeing has been influenced by students' online struggles, and that attempts to adopt a proactive and positive attitude to the transition were not fully successful when the respondents '*felt helpless'* to support their learners. Although building resilience can require time, every teacher and student can learn to be resilient. However, both educators and learners need support, both at professional/academic and personal levels, so that feelings of helplessness, inadequacy and loneliness do not outweigh the willingness to treat a new challenge as an opportunity to learn something new.

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Motivational strategies used by English teachers in Polish secondary schools and students' motivated behaviour during lessons

Abstract. Motivation is widely considered to be an aspect significantly affecting success in learning a foreign language. While motivation might be developed and maintained by different factors, it is crucial for learning to occur in an environment that is beneficial for the process. Teachers, being responsible for creating the classroom environment, can notably influence students' motivation through the use of various strategies, and therefore impact their success in learning the language. This study attempts to examine and analyse motivational strategies used by teachers during English lessons in secondary schools, as well as consider students' motivated behaviour in the classroom. In order to determine what strategies teachers use and how learners' engagement changes, multiple classroom observations were conducted with the use of an observational sheet adapted from Dörnyei and Guilloteaux (2008). The strategies used by the teachers are analysed in terms of their possible relationship with the variables of students' motivated behaviour. The presented results suggest that the majority of observed teachers frequently provide students with neutral feedback, while strategies such as promoting integrative values, including individual competition, or promoting instrumental values remain unpopular and not used. The total use of strategies declines from the beginning of the lesson to its final part. Some teachers generally use noticeably more motivational strategies than others. Students' motivated behaviour was assessed, and the results imply fairly diverse engagement among the observed groups. No correlation was found between teachers' motivational practices and students' motivated behaviour. Further research should include a bigger sample and study other factors that could have an impact on students' motivation.

Keywords: motivation, motivational strategies, secondary school, teacher motivational practice, student motivated behaviour

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1. Introduction

Learning a foreign language is a strenuous process. Therefore, it is crucial to not only arouse a learner's interest and willingness to learn, but most importantly to maintain it throughout the years (Dörnyei & Guilloteaux 2008). Motivated students show the ability to make constant progress in their learning as they feel the urge to work on their language skills. Studies have shown that motivation not only discourages students from the work avoidance approach, but also helps them to actively practise, participate, and seek opportunities to use the language (Engin 2009; Ramírez 2014; Takaloo & Ahmadi 2017). Language teachers prove to be crucial motivators in the process of learning, as it is their role to create the classroom environment (Anderson et al. 2004), set a personal example, and help students become independent and motivated learners of the language (Oxford & Shearin 1994). Motivating can be realised through teachers' mindful use of motivational strategies which are teachers' behaviours displayed to motivate students to willingly participate in the language lesson as well as study the subject on a long-term basis.

Students' motivated behaviour changes throughout the lessons, as their participation and engagement rise and decline alongside their interest in current classroom interactions. This motivated behaviour can be fairly easily observed as attention (Dörnyei & Guilloteaux 2008) or alertness (Ellis 2009), participation, and volunteering are visible indicators of students' willingness to engage in the lesson and learn.

The present study aims to examine motivational strategies used by teachers in Polish secondary schools and analyse their impact on students' motivated behaviour within the lessons.

2. Importance of motivation in language learning

Motivation proves to be directly connected to success in language learning. As Chen et al. (2005: 610) claim, it is a widely accepted fact among language teachers and methodologists that "language learners with higher levels of motivation will be higher achievers". Language teachers can frequently be heard to refer to students' success in learning in terms of motivation, as it is persistence in the tedious process of learning that determines success or failure (Dörnyei 2001). Multiple studies have been recently carried out that suggested the correlation between student motivation and their success in learning a foreign language.

Engin (2009) shows that effectively motivated learners are able to make progress and visibly improve their knowledge. Engin explains that regardless of the type of motivation, whether it is integrative or instrumental, those students generally tend to put actual effort into learning and completing tasks rather than turn to work avoidance and do the minimum they need to pass. Therefore, their honest approach to studying is undeniably helpful in the process of learning.

Additionally, learners' observable motivated behaviour that can be described in terms of classroom engagement (Dörnyei & Guilloteaux 2008) is usually a cause of effectiveness

in learning. Ramírez (2014) demonstrates students' high participation and alertness in activities designed specifically to serve as motivating tools. For instance, group work with a clear communicative purpose motivates students not only to participate in the lesson, but also to study the language that needs to be used beforehand. This means that motivated students are willing to both actively participate in language lessons, as well as use the language in class, and thus constantly practise their language skills. Moreover, Ramírez argues that motivation affects students' tendency to work individually, not only in terms of assigned homework, but also within independent activities that allow them to practise and master their productive language skills, especially speaking.

Constant practice allows students to learn a foreign language effectively. This includes not only productive skills of speaking and writing, but also receptive skills: reading and listening. Takaloo and Ahmadi (2017) conducted a study that proved the impact motivation has on students' willingness to work on their receptive skills. Learners who participated in the study were motivated by their need and wish to understand original materials in their target language. They regularly actively sought interesting texts, attempted to read and understand them, and therefore effectively developed their comprehension.

Hardré and Sullivan (2009) explain that due to students' age, their motivation in their adolescent years is no longer affected by their parents as much as it used to be in primary school. A stronger influence is that of teachers and peers, who now play a critical role in teenage students' development and learning. Additionally, as Gnambs and Hanfstingl (2016) argue, students' motivation tends to decline as they reach adolescence, most probably as a consequence of a school environment that does not satisfy students' needs to learn interestingly and effectively. For this reason, it is crucial for teachers not only to be aware of their role in motivating, but also to actively participate in students' learning in accordance with their needs.

3. The role of the teacher in motivating learners

One of the teachers' various roles is the role of motivator (Kaboody 2013). They are responsible for creating the classroom environment. While it tends to mostly depend on students' relationships in the group and their approach towards one another, it is still the teacher's responsibility to control and supervise the process of creating the classroom climate, thus providing students with a safe learning environment. Anderson et al. (2004) observe that the classroom climate seems to directly affect students' motivated behaviour in terms of participation in the lessons. Teachers' relationships with their students are an important element of teaching and upbringing that takes place in the classroom. As Wentzel (2009) argues, these positive relationships might significantly affect learners' motivation.

The personal behaviour of the teacher, which includes setting an example, as well as the manner of referring to students, can generally affect students' motivation. According

to Kikuchi (2009), teacher behaviour is the most influential factor that has the potential to both motivate and demotivate students to learn. Dörnyei (1994) proposes a list of thirty teacher practices that can effectively motivate students, consisting not only of language-level or learner-level strategies, but also of particular teacher-specific activities and behaviours. These include helpful clues for giving instructions or feedback, but also information on a teacher's desirable traits and long-term practice.

The practice mentioned above that requires teachers to apply long-term solutions in the classroom refers to helping students develop a sense of self-confidence and self-efficacy as they are crucial for their motivation to learn. Students tend not to feel safe and confident in the language lessons as they experience stress and anxiety connected to using a foreign language. For this reason, it is the teacher's responsibility to provide the learners with meaningful and achievable language tasks that can help them overcome these difficulties (Oxford & Shearin 1994).

As Moskovsky et al. (2013) argue, teachers' practices are directly related to students' behaviour. They present in their study that teachers' motivational strategies can strongly affect and enhance students' motivation since their learning and language anxiety decreases and their learning self-efficacy visibly increases under the influence of teachers' practices. Additionally, Cheung (2018) implies that motivational strategies used by teachers in the classroom positively affect students' confidence in learning and reinforce their positive attitude towards the course. Cheung shows that teachers' motivating behaviour helps students gain a positive attitude towards the subject, engages them in the course, as well as allows them to feel successful and confident in the learning process.

Shousha (2018) suggests that many students perceive their teachers as role models crucial for their learning. For this reason, their motivation to learn is often dependent on teachers' behaviour. Students' self-esteem might need to be increased by positive feedback. Moreover, a good relationship between the teacher and the students, as well as a positive atmosphere in the classroom, can strongly affect students' willingness to participate in the lessons.

4. Teachers' motivational practices

Due to the important role of the teacher in the whole process of building students' motivation, many researchers have studied motivational strategies and their influence on learners' motivated behaviour in the classroom. Keller (1987) proposed the ARCS (Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction) motivation model, whose strategies include getting students' attention, showing them the relevance of the taught material, helping them gain the confidence they need to believe in a chance of success, and stimulating satisfaction with rewards. Maeng and Lee (2017) carried out classroom observations based on Keller's model that involved analysing the motivational strategies used by Korean teachers of English. The outcome of the research implies that the observed teachers

mostly used motivational strategies to get students' attention. The scholars suggest that motivational strategies are generally used more frequently by inexperienced teachers than by experienced ones. Additionally, the majority of the teachers used most of the techniques at the beginning of the lessons.

Dörnyei and Csizer (1998) developed ten basic strategies for motivating foreign language students. Dörnyei (2001) further proposed a set of over a hundred motivational strategies devised specifically for the language classroom. Based on Dörnyei and Csizer's (1998) general techniques, and with the use of Dörnyei's (2001) list of strategies, Sugita and Tekeuchi (2010) created questionnaires for teachers and students who participated in foreign language lessons in Japan. The conclusion of the study suggested that Japanese teachers usually focus on creating a friendly learning environment. However, due to formal requirements of the Japanese government regarding education, they are unable to frequently use a wide variety of strategies as they need to focus on meeting the ministry's conditions.

Although researchers define motivational strategies and list advisable techniques in quite various ways, they are all focused on understanding the learners and their needs. Motivational strategies generally determine teachers' behaviour and activities in the classroom, and their conscious use proves to be effective in motivating students.

5. Learners' motivated behaviour

Students' classroom engagement seems to be strongly affected by motivation. However, it is an aspect that might be difficult to observe as the indicators of motivated behaviour may be wrongly interpreted (Kong 2021). Nevertheless, learners' motivated behaviour can be generally categorised as active and passive responding. As Goodman (1990) explains, active responding includes learner's participation in the tasks, while passive responding refers to attentive behaviour during the lesson, such as listening to the teacher or other students, or watching peers do a task.

Dörnyei and Guilloteaux (2008) proposed a further distinction into three variables that indicate learners' motivation to learn during the lesson: attention, participation, and volunteering. Attention, being a passive academic response, includes students' looking and listening to the teacher, as well as generally following the pace of the lesson. Participation means active engagement in interactions and completing tasks, and volunteering is determined by students' willingness to voluntarily participate in teacher-centred activities.

6. Motivation Orientation of Language Teaching

Motivation Orientation of Language Teaching (MOLT) is a classroom observation instrument that includes teachers' motivational practices and students' motivated behaviour. It was developed by Dörnyei and Guilloteaux (2008) to study the occurrence of motivational strategies in different teachers' work in the classroom and their correlation with students' attention, participation, and volunteering. They considered four variables of teacher motivational

practice: teacher discourse, participation structure, encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation, and activity design. These categories of observable behaviours were derived from Dörnyei's (2001) framework of motivational strategies for language teaching.

The use of MOLT includes recording the occurrence and duration of each motivational strategy used by the teacher in every minute of the observed lesson, as well as assessing and marking students' motivated behaviour in terms of proportion in the group of attentive, participating, and volunteering students.

Building upon previous research and based on Dörnyei's (2001) theoretical framework of motivational strategies, the present study addresses the following research questions:

(1) What motivational strategies are used by Polish teachers of English in secondary schools?
(2) To what extent do Polish students of secondary schools display motivated behaviour during English lessons?
(3) Is there a relationship between teachers' use of motivational strategies and students' motivated behaviour?

7. The study

7.1. Methodology

For the study I adapted Dörnyei and Guilloteaux's (2008) Motivation Orientation on Language Teaching research instrument. Dörnyei and Guilloteaux included twenty-five strategies used by teachers in the categories of teacher discourse, participation structure, encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation, and activity design. The observer marked the occurrence of each strategy that was used after every minute passing during the lessons. If more than one event happened during that minute, the researcher recorded the one that took noticeably more time. The observations also involved assessing student motivated behaviour based on three variables: attention, participation, and volunteering. Dörnyei and Guilloteaux marked them on a scale as "very low" if a few students displayed a certain behaviour, "low" if it referred to one-third to two-thirds of the group, and "high" if more than two-thirds of the group showed motivated behaviours.

I altered the observation sheet to mark the occurrence of each strategy within three equally long parts of the lessons. This allowed me to record every event of the use of motivational strategies regardless of the amount of time devoted to it. In the current study, each observation lasted forty-five minutes, and therefore the lessons were divided into three fifteen-minute-long segments. Observed strategies and their brief descriptions, as well as their occurrence, are presented in Table 2.

Learners' motivated behaviour was assessed after each part of the lessons on a three-point scale. Considering Ellis's (2009) critique of Dörnyei and Guilloteaux's (2008) model, the aspect of "attention" was changed to "alertness". As Ellis (2009) argues, attention is

students' state of noticing when confronted with language input, while proposed alertness refers to the behaviour of passive academic responding or readiness to adequately react to incoming stimuli. For this reason, students' behaviour in this study was evaluated in terms of their alertness, participation, and volunteering. For each variable, a group could get a maximum of three points in each part of the lesson, depending on the proportion of the group displaying motivated behaviour within the particular part. During the observation, I carefully took note of individual student behaviour and the whole group's engagement, and marked the score at the end of each part of the lesson. Each variable can be described as "low" with a score of one point, "medium" if it was marked with two points, or "high" with three points. Table 1 presents a description of the scale for assessing student motivated behaviour adapted from Dörnyei and Guilloteaux (2008).

Table 1. Assessment scale of students' motivated behaviour, based on Dörnyei and Guilloteaux (2008)

Variable	Points	Description
Alertness	1	Few or no students are paying attention, looking at the teacher, or turning to listen to other students speak. Most students are not making appropriate reactions to classroom interaction, and they might be displaying disruptive behaviour.
	2	Approximately half of the group is paying attention, looking at the teacher, or turning to listen to other students speak. The group generally is not displaying disruptive behaviour.
	3	Most or all students are paying attention, looking at the teacher, or turning to listen to other students speak. Nobody displays disruptive behaviour.
Participation	1	Few or no students are actively taking part in classroom interaction or working on activities.
	2	Approximately half of the group is actively taking part in classroom interaction or working on activities.
	3	Most or all students are actively taking part in classroom interaction or working on activities.
Volunteering	1	Few or no students volunteer without the teacher's active encouragement.
	2	Approximately half of the group volunteers without the teacher's active encouragement.
	3	Most or all students volunteer without the teacher's active encouragement.

Motivational strategies taken into account in the observations can be considered in three categories: teacher discourse, activity design, and encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation. Teacher discourse refers to all forms of teacher communication, including but not limited to particular ways of carrying on a conversation in the classroom such as social chat with the students or referring to aspects of language education that are important to the students while presenting material or giving instructions through, for instance, establishing relevance or promoting integrative values. The generally described activity design includes all techniques the teacher uses to motivate the students by adjusting the tasks and activities that learners are expected to complete. Personalization of taught material and the methods used, hence allowing students to express their feelings, opinions, and experiences in the classroom belong to this group of motivational strategies. Activities can also be designed in a way that provides students with an intellectual challenge, such as a problem to solve or obstacles to overcome. Encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation is a category of strategies devised for feedback and praise. For instance, a process feedback session allows students to understand their mistakes and errors and learn from them. At the same time, effective praise is a strategy of offering students sincere and specific appreciation for their effort.

The three categories create a set of twenty-four motivational strategies that are observable during lessons. During the observations, I marked each occurrence to examine the frequency with which each teacher used the strategies throughout the lesson.

Due to the limited size of the sample, the correlation study was conducted with the use of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (Spearman 1904).

7.2. Participants

The observations took place in three different secondary schools. Ten teachers who participated in the study were all experienced secondary school teachers as each of them had been teaching English for at least five years. Five of the observed groups were first-year students, three consisted of second-year students, and two groups included third-year students. The size of the groups depended on the school: in two schools the groups were fairly small (two groups of eight students, two groups of ten students, and two groups of twelve students), and in one school they were bigger and consisted of thirteen, fourteen, sixteen, and eighteen students.

7.3. Results

The following table shows a detailed presentation of the frequency of used strategies.

Table 2. The use of motivational strategies

Motivational strategy	Description	Occur
Neutral feedback session	Checking the answers without the teacher expressing any irritation or criticism.	26
Scaffolding	Providing students with strategies and models useful for completing activities.	24
Elicitation of self or peer correction	Encouraging students to participate in their own and their peers' feedback.	21
Signposting	Explaining lesson objectives and giving summaries of made progress.	20
Social chat	Informal conversations, usually unrelated to the lesson.	16
Effective praise	Sincere and specific praise for a student's effort or achievement.	13
Promoting cooperation	Creating cooperation activities and encouraging students to work together on the tasks.	10
Personalization	Allowing the expression of students' meanings, feelings, opinions, and experiences.	9
Process feedback session	Focusing on what can be learned from the mistakes and the process of correcting them.	9
Something creative/ interesting/fantasy	Including interesting elements, fantasy, or a chance to use students' creativity.	8
Team competition	Creating activities specific for group work and competition, e.g. quiz games, races, etc.	8
Establishing relevance	Showing how the taught material can be connected to students' everyday lives.	8
Arousing curiosity or attention	Raising students' expectations during the presentation of an activity by showing them something surprising or asking them to guess what they are going to do.	8
Referential questions	Asking questions to which the teacher does not know the answer, including questions about students' lives.	8
Class applause	Celebrating a student's or group's effort or success by applauding.	7
Display questions	Asking questions to which the teacher knows the answer to check students' understanding or knowledge.	6

Motivational strategy	Description	Occur
Intellectual challenge	Providing students with a problem to solve, an obstacle to overcome, a memory challenge, discovering something, etc.	5
Stating communicative purpose	Mentioning the activity's usefulness outside the classroom in terms of communication.	4
Promoting autonomy	Involving students in making decisions, e.g. regarding the timing of the activity, allowing them to use the Internet to research on their own, etc.	4
Tangible task product	Having the students work on the production of a tangible outcome, e.g. a poster.	4
Promoting instrumental values	Explaining how the language can be useful for students in the world, e.g. at work.	3
Individual competition	Providing students with an opportunity to individually compete with each other in games.	2
Promoting integrative values	Promoting students' contact with the culture of the foreign language and encouraging them to explore it.	1
Tangible reward	Rewarding students with candy, stickers, etc. for effort and success.	0

Five motivational strategies were used most frequently by the observed teachers. A neutral feedback session is the most popular practice among the participants. It is the process of checking answers with the group without the teacher's expression of criticism or irritation with students' mistakes. The second most frequently used technique was scaffolding. The teachers used it multiple times to provide students with appropriate strategies or models necessary for completing the activities. They also fairly often encouraged students to revise their own or their peers' work and correct mistakes. The fourth most popular motivational strategy was signposting. It included teachers explicitly stating the lessons' objectives, as well as presenting summaries of progress already made towards achieving the goals. Teachers generally seemed eager to use the technique of social chat, mostly to begin the lesson in a friendly manner. These were moments of brief informal conversations between the teachers and the students, quite often conducted in Polish and usually unrelated to the lesson.

Three strategies were used least frequently. Tasks including individual competition appeared twice. Additionally, only one teacher once mentioned the integrative values of the lesson and encouraged students to seek contact with native speakers of English. During all ten observed lessons, nobody offered students a tangible reward for the successful completion of an activity.

Dividing the lessons into three parts allowed me to observe changes in the frequency of used strategies throughout the lessons. During seven lessons, the number of strategies used by the teachers decreased as the lessons passed. Two teachers were able to maintain a constant number of used techniques throughout the whole lesson, and one teacher increased it in the final part of the lesson.

There were also some differences between the teachers. One of the teachers, who was the only one who had asked to see the observation sheet before the lesson, used a total of thirty-eight motivational strategies in forty-five minutes. A full list of the teachers and their use of motivational strategies are presented in the graph below.

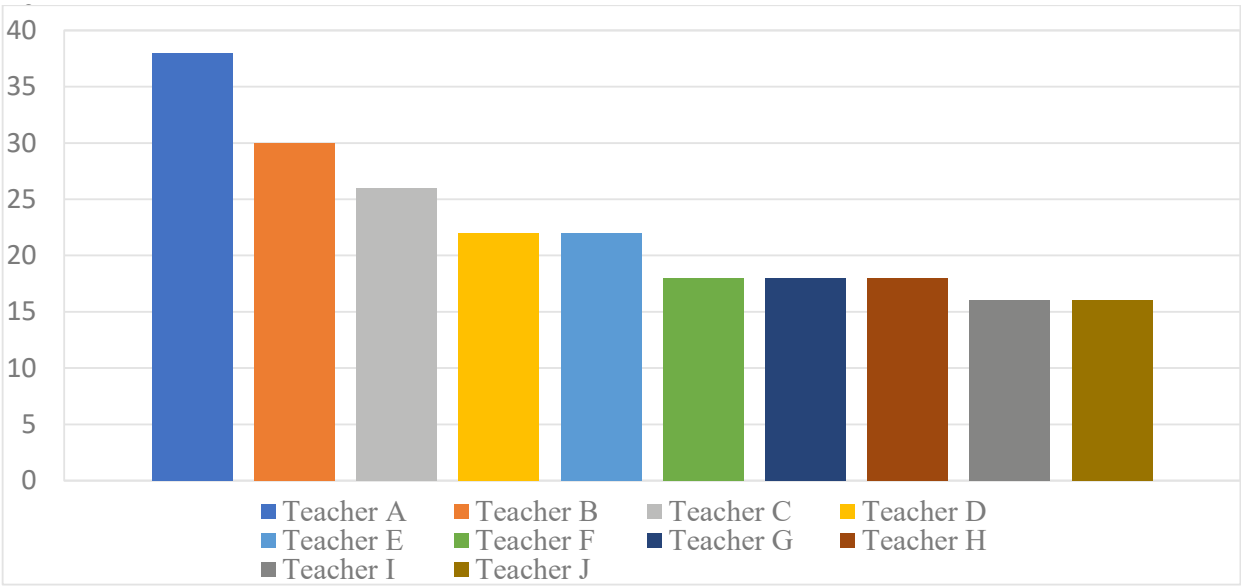

Figure 1. Differences between the teachers

Students' motivated behaviour was assessed in terms of three variables: alertness, participation, and volunteering in each part of the lesson depending on the proportion of engaged students in the group. Alertness and participation were the behavioural variables that were most frequently observed, while volunteering tended to remain rather low. A detailed assessment of students' motivated behaviour is presented in Table 3.

Alertness was the highest displayed behaviour in one group. In three groups, the variable was equally high with the aspect of participation, and in one group all three aspects were on the same level of medium-motivated behaviour. During five lessons, students seemed to be most alert during the first part of the lesson, losing some of their focus in the next parts. In those cases, most or all students in the groups paid attention to classroom interactions. In nine groups, students' alertness reached a high level at least once, and during one lesson it was maintained at a medium level throughout all three parts. Two groups were able to stay highly alert throughout the whole lesson.

Table 3. Students' motivated behaviour

Group	**Alertness**			**Total alertness**	**Participation**			**Total participation**	**Volunteering**			**Total volunteering**	**Total**
	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3		Part 1	Part 2	Part 3		Part 1	Part 2	Part 3		
Group A	3	3	3	9	3	3	3	9	2	2	2	6	24
Group B	3	3	2	8	3	3	3	9	2	3	2	7	24
Group C	2	3	3	8	2	3	3	8	1	2	2	5	21
Group D	3	2	1	6	2	2	2	6	2	2	2	6	18
Group E	3	2	3	8	3	2	3	8	2	1	2	5	21
Group F	3	2	1	6	3	3	2	8	2	2	2	6	20
Group G	3	2	2	7	3	3	2	8	1	2	1	4	19
Group H	2	3	2	7	2	3	3	8	1	3	2	6	21
Group I	2	2	2	6	3	2	3	8	2	1	2	5	19
Group J	3	3	3	9	3	2	3	8	2	1	3	6	23

In four groups, participation was the highest-scored variable during the whole lesson. Two groups were able to actively participate throughout the first thirty minutes of the lesson, partially decreasing the level of participation to medium in the last part. Three groups highly participated in both the first and last parts of the lesson with only a small decrease to the medium level in the second part. Three groups maintained the same level of participation during the whole lesson. These included two classes that kept the level high for all three parts, and one group that participated on the medium level. Two groups started the lessons with a score of two points for participation, but they started taking part in class more actively after the first fifteen minutes.

Volunteering was the least frequently displayed behaviour in nine observed groups. All scores for volunteering were fairly low compared to other categories of learners' motivated behaviour. Different groups managed to get three points in this aspect only three times. One point was given seven times in six groups as few or no students volunteered without teachers' additional encouragement. The most frequent score, which occurred twenty times in ten lessons, was two points. In four groups, some students started volunteering in the second part of the lesson. Three groups mostly stopped volunteering in the second part of the lesson. However, the level increased again in the final part. In three groups, students' willingness to volunteer stayed at the medium level throughout the whole lesson.

No correlation was found between the use of teachers' motivational strategies and generally considered motivated learner behaviour (Spearman's rho=0.469, p=0.172), as well as between motivational strategies and students' alertness (Spearman's rho=0.398, p=0.255), participation (Spearman's rho=0.488, p=0.152), or volunteering (Spearman's rho=0.287, p=0.421).

7.4. Discussion

As the results indicate, a neutral feedback session is the most popular motivational strategy among the observed teachers. The reason for this tendency might be the fact that it is the quickest and most efficient way of informing students about their errors and progress. Polish secondary school teachers require a lot of exercises for practising grammar and vocabulary in English lessons. They are supposed to help students prepare for final exams that include a major testing part with questions with only one possible answer. Therefore, teachers probably find it necessary to do many various exercises whose form is typical for the exams to give students the opportunity to get used to this form of testing. Neutral feedback does not require any additional preparation from the teacher, nor does it force him or her to check all the exercises after the lesson. Moreover, what is crucial for neutral feedback to take place is the lack of teacher criticism or negative emotions connected to students' making errors. It is simply a piece of clear information about whether an activity has been done correctly or not.

Intensive exam preparation might also be an explanation for the high frequency of scaffolding. Secondary school education is the time when students learn useful strategies for doing typical grammar and vocabulary tasks, completing reading and listening comprehension tests, and writing a correct exam essay that would meet the exam's strict criteria. Teachers use the strategy of scaffolding to help students understand the way the exam is created, the standards they need to meet, and the typical techniques that are useful in this particular type of test. The observed teachers occasionally mentioned the exam and drew students' attention to the types of activities done during the lessons.

Even though neutral feedback is quick and easy, elicitation of self or peer correction is a quite popular strategy in secondary schools. This might be due to the fact that teachers seem to be aware of self-correction being useful in students' development as independent learners. This technique allows them to seek alternative solutions and look at their own work critically. Peer correction has the potential to fulfil the same function as long as it is not overused towards the same student or small group of students as it might result in a loss of self-confidence in the group.

Signposting is crucial in education since it can help students understand all that needs to be done as well as track their progress in learning and pursuing a goal. Not only can it help build students' autonomy and confidence as learners, but it also works as additional motivation. As one of the most frequently used strategies, signposting occurred in all parts of the lessons. This included introductions with summaries and revisions of previously taught material in the first few minutes, tracking the progress made throughout the observed lessons, as well as repetitions and revising at the end of the lessons. This practice allowed students to stay focused on the tasks and see the effectiveness of their work.

Almost all of the observed teachers used the strategy of social chat at least one time during the lesson. Only one teacher decided to reject it in the observed class. Social chat does not require preparation and, most importantly, it is simply a natural form of interaction between the teacher and the students. This motivational strategy might give students the feeling that their teachers honestly want to get to know them and are genuinely interested in their lives and stories. Moreover, teachers can use this knowledge to appropriately adjust the lesson plans to the personal needs of the students.

Promoting instrumental values among the students was not a popular strategy, even though it might seem that potential social or financial success stemming from future language fluency could be a fairly motivating factor in the age group of secondary school teenagers. The reason for little or no use of this strategy may be the teachers' and students' willingness to mainly focus on school-oriented goals, such as tests, grades and exam preparations, rather than the long-term perspective on the usefulness of a foreign language.

Individual competition was not often used, most probably due to organisational factors. Small language classrooms in Polish secondary schools are not fit for individual competition as they do not have a lot of space to stand up or move around, especially in

the bigger groups. It is much easier to organise group activities and individual seated work that can be done without leaving the desks very often.

Promoting integrative values does not seem to be a popular motivational strategy. Even though the programme of English courses in Poland includes lessons regarding the culture and people of English-speaking countries, they most probably get neglected due to lack of time and the need to prepare for exams as much as possible. Promoting integrative values is presumably not a priority.

A secondary school is a place where the students are teenagers who do not get motivated by tangible rewards, such as candy or stickers. If a teacher proposed such a reward in the classroom, students would probably not take it seriously. It is possible to make the tangible reward age-appropriate and try to motivate teenagers with the promise of pizza or modern gadgets, but the obstacle here is the financial aspect, as the rewards would have to be bought from the teacher's personal budget.

The tendency observed in the practices of seven teachers to reduce the use of motivational strategies in the process of the lessons might be caused by their willingness to draw students' attention at the beginning of the lesson. After that, they use visibly fewer strategies, which might be caused by lack of time or the need to actively maintain students' motivation during the rest of the lesson. The same trend appeared in Maeng and Lee's (2017) study.

The differences in the use of motivational strategies between the teachers might be explained by the fact that they are simply different individuals with their own professional approaches to teaching. However, the case of the teacher who might have purposefully used thirty-eight motivational strategies in one lesson having seen the observation sheet beforehand brings out the possibility that teachers' awareness of their role in motivating and the importance of motivational strategies could affect their motivational practices.

Students' comparatively low willingness to volunteer might be a result of their anxiety in the language classroom. Horwitz et al. (1986) explain that many learners strongly believe that they are not supposed to say anything in a foreign language until they are certain of their knowledge and correctness of their words. Additionally, Awan et al. (2010) point out that it is frequently related to the stress of speaking in front of the teacher and the group, and making a mistake. Papi and Abdollahzadeh's (2012) study addressing the issue of students' motivated behaviour suggested the low volunteering tendency in comparison to other variables as well.

The small research sample is supposedly the main reason for no correlation that could be established between the use of motivational strategies and student motivated behaviour. It might also be related to students' age. As secondary school students, they are supposedly not easily affected by adults, including the teachers, and their attempts at encouraging them to learn. Additionally, students' motivated behaviour and their responses to teachers' motivational strategies might have been affected by the presence

of the observer. Teachers wanted to know what the objectives of the study and the observations were, and they were informed about them. For this reason, they might have used motivational strategies more frequently or in a different way than usual, which could have been surprising to students who, not being used to such a situation, may not have known how to react to them.

Dörnyei and Guilloteaux's (2008) results suggest that the most popular strategies are neutral feedback, establishing relevance, and including an element of fantasy or creativity. They also showed teachers' unwillingness to promote integrative and instrumental values and use effective praise. Interestingly, the current study shows that even though neutral feedback also seems to be the most frequently used motivational strategy, establishing relevance and using fantasy and creativity might be comparatively less popular. Similarly, promoting instrumental and integrative values was not frequently observed during this research. However, effective praise was used by the teachers multiple times, and is the sixth most often used motivational strategy. In contradiction to the results of this study, Dörnyei and Guilloteaux's (2008) research implies a strong correlation between teachers' motivational practice and students' motivated behaviour. As they argue, teachers' strategies are directly related to students' classroom behaviour.

As Dörnyei and Guilloteaux (2008) explain, there are many factors affecting students' motivation and motivated behaviour in the classroom, including their physical and psychological differences, or social influence. For this reason, the clear variety of different tendencies in all the observed groups suggests that a larger group of participants should take part in a study for any correlation between teachers' motivational practices and students' motivated behaviour to be observable.

8. Conclusion

Motivation is a crucial aspect that can significantly affect the process of learning a foreign language. The role of the teacher in the classroom and in motivating has been proven in different contexts, and many scholars have proposed various techniques for arousing and maintaining students' motivation in the language classroom. Even though motivational strategies are usually known to the teachers, practical and organisational aspects of the lesson do not always allow them to use them properly and effectively.

The current study presented the most and the least frequently used motivational strategies and the differences that occurred between ten secondary school teachers' motivational practices. The most popular techniques were neutral feedback, which is a quick and effective strategy to use in the classroom to give students precisely the information they need to correct their errors, as well as elicitation of self or peer correction, which can help students develop as independent learners. Additionally, many teachers used scaffolding, which is useful in exam preparation as it teaches the use of different strategies necessary for fulfilling the tasks. Signposting, almost as frequently used, allows

students to track their progress. Social chat was also a fairly popular strategy and helps build relationships with students. The least frequently used strategies were promoting integrative and instrumental values, and using individual competition, most probably due to the organisational reality of the language courses.

Students are generally not eager to volunteer during lessons without teachers' additional persuasion. This could be related to language classroom anxiety, as well as simply to the presence of the observer. The observed groups seemed generally willing to participate and stay alert during the lessons. Nevertheless, the limitations of the study caused by the relatively small number of conducted observations did not allow me to notice relevant tendencies in terms of alertness and participation.

No correlation was found between the use of teacher motivational strategies and student motivated behaviour. This might be due to the small sample, as well as related to the age of the students, or to the unusual situation of being observed during the lesson, from the perspective of both the teachers and the students.

The present study has implications for future research regarding factors affecting secondary school students' motivation to learn English as a foreign language. This study shows a lack of correlation between teachers' motivational strategies and student motivated behaviour. However, it would be worth conducting a study with a bigger sample that could allow a more detailed correlation analysis.

Multiple studies that have been conducted regarding motivational strategies could be used by teacher education and professional development programmes. Studies such as this one suggest that many teachers might not know how or why they could use motivational strategies to help their students improve and master the language. The fact that many teachers do not use these techniques is proof that there is space for a lot of growth in this field.

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The TUNJO battery as a predictor of phonetic ability: A survey among English Philology students

Abstract. Some learners are more successful in foreign language mastering than others. Among the plausible explanations discussed in the literature (Carroll 1981; Skehan 1991; Dörnyei 2005; Stansfield & Reed 2019; Griffiths & Soruç 2020), the concept of foreign language aptitude (FLA) is regarded as one of the key factors that can influence or predict learners' success in the process of foreign language acquisition. The present pilot quantitative study aims to assess the extent to which learners' level of foreign language aptitude can be correlated to their general phonological ability based on the example of first-year MA English Philology students (N=10). To assess the students' level of aptitude, the Polish adaptation of the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT), called the Test of Aptitude for the Learning of Foreign Languages (Test Uzdolnień do Nauki Języków Obcych – TUNJO), was used. On the other hand, to measure their level of phonetic ability, the test, which focused on several chosen areas covered during practical and theoretical phonetics classes during the BA programme, was constructed and submitted to the group. The quantitative data gathered throughout those two stages were subsequently analysed and interpreted. The results obtained revealed no significant correlation between the students' level of aptitude and their general phonetic ability. Other individual differences and affective factors in language learning, alongside the structure of the measuring tools and the measurement itself, may justify the apparent lack of correlation.

Keywords: foreign language aptitude, phonological ability, aptitude testing, pronunciation testing, correlational analysis

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1. Introduction

The notion of Individual Differences (ID) has attracted great scientific interest in applied linguistics, resulting in a daunting array of publications on the subject (Carroll 1991; Skehan 1991; Horwitz 2000; Dörnyei 2001; Ellis 2004). According to the differential psychological approach, which focuses on understanding the nature of human functioning, dissimilarities between people can contribute to several areas of their lives, including learning. Those dissimilarities are frequently referred to as IDs (Skehan 1991: 275–276).

A literature review might offer a vast number of individual learner variables. Ellis (2004: 525–528) reports that factors that may contribute to how successful one is in learning a language can be of an affective, cognitive, or social nature. Among the frequently discussed cognitive and affective individual difference factors in second language acquisition, the author mentions language aptitude, learning styles, motivation, anxiety, personality traits and learner beliefs.

The present study focuses on the notion of language learning aptitude, which is one of the cognitive factors that predicts one's future success in language performance. The existing body of research on language aptitude suggests that it can be linked to different spheres of L2 performance, including knowledge of grammar and vocabulary (Suzukida 2021: 50). Recent years have witnessed growing academic interest in the links between learners' pronunciation skills and their language aptitude (Baker Smemoe & Haslam 2013; Saito et al. 2019). The present study, therefore, was developed to examine the relationship between English philology students' aptitude levels and their phonetic performance.

2. The notion of Foreign Language Aptitude (FLA)

According to Spolsky (1995: 321), research in the field of language aptitude began at the start of the 20th century, with its most fruitful period dating back to the 1950s and 1960s. Initial endeavours to create language aptitude measures can be observed in the 1920s and 1930s and during World War II. During that period, the studies focused on finding a tool that would predict one's success or failure in learning a foreign language, and the tests created were known as so-called prognosis tests (Spolsky 1995: 323–325). However, the most comprehensive study of language aptitude in the 20th century was undertaken by J.B. Carroll, a famous American psychologist and linguist, whose effort and pioneering work are still regarded to be the most significant in the field (Saito et al. 2019: 203–204). Alongside his colleague S.M. Sapon, Carroll designed the Modern Languages Aptitude Test (1957), thereby marking the beginning of the wave of interest in the language learning aptitude concept. Thus, it is reasonable to commence the discussion of the notion of language learning aptitude with the work of Carroll.

The construct of foreign language aptitude can be defined in several ways. According to the basic definition based on Carroll's preliminary assumptions, language learning aptitude or foreign language aptitude (FLA) can be described as "the specific talent

for learning a foreign or second language" (Wen et al. 2017: 2). Others construe FLA as a "gift for languages" (Rosenthal 1996: 59) or "an ear for languages" (Pimsleur 1966). Still, a classic and widely used definition presented by Carroll (1981: 86) states that language learning aptitude is "an individual's initial state of readiness and capacity for learning a foreign language and probable facility in doing so given the presence of motivation and opportunity." FLA can also be described as "a set of perceptual and cognitive abilities" which contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the language learning process (Saito et al. 2019: 203). Throughout this paper, I will interchange the terms language learning aptitude, foreign language aptitude, and aptitude itself.

Regarding FLA as a multifaceted concept, Carroll (1965) created a four-component taxonomy for the distinction of sub-areas of aptitude. Currently, there is no finer or more influential categorisation of FLA components presented in the literature than Carroll's (Skehan 2012). According to Carroll (1965: 128–130), one can distinguish between four measurable elements of foreign language aptitude: *phonetic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, inductive language learning ability*, and *associative memory.*

The Carrollian (1965) taxonomy of FLA components, which is widely used to measure learners' aptitude, can be summarised using the following table:

Table 1. Carroll's (1965) taxonomy of Foreign Language Aptitude components

Phonetic coding ability	Learners' ability to recognise sounds and link them to their graphemic representations in the form of letters.
Grammatical sensitivity	Learners' ability to grasp the meaning of grammatical functions of words based on the context.
Rote learning ability	Learners' ability to learn new pieces of vocabulary and match them with their translations in L1.
Inductive language learning	Learner's ability to form general rules by means of analysing specific examples.

The first subcomponent of foreign language aptitude is the so-called phonetic coding ability. Carroll (1965: 128) defines it as one's "ability to code auditory phonetic material." To be more precise, it means that a person has the capacity to identify and later retrieve recently introduced sounds of a specified phonetic system from memory. However, when it comes to this particular ability, whether one is linking them to their visual and auditory representations is also measured (Wen 2012: 233).

The second component of FLA, namely, grammatical sensitivity, makes it easier for learners to identify the grammatical functions of lexical units in a text in various contexts (Carroll 1965: 129). Nevertheless, Robinson (2001: 324) states that grammatical sensitivity is occasionally confused with one's knowledge of grammar in a given language. So, it is

crucial to remember that this construct deals with one being aware of syntactic patterns within sentences.

The third variable, inductive language learning ability or inductive language learning, stands for the process of inducing linguistic rules through evaluating the structure of a given language by learners. Defining inductive learning, Carroll (1965: 130) states that it is "the ability to infer linguistic forms, rules, and patterns from new linguistic content itself with a minimum of supervision or guidance". It means the student's task is to discover rules by themselves while observing language samples.

The last of the four variables is associative or rote memory for foreign language materials. Wen (2012: 234) describes it as one's ability "to rote learn vocabulary items paired with their associated translations." Moreover, rote learning ability for foreign languages is also connected to one's capacity to form this set of associations in a relatively short period of time.

3. Research in the area of FLA

The primary research in the field of foreign language aptitude testing can be divided into two major branches: (1) the construction of aptitude tests, and (2) the validation of aptitude measurements, in particular, their construct and predictive validity. The former survey approach has been predominant since the late 1950s. Initial aptitude studies were conducted to set an effective language aptitude measure with a robust and solid predictive power (Spolsky 1995: 334). The latter approach is currently gaining in popularity and interest among researchers. According to Li (2015: 807–810), a considerable volume of studies investigate whether aptitude tests are valid and reliable so that language aptitude can be regarded as a predictive tool for L2 outcomes.

3.1. Testing aptitude: the MLAT battery and its adaptations

Initially, to measure the likelihood of one's success in acquiring a language, the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) was created and published by J.B. Carroll and S. Sapon in 1959. Targeting literate English-speaking adults, the construction of the test battery is done in such a way that it covers several components of FLA, so it is possible to measure the skills required to learn a foreign language.

On the whole, the MLAT is comprised of five sub-tests. Each of these parts focuses on distinct abilities and will be briefly discussed as presented in Stansfield & Reed (2019). The MLAT battery has the following framework:

(1) Number learning;
(2) Phonetic script;
(3) Spelling clues;
(4) Words in sentences;
(5) Paired associates.

In the first part (1), examinees are to learn the names of the numbers in a new language. The language used to cover the numerical system is fictitious. Chosen single-figure and multi-figure numbers consisting of digits from 1 to 4 are presented to the group aurally so that they can remember the names of the numbers they learnt and associate them with their written representations. In due course, after some practice, the task of the test-takers is to differentiate between those numbers while completing a listening comprehension activity. The figures in numbers are put into different variations up to hundreds. This sub-test covers rote-learning, inductive learning, and phonetic coding abilities according to its composition and procedure.

The second sub-test (2) rates one's ability to form a set of links between speech sounds and their graphemic equivalents while learning a language. However, unlike in the Number Learning test, the authors of the MLAT battery decided to conduct the second part using the symbols and sounds of the English language. The examinees are provided with sets of four syllables presented to them in oral form. Their task is to choose one of the four syllables which contains the sound they hear. Therefore, the Phonetic Script test mainly focuses on assessing phonetic coding ability.

The third element of the MLAT test (3) requires the task-takers to be able to create associations between the meaning of a given word and its synonym. Nonetheless, the pieces of vocabulary which express the synonymous expression are provided with a distorted spelling. It is also critical that successful performance in this activity is mainly dependent on one's knowledge of the target vocabulary in the English language. Thus, this sub-test can be regarded as a practical implantation of phonetic coding ability.

The fourth part (4) tests one's grammatical sensitivity or, in other words, examinees' awareness of grammatical structures. It is accomplished by analysing the structure of two sentences and the syntactic function of certain words in those chunks. In the first sentence, there is an underlined target word whose syntactic function should be matched with one of the five highlighted words in the second sentence. Task-takers examine the sentences without knowing the exact names of syntactic functions.

In the fifth part of the MLAT battery (5) the examined have to learn new pieces of vocabulary from another language alongside its English translations in a relatively short time. After completing an exercise to practice the newly learnt words, they are asked to perform the actual task. Due to the fact that the last sub-test aims to check how well one can recall the translations of the given words, it is connected to rote learning ability.

The MLAT test is one of many aptitude tests available on the market. There is a profusion of aptitude testing tools to choose from. Among other frequently used FLA measures, we can list the Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (PLAB) (Pimsleur 1966), the Cognitive Ability for Novelty in Acquisition of Language-Foreign (CANAL-F) (Grigorenko et al. 2000), the Language Learning and Meaning Acquisition (LLAMA) (Meara 2005), and the High-Level Language Aptitude Battery (Hi-LAB) (Doughty et al. 2010) tests. Still, it

is crucial to note that scholars (Li 2015: 387; Griffiths & Soruç 2020: 64) claim that those tests are mainly constructed on the basis of the MLAT. It is also not yet proven whether the alternative measures are more valid than the original source. Therefore, although the MLAT is often criticised for its uneven coverage of Carroll's four FLA components, since its publication in the 1950s the battery is still regarded as the most influential, popular, and comprehensive tool and measure in aptitude research. Besides, some scholars assert that there is no need to question the validity of the MLAT battery since "the validity of the MLAT and other FL tests had been amply demonstrated" (Sparks & Ganschow 2001: 101).

3.2. Implementations of aptitude measures

With regard to the second domain in aptitude research, scholars endeavour to correlate the content and results of aptitude tests to (1) other learners' individual differences, affective and cognitive factors that may influence language acquisition and learning processes, as well as (2) learners' results or achievement in L2 acquisition. In reality, those two strands of research often overlap because researchers consider both individual differences and learning outcomes.

It is also crucial to note that the primary intention of such studies is to gain evidence of the validity of the aptitude construct due to the ongoing argument on whether language aptitude can serve as a predictor of one's language performance (Li 2015: 808–809). Research findings present strong evidence that foreign language aptitude is a reliable predictor of learning outcomes. The vast majority of conclusions suggest that foreign language aptitude can be included as a predictor of future language performance due to consistent positive correlations that occur between FLA and L2 performance (Chappelle 1988; Sparks & Ganschow 2001; Hummel 2009; Haslam 2010; Baker Smemoe & Haslam 2013; Li 2015). For instance, such a hypothesis was examined in the study performed by Baker Smemoe and Haslam (2013), which is one of the very few examples of analysing foreign language aptitude and its relation to students' pronunciation skills. Their study focused on establishing correlations between language learning context, language learning strategies and language learning aptitude in terms of pronunciation gains. Interestingly, the study's results suggest that the higher the learners' level of aptitude, the higher their pronunciation accuracy is. The survey conducted by Haslam (2010) also provides support for FLA being regarded as a predictor of future performance. The results obtained by Haslam (2010), whose research tried to find the associations between language aptitude, learning strategies, and pronunciation proficiency, revealed no link between general aptitude and pronunciation gains. However, Haslam (2010: 96–97) suggests that "there was reason to believe that sound discrimination, aptitude and auditory ability quite possibly predict gain in pronunciation proficiency." The author suggests that only auditory aptitude can be implemented as an L2 learning success predictor.

On the other hand, the study of Zeidner (1987) offers some evidence that may diminish the role of language aptitude in predicting the results or performance in L2 courses. The results of the study failed to demonstrate consistent predictive validity in terms of performative differences. As stated by Zeidner (1987: 46–47), not only did the representatives of ethnic minorities in Israel obtain slightly lower aptitude results than the majority, but their scores also failed to predict their future marks. Following Zeidner's (1987) assumptions, using aptitude measures as a credible prognostic tool in the learning process might be revised for students from different backgrounds.

Considering the abovementioned facts, language learning aptitude may be acknowledged as a valid predictive measure. This point is supported by the statistical relationships established between learning outcomes and foreign language aptitude levels. If revised attentively, FLA can significantly predict one's future language learning success. As a result, aptitude tests can be utilised during the placement process. This conclusion is consistent with the point presented by (Bachman 1990; Spolsky 1995). As claimed by Bachman (1990: 58–59), "in many language programs, students are grouped homogeneously according to factors such as level of language ability, language aptitude, language use needs, and professional specialisation."

4. Aims of the study

This article reports on the results of the pilot study that was undertaken within the framework of establishing a correlation between foreign language aptitude with a particular area of language ability, i.e., pronunciation skills. Therefore, it was required to establish whether students' level of language aptitude predicted their pronunciation gains in foreign language acquisition. To do so, the following research questions were set:

1) What is the level of language aptitude in a group of English philology students?
2) What is the level of phonetic ability in a group of English philology students?
3) Is there a correlation between learners' level of foreign language aptitude (FLA) and their general ability in terms of phonetics?
4) What is the predominant aptitude profile in a group of English philology students?

Based on the assumptions found in the literature, the initial hypotheses were formulated as follows:

1. Both aptitude and phonetic ability levels are comparatively high in a given sample.
2. There is a positive correlation between students' level of foreign language aptitude and their general ability in terms of phonetics.

5. Methodology of the study

5.1. Participants

Ten first-year MA English Philology students who responded to the research inquiry participated voluntarily in the experiment. All of them had graduated from the University of Białystok and were in the process of obtaining their master's degrees in the field of TESOL during the study. The participants were Polish native speakers, holding bachelor's degrees in English Philology. Moreover, all participants had covered the same programmes regarding their phonetics training (both theoretical and practical phonetics) during their BA studies, so it could be assumed that their phonetic knowledge and abilities were comparable.

5.2. Procedures and measures

The experimental setup of the current pilot study is similar to the one proposed in the study conducted by Baker Smemoe & Haslam (2013). However, the choice of measurement tools was different. Two measures were set to find the answer to the research questions:

1. The level of foreign language aptitude;
2. The rate of the students' general phonetic ability.

Specifically, the pilot study included the following significant steps:

1. Submitting the FLA test (the TUNJO Battery) and the phonetics assessment to the students in order to measure their level of aptitude alongside their phonetic ability;
2. Collecting aptitude and phonetics tests results and carrying out the analysis.

Since the MLAT battery is aimed at native English speakers, several Polish versions of the aptitude tests were proposed (Kuliniak 2002; Rysiewicz 2008; Wojtowicz 2006). For the purpose of this study, the Foreign Language Aptitude Test – Polish (Test Uzdolnień do Nauki Języków Obcych – TUNJO) which was developed by J. Rysiewicz (2008) was selected. The field testing of the TUNJO battery and correlational analysis demonstrates ample evidence for the reliability and validity of the MLAT adaptation for Polish speakers. Therefore, it may be stated that the TUNJO battery can serve as a valid aptitude measure (Stansfield et al. 2019).

To a large extent, the structure of the TUNJO battery is highly similar to that of the MLAT test and can be described as a reflection built upon the original source (Stansfield et al. 2019). The sub-tests serve as a straightforward adaptation with slight changes in pace. However, one of the tasks, which concerns inductive language ability and is not found in the MLAT, was newly created by the test developer.

There are six parts of the test, regarded as:

(1) Phonetic Alphabet ("Alfabet Fonetyczny");
(2) Artificial Language ("Sztuczny Język");
(3) Hidden Words ("Ukryte Słowa");

(4) Number Learning ("Uczenie się liczb");
(5) Words in Sentences ("Słowa w zdaniach");
(6) New Words ("Nowe słowa").

The Phonetic Alphabet test (1) focuses on phonetic coding ability, which means that it examines one's ability to link the auditory version of the sound with the letter and retrain this association from memory for further manipulations while completing a particular task. Moreover, according to the author, the test allows measuring the capacity of one's auditory memory.

The second part, the Artificial Language test (2), which is not presented in the MLAT battery, tests the inductive language learning ability, letting learners perceive patterns in how linguistic forms change. Those patterns include singular and plural forms of nouns, tense shifts, and word formation rules. The task presents a list of different forms of words and phrases in an artificial language. After studying the examples for some time, examinees have to translate some fragments using both Polish and the artificial language of the task.

The Hidden Words sub-test (3) measures learners' phonetic coding ability. It is achieved in terms of comparing synonymous lexical items. The participants' task is to match synonyms despite one of them being in the form of a distorted word or phrase that lacks particular letters. The gaps in spelling should be completed based on the memorised version of the given word and the ability to associate sounds with letters.

The fourth component (4) combines examining two FLA variables covered in prior sub-tests, namely, phonetic coding ability and inductive language learning. However, its structure is more auditory-based if compared with the first sub-test of the battery since the information and the instructions are transmitted through audio. Moreover, learners' phonological memory is also tested due to the immediate response required.

The next sub-test (5) serves as a tool for grammatical sensitivity assessment. It examines learners' ability to notice syntactic functions of chosen words that are presented in a sentence without explicitly and specifically naming them.

The closing TUNJO part is specifically constructed to evaluate learners' capacity to remember a lexical item provided in an isolated context via visual and audio channels within a relatively short period of time.

The structures of the TUNJO and MLAT tests and their coverage of the FLA components are presented in the table below:

Table 2. The structure of the MLAT and the TUNJO batteries compared

The TUNJO battery	The MLAT battery	FLA components covered
Test I Phonetic Alphabet	Test II Phonetic script	Phonetic coding ability
Test II Artificial Language	not presented	Inductive language learning ability
Test III Hidden Words	Test III Spelling Clues	Phonetic coding ability
Test IV Number Learning	Test I Number Learning	Phonetic coding ability, inductive language learning and phonological memory
Test V Words in Sentences	Test IV Words in sentences	Grammatical sensitivity
Test VI New Words	Test V Paired Associates	Rote learning ability

Based on the total number of points earned in the TUNJO test, the level of aptitude is set. On the one hand, the results provide information about the relative ease and speed with which a learner masters a foreign language. The higher the learner scores in a given group, the higher their level of aptitude. Furthermore, according to Rysiewicz (2008), relying on the results of sub-tests, one can distinguish between three aptitude modalities or profiles: phonetic, analytical, and memory. From a pedagogical and educational perspective, these findings are extremely valuable and precious since it may be possible to adjust teaching techniques and methods to suit the needs of learners with a particular modality.

The results of the test, which included total scores in the battery and its subtests, as well as the information regarding the learning modalities of the students, were interpreted following the instructions provided by the author.

In the second stage, the oral phonetics test (Appendix 1) was used to assess the rate of participants' general phonetic ability. The test employed for the phonetic ability assessment was created as an adaptation of the existing examples (Celce-Murcia et al. 2010). Even though in pronunciation testing prosodic features such as intonation or stress are often neglected due to their assumed complexity (Dlaska & Krekeler 2008: 508), the implemented test focuses both on segmental and suprasegmental phonetics. Additionally, the content of the test corresponds to the syllabi of the practical phonetics courses taught during the BA programme at the University of Białystok.

The phonetics test is comprised of four minor parts. While the first part of the test covered only segmental features—the accurate pronunciation of the chosen items, the remaining subtests holistically assessed pronunciation, addressing both segmental and suprasegmental phonetics. The sub-tests can be regarded as follows:

Part I. The Minimal Pairs test;

Part II. The Scripted Paragraph test;

Part III. The Scripted Dialogue test;

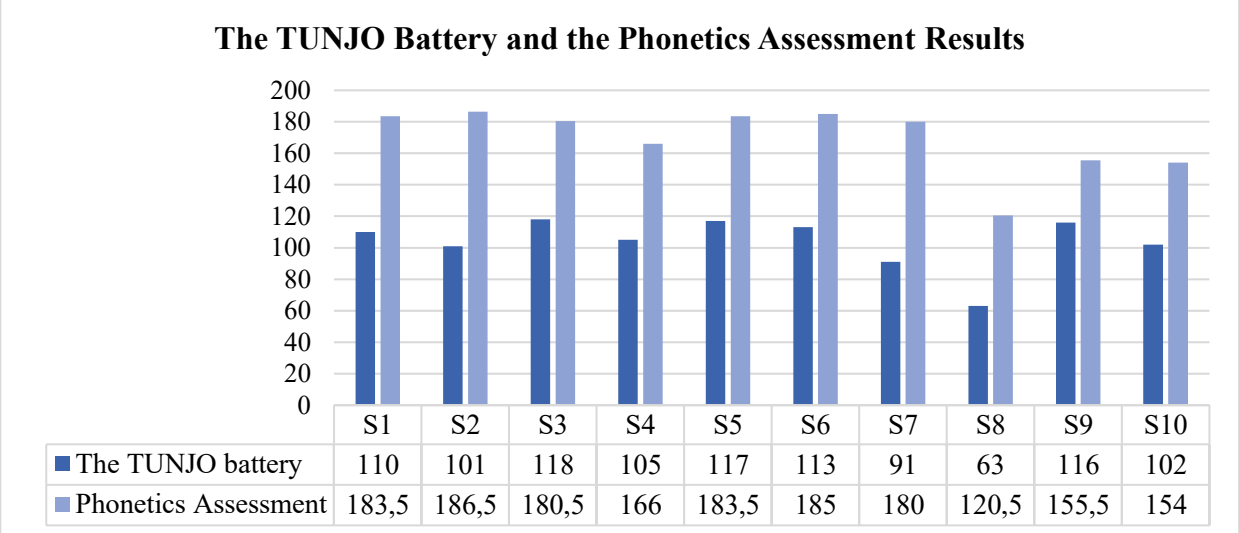
Part IV. The Free Speech test.

To design the test, thorough analyses of the syllabi content and the teaching materials used during practical phonetics classes were initiated. As a result, the most problematic sounds were selected for the first subtest, and the list of twenty minimal pairs that differ only in one phoneme was created. During the second part, the test-takers were asked to read the paragraph diligently, paying particular attention to the pronunciation of vowels and consonants, reduced forms, word and sentence stress, linking, and the intonation of statements. The following part, the scripted dialogue test, required being especially beware of intonation. Finally, the free speech subtest was designed to establish how well students could control their English pronunciation when they simultaneously had to concentrate on accuracy and content.

Each sub-test was recorded in the phonetics laboratory. The participants were asked to read the fragments aloud while being recorded. They were also offered several minutes so that they could prepare before they started recording parts II and III. The recordings were assessed by a phonetician teaching phonetics classes, using a scale from 1 to 5 (1=poor to 5=excellent) for each phonetic phenomenon.

6. Findings

The overall scores of the participants gained in the TUNJO battery (max. possible score = 145, max. score in the group = 118, min. score in the group = 63) and the phonetics assessment (max. possible score = 210, max. score in the group = 186.5, min. score in the group = 120.5) are presented in the bar graph below (Figure 1):



	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10
The TUNJO battery	110	101	118	105	117	113	91	63	116	102
Phonetics Assessment	183,5	186,5	180,5	166	183,5	185	180	120,5	155,5	154

Figure 1. The TUNJO Battery and Phonetics Assessment total

The scores obtained in the sub-tests of the TUNJO battery by each participant are presented in Figure 2.

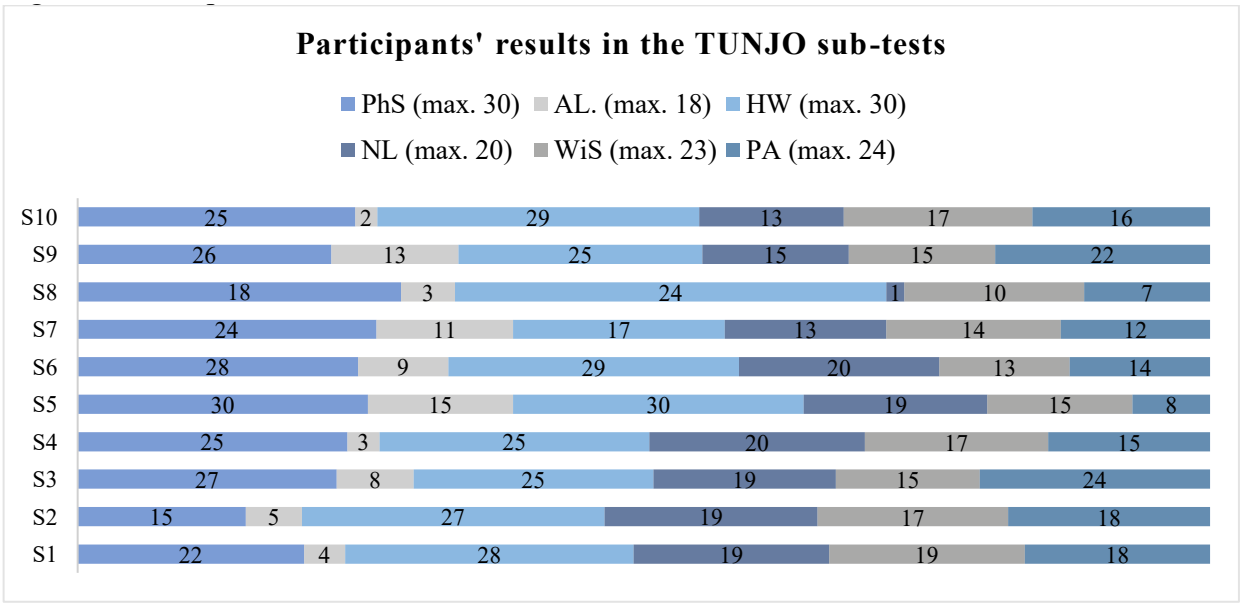


Figure 2. Participants' results in the TUNJO sub-tests

It is apparent from this chart that in the TUNJO test (M = 103.6, SD = 16.63, range = 55), with a total of 145 points, the majority of the students scored from 100 to 118 points. Only two participants obtained scores lower than 100 points, earning 91 and 63 points. The participants gained an average score of 24 points in the Phonetic Script test, 7.3 points in the Artificial Language test, 25.9 points in the Hidden Words test, 15.8 points in the Number Learning, 15.2 points in the Words in Sentences test, and 15.4 points in the Paired Associates test.

The scores accumulated in the minor parts of the Phonetics assessment test can be demonstrated by employing the following graph (Figure 3):

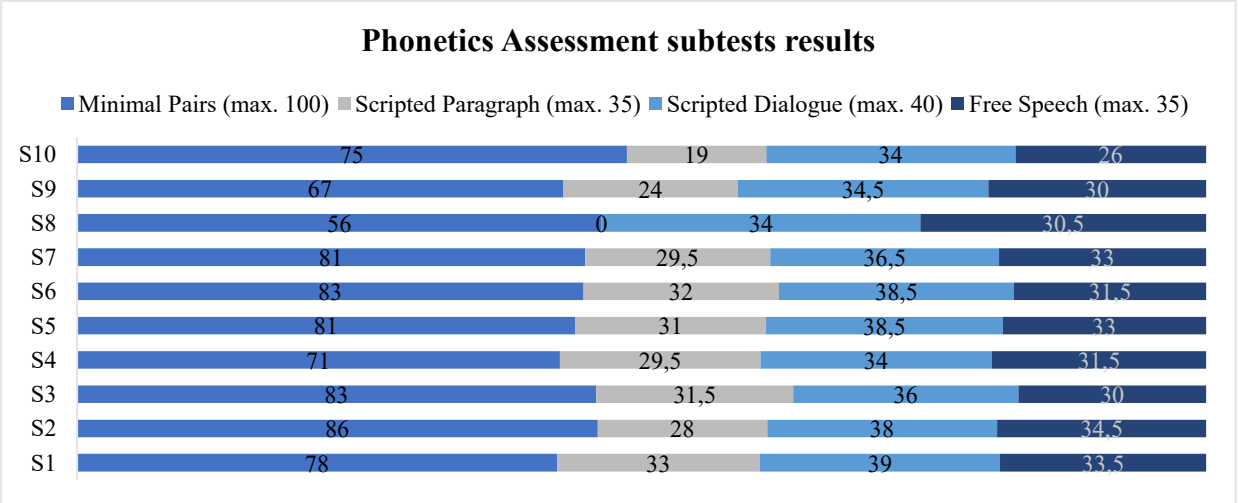


Figure 3. Phonetics Assessment subtests results

In the Phonetics Assessment test (M = 169.5, SD = 21.09, range = 66), test-takers mainly gained more than 150 out of 210 possible points. The average scores constitute 76.1 points in the Minimal Pairs test, 25.75 points in the Scripted Paragraph test, 36.3 points in the Scripted Dialogue test, and 31.35 in the Free Speech test.

Owing to the fact that this research looked into the nature of the relationship between learners' level of language aptitude and phonetic ability, the results revealed that half of the students in the group have a phonetic profile (N=5). Furthermore, data perusal revealed three representatives of a memory profile and two representatives of an analytical profile.

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was implemented to statistically analyse the data due to the relatively limited sample (N=10). Three primary variables were taken into consideration while conducting correlational analysis:

(1) the total results obtained in the TUNJO test;

(2) the total score gained in the phonetics assessment;

(3) aptitude modalities.

Contrary to the initially formulated hypothesis, correlational analysis of the quantitative data conducted utilising the SPSS software and the Spearman correlation coefficient revealed no significant correlations between the level of aptitude and the rate of pronunciation skills in the sample (Spearman's rho = 0.316, p = 0.374). Further steps in the analytical examination of the results showed no correlations between students' phonetic aptitude modalities and their results in the phonetic assessment (Spearman's rho = 0.137, p = 0.980).

7. Discussion

An initial objective of the currently discussed study was to identify the relationship between English Philology students' level of foreign language aptitude and their general phonetic ability. With respect to the fact that strong correlations between FLA and L2 performance have been reported in the literature (Baker Smemoe & Haslam 2013; Li 2015), it was hypothesised that there would be a positive correlation between the two variables. In order to determine this relationship, the study also set out with the aim of assessing students' aptitude level and their pronunciation skills. Regarding the first and the second research questions, it was hypothesised that participants, who belong to the group of English Philology students, would have relatively high levels of FLA and phonetic performance. The final research question was designed to identify the predominant aptitude profile among the participants.

From the data, we can see that students' FLA (max. = 145, M = 103.6, SD = 16.63) and pronunciation skills (max. = 210, M = 169.5) levels are relatively high. On the question of the relationship between FLA and phonetic abilities, the results of the research do not

support the previous findings. The present study fails to show any statistically significant correlations that occur between students' language aptitude and phonetics skills. These inconsistencies and rather contradictory results may have occurred because the sample consisted of English philology students. Therefore, test takers either may have initially had high levels of aptitude that may have influenced their choice of the academic discipline to study, or might have made considerable progress in terms of their pronunciation skills as a consequence of their studies.

Another significant piece of information, especially from didactic and pedagogic points of view, is students' aptitude modalities. The results indicated five representatives of a phonetic aptitude profile, three of a memory aptitude profile, and two of an analytical aptitude profile. Proper interpretation of these findings is essential to the teaching and learning processes since it can impact the choice of the aids, methods and techniques implemented during the classes. Both teachers and learners might gain from setting up a more personalised learning environment based on students' needs and preferences in terms of their aptitude profiles.

Among the potential limitations of the undertaken study that may have impacted the final results, the following criteria can be acknowledged and reviewed: (1) insufficient sample size for statistical measurements, and (2) measurement procedures and materials implemented in the study. Firstly, the sample was relatively limited because it comprised only ten students, so caution must be applied while discussing the results. Nevertheless, considering that the given study serves as explanatory research, the rather limited sample size can be justified. Therefore, as far as the proceeding steps of the study are concerned, the number of participants should be increased in view of the fact that a larger sample size yields more reliable data. Another limitation may have arisen from the choice and composition of the measurement tools. Yet, in the case of the TUNJO test, which seeks to determine the level of aptitude, there is strong evidence suggesting its validity submitted by Rysiewicz (2008) and Stansfield & Reed (2019).

8. Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between learners' level of foreign language aptitude and the level of general phonetic ability in a group of English Philology students. The participants earned relatively high scores both in aptitude and phonetics tests. These results should be interpreted with caution since correlational analysis revealed no correlations between students' aptitude and phonetic ability. The reason for the lack of correlation may lie in the composition of the sample. The group of students, with similar linguistic competencies and experiences, may have scored highly because of their prior knowledge and high levels of aptitude. The main conclusion that may be drawn from the examination of the results is that foreign language aptitude cannot serve as a universal predictor of learners' success in FL mastering. Therefore, while conducting

fully-fledged research, other individual differences or affective factors might be taken into account. In addition, a larger sample would allow for investigating the issue from a broader perspective and provide more accurate results.

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Appendix 1

Phonetics Assessment

Part 1 – Minimal Pairs

The participants are asked to read the list of twenty minimal pairs while being recorded. Then, the rater listens to their recordings and assesses their correctness. The scale will be the same for each pair:

In your opinion, rate the pronunciation of each pair from 1 to 5 (1=poor to 5=excellent).

The anticipated pronunciation of sounds is provided in the brackets after each pair; the participants will not see it.

1) peach pitch /iː – ɪ/
2) mess mass /e – æ/
3) mark much /aː – ʌ/
4) odd awed /ɒ – ɔː/
5) Luke look /uː – ʊ/
6) allusion illusion /ə – ɪ/
7) Roy raw /ɔɪ – ɔː/
8) ear err /ɪə – ɜː/
9) poor pour /ʊə – ɔː/
10) rope robe /p – b/
11) mouth *(n.)* mouth *(v.)* /θ – ð/
12) long longer /ŋ – ŋg/
13) soot sought /ʊ – ɔː/
14) sum psalm /ʌ – aː/
15) use *(v.)* use *(n.)* /z - s/
16) wrote road /t – d/
17) couch catch /aʊ – æ/
18) cloy claw /ɔɪ – ɔː/
19) breathe breeze /ð – z/
20) sick psych /ɪ – aɪ/

Part 2 – Scripted Paragraph

The group is asked to read the paragraph while they are being recorded. The participants are given several minutes to prepare before reading the fragment out loud. Later, the assessor rates the recordings, paying particular attention to the following criteria:

In your opinion, rate the pronunciation of the paragraph from 1 to 5 (1=poor to 5=excellent) regarding the following phenomena:

The pronunciation of vowels	
The pronunciation of consonants	
Reduced forms	
Word stress	
Sentence stress	
Linking	
Intonation of statements	

Over the past one and a half centuries, photography has been used to record all aspects of human life and activity. During this relatively short history, the medium has expanded its capabilities in the recording of time and space, thus allowing human vision to be able to view the fleeting moment or to visualise both the vast and the minuscule. It has brought us images from remote areas of the world, distant parts of the solar system, as well as the social complexities and crises of modern life. Indeed, the photographic medium has provided one of the most important and influential means of capturing the essence of our being alive. Nonetheless, the recording of events by means of the visual image has a much longer history. The earliest creations of pictorial recording go as far back as the Upper Palaeolithic period of about 35,000 years ago and, although we cannot be sure of the exact purposes of the early cave paintings, pictorial images seem to be inextricably linked to human culture as we understand it *(taken from Cambridge English Level 3 Certificate in ESOL International. Sample Paper).*

Part 3 – **Scripted Dialogue**

The participants are asked to read the dialogue as if role-playing it while being recorded, paying attention to weak forms, linking, intonation, and syllable and sentence stress. The dialogue is taken from "How now, brown cow?: A Course in the Pronunciation of English with Exercises and Dialogues" by M. Ponsonby (1987). The participants are given a few minutes to look through the text. Later, the rater is asked to assess their reading according to the following chart:

In your opinion, rate the pronunciation of the dialogue from 1 to 5 (1=poor to 5=excellent) regarding the following phenomena:

The pronunciation of vowels	
The pronunciation of consonants	

Weak forms	
Word stress	
Sentence stress	
Linking	
The intonation of tag questions	
Falling intonation of statements and 'wh-' questions	
Falling-rising intonation of 'yes-no' questions	

DIALOGUE 56. Listening to the plants talking

GEORGE: That's a funny sort of position you're sitting in, isn't it?
ANDREW: I'm listening to the plants talking.
GEORGE: Andrew! Plants can't talk—everybody knows that.
ANDREW: But they make noises. Not noises like the ones human beings make. Not even animal noises. Special sounds. You can hardly hear them with the human ear.
GEORGE: Well, if they aren't audible, how do you *know* they make them? Come on, you're just joking, aren't you?
ANDREW: I'm as serious as . . . as . . . Sunday. Honestly, George. Cross my heart and hope to die.
GEORGE: What's that thing that's hanging round your neck? Looks like a sort of a snake.
ANDREW: It's a doctor's stethoscope. Lie down on the ground and put the stethoscope into your ears. Hear anything?
GEORGE: Golly, I *did*! How extraordinary! A very high-pitched squeaking! It can't be the plants, can it?

Image 1 Part 3 Scripted dialogue (taken from Pronsonby 1987)

Part 4 – Free speech

The participants are asked to answer questions about their experiences while completing courses on phonetics at the university during their BA programme:

- *What do you think about the two-year course on phonetics that you completed during your bachelor's programme?*
- *Has the level of your competence when it comes to pronunciation changed? If so, what are the areas in which you made significant progress?*
- *Did you find the classes you attended helpful in acquiring the rules of English phonetics?*
- *What interesting things did you learn?*
- *What part of the course did you find the most important/least important?*

After that, the rater assesses the recorded fragments of participants' speech regarding the following criteria:

In your opinion, rate the pronunciation from 1 to 5 (1=poor to 5=excellent) regarding the following phenomena:

The pronunciation of vowels	
The pronunciation of consonants	
Weak forms	
Word stress	
Sentence stress	
Linking	
Intonation	

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Polish university students' and recent graduates' reflections on discussing controversial topics in American literature courses: a preliminary qualitative study

Abstract: Exploring contentious subjects in literature courses can provide students with cognitive, social, and emotional benefits (Flynn & Rivera 2022; Rybakova et al. 2013). Hand and Levinson (2012) note that discussion is commonly considered as the most effective means to explore sensitive topics in the classroom. According to Flynn and Rivera (2022), teachers should seek appropriate pedagogical approaches to engage students in meaningful discussions on controversial issues. Critical pedagogy, most famously promoted by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator striving for social justice, may be useful in foreign literature classes to help create an inclusive environment for awareness-raising discussions on challenging topics, especially concerning social inequities and politics (Darder et al. 2009; Kincheloe 2008; McLaren 2009). This research explores Polish university students' and recent graduates' perceptions of discussing controversial topics in American literature classes. Written critical reflection prompts were administered to fifteen Polish university students and graduates to gather qualitative data, which were subsequently evaluated using content analysis. The study revealed that classroom discussions on sensitive issues can benefit Polish students, provided that American literature instructors remain impartial, promote inclusivity, and raise awareness of cultural and linguistic differences between Poland and the United States. In light of this, critical pedagogy is recommended as an effective approach to teaching controversial topics.
Keywords: critical pedagogy, language teaching, higher education, American literature, contentious topics, Polish university students and graduates, critical reflections

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1. Introduction

This article addresses the research gap regarding students' and graduates' reflections on discussing sensitive subject matter in foreign literature courses. A qualitative study was conducted to discover how students and graduates representing two Polish universities perceive discussions on contentious topics in American literature classes. The results revealed that, albeit challenging, said debates can stimulate students' intellectual development and increase their sensitivity to controversial issues. Influenced by various philosophies, critical pedagogy, widely associated with Paulo Freire's legacy, integrates theory and practice to counteract social injustice. With its roots in critical theory developed by neo-Marxian scholars of the Frankfurt School, such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, the critical approach encourages students to question the status quo and actively oppose any forms of socio-political oppression (Darder et al. 2009; Kincheloe 2008; McLaren 2009). Promoting inclusivity and student empowerment, as well as counteracting teacher bias, critical pedagogy can facilitate classroom exploration of emotive topics.

2. Literature review

Flynn and Rivera (2022) argue that exploring controversial topics in literature classes can enhance adolescent and young adult students' socio-emotional growth. The authors highlight that the practice has been found to heighten learners' perceptiveness to diverse viewpoints, develop critical thinking skills, increase compassion and self-confidence, help question harmful assumptions, and provide meaningful insights into personal struggles. They also note that teaching controversial literature is conducive to constructive dialogue and the pursuit of social equity. Similarly, yet focusing specifically on young adult literature, Rybakova et al. state that "[t]he goal for raising hard topics in the classroom [...] is for students to recognize injustice, question the status quo, develop their own opinions about others, and learn how to overcome the angst and pains of adolescence" (2013: 39). Hand and Levinson (2012) note that discussion is widely considered as the most effective method of exploring contentious topics in the classroom. They also explain that exposing students to their peers' diverse ideas and values is more impactful than lecturing on a contentious subject.

According to Flynn and Rivera, "English teachers should select their pedagogical approaches to controversial literature wisely as to promote more opportunities for students to discuss these debatable topics in a safe and sensitive classroom environment" (2022: 156). Critical pedagogues postulate that the classroom be an inclusive, dialogic environment where previously silenced voices can be heard and respected. Hence, with its emphasis on learning about various contexts related to discussed issues, critical pedagogy encourages students to broaden their perspectives and be more receptive to the intricacies of human experience (Kincheloe 2008; McArthur 2010; Motta 2013). In light of

this, critical pedagogy, promoting openness to diversity, constructive dialogue, and the pursuit of social justice, can be an appropriate approach to teaching about controversial topics in literature classes. However, it is vital that discussions during courses complying with critical pedagogy be led in a secure, inclusive environment; otherwise, students and instructors may experience tension and anxiety in the classroom (Serrano et al. 2017).

Shin and Crookes (2005) conducted a case study in two EFL courses in South Korea, aiming to integrate critical pedagogy-informed components into the existing program and enable junior and senior high school students to concurrently improve their language skills and criticality. While the courses in question were culture- rather than literature-oriented, students were expected to read several assigned readings and engage in discussions on challenging topics. In both cases, student-centered classroom discussions allowed numerous course participants to express their diverse experiences freely, enhanced their critical thinking, and made learning more relevant, resulting in a sense of confidence and autonomy. Only one student deemed such classes less efficient compared to traditional lecture-based courses. Notably, although students agreed that discussing contentious topics in a foreign language was challenging, for most of them striving to do so increased their awareness of the purpose of foreign language learning.

In the context of language learning in higher education, using a particular literary work as a point of reference, Derince (2011) conducted a project involving Turkish university students of English, who investigated critical pedagogy issues within the context of Aldous Huxley's dystopian novel, *Brave New World* (1932). The project fostered collaboration and inclusivity among students. Furthermore, the learners' concluding observations demonstrated that the course enhanced their language competence and boosted the relevance of the learning process.

Also in the context of higher education, Motta (2013) attempted to implement critical pedagogy in an MA course at a renowned university. The objective was to foster students' openness to alternative viewpoints and promote social justice. Although the author did not classify the endeavor as a literature course, its purpose strongly resonates with the socially-oriented aims of tackling contentious subjects in literature classes. However, the pedagogical approach challenging hierarchical classroom structure and requiring increased participants' involvement evoked mixed reactions among the students. While some considered such education unreliable and unsatisfactory, others saw it as an opportunity to challenge firmly entrenched harmful majoritarian ideas, thus increasing underprivileged students' sense of inclusion.

3. The present study

This section aims to explain how the present study was conducted. The first subsection provides information about the research question and objectives. Subsequently, there is a description of the employed methodology, providing details concerning the research

instrument, ethical considerations, and the method of data analysis. Finally, the third subsection characterizes the research participants.

3.1 Goals and the research question

The study was designed to discover Polish university students' and recent graduates' perceptions of discussing controversial topics in American literature classes. The objective was to explore the benefits and downsides of said debates in foreign literature classes. Also, the study sought to determine whether critical pedagogy may serve as an effective pedagogical tool in the discussed context. In light of this, the following research question was posed: What are the perceptions of Polish university students and graduates of discussing controversial subjects in American literature classes?

3.2 Methodology

Critical theory, informing critical pedagogy, is also at the heart of critical reflection, aimed at identifying and analyzing the power relations that influence the processes under inquiry (Brookfield 2009). Besides, according to Ochieng (2009: 16, emphasis in original),

> Qualitative methods are highly appropriate for questions where preemptive reduction of the data will prevent discovery. If the purpose is to learn from the participants in a setting or a process the way *they* experience it, the meanings they put on it, and how they interpret what they experience, the researcher needs methods that will allow for discovery and do justice to their perceptions and the complexity of their interpretations.

Against this background, a written critical reflection prompt in the form of a questionnaire was selected as the most effective instrument for discovering Polish university students' and graduates' distinctive experiences and complex viewpoints on challenging discussions in American literature classes, especially including discussions concerning social inequity and politics. The questionnaires were administered in English. The questions were crafted specifically for the purpose of the study being part of the author's Master's thesis. An introductory statement outlining the research context and objectives proceeded a number of open-ended questions, several of which will be discussed in this article. The participants were instructed to answer each question in at least three sentences (excluding the demographic questions) and submit their responses within approximately two weeks.

Bogdan and Biklen (1998: 43) noted that "[t]wo issues dominate traditional official guidelines of ethics in research with human subjects: informed consent and the protection of subjects from harm." With respect to ethical considerations, prospective respondents, cognizant of the study's purpose, voluntarily consented to participate in the study and permitted the publication of the research results in the Master's thesis, at

academic conferences, and in journal articles. Content analysis was chosen to evaluate the qualitative data. According to Cohen et al. (2007: 476), "content analysis involves coding, categorizing (creating meaningful categories into which the units of analysis – words, phrases, sentences, etc., – can be placed), comparing (categories and making links between them), and concluding – drawing theoretical conclusions from the text." Complying with the abovementioned steps, the following section presents the participants' critical reflections, which have been organized into themes that emerged after two rounds of coding and categorizing conducted by the author of the article. The grammar of certain responses was slightly corrected to improve clarity but had no impact on the meaning. As a student pursuing a Master's degree in TESOL, I acknowledge that my personal experiences and beliefs may have impacted the interpretation of the findings. To prevent any potential misinterpretation of the responses, however, the participants were allowed to view the results report before publication.

3.3 Participants

The research was conducted in October and November 2022. Fifteen students and recent graduates of English studies, comprising ten females and five males aged 23-25, participated in the study anonymously. The participants represented two Polish universities and were randomly selected from various classes, which makes it difficult to estimate the number of American literature courses and instructors referred to by the respondents. The educators mentioned by the participants did not claim to be teaching within the parameters of critical pedagogy. Regarding the participants' field of study and earned degrees, the majority (ten participants) held a Bachelor's degree in English Philology and were studying for a Master's degree in TESOL; three respondents held a Bachelor's degree in English Philology and were studying for a Master's degree in English Philology; and two participants held a Bachelor's degree in English Philology solely. The courses attended by the participants included courses on American and British literature and culture, introductory lectures to literary studies, and specialization courses on American, British, and Canadian literature and culture.

4. Study results

This section aims to present the participants' critical reflections addressing the research question: What are the perceptions of Polish university students and recent graduates of discussing controversial subjects in American literature classes? To discover the respondents' opinions and emotional experiences related to any challenging discussions in their American literature classes, the participants were asked: "How are/were contentious topics (e.g., race, gender, politics, or religion) handled in your American literature classes? How do/did you feel when discussing them? What are the possible benefits and/or risks of discussing controversial issues in American literature classes?" To explore

the participants' reflections on discussions concerning social inequities, they were asked: "What are the possible benefits and/or risks associated with discussing matters pertaining to racism, discrimination, or other inequality issues in literature classes?" Finally, to investigate the respondents' perceptions of the intersection between politics and education, the following questions were posed to the participants: "What are the possible benefits and/or risks associated with discussing matters pertaining to politics in literature classes? Do you believe that education is inherently political? Why?" The findings of the study, grouped into themes established through the analysis of the participants' responses, are presented in the following subsections.

4.1 Positive evaluation of the teacher's handling of contentious topics

The majority (eight participants) stated that their American literature instructors (generally) aptly led in-class discussions on controversial topics. For instance, cognizant of educators' diverse approaches to analyzing texts addressing sensitive issues, Participant 1 noted:

> In my opinion, the contentious topics were usually handled very well in my American literature classes. Some teachers thoroughly analyzed topics of gender, religion, race, etc., that were given in the books, while others only mentioned them and focused on the literary devices such as themes, symbols, etc.

Recalling a seminal antislavery work that explores the abovementioned topics, Participant 4 noted: "I remember that these topics were handled well, giving us a chance to reflect on relevant pieces of literature (such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe), and subsequently discuss issues regarding these topics." Also in reference to learning about past atrocities, Participant 10 demonstrated a contrast between the character of the addressed themes and the manner in which they were handled by her American literature instructor, stating: "The contentious topics were usually dealt with in a subtle way, though not neglecting the brutal aspects of history."

4.2 Affective responses to challenging classroom discussions

Four respondents admitted that they did not feel secure or comfortable when discussing contentious topics in their American literature classes. Participant 2 observed: "All of the topics were sad and there was nothing positive, which is difficult because young people need to think about something positive sometimes". Participant 9, who found classroom discussions on race and gender unsettling, deemed his instructor's and fellow students' attitudes toward such debates inappropriate. Also feeling uncomfortable during discussions on sensitive topics due to peers' attitudes, Participant 13, without alluding to the instructor's conduct, responded:

> I felt really anxious and uncomfortable when we discussed topics such as gender, sexual orientation, and religion. The reason behind that is that I felt like not everyone was broad-minded. On top of that, some students did not like talking about matters which were not connected with American literature.

Participant 14, who favorably evaluated her American literature instructor's management of challenging discussions, also identified fellow students' narrow-mindedness as an impediment to productive debates on sensitive topics, noting that the peers' stubbornness, paired with the willingness to impose conservative views on others, disrupted classes and evoked discomfort.

Contrary to the participants whose affective responses to classroom debates on controversial issues were negative, another four respondents explicitly admitted to feeling (rather) comfortable when discussing delicate subject matters; for instance, Participant 4 stated: "I like discussions and I don't mind tackling difficult problems, especially given that questions were usually formed in ways that allowed us to speak freely." Participant 10, despite admitting that sensitive topics were properly handled by the instructor, expressed ambivalent feelings toward classroom discussions, stating: "It happened that sometimes I did not feel completely comfortable when some topics were discussed, but it was good that they were brought up, because it was worth learning some things." Participant 3 recalled being moved when specific themes emerged in classroom discussions:

> Race and gender are two of the most discussed topics that come to my mind. These topics were a bit emotional. I have often been able to realize how little I know about a topic and how much it can mean to some people/groups.

Conversely, Participant 1 admitted to being emotionally unaffected by the exposure to contentious subjects, stating: "I felt mostly neutral about discussing them. However, I know that it is essential to learn about these topics." Finally, Participant 8, who did not recall discussing contentious issues in American literature courses, noted that instructors "could be afraid to talk about controversies during classes."

4.3 Intellectual and socio-emotional development

The actual benefits of classroom discussions on contentious topics reported by the respondents concerned their intellectual and socio-emotional growth. Participant 1 remarked that literature classes frequently address timeless concerns and encourage reflection. Referring to intellectual development, Participant 4 observed that the "[b]enefits of a well-prepared discussion on controversial topics range from students' developing of a mature stance on contentious issues to students' being less certain of the idea that truth can be found only in one approach." Analogically, Participant 5 responded: "The

benefit is the discussion because you can see the opinion of others which sometimes is eye-opening." Similarly, Participant 12 stated: "We spoke about politics, religion, and gender. It made me aware." Participant 3, in addition to intellectual growth, identified affective stimulation as the benefit of discussing controversial topics, stating: "[T]he benefit was certainly to make students aware of many topics, but also to awaken a general sensitivity." Comparably, Participant 15 stated:

> All of the topics were discussed. We would usually have a discussion where everybody was welcome to share their opinion. I found the discussions very interesting. No one was offended by them. Such a way of conducting a class definitely makes one more sympathetic and understanding.

Concerning discussions on inequality, Participant 4 explained: "As university graduates, it is vital that we develop intellectual 'tools' to analyze and consider varied viewpoints, and one of such 'tools' is knowledge of difficult topics such as racism or discrimination." Participant 8 also emphasized the significance of acquiring a broader understanding of social inequities, remarking that it raises awareness of the subject among young people and aids in navigating the globalized world's intricacies. Participant 13 perceived the opportunity to exchange diverse opinions as a benefit of in-class debates, believing that "by discussing matters such as racism, or discrimination people become wiser, and they are able to realize things they may not have seen in the past." Participant 15 referred to the darkest chapters in human history, stating:

> The benefits are countless. It definitely makes one more open-minded but also sympathetic. I believe that everyone should know at least a little bit about such events as the Holocaust or slavery, which both derive from discrimination. Talking about it during classes should not be considered uncommon. It should be a teacher's duty.

As far as discussing politics is concerned, Participant 2 recalled: "We had many interesting discussions about politics which made me reflect on the voting system and discrimination. We also could compare politics in other countries to Poland, which was eye-opening in some way." Participant 4 observed that "one of the goals of higher education is to produce responsible and constructively critical citizens, and it cannot be done without discussing such problems." According to Participant 7, it is valuable to discuss politics even if it entails an exchange of opposing views:

> It is beneficial to get to know different perspectives and political views of other people, even if you do not agree with them. It is also valuable to learn how to express your opinions in a clear, assertive, but civilized way.

Participant 15 believed that tackling the abovementioned topic "definitely makes one more open-minded but also more woke (socio-politically aware)," adding that "everyone should have an opinion on such an important topic, and not having one makes you ignorant. Therefore, talking about it during classes should not be considered uncommon."

4.4 The potential advantages of challenging classroom discussions

Several participants mentioned the potential benefits of tackling controversial issues in American literature classes. Participant 5 expressed the belief that "[i]f the teacher is understanding and not judgmental, it might be fun and educational to have discussions in class." Participant 10 briefly remarked that the discussions in question may be informative. Participant 11 identified expanding horizons as the primary benefit of tackling sensitive issues in literature classes, noting that "such literature can raise awareness of a variety of topics" and "benefit students." Pointing to the transformative potential of tackling sensitive issues in literature classes, Participant 1 explained that discussions on social inequity might help certain students recognize and subsequently change their own discriminatory behaviors, as well as provide support for underprivileged students. Participant 3 noted that debates on inequality "can raise awareness of the importance of the issue." Participant 5 stated that discussing inequality in American literature classes "might help one come to different conclusions and open the eyes." Participant 11 identified not only intellectual development as the potential benefit of classroom discussions, but also increased empathy, noting that

> [b]y raising awareness and discovering writers who write about inequality, one can gain a new point of view and understand these issues. And this, in turn, can enrich and sensitize the participants of the discussion to these topics.

Similarly, Participant 14 stated that discussing inequality in American literature classes is important and can be eye-opening. Participant 1 stated that classroom debates pertaining to politics may encourage students to critically reevaluate their standpoints. Participant 10, also in reference to discussing politics, identified the possibility to express varied viewpoints in the classroom as the potential benefit.

4.5 Students' and teachers' inappropriate attitudes

A number of respondents identified the detrimental impact of their teachers' or fellow students' inappropriate attitudes as a serious drawback of classroom debates on sensitive topics. Participant 6 observed that course participants' varied viewpoints usually prompt unproductive altercations, adding that "the issues raised in the literature do not always arouse sympathy among students." In reference to discussions on inequality, Participant 2 criticized her instructor for insufficient sensitivity to "real-life problems," although

without specifying the nature of those problems. Participant 9 expressed the opinion that "there is a huge risk of descending into glorification of despicable acts presented in literature due to the cultural differences between Poland and the US," adding: "As the students learned, for instance, about the treatment of women in the 19th century, I recall at least two occasions when male members of the class mocked the situation." Participant 9 mentioned the teacher's partiality as a significant impediment to informative discussions:

> Those topics should be discussed in an unbiased, factual manner. However, as far as my own experience is concerned, the ability to provide students with politically neutral information is uncommon. I honestly cannot see any benefits of discussing racism, discrimination, and inequality during literature classes as the students are often so politically divided that the discussion is sure to descend into an argument.

Pointing to the disadvantages of classroom discussions on inequality, Participant 14 observed that "most of the conservative people do not try to understand such topics. Even worse, they impose their views on others, often in an aggressive way."

4.6 Lack of interest in the course content

Two participants expressed dissatisfaction with the content of their American literature course. Perceiving it as excessively pessimistic and ineffectively presented by the instructor(s), Participant 2 explained:

> During the classes we discussed interesting books but also very difficult poems which were written in a language that nobody was able to understand. We also needed historical context to understand them, and it wasn't easy to interpret them. I didn't feel interested in discussing history in a boring way, with just dates and no interesting approach to the topic.

Participant 7, on the other hand, observed that although it is valuable to discuss challenging subjects, they frequently take exaggerated precedence over other aspects of American literature classes that also deserve attention. In response to the question about the benefits and risks of discussing inequality issues, the respondent elaborated on his opinion, stating:

> It is beneficial if it is connected with the discussed work/author/literary movement, etc. If not, then I would argue it is unnecessary as it diverges from the topic at hand. I think it is easy to let these issues dominate the class, even if it is not always desirable. Broadening awareness of such matters is a good thing, but I have noticed that it sometimes tends to eclipse other parts of a literature class, which I personally find disappointing as it is not my main area of interest.

4.7 The potential disadvantages of challenging classroom discussions

Several respondents referred to the potential disadvantages of discussing sensitive topics in American literature classes. Participant 1 remarked that discussions on contentious issues in American literature classes may contribute to conflicts among course participants, and that there could be students experiencing discomfort having to discuss problems related to their personal experience. Participant 3, who identified the teacher's potential bias as the key impediment to productive debates, explained that because educators' and students' opinions may vary, careful planning of classes involving discussions on contentious topics is needed to avoid altercations spoiling the classroom atmosphere. Participant 4 also listed the teacher's bias as the potential disadvantage of discussing sensitive topics in American literature classes.

Referring to the impact of cultural and linguistic disparities on classroom discussions on inequality, Participant 1 explained:

> [I]n English, there are words connected to race that should not be said during a lesson. While most people are aware of the fact that using racial slurs is very harmful as they are connected to historical events (such as slavery), some Polish people might not fully understand the meaning behind these words because of the language and cultural differences. Therefore, teachers have to be very delicate while discussing this subject because they might not explain it properly and create an ignorant environment in the classroom.

Participant 5 noted that tackling discrimination issues in American literature classes can lead to arguments because of students' differing opinions. Participant 6 stated "Each issue related to such sensitive topics may meet with a diverse student reception." Participant 9 also identified potential conflicts as the primary disadvantage of classroom discussions on inequality issues. Participant 10 observed that students may unconsciously offend someone or feel discomfort when discussing discrimination in American literature classes. Similarly, Participant 12 identified the possibility of offending others based on their race or sexuality as a downside of discussing inequality in American literature classes.

Regarding discussions on politics, Participant 1 observed that they might lead to conflicts due to students' differing views. Participant 4 responded that discussing the abovementioned topic can be controversial and unpleasant. Regarding the instructor's role in this process, the respondent mentioned the teacher's potential bias as a disadvantage of classroom discussions on politics. Analogically, Participant 7 observed that the instructors' imposition of specific assumptions on students may impede debates on the topic in question:

> [S]uch discussions may be used by certain teachers to project their own views onto others, and I do not believe that literature classes should be used to promote any particular belief.

> Everyone should be able to formulate their own opinion, regardless of how different and/or controversial it might be.

Comparably, Participant 5, highlighting the impact of the teacher's attitude on classroom debates concerning politics, noted: "Maybe if the teacher has different opinions, they might 'punish' you by giving a poor grade." Participant 6, in addition to identifying potential conflicts stemming from adverse viewpoints as the potential risk of discussing politics, observed that certain topics might be emotionally triggering to particular students. Participant 15 also identified possible altercations as a risk of discussing politics in American literature classes. Referring to the same risk as Participant 7, Participant 9 responded: "While the teacher's political views will be obvious in the course of a lesson, they should strive not to bias their teaching." Participant 10 observed: "[P]olitics is a turbulent topic, and discussing it is like walking on thin ice. Some students may argue or convince others of their opinion by force. By conducting classes tainted with political bias, the teacher risks creating division in class." Participant 13 stated that in certain circumstances students may "feel forced to speak" about issues pertaining to politics.

4.8 Opinions on the political nature of education

The majority (nine respondents) admitted that education was, or might be (inherently) political, although, as added by a few of them, it should not be so. Participant 2, referring specifically to the Polish context, stated: "Education in Poland became political but it wasn't really visible during literature classes. In other classes, however, we had to be careful about our opinions and pretend that we have a different one." Pointing to the impact of educators' personal preferences or prejudice on their teaching, Participant 1 explained:

> In my opinion, education is inherently political as teachers unconsciously may convey their own opinions during a lesson. For example, teachers who support LGBTQ+ rights might highlight authors' sexual orientation and analyze hidden homosexual motifs in books, while other teachers might ignore them or even talk about them in a negative manner.

Participant 5 expressed the belief that "education might be political." Participant 8, despite perceiving education as political due to its dependence on governmental decisions, noted: "I couldn't say that I felt any limitations when it came to discussing politics during literature classes. Maybe it could be explained by the fact that we were discussing past facts." Providing an analogical argument, Participant 12 stated: "The ruling party always puts something in the books so that they can control the younger generation." Participant 14, expressing the belief that education was political, also referred to the governmental control of education. Pointing to teachers' impartiality, Participant 3 observed: "Education

should not be political, but unfortunately it often is. Instructors/teachers should not express their views to students, and especially should not impose them. I haven't seen it often, but it has happened a few times."

By comparison, Participant 4 expressed the hope that education was not inherently political despite being affected by politics. Participant 9 also noted that education should not be political, although without determining whether it was. Participant 7 referred not only to education in general, but also specifically to literary education, explaining: "I would say that education does not have to be inherently political, but literary education probably is, since literature reflects our reality and is influenced by certain beliefs." By contrast, Participant 11, who also referred to literary education, disagreed with the assumption that it was inherently political, stating: "I don't think political matters are very much related to literature. Discussing literature does not necessarily involve discussing politics. I don't really think that education is inherently political." Similarly, Participant 13 stated: "I do not believe that education is inherently political. I believe that literature is a form of expressing yourself, and it was one of the very few subjects that students did not have to focus on so much. We were able to read, discuss and think about the authors' approach towards the books we read."

5. Discussion

The study revealed the participants' varied experiences concerning debates on sensitive issues in American literature classes. Table 1 concisely shows the respondents' affective responses to challenging discussions:

Table 1. Emotions and feelings evoked in the participants by discussions on contentious topics

Neutral	**(Quite) Positive**	**(Rather) Negative**	**Stirring**	**Ambivalent**	**No Recollection/ Response**
1 participant	4 participants	4 participants	1 participant	1 participant	4 participants

According to scholars such as Flynn and Rivera (2022), McArthur (2010), and Serrano et al. (2017), it is vital that challenging topics be discussed in a safe and inclusive atmosphere. The majority of the participants positively evaluated their American literature instructors' management of challenging discussions. Besides, several respondents reported feeling neutral or (quite) comfortable when tackling sensitive topics. A few respondents, however, experienced discomfort due to their instructor's or fellow students' inappropriate attitudes.

The research also revealed several advantages and downsides of discussing controversial issues in American literature classes. Table 2 summarizes and juxtaposes the

actual benefits and disadvantages of tackling contentious topics, including discussions on inequality and politics mentioned by the participants of the present study.

Table 2. The actual benefits and risks or disadvantages of discussing contentious topics, including discussions on inequality and politics mentioned by the respondents

Benefits	Disadvantages
Intellectual development	Students' or teachers' inappropriate attitudes
Socio-emotional development	Lack of interest in the course content

The benefits of discussing contentious subjects in literature classes mentioned by the participants support the assumption by Flynn and Rivera (2022) that the practice in question can foster students' socio-emotional growth. Furthermore, a few respondents emphasized that classroom discussions on controversial subjects not only foster critical reflection on matters concerning social inequities, but also have the potential to inspire students to actively oppose detrimental practices. This corresponds with the belief shared by the authors cited in the literature review that classroom dialogue can help students discern and oppose social injustice. Besides, several participants highlighted the benefits of exchanging varied views with peers, which seems to be in line with the assertion by Hand and Levinson (2012) about the usefulness of classroom discussion in exploring sensitive issues. The abovementioned advantages also correlated with the purpose of the critical pedagogy-informed course described by Motta (2013), aiming to foster students' openness to perspectives other than the dominant one. However, it should also be remembered at this point that there were students who evaluated the abovementioned course negatively. Comparatively, in the present study, many participants emphasized the high probability of such interactions prompting unproductive altercations among students. This implies that classroom discussions on challenging topics, although useful, can spoil the classroom atmosphere if mishandled.

Finally, the study by Shin and Crookes (2005), as well as the one by Derince (2011), showed that debating controversial topics in a foreign language can improve students' language skills. By contrast, in the present study none of the participants reported improved learning abilities as a result of discussing controversial subjects. Instead, a few respondents noted that due to linguistic and cultural differences, Polish students may unconsciously use offensive language during classroom debates on sensitive topics.

6. Limitations

At this point it is essential to highlight that the present research has several limitations. Due to the study's qualitative nature, the number of participants was relatively small,

and thus the results are not statistically representative. Given that the respondents' reflections are nuanced and context-specific, they should be generalized with caution and only to similar contexts. Also, it should be noted that the adoption of a critical reflection prompt as the study instrument always entails reliance on the participants' accuracy and veracity.

7. Conclusion

The study aimed to explore Polish university students' and graduates' perceptions of discussing controversial topics in American literature classes. The findings revealed that Polish university students and graduates tend to positively evaluate their American literature instructors' approaches to teaching sensitive issues. The study also indicates that carefully managed classroom discussions can provide a valuable forum for the expression of varied perspectives, promoting intellectual, social and emotional growth among students. To minimize potential adverse effects of teaching about contentious topics, teachers should refrain from imposing personal beliefs on students, especially pertaining to politics. The research also suggests that encouraging inclusivity in the classroom is crucial to promote diverse perspectives and foster a constructive approach towards opposing ideas. To prevent unintentionally offensive behavior causing tension among students, Polish instructors teaching American literature should raise awareness of cultural and linguistic differences between Poland and the United States prior to challenging discussions. In light of this, critical pedagogy, with its emphasis on inclusivity and student-centered dialogue, can help academics to effectively explore controversial issues in foreign literature classes

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