



## Investigation of Students' Emotions During A Remote Teaching Experience of Italian and French as Foreign Languages in Malaysia in The Midst of COVID-19 Pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

With the aim of improving online and blended learning and teaching, this paper analyses students' emotions of a remote learning experience of French and Italian as foreign languages during the COVID-19 pandemic in a Malaysian university. This data was collected through a distance course survey on learners' emotions. The validity of this survey was proven by internal consistency coefficient tests and by a pilot survey made by external learners. The descriptive statistics method used (based on a five-point Likert scale) underlined the contradictory effects of the emergency remote teaching (ERT). On one hand, learners were frustrated with the internet and technological tools disruption, and anxious about their competencies in the target foreign language. On the other hand, students' motivation to learn a new foreign language and their appreciation of the interpersonal interaction (with lecturers and peers) remained high notwithstanding the forced circumstances (the ERT). In addition, due to shyness, students yielded a lack of self-confidence during the online live webcam classes when showing their face and when they had to share their foreign language skills with peers. Lecturers of French and Italian acknowledged the findings of this research and adapted the necessary hybrid and remote teaching changes to improve the quality of the course and to encourage the learners' positive emotions during their future foreign language classes.

**Keywords:** *French Language; Italian Language; Foreign Languages; COVID-19; Emergency Remote Teaching; Survey; Emotions.*

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### INTRODUCTION

This study engaged lecturers and undergraduate students of French and Italian as Foreign Languages (FFL, IFL) in a Malaysian university, during the academic year 2019/2020. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the second semester was organized online. It was *emergency remote teaching* (ERT) which, according to Hodges et al. [1], is due to circumstances, and is a specific and transitory distance teaching and learning, rather than a high-quality educational context. ERT is temporary for planning, access to support systems and faculty training, furthermore, educators are expecting courses to return to their original format after the exceptional circumstances of crisis [2]. For instance, Czerniewicz et al. [3] underlined the lack of planning and coordination when universities in South Africa were forced to go online in response to student protests and campus shutdowns in 2015/2017. As Olasile and Emrah [4] argued, the remote teaching in the midst of COVID-19 syndrome must be explained within ERT context: "effective online learning is a byproduct of cautious design and planning of instruction with the application of organized models for designing and development of instruction" [4]. Recent neurology and psychology studies on the mental and emotional impact of COVID-19 pandemic, "revealed relatively high rates of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), psychological distress, and stress" [5]. Particularly, according to Mseleku [6], during COVID-19 teachers and learners were distressed by the technology and connectivity disruptions, disadvantageous environment and mental-health issues due to limitations on accessing remote teaching and learning resources. Since students did not choose their learning environment, new knowledge of learners' emotions in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic needed urgently to be explored [7]. Consequently, several studies on foreign language (FL) remote teaching during the pandemic have been made especially regarding English as a Foreign Language [8], but that was not the case for FFL and IFL in a Malaysian educational context.

On the light of the above-mentioned points, the writers of the current paper, who were also the lecturers conducting the distance foreign language learning (DFLL) course, aimed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of both distance learning in the academic year 2020/2021 and post-pandemic blended teaching and learning, by taking into consideration the students' emotions of their remote learning experience during the first wave of COVID-19 in Malaysia.

The following three research questions guided this study:

Research question 1: Were learners' DFLL emotions more positive or negative?

Research question 2: Which kind of feelings prevailed within learners' positive and negative emotions?

Research question 3: Did learners' individual factors impact learners' emotions?

The present article, before presenting the database analysis (material, methods, findings and their discussion), first introduces the Malaysian study learning context where DFLL took place. Next, it summarizes the literature review related to this study of learners' emotions.

### **Study learning context**

#### ***COVID-19 first wave: The University closure and the preliminary survey on devices and internet availability***

At the start of the COVID-19 first wave, in March 2020, the Malaysian Government announced all universities were to shut down with immediate effect. Most students headed back to their towns and villages, which meant that internet connectivity was likely to become a major and distressing problem. In order to decide how to design the distance learning classes, lecturers conducted an online survey on *Google Forms* to collect the information needed. The survey aimed to gain an accurate picture of student resources so as to make choices concerning the tools and technologies which were likely to reach every single student. The survey was carried out in the department of Italian and French and accrued 83 responses in total. The results indicated that although all students had a device to work on (smartphone, 100% of the students, desktop and/or laptop, 91.4%), connectivity throughout the day could be a problem due to lack of sufficient internet plans (95.1% stated they had internet access, mainly through phone plans, mobile hotspot or internet access on desktops), or connectivity problems caused by low bandwidth (connection speed was mainly between 5 and 40, 39.5%, or 40 and 100, 30%). As for the accessibility of the tools, the majority of the students had access to *WhatsApp* (85.2%) and *Spectrum* (Moodle platform, 81.5%), only 19.8% to *Zoom*.

#### ***French and Italian as a Foreign Language: The DFLL course***

The lecturers had four weeks to outline online courses in both Italian and French, and design or adapt all the materials, following their own experience and knowledge of the students' needs. Teachers were aware that what they managed to provide was not the kind of quality material one would expect from a *proper* DFLL course, which takes various months to prepare before it is delivered. Following the above preliminary survey on devices and internet availability results, the lecturers agreed on using the institutional platform *Spectrum* as the main lesson platform and to create a low bandwidth version of the courses, so that the students could also be reached through mail or *WhatsApp* and could be offered alternatives to the face-to-face online live webcam course. 25% of the lessons were conducted in synchronous modality (face-to-face online live webcam interaction) and 75% in asynchronous modality. According to Connolly and Stansfield [9], the asynchronous lessons correspond to the first generation of e-learning modality, where traditional materials were simply repurposed to an online format, while the synchronous ones would be typical of the second and third e-learning generations [10]. Lecturers produced materials which were a combination of new material which made use of learning apps and other technological tools and traditional materials repurposed to an online format. The video conferencing service mostly used was *Zoom*, to make it feasible for the teacher to organize breakout rooms for group work. Since in the Malaysian educational context autonomy and self-study cannot be given for granted, teachers were interested in the way students would cope with their difficulties and in what degree of autonomy. Language learning strategies, despite the wide experience in EFL learning, were underdeveloped. Many students were still highly dependent on their teachers when carrying out their tasks in DFLL. This has been acknowledged by studies conducted both at school and higher education levels. Azman et al. [11] identify the problems students within the Malaysian education system face in terms of learning EFL: a focus on national assessment fails to produce autonomous students, "whereby learners assume the part of *empty vessels* to be filled up by the teachers alone" [11], expecting teachers to feed them what they are supposed to know. However, according to Adnan and Anwar [13], the lack of technological devices and internet connection does not make distance learning as attractive and motivating for learners in undeveloped countries. This could also be true for the rural areas of Malaysia. The problems mentioned above demanded the lecturers to simplify programs, content, materials and assessment to facilitate student access and/or provide more meaningful and engaging tasks to be carried out autonomously.

### **Literature review**

#### ***Learners' emotions in (D)FLL***

Researchers in the field have underestimated the role of the emotions that can simultaneously appear in a (D)FLL context [14,15]. Positive emotions such as enjoyment, self-confidence and motivation, as well as negative feelings like anxiety and frustration, could have an impact on the learners' FL experience, perception of a (D)FLL context and learning outcomes [16].

The most studied emotion in FL learning is anxiety [17,18], commonly described as a negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a FL. It is seen as highly detrimental to the learning process [14]. According to research [19,20,21], language anxiety is a feeling of insecurity and discomfort when coping with the tasks of FL skills and exams. Anxiety is correlated with cognitive disruptions and distractions, and associated with self-focused thinking [22], individual feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry [23]. Students' anxiety may be impacted by peers' interaction and attitudes, such as when a student has to perform in front of peers [24,25]. Indeed, language anxiety is often linked to students' shyness that hampers communication skills [26,27]. However, studies showed that online learning may be beneficial to shy students given that they generally do not participate actively during physical classes [28,29]. During DFLL courses, shy students have more chances to generate and initiate different kinds of discourse, becoming more active and involved in interpersonal interactions [30]. Pre-COVID-19 syndrome studies revealed that during DFLL, students are less anxious [31], especially during oral interaction activities [32,33]: "the virtual students knew the anonymity of the learners in virtual classrooms as the positive factor that could contribute to an increase in self-confidence level and the decrease of nervousness" [34]. Nonetheless, according to the *facilitative anxiety* principle [35,36,37], anxiety could have a positive effect against negative emotions, which "are not always bad, as they can help learners to eliminate an obstacle but they can be paralyzing" [15].

Conversely, the positive emotions are behaviors seen as beneficial in learning [16,14,15]. FLL enjoyment may even serve a preventative function against negative emotions, such as language anxiety, when anxiety is difficult to avoid [16,17]. Shao et al. [38] underline "the beneficial functions of positive emotions for language learners in terms of broadening cognition, tempering negative emotions, promoting resilience, building personal and social resources, and triggering a virtuous circle toward greater well-being and achievement" [38]. However, in their study of the FLL enjoyment and anxiety of 1746 students around the world, Dewaele and MacIntyre [39] showed that the two dependent variables, positive and negative emotions, were negatively correlated, but that they shared less than 13% of their variance. This means that enjoyment and anxiety weren't the two ends of the emotional continuum, but two distinct feelings with specific dynamics of which trends could occasionally converge or diverge. In a study of Saito et al. [40] focused on how students' emotions and motivation were linked to speaking proficiency of 108 Japanese high school learners, findings showed that the enjoyment and motivation to learn the target FL were positively related to each other and to studying, practicing and using the target FL. Liu and Chen [41] and Gkonou [19] found that motivated students in learning EFL had lower anxiety. Positive emotions may be related also to the learner-learner and learner-teacher interpersonal interaction. In a study concerning the factors influencing students' enjoyment in a Chinese FL context conducted by Jin and Zhang [42], the final FLL enjoyment had a significant impact on achievement scores: students' enjoyment was especially linked to the support provided by peers and teachers. In another research on the role played by interpersonal collaboration in a fully EFL course, Kara [43] yielded that the higher the teacher's positive attitude towards interpersonal interaction, the higher was the student's satisfaction (positive emotion) of the DFLL as a whole. Then as well, Dewaele et al. [16], state that in a FLL context, teachers play a significant role in the learner's enjoyment, more than the students' peer interactions. Teacher's empathy impacts the learners' motivation in a DFLL [44] as well as their FL progress [45]. Conversely, a negative teacher behavior [35,24], a weakness of teaching methods and of classroom dynamics during FL lessons, may increase students' negative emotions.

### ***Learners' emotions in DFLL during COVID-19 pandemic***

The scientific interest in students' remote learning emotions during COVID-19 syndrome has been promoted in light of the stressful circumstances that forced students to the DFLL and considering the higher level of anxiety in their own home because of the pandemic [7]. For instance, Liu and Yuan [46] stated that students enrolled in their first year of EFL yielded higher levels of anxiety during the whole DFLL pandemic semester. However, according to recent research, ERT promoted both learners' negative and positive emotions. In a study aiming to analyse 207 Romanian learners' behaviour, perceptions and emotions in the midst of COVID-19 in a DFLL context, Cocoradă and Maican [47] found that their study features "are consistent with other [pre-pandemic] studies which reveal that mixed feelings in L2 communication are detected in relation to specific events. The pandemic is a traumatic event and online learning is a complex process, in which the chances to succeed or fail are present, but uncertain" [47]. In their findings, enjoyment and anxiety were correlated but dynamically coexistent and enjoyment held a protective role against stressors (anxiety). Furthermore, in spite of a general DFLL enjoyment, learners expressed their own preference for the blended course rather than the full remote learning. More precisely, students were frustrated by the overload of assignments and tasks, poor Internet and connection problems, concern about FL progression and lack of interaction with teachers and peers. As a confirmation of the interpersonal interaction relevance throughout (D)FLL courses, in their study on the difficulties for Spanish students in e-learning Arabic as a FL amidst the pandemic, Nassima and Baya Essayahi [48] showed that 59.4% of the responders assumed that between the major difficulties there were loneliness, (oral) interaction restrictions, being confined to the house and not having social contact. Likewise, in an observational study on elements that were supposed to increase empathy when a FL was introduced into seminars for 203 undergraduate Russian students during COVID-19, Dronova and Kurmangalieva [49] found in the opinions of the students, "the possibility and effectiveness of introducing empathy in the distance learning of foreign languages at universities" [49] by increasing humorous and funny interactions.

In a research related to 212 Turkish university students during their pandemic EFL remote learning, Valizadeh [34] compared learners' feelings in physical (pre-pandemic) and virtual (during pandemic) classes. The author found that students rated the remote videoconferencing classes as more stressful and frustrating. On one hand, students were stressed to participate in the language activities and to be recorded during classes, on the other hand, they were frustrated because peers could see settings or hear voices in their home. In Valizadeh' [34] research, the DFLL beneficial effects involved students' shyness: students were more comfortable since peers did not see their face and appearance, even when answering teachers' questions. Analysing the integrative literature review study of 69 studies conducted between March 2020 and February 2021 to explain the first year of the pandemic of EFL globally, Erarslan [8] illustrated both positive and negative aspects, sometimes in contradiction with each other, from the students' perspective. As regards the positive opportunities of the ERT, students were able to practice EFL through supplemental media, they increased their ICT knowledge, platforms and apps made students feel confident and attracted to learning the language, and they increased their motivation by having access to rich pedagogical databases. Lastly, students appreciated the DFLL because of the flexibility and the autonomy provided and the confidence that students gained. As regards the negative sides, students assessed the remote environment as monotonous and boring. Furthermore, some students were affected "for reasons such as having low language proficiency, being unmotivated to actively participate in online English courses" [8]. As we saw above, some recent research stated the low level of students' motivation to learn the target FL amidst the ERT. Interestingly, according to their findings of a study of 202 Indonesian learners' motivation to acquire EFL during the pandemic, Ikhwan and Andriyanti [50] proved that students yielded a lower level of motivation to study English. The authors found a significant statistical correlation between students' motivation and distance learning activities. Nonetheless, their features did not show any relevant relationship between learners' motivation and the COVID-19 pandemic: the pandemic did not affect the students' motivation to learn English.

### ***Learners' individual factors impact on learners' emotions***

Recent studies on (D)FLL emotions showed that learners' feelings could be related to their individual factors, for instance, to their social-ethnic, linguistic and economic background [51]. In their study on language anxiety, Gardner and MacIntyre [52] showed that anxiety tends to decrease as language competencies increase. Dewaele's [53] research found that the number of languages known (NKL) impacted language anxiety: learners knowing and using three or more FL were less anxious in communicating in a FL. Dewaele and MacIntyre' [39] findings yielded how sociocultural, linguistic and educational learners' backgrounds influenced both emotions of enjoyment (positive) and anxiety (negative): i.e., the higher the NKL, the mastery of the FL target and the educational level, the higher the enjoyment and the lower the anxiety. Finally, in their research, gender impacted both feelings: females scored higher levels of enjoyment and anxiety than male responders. Generally speaking, according to several pre-pandemic studies [54 and 55] as well as studies conducted during the pandemic [56] gender is a learners' variable predicting anxiety. However, Cocoradă and Maican [47] argued that in their study, learners' study program, achievement level and gender did not impact students' DFLL emotions. Lastly, both pre-COVID-19 studies [33,57], and studies conducted in pandemic times [47,8] revealed that remote teaching can cause higher anxiety because of lack of technological knowledge and/or of previous online learning experience.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

### **Data collection: The survey on learners' emotions**

A survey was made on the positive and negative emotions experienced by students of French and Italian during the DFLL course. The online questionnaire was made by *Google Survey* and was an adaptation of the one proposed by Dewaele and MacIntyre [39] whose study focus on *Foreign Language Enjoyment* and *Foreign Language Anxiety* was similar to that of the present research. Before launching the research, a pilot survey was made by five external learners that had undergone a DFLL course during the same pandemic. The learners were asked to fill the questionnaire with the aim to ensure the coherence and the pertinence of the statements (items) and questions.

The *Distance language Learning Positive Emotions* (DLPE: see *Table 1*) category was composed of four subcategories and 21 statements in total. Self-confidence feelings (subcategory 1) concerned emotions like creativity, laughing off embarrassing mistakes and confidence in student strengths. Learner enjoyment feeling (subcategory 2). Motivational feelings in following the DFLL (subcategory 3). Finally, the appreciation of interpersonal interaction with peers, teachers or both (subcategory 4).

**Table 1:** *The Distance language Learning Positive Emotions (DLPE) scale*

1	SC	I can be creative in the distance foreign language class
2	SC	I can laugh off embarrassing mistakes in the distance foreign language class
3	EJ	I don't get bored in the distance foreign language class
4	EJ	I enjoy the distance foreign language class
5	SC	I feel as though I'm a different person during the distance foreign language class

6	SC	I learnt to express myself better in the foreign language
7	IN	I'm a worthy member of the distance foreign language class
8	MO	I learnt interesting things
9	SC	In distance foreign language class, I feel proud of my accomplishments
10	IN	Distance foreign language class is a positive environment
11	MO	It's cool to know a foreign language
12	EJ	Distance foreign language class is fun
13	SC	Making mistakes is part of the learning process
14	IN	The peers are nice during distance foreign language class
15	IN	The teachers are encouraging during distance foreign language class
16	IN	The teachers are friendly during distance foreign language class
17	IN	The teachers are supportive during distance foreign language class
18	IN	There is a good atmosphere during distance foreign language class
19	IN	We form a tight group during distance foreign language class
20	MO	I am happy to attend synchronous (online live webcam) lessons
21	EJ	We laugh a lot during distance foreign language class

SC: Self-Confidence (Subcategory 1)

EJ: Enjoyment (Subcategory 2)

MO: Motivation (Subcategory 3)

IN: (Appreciation of) Interpersonal Interaction (Subcategory 4)

In respect to the *Distance language Learning Negative Emotions (DLNE)* (see Table 2), the three subcategories consisted of 13 statements. Anxiety feeling (subgroup 5) related to the student performance during the DFLL. Lack of self-confidence (subgroup 6). Frustration of having problems with technological tools and internet accessibility (subcategory 7).

**Table 2:** *The Distance language Learning Negative Emotions (DLNE) scale*

22	AX	Even if I am well prepared for the distance foreign language class, I feel anxious about it
23	LC	I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do during distance foreign language class
24	AX	I can feel my heart pounding when the teacher calls me to respond in distance foreign language class
25	FR	I get frustrated when the tools (apps, platforms, etc.) provided by my instructors don't work on my devices
26	FR	I feel left out because I cannot attend distance foreign language classes in the same way as my fellow students due to problems with my internet connection and my devices
27	AX	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my distance foreign language class
28	AX	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in distance foreign language class
29	LC	It embarrasses me to volunteer to answer in my distance foreign language class
30	AX	My lack of e-learning experience makes me feel anxious during distance foreign language class
31	LC	It embarrasses me to show my face in synchronous (online live webcam) lessons
32	AX	I feel overwhelmed by the quantity of tasks I must accomplish during distance foreign language class
33	LC	I don't worry about making mistakes in distance foreign language class (reverse-code)
34	LC	I feel confident when I speak in distance foreign language class (reverse-code)

AX: Anxiety (Subcategory 5)

LC: Lack of Self-Confidence (Subcategory 6)

FR: Frustration (Subcategory 7)

Internal consistency coefficient tests of DLPE and DLNE surveys were very high (Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient: DLPE=0.91, DLNE=0.86; reliable score at 0.70 level), indicating a good internal consistency of the survey items (a great interrelation between the items).

Over the last week of the DFLL (June 2020)IFL and FFL learners were sent out a link to the survey by *WhatsApp*. By filling the questionnaire anonymously, responders allowed the researchers to carry out the data processing for study

purposes. The student's assessment of the 34 items was based on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

### Database analysis proceeding (instruments)

As to the present database analysis proceeding, a few statistical tests have been carried on through SPSS, together with a descriptive statistical analysis of the learners' scores, means (M) and standard deviation (SD). Each test had a minimum level of significance of  $p \leq 0.05$  (two-tailed). Three groups of learners' factors, six variables in total, were considered and correlated with the dependent variables (DLPE and DLNE): sociocultural (ethnicity; gender), linguistic background (NLK; mastery of the FL target; MUET, *Malaysian University Entrance Test*, EFL certificate results) and educational (previous or no previous distance learning experience). Focused comparisons have been run between dependent variables (DVs) and independent variables (IVs), as well as between and within the dependent ones, by One-Way ANOVA post hoc test (including Tukey and Dunnett' T3 multi comparison tests), Paired Sample t test (for descriptive statistics in analysing the means and SD variances) and linear correlation tests (Pearson,  $r$ ; Eta Squared coefficient test,  $\eta^2$ ; Partial Eta Squared,  $\eta_p^2$ ). Finally, independent t test ( $t$  value) has been used to correlate two dichotomous nominal variables, responders' gender and previous/no previous distance learning experience, with the IVs.

### Participants

The 78 learners that completed the DFLL survey were enrolled in the bachelor of FFL (50%, N=39) and IFL (50%, N=39). As for the educational profile, most students had no previous experience with distance learning (70.5%, N=55). As for the sociocultural information, students were mostly females (87.2%, N=68), and belonged to the Malay ethnical and cultural group (62.8%, N=49), followed by Local Chinese (21.8%, N=17), Kadazandusun and Local Indian (both 5.1%) and other ethnicities, i.e., Bisaya, Bruneian, Dusun and Sungai (5.2%). As for the learners' linguistic background (see *Table 3*), learners were multilingual: they spoke more than two languages (between three and eight native and foreign languages), the majority (55.1%, N=43) were quadrilingual or pentalingual. 82.1% (N=64) of the learners rated their mastery of FFL or IFL as low intermediate (level A2) or intermediate (B1), given that 74.4% (N=58) of them were enrolled in the first or the second year. Finally, according to the national educational policy that ensures that only learners with necessary qualifications in English are enrolled in Malaysian public universities, most of the students (87.2%, N=68) obtained band 3 or 4 (out of 6 levels in total) in the MUET certificate.

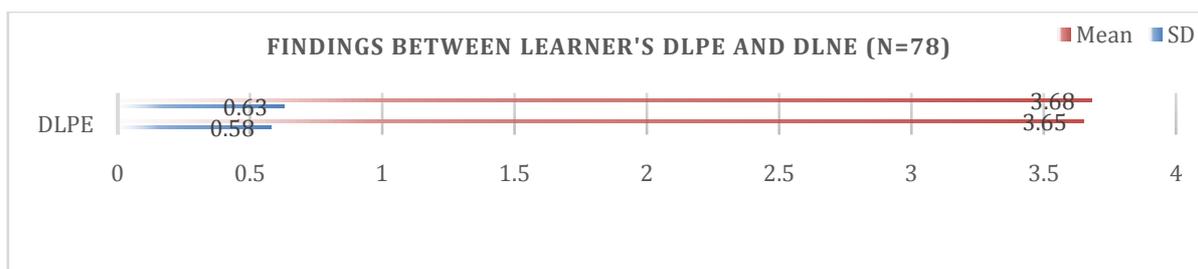
**Table 3: Student linguistic background information**

Languages Known	Mastery of FFL/IFL Rated	MUET
Three: 23%	Beginner (A1): 15.4%	Band 2: 1.3%
Four: 25.6%	Low-Intermediate (A2): 44.9%	Band 3: 35.9%
Five: 29.5%	Intermediate (B1): 37.2%	Band 4: 51.3%
Six/Eight: 21.9%	Upper-Intermediate (B2): 2.5%	Band 5/6: 11.5%

## FINDINGS

### Overall findings between learners' positive and negative emotions

A general overview of the data showed many similarities between DLPE and DLNE categories as a whole. For both categories, Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test stated that the means' distributions were normal (DLPE and DLNE,  $p=0.20$ , with a significant level at  $p>0.05$ ). Likewise, *Figure 1* yields that DLPE and DLNE Likert score range and overall means were congruent (scores range the following: DLPE from 2 to 5, DLNE from 2.08 and 5), which means that the distribution of the Likert scores between positive and negative emotions was similar (Paired sample  $t$  test, DLPE/DLNE:  $t=-0.28$ ,  $df=77$ ,  $p>0.05$  ( $p=0.78$ ); Difference mean: 0.03; Difference SD: 1). However, the findings of a Pearson correlation test showed a moderate negative correlation between the two opposite emotions: the higher the learner's scores on DLPE, the lower the scores on DLNE, and vice versa (DLPE/DLNE:  $r=-0.26$ ,  $p=0.02$ ).



**Figure 1: Overall findings of learners' DFLL positive and negative emotions (DLPE/DLNE) categories as a whole**

In terms of the major mean differences between the opposite DLPE/DLNE subcategories (see *Table 4*), Paired sample  $t$  tests showed that despite a high motivation for the DFLL course, learners felt less enjoyment and higher

frustration and anxiety. Indeed, the highest mean-variance concerned, on one hand, motivation for the DFLL and the lack of self-confidence (due to learner's performance in the target FL skills) and, on the other hand, the negative emotions of frustration (due to poor Internet connection and to the technological devices disruption) and anxiety (as regards the student's FL performance) and the positive one of enjoyment (to follow the DFLL). More details within DLPE and DLNE categories will be presented in the next session. Furthermore, correlation tests also confirmed inverse (negative) linear intergroup correlations: learners that enjoyed the DFLL felt a lower level of anxiety and frustration. Similarly, the higher the lack of self-confidence, the lower the learner's motivation for DFLL and satisfaction with their interpersonal interactions with peers and/or lecturers.

**Table 4:** Overall findings, most relevant mean-variance, and correlation results of learners' positive and negative emotions subcategories on distance learning

Paired	Overall findings (N=78)				Paired sample t test (df=77)		Pearson correlation	
	M	SD	DM <sup>1</sup>	DSD <sup>2</sup>	t	p	r	p
Motivation	4.02	0.63	0.63	1.05	4.57	0.00	-0.27	0.01
Lack of SC <sup>3</sup>	3.39	0.84						
Enjoyment	3.21	0.87	-0.80	1.24	-5.01		-0.31	0.00
Frustration	4.01	0.89						
Enjoyment	3.21	0.87	-0.60	1.17	-4.16		-0.23	0.01
Anxiety	3.81	0.78						
Interpers. Inter. <sup>4</sup>	3.79	0.64	0.40	1.06	2.89		-0.25	0.01
Lack of SC <sup>3</sup>	3.39	0.84						

<sup>1</sup>Difference mean

<sup>2</sup>Difference SD

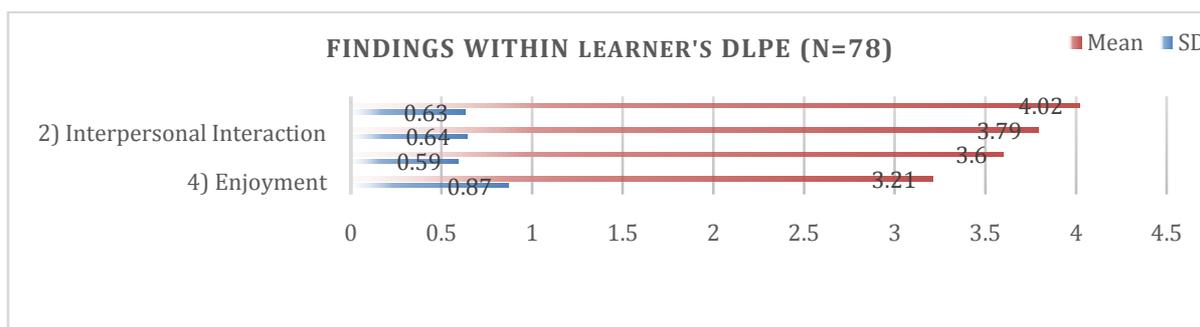
<sup>3</sup>Lack of self-confidence

<sup>4</sup>Interpersonal interaction

As a consequence of the intercategory similarities in terms of descriptive statistics (research question 1; see *Figure 1*), the authors decided to carry on an observational study within the two categories which can provide detailed information in respect to the different feelings of the students (research question 2).

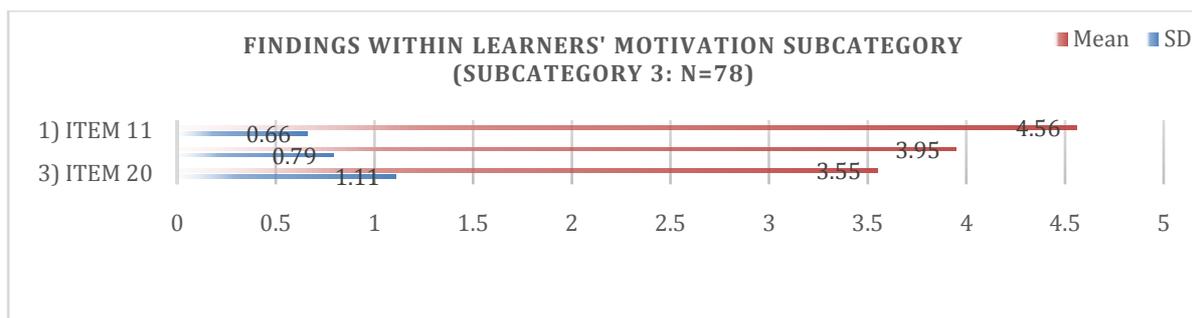
#### Findings within learners' positive emotions (DLPE)

In accordance with *Figure 2*, the overall means of the four DLPE subcategories were high, i.e., with a moderate difference mean and a small dispersion (Difference mean: 0.81; Difference SD: 1.38). As shown in Pearson tests, motivation, interpersonal interaction appreciation, self-confidence and DFLL enjoyment were positively related and increased evenly (r value between 0.46 and 0.73, with a shared variance between 21.16% and 53.29%, this means with a small-medium effect strength;  $p < 0.05$ ).



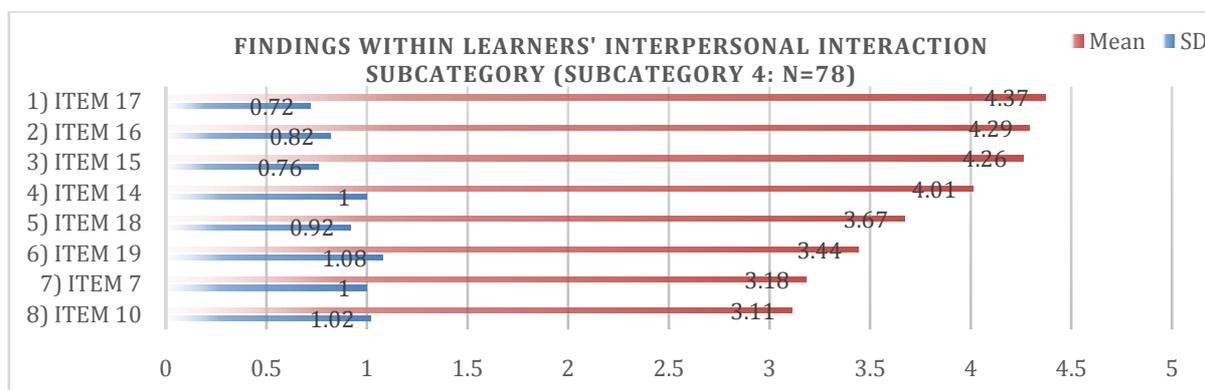
**Figure 2:** Overall findings (means and SDs) within learners' positive emotions category on distance learning

The most positive emotions involved learners' motivation to attend the DFLL classes (see *Figure 2*). *Figure 3* yields that students particularly appreciated learning a new FL (item 11), especially (new) interesting things (items 8).



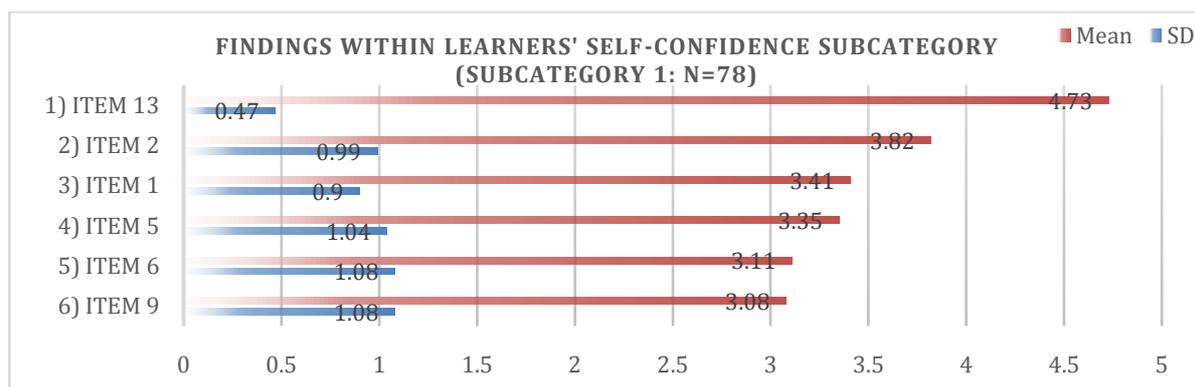
**Figure 3:** Overall findings (means and SDs) of the learners' motivation to learn the target FL on distance learning

Likewise, learners appreciated the interpersonal collaboration between learner-learner and learner-teacher. Students valued positively above all the collaboration with the lecturers that have been supportive (item 17), friendly (item 16) and encouraging (item 15) during online classes (see Figure 4).



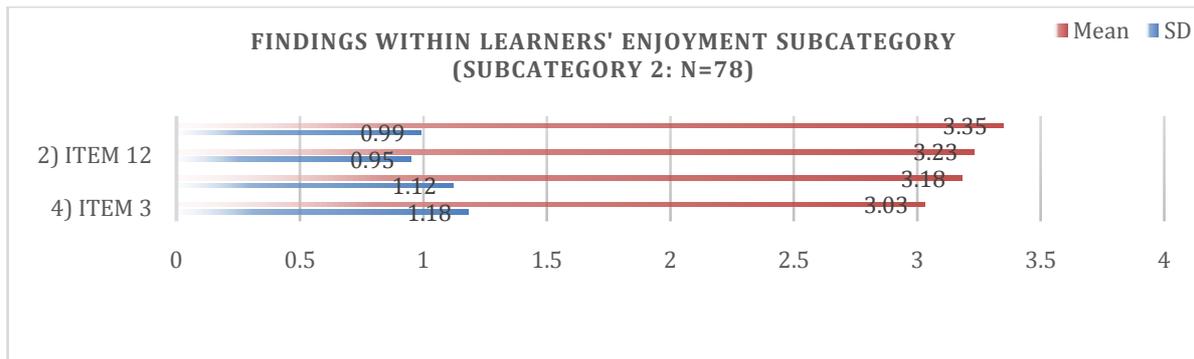
**Figure 4:** Overall findings (means and SDs) of the learners' appreciation of the interpersonal interactions with peers and lecturers during the distance learning

Students yielded a moderate self-confidence feeling during the DFLL course (see Figure 5). Indeed, students agreed moderately with statements focusing on feelings of pride (of their own accomplishments: item 9) and on creativity (items 5 and 6), in spite of the fact that they did not mind making mistakes (item 2), given that mistakes are part of their learning process (item 13).



**Figure 5:** Overall findings (means and SDs) of the learners' self-confidence feeling during the distance learning

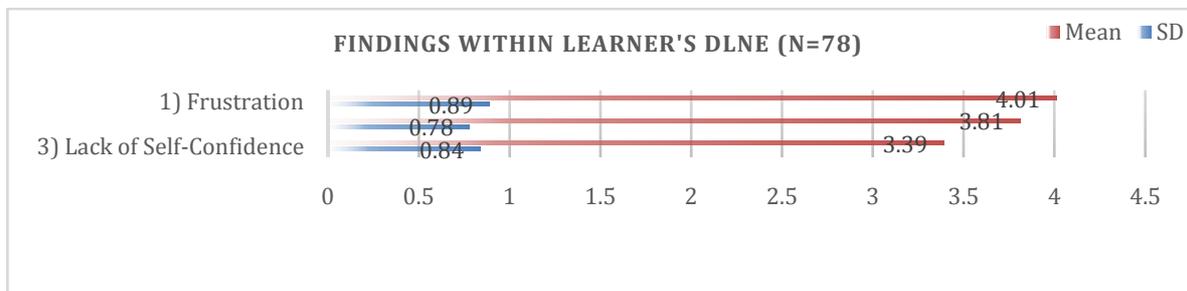
Despite a high motivation with the DFLL, students' enjoyment was very low (Motivation scores ranged from 2.33 and 5; Enjoyment scores ranged 1 to 5; Paired sample *t* test Motivation/Enjoyment subcategories: difference  $M=0.80$ ,  $t=10.14$ ,  $df=77$ ,  $p=0.00$ ). Indeed, according to Figure 6, learners agreed moderately with statements indicating that DFLL was enjoyable (item 4) and not boring (item 3).



**Figure 6:** Overall findings (means and SDs) of the learners' enjoyment of the distance learning

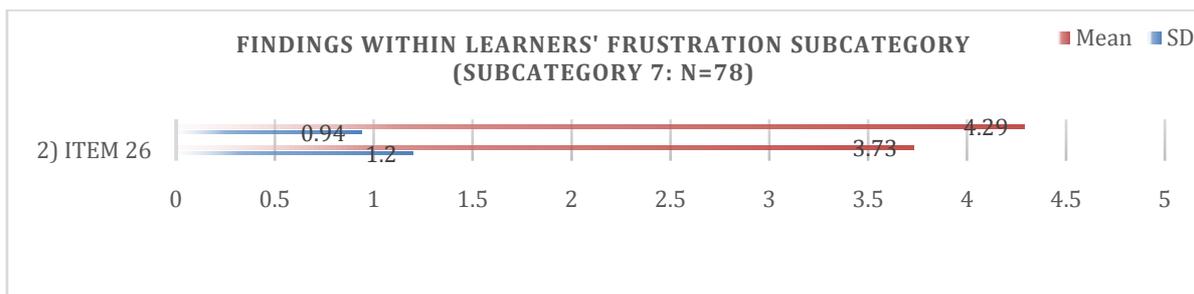
### Findings within learners' negative emotions (DLNE)

According to *Figure 7*, Likert score ranges of the three DLNE subcategories were congruent (Anxiety and Frustration, scores ranged from 2 to 5; Lack of self-confidence, 1.80 to 5). Furthermore, similarly to the DLPE subcategories statistical trend, the overall means were high, with a moderate difference mean (0.62) and a general small dispersion (Difference SD: 1.45). Person states a higher linear positive relation between learners' DLNE of anxiety, lack of self-confidence and frustration (r value between 0.27 and 0.65, with a shared variance between 7.29%, a small effect strength, and 42.25%, a small-medium one;  $p < 0.05$ ).



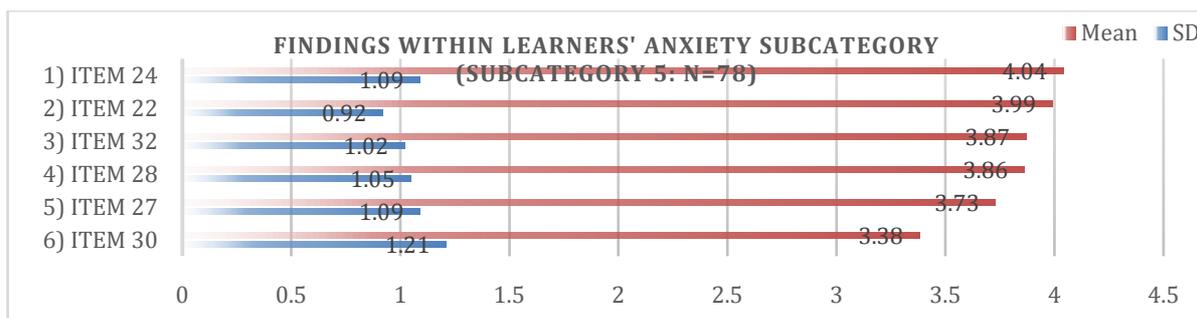
**Figure 7:** Overall findings (means and SDs) within learners' negative emotions category on distance learning

In light of the results (see *Figure 7*), the most negative emotion involved learners' frustration, firstly, because of technological devices disruption (item 25) and, secondarily, because of poor internet connection (item 26). See *Figure 8*.



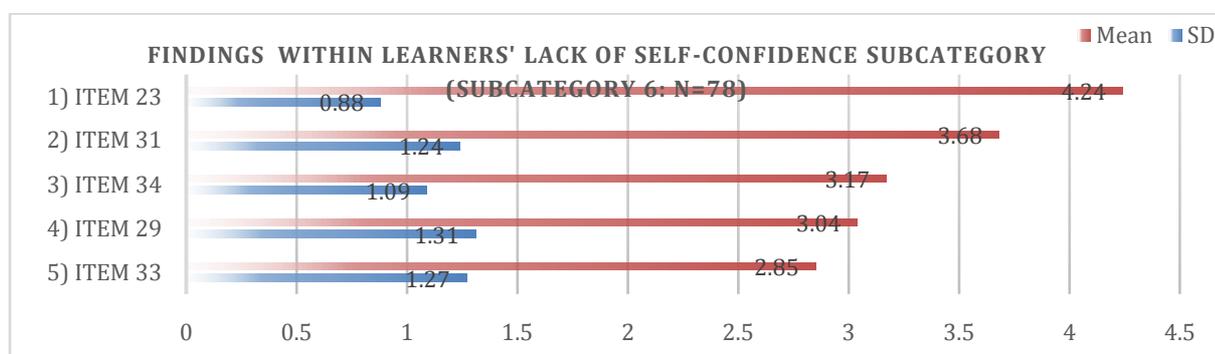
**Figure 8:** Overall findings (means and SDs) of the learners' frustration during the distance learning

According to *Figure 9*, the findings within the Anxiety subcategory show that learners felt higher anxiety when questioned by the lecturer (item 24), even if they were prepared for the online class (item 22), which is in contradiction with the learners' higher appreciation of the collaboration with lecturers (see above). This contradiction might be explained by the high value of items 32 and 28, both focusing on learners' autonomous study: students felt overwhelmed by the homework given by the teachers (item 32), and frantic when speaking during the synchronous live webcam class due to a lack of previous homework preparation (item 28).



**Figure 9:** Overall findings (means and SDs) of the learners' anxiety during the distance learning

Finally, the lack of self-confidence feeling subcategory as regards the personal performance in FFL or IFL skills held a lower value. Indeed, Paired sample *t* test yielded a high difference mean between Frustration and Lack of self-confidence emotions (difference  $M=0.62$ ,  $t=5.18$ ,  $df=77$ ,  $p=0.00$ ). Two factors seemed to increase the lack of self-confidence: the comparison with the peers' speaking skills in the target FL (item 23), and the shyness when students had to turn on the webcam in the synchronous live webcam lessons (item 31, reverse-code rating item). See *Figure 10*.



**Figure 10:** Overall findings (means and SDs) of the learners' lack of self-confidence during the distance learning

### Effects of learners' characteristics on positive and negative emotions

With the aim to respond to research question 3, in this stage the writers analysed whether the learners' individual characteristics (the IVs) had any effects within DLPE and DLNE emotions (the DVs). As will be seen, only learners' ethnicity (socio-cultural belonging) and previous online course experience (educational background) had some impacts on the learners' emotions throughout DFLL.

As regards learners' DLPE category, the educational background influenced both enjoyment and self-confidence feelings: students with no previous experience of online courses had more enjoyment and were more self-confident (see *Table 5*).

**Table 5:** Independent sample test. Relevant correlations between learners' educational background and positive emotions subcategories

Variables		Overall findings (N=78)			Independent sample test (df=76)	
IV	DV	N	M	SD	t	p
POE <sup>1</sup>	Enjoyment	23	2.93	0.78	-1.86	0.05
NPOE <sup>2</sup>		55	3.33	0.89		
POE <sup>1</sup>	Self-confidence	23	3.37	0.65	-2.26	0.03
NPOE <sup>2</sup>		55	3.69	0.54		

<sup>1</sup>(With)Previous Online Experience

<sup>2</sup>No Previous Online Experience

*Table 6* yields that the most significant correlation involved items 4 and 6: unlike online learning experienced students, learners with no previous experience rated particularly higher the statements *I enjoy the distance FL class* (item 4, Enjoyment subcategory) and *I learnt to express myself better in the FL* (item 6, Self-Confidence subcategory).

**Table 6:** Independent sample test. Correlations between learners' educational background and items 4 (Enjoyment subcategory) and 6 (Self-Confidence subcategory)

Variables		Overall findings (N=78)			Independent sample test (df=76)	
IV	DV	N	M	SD	t	p
POE <sup>1</sup>	Item 4	23	2.70	0.93	-2.54	0.01
NPOE <sup>2</sup>		55	3.38	1.15		
POE <sup>1</sup>	Item 6	23	2.61	1.23	-2.79	
NPOE <sup>2</sup>		55	3.33	0.94		

<sup>1</sup>(With)Previous Online Experience

<sup>2</sup>No Previous Online Experience

Only sociocultural belonging had some evident impacts on students' DLNE. Ethnicity impacted the lack of self-confidence of students' skills in the target FL: Tukey and Dunnett post hoc tests (with a significant p value  $\leq 0.05$ ), showed that Chinese students felt less confident than Malay learners (see Table 7).

**Table 7:** One-Way ANOVA test. Significant correlations between learners' sociocultural belonging and negative emotion subcategories

Variables		One-Way ANOVA (N=78)				Correlation	
IV	DV	df	F	p	$\eta_p^2$	eta <sup>2</sup>	
Ethnicity	LSC <sup>1</sup>	4, 73	2.30	0.05	0.11	0.33	
<b>Most relevant overall group findings</b>				<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	
<b>Ethnicity/Lack of Self-Confidence</b>							
Malay				49	3.23	0.77	
Chinese				17	3.92	0.83	

<sup>1</sup>LSC: Lack of Self-Confidence

$\eta_p^2$ : Partial Eta Squared test

eta<sup>2</sup>: Eta Squared coefficient test

This is particularly evident during synchronous live lessons: compared to Malay students, the Chinese ones felt more embarrassed when turning on the webcam (item 31) and more worried about making mistakes (item 33, reverse-code rating item). See Table 8.

**Table 8:** One-Way ANOVA test. Correlations between learners' sociocultural belonging and items 31 and 33 (Lack of Self-Confidence subcategory)

Variables		One-Way ANOVA (N=78)				Correlation	
IV	DV	df	F	p	$\eta_p^2$	eta <sup>2</sup>	
Ethnicity	Item 31	4, 73	2.50	0.05	0.12	0.35	
	Item 33	4, 73	3.26	0.02	0.04	0.39	
<b>Most relevant overall group findings</b>				<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	
<b>Ethnicity and Items 31 and 33 (reverse-code)</b>							
Item 31	Malay		49	3.43	1.25		
	Chinese		17	4.35	0.86		
Item 33	Malay		49	2.67	1.26		
	Chinese		17	3.71	1.26		

$\eta_p^2$ : Partial Eta Squared test

eta<sup>2</sup>: Eta Squared coefficient test

## DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the learners' emotions during their DFLL course in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic in a Malaysian university. As will be seen, our findings are partially consistent with studies conducted both in pre-pandemic and in the ERT time.

### 1. Interactions between learners' DLPE and DLNE: The ERT influence on learners' feelings

In response to *research question 1*, the results from this database analysis showed that the general emotional variance in terms of learners' DLPE and DLNE assessment was not statistically significant, even though, according to

previous pre-COVID and during-pandemic studies [39,47], each learner experienced mainly positive or mainly negative emotions, which appeared to be in an inverse linear correlation with each other. Generally speaking, and in response to *research question 2*, the findings revealed a balance between positive and negative emotions. These results are consistent with the ERT contradictory effects as pointed out by recent research. ERT held a negative impact on learners' psychological and emotional status (feelings of frustration and anxiety), but it did not affect learners' FLL motivation, which stayed high notwithstanding the forced circumstances. Unlike learners' psychological and emotional status, which was negatively affected by ERT, learners' motivations did not decrease. As regards DLNE, our findings are consistent with previous research issues [47,34]: the learner's main negative feeling concerns distress (frustration) for the risk of internet and technological tools disruption, followed by the students' FL anxiety, especially when speaking with lecturers and when they felt overwhelmed by the homework. In line with pre-COVID studies [26,27,24,25], students' shyness played an important role on students' negative feelings: learners were seized by the lack of self-confidence when showing their face on cam during synchronous lessons and when they had to compare their FL skills with peers. These results could explain the general lower enjoyment of the DFLL as a whole, which was in contrast to the Cocoradă and Maican' [47] findings. Nevertheless, according to our literature review [43,16,44,58,42,55,19], this paper found that the three dimensions, motivation, interpersonal interaction appreciation and DFLL enjoyment, were positively correlated with each other. Indeed, in agreement with Erarslan[8] learners were highly motivated to learn FFL/IFL in spite of the ERT: this research confirms that the intrinsic motivation to learn a FL was not affected by the forced circumstances of crisis, the ERT [50]. Furthermore, as Nassima and Baya Essayahi [48] and Dronova and Kurmangalieva [49] argued, learners appreciated the DFLL interpersonal interactions with peers and, particularly, with lecturers. This apparent incongruity between negative emotions (i.e., students' anxiety when interacting with peers and lecturers) and positive feelings (i.e., appreciation of the interpersonal interaction) can acknowledge the contradictory effects of the ERT context.

## 2. Learners' factors influence

In response to *research question 3*, this paper showed that learners' individual characteristics had only some relevant influences on learners' DFLL emotions.

Unlike some pandemic-time research mentioned above [47,8], students with no previous online learning knowledge enjoyed their DFLL experience more and felt more confident in the target FL. This result is in disagreement also with part of pre-COVID-19 research [33,57], for which the pre-ERT study contexts was, however, a major difference. These apparently contradictory results could be explained once again by the ERT situation. The students who had already experienced pre-COVID distance learning, could compare it to the forced ERT experience, with problems it carried with it.

Furthermore, as Altugan [51] and Dewaele and MacIntyre [39] argued, the learners' social-ethnic belonging impacted the DFLL feelings. As for the present research, given that Malay students experienced a lower level of lack of self-confidence, and since the majority of the students belonged to a Malay sociocultural group, we assume that, as for this database, the greater number of the learners felt confident during their DFLL.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Improvement of the (Hybrid) Remote Teaching & Learning

In light of the impact of learners' positive emotions on the increase of FLL achievements, studying motivation and performance, and on the decrease of negative feelings like anxiety (see above), as Dewaele et al. [40] argued, teachers should work to boost learners' enjoyment rather than control learners' anxiety during the FL classes. Acknowledging the results of this paper, the lecturers-researchers have become more aware of the importance of encouraging learners' positive emotions and of monitoring their progress and wellbeing. Furthermore, starting from the following semester, improvements were made in course design and planning, mainly as regards class time (which was shortened), course materials (which were simplified) and deadlines (which became more flexible). This helped to maintain motivation high, together with the design of achievable tasks and the supportive environment the lecturers created. Synchronous lessons were also increased, to favour more interpersonal interaction, in a setting which, as Blum [59] remarked, has some of the characteristics of real life, like hearing voices and exchanging information and views. Students' enjoyment also benefited from being more engaged in FL learning.

All in all, the first semester of 2020/2021 was much more positive, both for students and teachers, who found ways to cope with the difficulties previously experienced and had grown in self-confidence. Of course, the issues brought out by ERT (poor internet connection, lack of appropriate devices) need to be addressed.

A study of learners' emotions after the ERT would help to gain a better understanding of the role of the affective filter [60] during and after an ERT context.

### List of abbreviations

(D)FLL: (Distance) Foreign Language Learning.

DLNE: Distance language Learning Negative Emotions.

DLPE: Distance language Learning Positive Emotions.  
 DV: Dependent Variable(s).  
 EFL: English as a Foreign Language.  
 ERT: Emergency Remote Teaching.  
 FFL: French as a Foreign Language.  
 FL: Foreign Language(s).  
 IFL: Italian as a Foreign Language.  
 IV: Independent Variable(s).  
 M: Mean.  
 MUET: Malaysian University Entrance Test.  
 NLK: Number of Languages Known.  
 SD: Standard Deviation.

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