El Guiniguada

(Revista de investigaciones y experiencias en Ciencias de la Educación)

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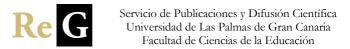## Digital Age and Anxiety: the Impact of Online Classes on Spanish as a Foreign Language (ELE)
Era digital y ansiedad: impacto de las clases en línea en estudiantes ELE

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Digital Age and Anxiety: the Impact of Online Classes on Spanish as a Foreign Language (ELE)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of online education on students' anxiety. A modified version of the *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS) was administered to a group of 18 beginning-level Spanish students. Data were analyzed quantitatively to find out whether students described feeling more anxious in the online setting versus the in-person setting and to examine what features participants identified with anxiety. Results show that a higher anxiety was present in the online mode of instruction than in the in person setting. Several relevant factors were identified, including connection issues and the lack of visuality of non-verbal responses.

KEYWORDS

ANXIETY, L2 LEARNING, ONLINE EDUCATION

RESUMEN

El propósito de este estudio era investigar los efectos de la educación en línea en la ansiedad de los estudiantes. Se administró una versión modificada de la *Foreign Language Classroom Scale* (Escala de Ansiedad en el Aula de Lenguas Extranjeras) (FLCAS) a un grupo de 18 estudiantes de español de nivel inicial. Los datos se analizaron cuantitativamente para averiguar si los estudiantes describían sentirse más ansiosos en el entorno en línea que en el presencial y para examinar qué factores identificaban los participantes con la ansiedad experimentada. Los resultados muestran que los estudiantes reportaban sentir una mayor ansiedad en la modalidad de enseñanza en línea que en la presencial. Se identificaron varios factores relevantes, como los problemas de conexión y la falta de visibilidad de las respuestas no verbales.

PALABRAS CLAVE

ANSIEDAD, APRENDIZAJE DE L2, EDUCACIÓN EN LÍNEA

INTRODUCTION

The use of technology to enhance learning is gaining ground worldwide, reducing the temporal and spatial problems associated with in-person learning. Although distance learning has been around for a long time, since 2020, and in response to the situation created by the COVID-19 virus, different platforms have continued to be used for the classes to be carried out virtually. As online advancements in technology continue to meet the demands of an increasingly digital world, language course instructors find in these tools a great help to teach from home, which in addition to allowing students to keep up with their education regardless of their setting, also seems to adapt well in terms of communication between students, teachers and families (Lozada et al., 2022). Courses will continue to be imparted online, and introducing students to online platforms has been—and continues to be —a challenging task, particularly in the context of L2 teaching, in which the key focus on communicative activities may be affected by the mode of instruction. How online learning affects students remains an important area of research that ought to be addressed.

In order to understand what the word "online" encompasses in terms of teaching it is important to understand the differences in the terminology used to describe the use of technology in the classroom. Bates (2005) pointed out that the terms "online learning" and "e-learning" are used interchangeably but made the distinction that "e-learning" can encompass any form of technology, while "online learning" refers specifically to using the Internet in the educational process. It can be said that "online learning" has its roots in distance education. In this way, the term "fully online" is used by Bates (2005, p. 9) to distinguish distance courses where students must have access to an Internet device to be able to undertake the entire course. There are many definitions of "online learning," reflecting the wide diversity in terms of the practices and technologies that are in use regarding the Internet. Ally (2004) defined it in the following way:

> … the use of the Internet to access materials; to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners; and to obtain support during the learning process, in order to acquire knowledge, to construct personal meaning, and to grow from the learning experience (p. 5).

In this article, the term "online learning" will be used to encompass the definition offered by Ally while incorporating the distinction used by Bates. Online learning, as described in this study, is taken to be a form of distance education mediated by technological tools where learners are geographically separated from their institution.

Many authors have reiterated the potential benefits of online learning. Plaisance (2018) explained that online learning could be delivered synchronously or asynchronously. The synchronous mode enables real-time communication between teachers and learners (Plaisance, 2018) through applications such as Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet. This context has been specifically relevant in terms of language learning, which requests dedication in terms of time. Online learning allows learners to learn a second language (L2) in a virtual environment at their own pace and time, especially in the context of the asynchronous mode, due to the flexibility that it offers (Akcaoglu et al., 2016).

However, even though this mode of education provides students with the opportunity to receive their education despite their location, it has also proven problematic for different reasons. Mondol and Mohiuddin's (2020) study concerning online learning during the pandemic in Bangladesh reported that their participants faced various

learning difficulties, mainly because of weak Internet connectivity at home and the unavailability of supporting devices. The teaching-learning process, being interrupted by these difficulties resulted in a motivation swing in students. Furthermore, teachers' limited ability to check learners' understanding through visual signs even in a synchronous mode of instruction can lead to learners' misconceptions being prolonged, unless they independently study further or are willing to ask questions in class (Plaisance, 2018). Hence, unless carried out mindfully, online learning could lead to possible learner disconnection and disengagement (Plaisance, 2018). Some studies regarding students' attitudes towards online learning during the pandemic have proven that students' feelings towards education are indeed affected by the online context (e.g., Russell, 2020; Coman et al., 2020; Evişen, 2020). According to the previously mentioned studies, affective factors such as anxiety seem to be the main aspects affected by the mode of instruction. These emotional agents have continued to generate a considerable amount of research even after the pandemic (Apridayani, 2023; Peng et al., 2024; Tao et al., 2024).

Anxiety has been one of the main areas of interest in educational contexts during the past two decades. Horwitz et. al (1986) defined anxiety as "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with the arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (p. 125). When considering anxiety, a distinction has been made between "general anxiety" and "L2 anxiety", making this affective factor an even more relevant element in the research related to *Instructed Second Language Acquisition* (ISLA). Horwitz et al. (1986) pioneered the term *Foreign Language Anxiety* (FLA) as a specific syndrome from which three other forms of anxieties emerge: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. In addition, Pae (2013) argued that there are specific L2 skills that are more anxiety-provoking than others, considering speaking to be one of the most influential in this regard. Such anxiety may result, as Horwitz et al. (1986) claimed, in an inability to speak from the fear of making a mistake or in a lack of self-efficacy. Foreign language theorists and educators know that anxiety and stress are obstacles for foreign language students, and therefore, it has been a well-researched topic (e.g., Krashen, 1981; Horwitz, et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994a, 1994b; Von Worde, 2003; Blake, 2008; Pichette, 2009; Chametzky, 2013a, 2017, 2019; García-Marín et al., 2022).

Even though there has been a shift towards the study of more positive emotions in the classroom (McIntyre et al, 2019), such as enjoyment or resilience, anxiety seems to have regained some attention since the pandemic. Researchers found that the new online mode of instruction imposed by the medical emergency situation provoked anxiety related issues for students, mainly induced by the lack of technological knowledge, academic overload and the lack of human interaction (Aldossari and Altalhab, 2022; Cueva and Terrones, 2020; Valizadeh, 2022). However, this preoccupying affective factor was regarded as problematic even before COVID-19. For example, Saadé et al. (2017) found that 30% of students experienced anxiety when receiving online courses, and their performance seemed to be compromised, which makes the presence of this affective factor a preoccupying issue worth paying attention to. Moreover, although there are many technology and Internet related anxiety studies (Stowell & Bennet, 2010; Bolliger et al., 2011; Saadé et al., 2017; Cueva & Terrones, 2020), those related to second language acquisition are relatively scarce. While foreign language anxiety has been researched in face-to-face learning environments, it is not

completely evident that it manifests in the same manner in an online environment, leaving a gap in research that must be regarded.

METHODOLOGY

Research questions

This study aims to explore student anxiety in Spanish as a foreign language class. More specifically, the present study examines whether there are any differences in students' experience of anxiety in the online synchronous versus the in-person setting. The following research questions were created to address these issues.

1. Do students experience more anxiety during online synchronous language classes than in the in-person setting?
2. What factors do students identify with anxiety?

Participants

The participants of this study were 18 L2 Spanish students in a medium-size public university in the United States. The students were enrolled in a beginning-level Spanish as a foreign language course that was primarily taught in-person, but that also had an online synchronous component. Many of the students were taking the course to fulfill a language requirement, not because they were planning to major or minor in Spanish or studying the language for personal reasons.

Teaching context

The Basic Spanish Skills course of the present study is the first introductory course for beginning students of Spanish at this university. Students who enroll in this four-credit hour course are not expected to have prior knowledge of the language. The course is imparted in fifty-minute lessons, four days a week during one semester. Students learn Spanish for a total of fifteen weeks (60 hours per term). During the first week of the semester, four hours of instruction were obligatorily taught in the online synchronous format using the video-conferencing platform Zoom due to measures taken by the university to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at the time when the number of cases were high in the local community. Moreover, once in-person classes were re-stablished, a total of eight classes during two consecutive weeks towards the middle of the semester were taught in the online synchronous format using the video-conferencing platform Zoom, just for the purpose of the present study. Hence, a total of three weeks of the 15-week course or 20% were taught synchronously online, while the other 80% of the class sessions were taught in person.

In this Spanish course, students learned the materials following the flipped-classroom approach. Instructional videos about grammar and vocabulary were found in *Contraseña,* an online platform where students are presented with all the learning resources necessary for the course. After watching these explanatory videos, students completed some input-based application activities before attending class. During class time, the instructor provided the students with input-based activities and communication-based tasks in order to practice the previously learned content. Students were expected to be able to convey personal basic meaning and engage in very simple conversations about personal or daily topics. The emphasis of this course was to develop oral skills in Spanish. This approach was maintained during the three weeks of online teaching created for the current study. Since many activities involved communication in pairs or groups, these were done using *breakout rooms*, a feature in

Zoom that allowed the instructor to divide the students into separate virtual rooms where pairs or groups could interact on their own.

Data collection procedures

To measure the anxiety, participants completed an adapted version of the *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS) created by Horwitz et al. (1986). The original instrument contains 33 items, which each included a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "strongly agree" (1) to "strongly disagree" (5). It measures students' self-reports regarding anxiety by adding up the ratings on the 33 items. The FLCAS comprises three dimensions of anxiety: (1) fear of negative evaluation; (2) communication apprehension; and (3) test anxiety. Adapted versions of the FLCAS, such as the *Online World Languages Anxiety Scale* (OWLAS) (Chametzky, 2019) and the *Language Virtual Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLVCAS) (Kaisar and Chowdhury, 2020), where used as models for the creation of the questionnaire employed here. Such adaptations of the FLCAS were useful for this study because they were designed to measure FLA specifically in the online setting. However, some adaptations for the present study were still needed. Specifically, some items were revised for clarity, some questions were discarded due to irrelevance, and some others were added to make the questionnaire fit for a class that was not taught entirely online. There are questions on the instrument that specifically ask students to compare the online and the face-to-face settings. The final anxiety questionnaire employed in this study is composed of 19 items and uses a five-point scale to measure the level of anxiety. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire online through the platform Qualtrics, and it was administered towards the middle of the semester, immediately after the online synchronous instruction had concluded.

RESULTS

To begin, the percentage of students who answered "agree", "neutral" or "disagree" to these questions is shown in Table 1. For ease of representation, "strongly agree" was merged with "agree" and "strongly disagree" with "disagree".

Fig. 1
Responses to anxiety questionnaire

Question	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1. I feel uneasy thinking that my teacher or fellow students might see my home setting when in online classes.	0%	0%	100%
2. I feel anxious that I might miss something due to connection issues.	64.71%	0%	35.29%
3. I feel anxious thinking that the teacher might not see my non-verbal responses or involvement during online class.	52.94%	11.76%	35.29%
4. I feel uncomfortable about the possibility of being recorded during virtual class.	11.76%	5.88%	82.35%
5. Since I do not necessarily have to expose my physical appearance in a virtual class, I feel more comfortable and relaxed when the class is online.	35.29%	11.76%	52.94%
6. Long time using technology during the virtual class makes me anxious about my physical and mental health.	41.17%	5.88%	52.94%
7. I feel more anxious when I do tests in-person than in the online classroom.	52.94%	5.88%	41.17%
8. I feel more anxious when I do tests in the online classroom than in-person.	35.29%	5.88%	58.83%

[table continues]
[table continues]

9. The direct presence of eye contact with the teachers makes me more nervous in class than in a virtual environment.	23.53%	5.88%	70.59%
10. I worry more about making mistakes in in-person classes.	35.29%	5.88%	58.83%
11. I worry more about making mistakes in online classes.	23.53%	11.76%	64.7%
12. I feel more anxious when I know I´m going to be called on in the online class.	58.83%	5.88%	35.29%
13. I feel more anxious when I know I´m going to be called on in the in-person class.	41.17%	0%	58.83%
14. It embarrasses me more to volunteer answers in the online class.	52.94%	5.88%	41.17%
15. It embarrasses me more to volunteer answers in my in-person class.	17.64%	17.65%	64.71%
16. I feel less self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students in the online classroom.	35.29%	17.65%	47.05%
17. I feel less self-conscious about speaking in the foreign language in front of other students when in-person.	47.06%	23.53%	29.41%
18. A real classroom environment fits me more for the Spanish class.	76.47%	11.76%	11.76%
19. I prefer the online class to learn Spanish.	17.64%	5.88%	76.47%

Source. Own elaboration

The main factors indicated by students as being anxiety-provoking in the online setting were connectivity issues (64.71%), lack of visuality of non-verbal responses (52.94%), being called on by the teacher (58.83%), and volunteering answers (52. 94%). However, there were some features that were identified by students as being less anxiety-provoking in the online class than in the in-person context, such as making mistakes, since 58.83% of students worried more about making mistakes during in-person classes compared to online classes. Regarding testing, when comparing question 8 with question 7, it seems that a slightly higher percentage of students felt anxious when quizzes took place in-person (52.94%) when compared to online (35.29%). However, some of the features that were exclusive to the virtual setting were not identified as anxiety-triggering, as students disagreed with the fact that exposing their home setting when online (100%) and the possibility of being recorded (82.35%) were anxiety-provoking for them. Finally, when presented with the item "I prefer the online class to learn Spanish", 76.47% of students disagreed.

The direct eye contact that students experience when they are physically present in front of the teacher was considered a possible anxiety provoking factor and thus included in the questionnaire. Nevertheless, 70.59% of the participants disagreed with the fact that eye contact made them more nervous in an in-person classroom than in a virtual environment. 47.06% of the students felt less self-conscious about speaking in Spanish when they were in the physical classroom, which is a high percentage compared to the 29.41% who disagreed with this affirmation. Further, the highest number of neutral responses was found in this question (23.53%). Volunteering answers in the in-person classroom did not seem to affect students' levels of anxiety either, since only 17.64% of the students agreed with item 14. In comparison, 54.94% believed that volunteering answers online was more embarrassing than in-person. Making mistakes in front of their peers in-person as being more anxiety-producing in person than online was only

agreed upon by 35.29% of the participants. However, this percentage decreased when this question was asked in reverse, since 23.53% of the participants worried more about making mistakes online than in person. Anxiety provoked by the action of being called on in the in-person class was not considered a problem by 58.83% of students. However, the same percentage of students agree upon the fact that being called on in the online classroom is anxiety provoking. Above half of the participants (52.94%) felt more anxious when they did tests in-person, while only 35.29 % felt more anxious when exams took place online. With regards to student's preferences on the context of the Spanish language classroom, 76.47% reported that the in-person language classroom fit them more for learning a language, a high amount when compared to the 17.64% of students who preferred the online class to learn Spanish.

DISCUSSION

From early studies, it was found that the levels of anxiety in the synchronous online context did not differ much from those in the in-person setting. However, in some studies, students also showed concern about technical support and pointed to connectivity as being one of the few but main problems that they had to face when taking classes online (Scida and Jones, 2016). Similarly, Cueva and Terrones (2020) found that 82.4% of participants attributed high anxiety to managing Zoom, and 46% rated connection issues as highly significant. Valizadeh (2021) also reported that over two-thirds of students feared disconnection, driven by a fear of missing important information. In Kaisar and Chowdhury's (2020) interviews, most students linked connectivity problems with missing key details from the teacher, which heightened anxiety. The present study aligns with these findings, as many students cited connectivity as an anxiety factor.

This fear of missing information from the teacher can also be present in the other direction since students have also reported concern about not being correctly perceived by the teacher during online sessions. More than half of the participants of this study agreed that they felt anxious thinking that the teacher might not see their non-verbal responses or involvement during class. Previous researchers also found this factor as a concern in their studies, such as Valizadeh (2021), whose results showed that 65.2% of the participants felt anxious thinking that the teacher might not be able to perceive the students' careful listening in the form of nodding or shaking heads. Kaisar and Chowdhury´s (2020) participants also identified this issue, since 68.2% of them reported that the source of their anxiety was that the teacher might not realize their seriousness about the course. Moreover, most students in Kaisar and Chowdhury reported feeling uncared for by teachers during the synchronous virtual language class, which shows how pivotal the role of the teacher may be when the context of education changes.

Another source of anxiety identified by the students that participated in this study is knowing they were going to be called on in the online class. This specific anxiety triggering factor was targeted in the original FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986) through the item: "I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class". Being called on in class seemed to generate a nervous response in students in the in-person classroom (Horwitz et al., 1986). This same item in Scida and Jones' (2016) research indicated high levels of anxiety in the online context, but it had the highest mean difference from pre- to post-FLCAS, indicating that students felt less anxious when being called upon in class near the end of the semester relative to the beginning

of the semester. This shows that the more time students spend online, the less anxiety provoking it becomes. This information may help in understanding why the participants of the present study showed higher levels of anxiety on this item. Since they only experienced three weeks of online education, they could not get accustomed to the dynamics of answering questions on Zoom. However, it seems to be a problematic feature that must be considered, since in the present study, a clear difference among those who felt anxious when being called on in the physical classroom (41.17%) and in the online classroom (58.83%) was observed.

It seems clear that oral communication is an extremely stressful activity for many students, and that they are more anxious when they must speak than when they must write in the foreign language. When Chametzky´s (2019) participants were asked about their confidence when speaking in the classroom, 71.4% of the participants reported not feeling confident about their speaking abilities, which points to oral production as an element that causes anxiety in students. Therefore, it could be expected that any activity related to oral communication can provoke distress in foreign language students, and that actions such as volunteering answers or speaking in front of other students would be anxiety provoking regardless of the context in which they take place. However, the present study showed students felt more embarrassed volunteering answers online (52.94%) than in person (17.64%). Similar trends are noted in other research: Kaisar and Chowdhury (2020) found a preference for in-person speaking, although 45.2% also felt comfortable with online speaking tasks. Valizadeh (2021) reported that 85.3% of students were comfortable speaking in person, and 70.3% felt similarly online. In Pakpahan and Gulton (2022), students expressed a belief that in-person interactions would enhance their speaking skills more effectively than online settings, suggesting that face-to-face environments may be better for developing oral competence.

As Pichette (2009) maintained, FLA can make learners unwilling to interact with their peers in the classroom, and it is probable that some students resort to virtual learning for such reason, because they seek security and anonymity. Valizadeh (2021) supported this, reporting that 67.4% of students felt more comfortable in online classes because they didn't have to respond while being observed, and 72.1% felt relaxed due to the lack of physical visibility. Kaisar and Chowdhury (2020) found similar results. However, in the present study, only 35.29% of students felt more worried about making mistakes in person versus 23.53% online, and most students remained neutral. A potential explanation is that mandatory camera use limited anonymity that could reduce anxiety in online classes. The majority of respondents of this item of the anxiety questionnaire decided to remain neutral, which makes it difficult to interpret this issue.

Apart from exposing their physical appearance, it can be observed in previous research that some students also felt uneasy about the possibility of showing their personal space when they attended the course from their homes. It has been observed that this is one of the most anxiety provoking characteristics of virtual education, as can be seen in Kaisar and Chowdhury's (2020) and Valizadeh's (2021) studies. About two thirds of the Turkish respondents in the former study stated that they felt uneasy thinking that the teacher or fellow students might be able to see their home setting or hear the voices in their homes. A good number of respondents (45.2%) in Kaisar and Chowdhury´s (2020) study also reported feeling anxiety when thinking about their peers or teacher observing their surroundings. Results in this study completely contradict previous research since the totality of students in the present study disagreed with this particular

item. One possible interpretation is that the students participating in this research had already met each other in person before the online sessions took place. This might imply higher acquaintanceship with their peers and teacher, eliminating the trust barrier that might be the reason behind their concern to share their surroundings.

The direct presence of eye contact has often been cited as a source of anxiety for students in in-person classes (Kaisar and Chowdhury, 2020; Valizadeh, 2021), leading some researchers to suggest that online settings may decrease this stress by reducing the feeling of being observed. In Kaisar and Chowdhury's (2020) study, however, most participants did not report greater nervousness from eye contact in person than online. Similarly, in the present study, 70.59% of respondents disagreed with the idea that teacher eye contact in either setting was anxiety-inducing, suggesting that they felt equally comfortable with eye contact in both environments, consistent with previous findings. Interestingly, Valizadeh (2021) found that the lack of eye contact had the opposite effect than expected. Through the open-ended item, some enlightening perceptions were collected: "Because when I don´t have eye contact with others in class, I feel confused" or "I like eye contact and direct speech. This way is natural" are comments reflecting the predominant feelings of the participants in Valizadeh's study. These responses suggest that the virtual setting can be anxiety provoking for some students precisely because of the lack of eye contact, becoming unnatural and confusing.

A feature that can be said to be more prevalent in the online setting is the possibility of being recorded during the lesson. Therefore, it was considered an important factor to include in the questionnaire for the present study. Even though the online lessons for this research were recorded, a high percentage (82.25%) of the participants in this study disagreed with the item "I feel uncomfortable about the possibility of being recorded during virtual class", disregarding this factor as an anxiety provoking issue. In this sense, the data collected in this study is not consistent with previous studies. 60.9% of Valizadeh's (2021) participants reported feeling anxious about being recorded in every activity during the virtual class. However, Kaisar and Chowdhury´s (2020) participants reported in their in-depth interview that the class being recorded made them feel assured that they would not miss anything from the lecture. These findings do not project into the current study, mainly because the recordings were not shared with students after the lesson.

According to Stowell and Bennett (2010), students who normally experience high levels of anxiety during exams in the classroom had reduced test anxiety when they took place in an online setting, demonstrating that test delivery mode indeed affected the levels of anxiety of students. The present study stands in line with previous research in that 52.94% of the respondents agreed with the fact that taking quizzes in-class is more anxiety provoking than in the online classroom. When asked the reverse, 58.83% disagreed, again showing a tendency in favor of the online setting for assessment to take place. However, it can be said that this is one of the few anxiety-reducing factors that students in this study reported for the online mode of language instruction. A possible explanation may be the easy access to external help during assessments. Aldossari and Altaihab (2022) reported that about half of interviewed teachers considered online exams unreliable for measuring student proficiency, as students could easily use resources like bilingual dictionaries or notes. This concern is also echoed by Adedoyin and Soykan (2020), who highlighted the potential for internet-based assistance, raising issues about the integrity of online assessments.

Research on the effects of online classes on students' mental health during the pandemic highlights significant mental health challenges. Cueva and Terrones (2020) found that 83.8% of students believed virtual classes impacted their mental health negatively, noting that teachers and students faced an educational transition that demanded new skills and led to increased workloads, contributing to mental strain among students. Valizadeh (2021) reported that 71.6% of students felt overwhelmed in online classrooms, with 70.8% experiencing anxiety from extended technology use. Similarly, Kaisar and Chowdhury (2020) showed that, even in courses previously online before COVID-19, 62.2% of students felt technology use impacted their mental and physical well-being. However, in the current study, only 52.94% reported online classes affected their mental health, likely due to the brief, three-week duration of online instruction and the absence of pandemic-related stressors, which could have reduced anxiety compared to pandemic-era studies.

Despite variations across studies, research consistently shows a student preference for in-person language learning environments over synchronous online formats. Valizadeh (2021) found that 43.4% of participants favored in-person classes for language learning compared to 21.7% who preferred online. Kaisar and Chowdhury (2020) reported similar findings, with 77.8% of students preferring face-to-face settings, mentioning issues with one-way communication, monotony, and distraction in online classes. Participants noted that the in-person environment allowed for peer support, which reduced anxiety, a preference also reflected in the present study, where 76.47% agreed that face-to-face language learning suited them better. These studies collectively indicate a consistent preference for in-person language learning environments.

CONCLUSION

Online instruction brings with it numerous alterations in education. This research gathers some of the main factors affecting anxiety of language students enrolled in a Spanish for beginners' course at university level. Anxiety and the factors affecting it were analyzed. It was concluded that online instruction can have repercussions on students' anxiety, since participants of this study experienced more anxiety during online language lessons than in the in-person setting. Connectivity issues were considered one of the main problems of the online context, followed by the lack of perception of non-verbal responses by teachers. Actions such as volunteering answers, speaking in front of teachers and classmates, and being called on in class were considered more anxiety provoking when the class took place online. However, a slightly higher percentage of students felt more confident about committing errors when the class took place online. Showing personal surroundings or being recorded during online classes was not considered problematic by students. Eye contact was also not considered threatening in in-person classes, nor any less when the class took place online. Students did not consider that the online sessions took a toll on their mental health. Finally, and even though doing quizzes in person was considered more anxiety provoking than when online, an overall preference for in-person classes for the Spanish language class was found.

In conclusion, investigating the factors that influence students' anxiety in online education can be a great source of knowledge for making enhancements to online learning. Some improvements that might be implemented include encouraging pair work, using alternative platforms for participation, and creating attractive, interactive

and visually appealing activities. Addressing the factors that contribute to students' anxiety in online education is crucial for enhancing the learning experience, fostering a supportive environment where students can thrive mentally and academically, ultimately ensuring equitable access to quality education for everyone.

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