

The Changing Nature of Foreign Language Anxiety: The Case of Individual Learners



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Abstract The paper reports on the findings of a classroom-based study whose main purpose was to investigate changes in the levels of foreign language anxiety among individual language learners over the course of several weeks. The participants were seven senior high school learners. More precisely, there were four learners who tested high and three who tested low on language anxiety. The study encompassed 24 naturally occurring English lessons. The data were gathered by means of a background questionnaire, the *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS; Horwitz et al., 1986), anxiety grids, evaluation sheets and lesson plans. The collected data were analyzed quantitatively. The results of the study provided evidence that levels of foreign language anxiety reported by the participants were subject to change during a single class and from one lesson to another, particularly in the case of the learners who tested high on anxiety. Also, possible reasons accountable for the changes in the levels of anxiety are discussed.

Keywords Foreign language anxiety · Changes in FLA · Individual learners

1 Introduction

Anxiety as one of the affective variables often referred to as an enormous barrier to L2 learning occupies a significant position in second language acquisition (SLA) research (Horwitz & Young, 1991; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, 1994; Ohata, 2005). Anxiety is one of the best documented and most widely examined phenomena in psychology and education (Horwitz, 2001; Riasati, 2011), which is by no means surprising, given that it affects at least one-third of all language students reporting that they have experienced it with different degrees of intensity at different points of the learning process (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 1995a;

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Horwitz, 2000; Price, 1991). Anxiety as a factor seriously hindering L2 learner performance cannot be, however, as easily eliminated from the language classroom as was proposed by the humanistic approaches of the 1970s, comprising Suggestopedia, Community Language Learning or the Natural Approach (Horwitz et al., 1986), which is due to its extremely dynamic, complex and multifaceted character (Pawlak, 2011). Various authors (e.g., Campbell & Oritz, 1991; Cope-Powell, 1991; Horwitz et al., 1986) tend to distinguish between the concepts of *anxiety* per se and *foreign language anxiety* (FLA), which, because of students' limited L2 competence entailing problems with speaking in front of others, is thought to be an exceptionally face-threatening experience (Gkonou, 2011). Different researchers reveal anxiety as interfering with various areas of SLA (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991), including individual difference variables (self-esteem, self-confidence) (Gardner et al., 1997; Horwitz, 2001; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999) and classroom-related factors, such as performance and achievement (Aida, 1994), not to mention teachers themselves (Briesmaster & Briesmaster-Paredes, 2015). The influence of anxiety may fluctuate depending on individual learners and learning environments (Gkonou, 2013), which is why it escapes unambiguous and unanimously confirmatory analyses. The present paper is an attempt to shed additional light on foreign language anxiety by reporting a quantitative study of seven senior high school students' perceptions of high vs. low anxiety situations.¹ The empirical part is preceded by literature review focused on the exceptional nature of FLA in SLA and selected studies.

2 Literature Review

2.1 On the Uniqueness of Anxiety in SLA

It was not until the mid-1960s that researchers began to pay attention to anxiety as interfering with L2 learning and L2 performance (Chastain, 1975; Kleinmann, 1977). Consequently, they began to refer to L2 students' feelings of uneasiness, fear, paralyzing shyness or frustration as language anxiety, which was conceptualized as a combination of three intertwined components, namely *communication apprehension*, which results from students' difficulty in expressing mature thoughts, *fear of negative evaluation*, which is connected with students' need to positively impress their interlocutors, and *test anxiety*, which arises from the apprehension about having to undergo academic evaluation (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, 1991). Of these three components, communication apprehension is the most frequently underlined, ego-threatening problem faced by L2 students who experience a mental block against speaking in pairs or groups (i.e., *oral communication anxiety*) or in front of a larger audience (i.e., *stage fright*), or against listening to spoken information (i.e., *receiver*

¹The analysis is part of a wider project exploring FLA changes reported by Polish senior high school students over the course of one semester with a view to investigating causes of such changes (Kruk, 2018).

anxiety) (Horwitz et al., 1986). Although Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128) agree that communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety conceptually contribute to a comprehensible description of foreign language anxiety, they go a step further defining it as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” compared to other academic anxieties. Correspondingly, the L2 learning environment appears to be particularly conducive to anxiety arousal (Price, 1991) as students find themselves in an inauthentic situation when they have to non-spontaneously produce utterances or sentences in the language that has not been mastered yet and when they realize that what they will say and how they will perform will be subject to others’ evaluation based on the unknown linguistic and socio-cultural criteria. This is what challenges their self-concept as communicative language users and what, therefore, increases their forgetfulness, reticence, distractibility and avoidance of complex structures or reluctance to volunteer answers and participate in oral activities. These psychological symptoms of anxiety, coupled with physiological reactions, such as sweating, freezing or palpitations (Crookall & Oxford, 1991; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), lead to L2 student inconvenience and bring about further feelings of dread and uncertainty (Gkonou, 2013).

Three major sources of FLA can be identified, relating to the learner (e.g., beliefs about language learning), the teacher (e.g., beliefs about language teaching) and the instructional practices (e.g., classroom procedures, language testing) (Young, 1994). For example, L2 students’ belief that they are expected to produce error-free utterances and sentences is very likely to enhance the state of tension and uneasiness which may, in turn, culminate in compulsive, L2 performance impairing behaviors like overstudying or class skipping (Horwitz et al., 1986). When discussing the cause-and-effect aspects of anxiety, attention needs to be paid to the *linguistic coding differences hypothesis* (Ganschow et al., 1994; Sparks & Ganschow, 1991), in light of which anxiety results from rather than causes poor achievement deriving from subtle L1 learning deficits. This stance was, however, firmly questioned in defense of a position that language anxiety can exist independently of language difficulties (Horwitz, 2000; MacIntyre, 1995a, 1995b).

2.2 Previous Research into Anxiety

Over the last three decades foreign language anxiety has attracted a lot of empirical attention, so it is hardly a surprise that there are quite a few lines of inquiry into this construct. They will be commented on below, with a special regard to the studies examining the dynamics of anxiety which is of crucial importance for the present paper.

Researchers (e.g., Woodrow, 2006) seek to investigate such issues as, for instance, the relationship between anxiety and language attainment (e.g., Woodrow, 2006), anxiety and enjoyment in the L2 classroom (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014),

anxiety and language learning strategy use (e.g., Pawlak, 2011), anxiety and learning deficits (e.g., Sparks & Ganschow, 1991) or the components of oral classroom anxiety and L2 speaking fluency (e.g., Gkonou, 2014). However, it would be an oversimplification to state that the impact of anxiety is limited to speaking activities (MacIntyre, 1995a; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999). Different authors (e.g., Cheng et al., 1999; Kim, 2000; Sellers, 2000) regard foreign language reading, writing or listening anxiety as distinguishable from general foreign language classroom anxiety and as exerting a negative, both affectively (lowered self-concept) and cognitively (poor text recall) oriented, influence on L2 learner work.

Recently, the research into anxiety has taken a new direction, shifting its focus towards changes in the levels of FLA and thus highlighting it as a complex, dynamic construct. For example, Campbell's study (1999), involving students at the military language institute two weeks before the course and two weeks after it, revealed the relationship between the intensity of reading anxiety and gender. The results obtained from the study conducted by Chuo (2007) over the period of fourteen weeks, aimed at investigating the effect of the WebQuest Writing Instruction Program on the Taiwanese EFL students' writing production, showed their writing apprehension levels as significantly decreasing with time. The study conducted by Gregersen et al. (2014), with reliance on the physiological, idiodynamic interview and self-report survey data derived from three high and three low anxiety language students, revealed a connection between anxiety scores and variations in physiological responses. Mahmoodzadeh's study (2015), intended to examine temporal variations of the in-class anxiety and the dynamic peer orientation of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) perceived by the Iranian students, uncovered a link between the dynamicity of FLCA and intra-individual/inter-individual variations. The study conducted by Kruk (2016) investigated fluctuations in the level of anxiety, alongside motivation and boredom, experienced by a group of English majors during their visits to the virtual world of *Second Life* over the period of one semester. The findings showed a successive increase in the levels of boredom and motivation, whereas those of anxiety remained stable over time. In his next study, Kruk (2018) explored the dynamics of FLA experienced by the senior high school students. Collected data uncovered fluctuations in the respondents' levels of FLA observed both during single lessons and from one lesson to another. The researcher also identified the most anxiety-provoking factors which included written tests and traditional, coursebook-based grammar exercises as opposed to Internet-supported grammar activities.

3 The Study

3.1 Aims and Research Questions

The general aim of the wider project was to investigate the changes in the levels of FLA reported by a group of Polish senior high school students over the course of

Table 1 Levels of foreign language anxiety reported by the individual learners and the whole group

	Level of foreign language anxiety	Standard deviation ^a	Range ^b
Student A	128	1.02	4
Student B	117	0.79	2
Student C	114	1.35	4
Student D	106	0.93	4
Student E	73	1.05	4
Student F	78	0.86	3
Student G	84	0.56	2
Class ($n = 20$)	93.9	14.69	58

^aThe range is the difference between the lowest and the highest score (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 214)

^bThe standard deviation is the measurement of the spread of the data (Larson-Hall, 2010, p. 66)

one semester with a view to understanding causes of such changes. The purpose of the current study was to investigate changes in levels of FLA as reported by seven individual students who tested high on language anxiety (i.e., they reported high levels of FLA on the *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS)) and three participants who tested low on anxiety (i.e., they reported low levels of FLA on FLCAS) (for details see Section 3.2). In addition, the study investigated factors affecting FLA fluctuations. It was the belief of the present researchers that the focus on individual students would provide an in-depth description of the issues in question. More specifically, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the extent to which levels of FLA reported by individual students change during a single lesson and from one lesson to another?
2. Are there any differences in these levels between students who test high on anxiety and learners who test low on anxiety?
3. What factors are accountable for these changes between students who test high on anxiety and learners who test low on anxiety?

3.2 Participants

The participants of the study were seven pupils selected from a class of 20 senior high school learners enrolled in the second year of a 4-year program. Four of these pupils tested high and three tested low for language anxiety. The level of the participants' anxiety was measured by means of the FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986). The data included in Table 1 show each individual score and the whole group's total score on the FLCAS²:

²It has to be noted that one learner who tested low on anxiety had to be excluded from this analysis due to his absence from numerous lessons.

The participants (i.e., the seven students who tested high and low for anxiety) were 17-year-old male students. Their command of the English language and their own self-assessment of English proficiency were rather poor; however, the students who tested high for anxiety (i.e., Students A, B, C and D) proved to be even weaker in this respect. The same can be said about these learners' self-assessment of their motivation for learning English (see Table 2). In addition, the students pointed to the need to learn English in order to get a job in the future and they claimed that they had to learn it because it was a mandatory subject at school. Finally, it should be noted that all the participants of the study had two English lessons per week.

3.3 *Procedures, Data Collection Instruments and Analysis*

The study was conducted over a period of several weeks and it comprised 24 naturally occurring English lessons. The learners were taught by one of the authors who was their regular English teacher. They were taught by means of a coursebook and some of the language tasks were completed by the students online. The lessons were conducted in a similar manner. Thus, a typical English lesson began with checking a homework assignment and/or verifying the learners' knowledge by asking them questions with regard to the material covered in previous lessons. The students' homework and/or their answers were assessed by the teacher and the students received grades. Next, the teacher presented and explained a new topic. After that, the participants practiced the new material by performing a variety of language tasks. They usually worked individually, in pairs and in small groups. At the end of the lesson, the teacher summed up the most important points of the class and set a new homework assignment.

The following data collection tools were utilized in the course of the study: *a background questionnaire, the FLCAS, foreign language anxiety grids, evaluation sheets and lesson plans.*

- the background questionnaire—its main purpose was to obtain insights into the study participants' learning history, favorite language skills and subsystems, their motivation, etc.; it was completed by the learners at the beginning of the study;
- the FLCAS—the tool was developed by Horwitz et al. (1986); the scale was used to assess the degree to which the subjects felt anxious in a foreign language classroom; FLCAS is a well-known and frequently used instrument, the validity and reliability of which has long been recognized; the scale included 33 statements in the form of a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*); the students' responses on the FLCAS were scored in such a way that higher scores indicated higher anxiety (scores were added up); the original version of the instrument was translated into Polish (this was done in order to avoid potential misunderstandings due to the students' low level of proficiency); the Polish version of the tool was piloted with students who did not participate in

Table 2 The participants of the study

	Years of studying English	Mean semester grade in English	Self-assessment of English proficiency	Language skills/subsystems				Self-assessment of motivation
				Most favorite	Least favorite	Easy to study	Difficult to study	
Student A	10	3	3	speaking	grammar	speaking	grammar	4
Student B	7	2	1	writing	listening	writing	grammar	4
Student C	7	2	2	grammar	vocab	grammar	vocab	4
Student D	5	2	2	vocab	grammar	vocab	pronunc	4
Student E	7	3	4	speaking	writing	vocab	grammar	5
Student F	7	3	3	speaking	listening	writing	listening	6
Student G	11	3	3	pronunc	vocab	writing	vocab	5
Class (<i>n</i> = 20) Mean SD/Range	7.55 2.17/7	2.55 0.60/2	2.60 0.94/3	speaking	grammar	vocab	grammar	4.40 1.14/5

this study; the internal consistency of the tool was established for all the students by calculating Cronbach's alpha, which equaled 0.83;

- the foreign language anxiety grid—it was designed to measure the students' level of language anxiety during a single English lesson; the students were requested to self-rate their anxiety every ten minutes (i.e., four times) on a scale ranging from 1 (the lowest) to 7 (the highest) in response to a sound; the learners' responses were scored in such a way that higher scores showed higher anxiety; the value of Cronbach's alpha for the instrument amounted to 0.95;
- the evaluation sheet—its main aim was to provide data related to the study participants' evaluation of their feelings of anxiety in a particular lesson; the tool was completed by the learners at the end of each class; the learners were asked to respond to four items involving a semantic differential scale (*sure* vs. *unsure*, *relaxed* vs. *tense*, *stressed out* vs. *calm*; *confident* vs. *worried*); the participants' responses were scored in such a way that higher scores indicated higher anxiety; the instrument was similar to a seven-point Likert scale; the value of Cronbach's alpha was 0.95;
- the lesson plans—their purpose was to provide information concerning the lessons (e.g., stages, modes of work, tasks performed by the subjects).

The data collected by means of these instruments were mainly analyzed quantitatively. Descriptive statistics in the form of means, standard deviations and ranges were calculated for some of the items in the background questionnaire, the foreign language anxiety grid and the evaluation sheet. In the case of FLCAS, scores were added up, standard deviation and range values were computed. Shifts in FLA were juxtaposed with lesson plans to identify language activities, modes of work and phases of a lesson that generated different FLA levels.

4 Results

The description will first concentrate on students who tested high for anxiety, and then on learners who tested low for FLA. First, overall changes in the levels of FLA in all lessons will be offered for each individual. In view of the fact that the overall changes in each learner's levels of FLA may not always reflect those related to FLA trajectories of individual lessons, only the most pronounced fluctuations in the levels of FLA of one class will be presented.³ Finally, each student's evaluation of the classes will be given.

³It should be noted that due to space limitations this can only be done on the basis of one randomly selected lesson.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for the changes in the levels of FLA during all lessons (overall)

	min10	min20	min30	min40
	Mean / Standard deviation / Range			
Student A	5.18 / 0.64 / 2	4.82 / 0.73 / 3	4.71 / 0.85 / 4	4.35 / 0.86 / 3
Student B	6.05 / 1.27 / 4	4.74 / 1.33 / 4	4.16 / 1.21 / 5	3.84 / 1.17 / 5
Student C	4.00 / 1.95 / 5	3.33 / 1.80 / 5	3.05 / 1.66 / 5	3.10 / 1.81 / 6
Student D	5.87 / 1.22 / 4	4.22 / 1.13 / 4	3.70 / 0.97 / 5	3.61 / 0.99 / 5

4.1 *Students Who Tested High for Anxiety*

4.1.1 Student A

In general, the mean values included in Table 3 show that Student A reported a steady decrease of anxiety from minute 10 to minute 40 (the difference in the mean scores equaled 0.83). The analysis of the data showed that the levels of anxiety varied during single classes. For example, Student A declared the highest levels of FLA in the first half of lesson 6 (i.e., minutes 10 and 20; 5 and 4 points on a 1–7 scale; students' questioning; description of a picture; pair work).⁴ Then a sudden decrease in the level of anxiety was observed in the second half of this lesson (i.e., minutes 30 and 40; 2 points; writing; pair work). The drop was quite substantial and equaled 3 points (on a scale of 1–7) when compared with the highest value (i.e., 5 in minute 10).

As can be seen in Table 4, the student's evaluation of the lessons varied. During lessons 16 (short test, vocabulary, grammar), 11 (test) and 21 (grammar) Student A experienced the most anxiety. Conversely, in lessons 10 and 14 the student felt quite relaxed. During these lessons the learners were requested to work with a dialog and perform a set of online grammar exercises (pronouns) respectively.

4.1.2 Student B

As can be seen in Table 3, the values of the mean demonstrate that, generally, Student B experienced the highest levels of anxiety at the beginning of the lessons and the lowest at the end of the classes (the difference in the mean amounted to 2.21). The analysis of all the lessons demonstrated that the most visible changes in the levels of FLA occurred in lesson 5 (revision of grammar) and lesson 13 (grammar). For example, the student experienced the highest levels of anxiety in the first 10 minutes of lesson 5 (7 points on a scale of 1–7; students' questioning) and then his level of FLA decreased suddenly in minute 20 (4 points; grammar activities; individual work). The participant reported a steady level of anxiety from minute 30 to minute 40 (3 points; grammar activities; individual work). The decrease in the level of FLA

⁴A short description of relevant lessons (e.g., the minutes, the levels of FLA in points on a scale of 1–7, the teacher's and students' actions, activities, etc.) are offered in parenthesis.

Table 4 Descriptive statistics for the students' overall evaluation of all lessons

Lesson	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D
	Mean / Standard deviation / Range			
1	n/a*	3.14 / 0.38 / 1	5.86 / 0.69 / 2	3.86 / 0.38 / 1
2	4.29 / 0.49 / 1	3.14 / 0.38 / 1	4.57 / 0.53 / 1	3.86 / 0.69 / 2
3	n/a	n/a	3.14 / 0.38 / 1	4.29 / 0.49 / 1
4	3.57 / 0.53 / 1	5.00 / 1.41 / 3	3.00 / 0.00 / 0	3.43 / 0.53 / 1
5	4.57 / 0.53 / 1	4.71 / 0.49 / 1	3.00 / 0.00 / 0	3.57 / 0.53 / 1
6	4.29 / 0.49 / 1	3.14 / 0.38 / 1	4.29 / 0.76 / 2	3.71 / 0.49 / 1
7	3.29 / 1.11 / 3	3.14 / 0.90 / 3	6.00 / 0.00 / 0	3.14 / 0.90 / 3
8	n/a	3.57 / 1.13 / 3	2.14 / 0.38 / 1	3.86 / 1.07 / 2
9	4.00 / 0.58 / 2	n/a	2.00 / 0.00 / 0	3.57 / 0.79 / 2
10	2.86 / 0.69 / 2	3.29 / 1.70 / 4	2.86 / 0.69 / 2	4.43 / 0.53 / 1
11	5.29 / 0.49 / 1	4.00 / 0.00 / 0	4.43 / 0.53 / 1	4.29 / 0.95 / 2
12	n/a	5.86 / 0.38 / 1	n/a	4.57 / 0.79 / 2
13	3.86 / 0.69 / 2	2.00 / 1.83 / 5	2.00 / 0.00 / 0	4.29 / 0.76 / 2
14	2.57 / 1.27 / 3	3.29 / 0.76 / 2	1.29 / 0.76 / 2	3.57 / 0.53 / 1
15	3.57 / 0.53 / 1	3.71 / 0.95 / 2	2.71 / 0.76 / 2	4.00 / 1.00 / 2
16	6.14 / 2.27 / 6	n/a	6.14 / 0.38 / 1	5.43 / 0.53 / 1
17	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
18	n/a	4.71 / 0.49 / 1	4.29 / 0.76 / 2	3.86 / 0.38 / 1
19	n/a	1.86 / 0.69 / 2	n/a	3.71 / 0.76 / 2
20	4.14 / 0.38 / 1	n/a	2.00 / 0.00 / 0	3.29 / 0.76 / 2
21	5.00 / 1.53 / 4	3.86 / 0.90 / 2	5.86 / 0.90 / 3	3.86 / 0.90 / 2
22	4.14 / 0.69 / 2	3.71 / 1.11 / 3	1.71 / 0.49 / 1	3.71 / 0.76 / 2
23	3.71 / 0.76 / 2	3.43 / 0.53 / 1	2.00 / 0.00 / 0	3.00 / 0.00 / 0
24	4.00 / 0.00 / 0	2.71 / 0.76 / 2	4.57 / 0.53 / 1	3.57 / 0.53 / 1

* Indicates the student's absence

was considerable and amounted to 4 points when compared with the highest value (i.e., 7 in minute 10).

When it comes to the student's assessment of the lessons, it was also diverse (see Table 4). The learner was the most anxious in lessons 4 (listening, reading, vocabulary), 5 (revision of grammar), 12 (grammar) and 18 (revision of grammar). On the contrary, the student's evaluation of lessons 13 (grammar), 19 (reading, vocabulary, speaking) and 24 (grammar) showed that he did not experience much anxiety.

4.1.3 Student C

As far as the changes in the levels of FLA during the lessons are concerned, on the whole, the participant experienced the most anxiety in minutes 10 and 30 and the least in minute 40 (see Table 3). The biggest difference in the mean (i.e., between minutes 10 and 30) is tantamount to 0.95. The detailed analysis of the data related to all the lessons showed that throughout lessons 1 (grammar), 15 (listening, grammar) and 21 (grammar) the student reported the largest changes in the levels of FLA. For example, the learner felt most anxious at the very start of lesson 15 (5 points on a scale of 1–7; students' questioning). Then his level of anxiety dropped by 3 points (minute 20; listening comprehension; individual work) and it increased a bit in minute 30 (3 points; online grammar activities; individual work) only to fall again in minute 40 (1 point; online grammar activities; individual work).

As can be inferred from Table 4, the student was rather diverse in his evaluation of the lessons. The participant felt very anxious during lessons 1 (grammar), 7 (grammar), 16 (short test, vocabulary, grammar) and 21 (grammar). In addition, the student felt quite comfortable in lessons 9 (revision of grammar), 20 (listening, speaking), 22 (dialog) and lesson 23 (grammar).

4.1.4 Student D

The values of the mean scores revealed that, in general, the learner reported the highest and the lowest levels of FLA in the first and second half of the lessons respectively (see Table 3). The difference in the mean between minutes 10 and 40 equaled 2.26. A closer investigation of the gathered data revealed that the most noticeable changes in the levels of FLA happened in as many as seven lessons, that is, lesson 6 (speaking and writing), 7 (grammar), 13(grammar), 16 (short test, vocabulary and grammar), 19 (reading, vocabulary, speaking), 21 (grammar) and 23 (grammar). An interesting pattern of the changes in the levels of FLA was observed in lesson 19. The highest level of anxiety was detected in minute 10 (7 points; checking homework). Then it fell suddenly in minute 20 (3 points; reading a text; individual work). Finally, the levels of FLA rose a bit in the last part of the lesson (i.e. minutes 30 and 40; reading and vocabulary activities; speaking).

When it comes to the learner's evaluation of the classes, it also varied (see Table 3). During lessons 3 (grammar), 10 (dialog), 12 (grammar), 13 (grammar) and 16 (short test, vocabulary, grammar) the subject experienced the most anxiety but he felt quite relaxed in lessons 7 (grammar), 20 (listening and speaking) and 23 (grammar).

It should also be noted that the learners were very dissimilar in reporting the levels of FLA they experienced during the lessons (although Student A was more uniform in that regard). This is indicated by high values of the standard deviation and the range (see Table 3). It is also interesting to observe that two students, that is, Student A and Student B, as opposed to Student C and Student D, displayed more diversity in their evaluations of the lessons as indicated by high values of the measures of dispersion (see Table 4).

Table 5 Descriptive statistics for the changes in the levels of FLA during all lessons (overall)

Student	min10	min20	min30	min40
	Mean / Standard deviation / Range			
Student E	2.10 / 1.09 / 4	1.48 / 0.68 / 2	1.10 / 0.30 / 1	1.19 / 0.40 / 1
Student F	1.35 / 0.61 / 2	2.47 / 0.72 / 2	1.18 / 0.39 / 1	1.65 / 0.49 / 1
Student G	1.52 / 0.67 / 2	1.13 / 0.34 / 1	1.13 / 0.63 / 3	1.00 / 0.00 / 0

4.2 Students Who Tested Low for Anxiety

4.2.1 Student E

The mean values included in Table 5 demonstrate that, on average, the student declared a relatively steady and low level of anxiety from minute 10 to minute 40 (the biggest difference in the mean scores between minutes 10 and 30 equaled 1 point). In addition, the analysis of all the lessons showed that the levels of anxiety reported by the learner were subject to some changes in lessons 19 (reading, vocabulary, speaking) and 24 (grammar). For example, the subject was the most anxious at the beginning of lesson 24 (minute 10; 4 points on a scale of 1–7; checking homework) and then the level of anxiety reported by the subject dropped quite suddenly and remained low until the end of this class (i.e., 2 points in minute 20; 1 point in minutes 30 and 40). The main part of lesson 24 focused on grammar activities related to comparing people and objects.

As far as the subject's evaluation of the lessons is concerned, he felt less comfortable during lessons 17 (listening and speaking) and 23 (grammar) (see Table 6).

4.2.2 Student F

According to the numerical data included in Table 5, overall, Student F reported the highest level of FLA in minute 20 and the lowest in minutes 30 and 10. The biggest difference in the mean scores was observed between minutes 20 and 30 and amounted to 1.29. The analysis of the data showed that in 11 lessons the levels of anxiety varied to some extent throughout the whole classes. It concerned lessons: 3 (grammar), 10 (dialog), 11 (grammar), 14 (grammar), 15 (listening and grammar), 17 (listening and speaking), 18 (grammar), 19 (reading, vocabulary, speaking), 20 (listening and speaking), 23 (grammar) and 24 (grammar). For example, the learner reported the lowest levels of FLA in lesson 14 in minutes 10 (1 point; checking homework) and 30 (1 point; online grammar activities; individual work) and the highest ones in minutes 20 (3 points; grammar: coursebook activities; individual work) and 40 (2 points; online grammar activities; individual work). It should be noted, however, that the difference between the highest and the lowest levels of FLA was small and equaled 2 points.

Table 6 Descriptive statistics for the students' overall evaluation of all lessons

Lesson	Student E	Student F	Student G
	Mean / Standard deviation / Range		
1	2.29 / 0.49 / 1	2.57 / 1.27 / 3	1.71 / 0.76 / 2
2	2.29 / 0.76 / 2	1.29 / 0.49 / 1	1.29 / 0.49 / 1
3	2.29 / 0.76 / 2	1.29 / 0.49 / 1	1.86 / 0.69 / 2
4	1.86 / 0.69 / 2	n/a*	1.71 / 0.49 / 1
5	1.43 / 0.53 / 1	n/a	1.29 / 0.49 / 1
6	1.57 / 0.53 / 1	2.00 / 0.82 / 2	1.43 / 0.79 / 2
7	1.14 / 0.38 / 1	1.00 / 0.00 / 0	1.43 / 0.53 / 1
8	1.29 / 0.49 / 1	1.29 / 0.49 / 1	1.43 / 0.53 / 1
9	1.71 / 0.49 / 1	3.00 / 2.77 / 6	1.29 / 0.49 / 1
10	1.71 / 0.49 / 1	1.86 / 0.90 / 2	1.14 / 0.38 / 1
11	2.00 / 0.00 / 0	3.57 / 1.40 / 4	1.14 / 0.38 / 1
12	1.00 / 0.00 / 0	n/a	1.14 / 0.38 / 1
13	n/a	n/a	1.14 / 0.38 / 1
14	1.43 / 0.53 / 1	2.00 / 1.91 / 5	1.14 / 0.38 / 1
15	1.71 / 0.49 / 1	1.71 / 0.95 / 2	1.14 / 0.38 / 1
16	1.14 / 0.38 / 1	n/a	1.14 / 0.38 / 1
17	3.29 / 1.25 / 4	1.71 / 0.49 / 1	2.71 / 2.93 / 6
18	n/a	2.14 / 1.57 / 4	1.00 / 0.00 / 0
19	2.29 / 0.49 / 1	1.86 / 0.69 / 2	1.86 / 2.27 / 6
20	1.71 / 0.76 / 2	2.43 / 1.27 / 4	n/a
21	n/a	n/a	1.00 / 0.00 / 0
22	1.43 / 0.53 / 1	n/a	1.00 / 0.00 / 0
23	3.43 / 2.23 / 6	1.86 / 0.90 / 2	1.00 / 0.00 / 0
24	1.86 / 0.38 / 1	2.14 / 1.57 / 4	1.00 / 0.00 / 0

* Indicates the student's absence

As can be seen in Table 6, the student's assessment of the lessons he attended showed that the learner had experienced a bit more anxiety in lessons 9 (grammar) and 17 (listening and speaking). However, the values of the mean scores were not large and they never exceeded 3.57 of a point.

4.2.3 Student G

On the whole, the learner showed the highest and lowest levels of anxiety at the beginning of the lessons and at the end of them, respectively (see Table 5). The largest difference in its mean equaled 0.52. Moreover, only during lesson 3 did the levels of anxiety change the most; however, the fluctuations were very small. In more

specific terms, the student was a bit anxious in the first 10 minutes of the lesson (3 points; students' questioning) and then he felt relaxed till the end of the class (2 points—minute 20 and 1 point—minutes 30 and 40; grammar activities concerning indefinite pronouns; individual work).

In addition, the subject's evaluation of all the lessons demonstrated that he experienced the most anxiety in lessons 17 (listening and speaking), 3 (grammar) and 19 (reading, vocabulary, speaking). It has to be noted, however, that the values of the mean were small (see Table 6).

Finally, it should also be noted that, generally, Students E, F and G were quite uniform in their assessment of the levels of FLA they experienced during the lessons. This is indicated by the low values of the standard deviation and the range (see Table 5). What is more, the students' evaluation of the classes demonstrated that, with the exception of Student F, the other two students were fairly unanimous in their evaluations of the lessons as indicated by low values of the measures of dispersion (see Table 6).

5 Discussion

The analysis of the foreign language anxiety grids showed that, on the whole, each student who tested high on anxiety displayed quite high levels of FLA during the lessons. In contrast, each learner who tested low on anxiety demonstrated low levels of FLA in the course of single lessons. Besides, the analysis of the foreign language anxiety grids provided some evidence for the changing character of the construct throughout single lessons as reported by individual students. More precisely, the participants who tested high on anxiety generally reported the highest and the lowest levels of anxiety at the beginning of the lessons and at the end of them, respectively (cf. Chuo, 2007). As regards the students who tested low on anxiety, two of them also showed more anxiety at the start of the lessons but the differences in its levels were rather small (cf. Kruk, 2016). Additionally, in the case of one of these learners the levels of anxiety kept changing from the start to the end of the classes. A plausible explanation of such findings is that the students (i.e., the ones who tested high on anxiety, in particular) may have feared to be quizzed and negatively evaluated by their teacher (cf. Kruk, 2018). This is because the beginning of each lesson was typically used by the teacher to check and grade the students' homework assignments and/or assess the learners' mastery of the material covered in the previous lessons. It should be remembered that the participants, especially those who tested high on anxiety, experienced problems with the English language, they were not very motivated to learn it and quite frequently they were not prepared for their English classes. Such issues may have led to a substantial increase in the level of anxiety in the first few minutes of each English lesson. Finally, it could also be argued that such factors may have contributed considerably to making these students (i.e., those who tested high on anxiety) simply more susceptible to experiencing different levels of FLA during a single language class.

Just as in the case of the foreign language anxiety grids, the analysis of the evaluation sheets revealed that on average the four participants who tested high on anxiety evaluated the English classes higher than the three learners who tested low on anxiety. At this point, it should be recalled from the section on procedures, data collection instruments and analysis that higher mean scores reflect more feelings of FLA. Additionally, the analysis of the evaluation sheets offered some evidence of the dynamic nature of FLA over time, that is, from one language class to another (cf. Kruk, 2018). It was revealed that both groups of students' evaluations of the classes varied to a greater or lesser extent. It is interesting to note, however, that the behaviors of the students who tested high on anxiety were more varied and dynamic in this respect, whereas the students who tested low on anxiety acted in a rather stable way. Although it is likely that the high levels of anxiety reported by the individual participants at the beginning of the lessons somehow translated into high mean values reported by them in their evaluations of the lessons, it is equally possible that, among other things, the content of the classes (i.e., the foci of the lessons, language activities), language material (i.e., the use of traditional coursebook or the Internet), modes of work (i.e., individual, pair or group work) as well as student–student and student–teacher relationships may have also played a role here.

As can be seen, the picture of FLA that emerged from the analysis of the data gathered by means of the foreign language anxiety grids and the evaluation sheets is quite complex and sometimes difficult to interpret. This is because even the same student may have experienced feelings of anxiety in similar contexts. For example, Student C reported different levels of FLA in the second half of a lesson (i.e., lesson 15) during which he individually performed a set of online grammar activities. Another student (i.e., Student D) evaluated two similar lessons (i.e., lessons 23 and 24) differently despite the fact that both classes were devoted to practicing grammar (i.e., comparative of adjectives). It should be recalled at this point that the evaluation of the lessons performed by the learners who scored high on anxiety was higher and more varied when compared with the one conducted by the subjects who scored low on anxiety. When it comes to some possible explanations of this state of affairs, it seems that students may have experienced different degrees of FLA not only from one lesson to another but also during a single lesson (or in a relatively short period of time, e.g., 20 min) when facing language activities of different levels of difficulty or feedback they received as it probably was the case with Student C during the second part of lesson 15 (cf. Kruk, 2018). Other plausible explanations may be related to, among other things, students' disposition during a particular lesson, the atmosphere in which English lessons are conducted, students' weekly workload, or a combination of these and other factors.

Despite the fact that the study offered some insights into the changing character of FLA, it suffers from a number of weaknesses. For one thing, the data collection instruments used in this study may have not been sensitive enough to detect all changes in the levels of FLA. For example, the participants may have been asked to indicate their level of anxiety more frequently during a single lesson or the number and adjectives used in the evaluation sheet could have been different. Secondly, the

number of students involved in this study could have been larger and have included both male and female students. It should be noted, however, that the number of students was thought to be sufficient since the purpose of the study was not to investigate group averages but rather to zero in on individual level analysis. Thirdly, difficult as it may be, given the specificity of the Polish educational setting, more than one teacher should have been involved and have conducted the English lesson. This is because the participants may have not been willing to disclose their feelings to the class regular teacher. Finally, more instruments of data collection could have been used (e.g., dairies, reports) and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

6 Conclusions and Implications

Considering the research findings discussed above, a few possibilities of lowering anxiety levels in the L2 classroom can be indicated. In all likelihood, students' positive perception of teacher support plays a crucial role in alleviating their frustration and apprehension about having to face something they have almost no idea of. Since teacher-related factors are found among the most influential foreign language anxiety sources (Young, 1994), it seems reasonable to reflect on opportunities for reversing this tendency, which can be discussed in broader terms of encouraging adolescent students' stress-free as well as constructive engagement in L2 activities (Saito et al., 1999).

First of all, a rapport has to be mentioned as relying on the teacher's openness, trust and interest in their learners' ideas (Trickett & Moos, 1995). Another important aspect is lack of competition and clear task orientation allowing students to know what goals they are aiming at and what exactly they are supposed to do in order to accomplish them, and also raising their awareness of results they can expect (Saito et al., 1999). Due to the fact that one of FLA driving forces is the student's low self-esteem and anticipation of a failure as was shown in the present study, emphasis should be laid on the properly rendered assessment of their learning achievements. The most promising solution seems to be formative assessment with its focus on instructor ongoing and descriptive judgments as well as student self-evaluation (Zawodniak, 2005). Positive affective feedback and in some cases positive reinforcement showing the teacher's appreciation of students' effort and involvement might also contribute to improving their self-image and thus lowering anxiety levels. In light of the results obtained from this research, positive affective feedback and positive reinforcement seem to be of special importance at the beginning of classes when the previously covered material is usually recalled and when students' anxiety levels rise due to their uncertainty and fear of being negatively evaluated by the teacher. Last but not least, training students in various compensation strategies (e.g., non-linguistic signals, prefabricated patterns, circumlocution, code-switching) and language learning strategies (e.g., requests for clarification, positive thinking, positive self-talk, deep breathing, self-monitoring, imagery) is likely to feed into pupils' belief that they are in a position to overcome

temporary L2 learning problems and succeed in doing assigned tasks (Horwitz, 2001).

As has been repeatedly indicated above, anxiety is a complex, multidimensional variable and as such it can have a detrimental, interfering effect on L2 learning. Given that language classroom is the environment in which students are shown a tool that they know much worse than their mother tongue and that they are required to use to communicate, they begin to feel insecure, embarrassed and subjected to others' judgments (Hilleson, 1996; Tsui, 1996). This is why, it is difficult to overestimate the teacher's responsibility for creating a friendly, relaxed atmosphere and at the same time contribute to a challenging learning environment.

Appendix

Levels of FLA reported by each study participant during each lesson.

Lesson	Student A				Student B			
	10 min	20 min	30 min	40 min	10 min	20 min	30 min	40 min
1	--	--	--	--	5	4	3	3
2	5	5	5	4	6	4	4	3
3	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
4	5	5	5	4	4	3	3	3
5	5	5	5	5	7	4	3	3
6	5	4	2	2	7	4	4	4
7	4	4	4	4	7	4	4	4
8	--	--	--	--	7	3	3	3
9	5	5	5	5	--	--	--	--
10	4	3	4	4	3	3	2	2
11	6	5	6	5	7	7	7	5
12	--	--	--	--	7	5	4	4
13	6	6	5	4	5	4	3	2
14	5	5	5	5	6	4	4	4
15	5	4	4	4	7	5	5	5
16	5	5	5	5	--	--	--	--
17	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
18	--	--	--	--	7	5	4	4
19	--	--	--	--	4	5	5	5
20	6	5	5	5	--	--	--	--
21	6	6	5	5	7	7	5	4

(continued)

(continued)

Lesson	Student A				Student B			
	10 min	20 min	30 min	40 min	10 min	20 min	30 min	40 min
22		5	5	5	6	6	5	4
23		5	5	5	6	7	6	7
24		5	5	3	7	6	5	4
	Student C							
	10 min	20 min	30 min	40 min	10 min	20 min	30 min	40 min
1	7	6	5	5	4	3	3	4
2	4	3	4	3	5	3	3	4
3	2	2	2	2	6	4	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3
5	2	2	2	2	6	3	3	3
6	2	3	2	2	7	4	4	2
7	7	7	7	7	7	4	2	2
8	2	2	2	2	7	4	3	3
9	2	2	2	2	7	3	3	3
10	2	3	2	2	5	5	4	4
11	5	5	5	5	7	7	7	7
12	--	--	--	--	4	4	4	4
13	7	7	7	7	6	5	4	3
14	5	2	2	2	6	5	4	4
15	5	2	3	1	7	4	4	4
16	6	6	2	2	7	7	5	4
17	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

(continued)

(continued)

	Student A					Student B				
	6	2	2	2	2	5	4	4	4	4
18										
19	--	--	--	--	--	7	3	4	4	4
20	5	2	2	2	2	7	4	3	3	3
21	5	4	3	3	3	6	5	4	4	4
22	2	2	2	2	2	6	4	4	4	4
23	2	2	2	2	6	6	5	3	3	3
24	2	2	2	2	2	3	4	4	4	4

Lesson	Student E				Student F			
	10 min	20 min	30 min	40 min	10 min	20 min	30 min	40 min
1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2
3	2	1	1	2	3	2	1	1
4	2	1	1	1	--	--	--	--
5	2	1	1	1	--	--	--	--
6	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	1
7	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	1
8	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1
9	3	2	1	1	2	1	2	1
10	1	3	1	2	1	3	1	2
11	3	2	1	1	1	3	1	2
12	1	1	1	1	--	--	--	--
13	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
14	2	1	1	1	1	3	1	2
15	3	1	1	1	1	3	1	2
16	1	1	1	1	--	--	--	--
17	1	3	1	2	1	3	1	2
18	--	--	--	--	1	3	1	2
19	5	1	2	1	1	3	1	2
20	2	1	1	1	1	3	1	2
21	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
22	1	2	1	1	--	--	--	--
23	3	2	1	1	1	3	1	2
24	4	2	1	1	1	3	1	2

Lesson	Student G			
	10 min	20 min	30 min	40 min
1	1	1	1	1
2	2	1	1	1
3	3	2	1	1
4	2	2	1	1
5	2	2	1	1
6	2	1	1	1
7	2	1	1	1
8	1	1	1	1

(continued)

(continued)

Lesson	Student G			
	10 min	20 min	30 min	40 min
9	1	1	1	1
10	2	1	1	1
11	1	1	1	1
12	1	1	1	1
13	1	1	1	1
14	1	1	1	1
15	3	1	1	1
16	1	1	1	1
17	1	1	4	1
18	2	1	1	1
19	1	1	1	1
20	--	--	--	--
21	2	1	1	1
22	1	1	1	1
23	1	1	1	1
24	1	1	1	1

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