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Is It All That Positive? An Exploratory Study of Emotions in the Older Adult In-Person and Online EFL Classrooms

Abstract: Late-life foreign language education (i.e., FL geragogy, FLG) is said to be related to the delay of age-related cognitive changes in healthy individuals and has been shown to positively affect the quality of life of older adults, the fastest-growing age group worldwide. These are also the two main reasons which seem to be behind the high enrolment rates for FL courses at the Universities of the Third Age (U3A) and senior centres alike. Nowadays, following the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and months spent in the emergency remote teaching, some of the older learners decided to continue their education online, others came back to the classrooms. In both cases, the research on third age learner emotions remains rather scarce, despite a gradually increasing interest of applied linguists in this age group. The aim of this paper is thus to bridge the gap between FLG and Positive Language Education (Mercer et al.) by discerning the reasons behind the learners' choice of in-person or online classes and investigating the emotions experienced in both modes. To this end, the qualitative research was conducted in two groups of older adult English as a FL learners in the in-class ($n = 11$) and online mode ($n = 6$). The data was collected via open-ended questionnaire and a thematic analysis of the dataset was done to identify patterns of meaning. The results indicate that although the emotions in both modes are similar, and learning English in later life is a source of pride, satisfaction, and self-fulfilment irrespective of the form of classes, the online experience is decidedly more negative and causes greater anxiety, frustration, and boredom. In addition, face-to-face social interaction seems to play a vital role in the learners' overall perception of the course.

Keywords: University of the Third Age (U3A), foreign language geragogy (FLG), lifelong learning, positive psychology, positive language education, learner well-being

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised numerous challenges for education community worldwide. A particular example was the emergency remote teaching (ERT)—an

urgent and unexpected request for previously face-to-face courses to be taught on-line (Hodges et al.). As a result, due to crisis circumstances, all students alike, took part in online courses using various platforms and applications. Yet, older adults (at the age of approximately sixty and older) who this far have attended traditional, in-person foreign language (FL) classes and are often not as versed in technology as younger students, had to quickly adapt to the new situation and acquire new skills that would allow them to participate in the online classrooms (in this paper under-stood broadly as a learning environment with a synchronous interaction between teacher and students irrespective of the mode). This often meant that only those open to new challenges, supported by others (usually younger family members), or already familiar with the use of computers, were for some time able to continue their education. As a result, many older learners were left out without any chance to spend time with their peers (e.g., at the U3A in Wrocław, the number of regular English courses dropped from fourteen in 2019, to two online classes in 2020, and three in 2021). Among those few who have currently signed up for EFL courses online, there are students who prefer this type of instruction, which, however, is not without its drawbacks (see Baran-Łucarz and Słowik-Krogulec; Kruse, Lutskovs-kaia, and Stepanova; Pikhart et al.). But despite the emerging issues and the real necessity to learn more about the needs and abilities of this very particular group of learners, the research on FLG has a relatively short tradition as it started to flourish in the second decade of the twenty-first century (Gabryś-Barker; Ramírez Gómez). Thus, as can be expected, there seems to be a shortage of studies related to the on-line older adult FL education, the related emotions, and its potential challenges. In fact, the research on emotions, has also expanded only in the past two decades as Positive Psychology (PP) has gained its momentum following the publication of the seminal paper by Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi in 2000. Since then, the re-search on PP in the context of second language acquisition (SLA) studies has also been marked by a shift of interest in FL learner and teacher psychology (MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer, *Positive*, "Setting"; MacIntyre and Mercer). The earlier lit-erature on emotions in SLA has concentrated mainly on negative feelings associ-ated with FL education, classroom anxiety (FLCA) in particular, which has been receiving scientific attention for decades (see Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope). The shift of interest has led to a more balanced approach, in line with which positive and negative emotions are understood as complementary and intricately linked, instead of being the opposite ends of the spectrum (Dewaele and MacIntyre, "The Two").

2. Older adult FL learners

With the societies ageing, the number of older adult FL learners is also rapidly growing, which causes significant challenges to widely understood education. Recent research shows that older people who take part in purposeful, socially

engaging, and intellectually stimulating activities enjoy better physical and health outcomes (e.g., Antoniou, Gunasekera, and Wong; Antoniou and Wright; Irving, Davis, and Collier), including a decreased risk of dementia (WangK et al.; Bialystok et al.) or loneliness (Zhong, Chen, and Conwell) and an improved quality of life (Owen, Berry, and Brown). The studies on cognition also indicate that in the case of normally ageing individuals memory training may either improve or even slow down further decline (Harada, Love, and Triebel). Hence, learning a FL language in later life, which is such a complex and multidimensional brain-stimulating cognitive leisure activity, has been shown to have a positive effect on older adults' subjective well-being (e.g., Klímová et al.,"Factor"; Pikhart and Klímová; Pot, Keijzer, and de Bot; Słowik-Krogulec) and mental functions (e.g., Klímová and Pikhart; Pfenninger and Singleton; Pfenninger and Polz; Ware et al.). As pointed out by Pfenninger and Polz, learning an additional language in later years demonstrates cognitive (Pfenninger, Festman, and Singleton; Ware et al.; Wong et al.), attentional (Bak, Vega-Mendoza, and Sorace), linguistic and socio-affective improvement, though, there are studies that do not support this claim (Berggren et al.). Overall, at present, cognitive scientists agree that the brain maintains its plasticity across the lifespan and can be affected by experience at any time (Pfenninger and Singleton 2). Finally, late life foreign language learning is "not just a goal in itself, but … a means of promoting social interaction and integration— an important finding considering that it is partly through the stimulation of social well-being that its cognitive effects may be observed" (Pfenninger and Polz 10). However, the benefits of FL learning, including the stimulation of positive emotions and an improved quality of life, might be outweighed by the inability to take part in the classes caused by learner-internal factors, for instance the fear of negative evaluation, or contextual reasons, such as problems with the use of technology, especially computer handling and familiarity with virtual meetings platforms, e.g., MS Teams or Zoom, not uncommon for older adults.

3. Emotions in FL learning

For years, cognitive factors have been at the heart of SLA research. In addition, educational psychologists and applied linguists have concentrated on an inves-tigation of negative emotions, such as anxiety and burnout. It was only after the emergence of PP and its rejection of the focus on problems (Dewaele and MacIn-tyre, "Do") that the research on learner and teacher psychology started to flourish. As a result, the past decade has witnessed a fast growth of studies that recognize the value of understanding emotions in FL learning and teaching (MacIntyre and Gregersen; MacIntyre and Mercer). The learners are no longer seen as deficient, but rather as individuals on the path leading to self-development and well-being (Dewaele et al.). The focus has thus shifted from research on FLCA to positive

emotional states and learner characteristics, among others, enjoyment, love, grit, buoyancy, resilience, flow, and well-being.

Positive emotions are also one of the elements of Seligman's PERMA model published in 2011 (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement), and are the building blocks of subjective well-being, forming the basis of flourishing (Seligman). In fact, as indicated by MacIntyre and Gregersen in 2012, the ability to imagine the change from the "negative-narrowing emotional responses that individuals associate with language learning" to "a relaxation response when confronted with the negatively conditioned stimulus" (205) might help the learners utilize the power of positive emotions and create a balance between positive and negative states. The authors further argue that teachers can affect learner emotions to a certain degree, by creating a safe learning environment and showing the disparity between the learners' present and future selves. Experiencing more positive emotions should, in turn, make it easier to learn a FL, become more resilient, and mitigate the effect of negative emotions (Dewaele et al.; see also Fredrickson). The post-pandemic experience of emergency remote teaching has also shown that the dynamics of emotions which emerge in the online educational settings might have far-reaching consequences in terms of the learners' FL achievement and well-being (Resnik and Dewaele), and that the role of the teacher is, indeed, crucial in creating a positive and propitious learning environment (e.g., Baran-Łucarz and Słowik-Krogulec).

The COVID-19 pandemic has additionally accelerated the process of re-imagining education by integrating the so-called twenty-first century skills (including 4Cs—Creativity, Critical Thinking Skills, Collaboration, and Communication, as well as digital literacy, ecoliteracy, global citizenship, and well-being) with linguistic competencies (see Babic et al.). This educational approach, termed in 2018 by Mercer et al.—Positive Language Education, promotes student well-being through language and places it at the centre of education alongside academic subjects. This has also important implications for late-life FL learners, whose participation in education, also online, is completely voluntary, and their need for social interaction seems to be very high. Moreover, as already mentioned, many older people are not versed in technology and the digital divide can be observed even during EFL classes, which can have a negative impact on the learners' emotional states and their in- and out-of-the-class quality of lives.

4. Research aim and questions

The present study aims to investigate the emotions of older adults in different modes of instruction in reference to various aspects of the teaching and learning processes. The following research questions (RQs) have thus been addressed in this article:

RQ1: What are the emotions experienced in the FL classroom in both modes? Are they different in relation to the process of learning English, the teacher, other students, and the materials used?

RQ2: Are the emotions experienced in the two EFL courses different from those in the other classes at the U3A? If so, what are the differences?

RQ3: What are the reasons behind the choice of online or in-person classes at the U3A?

5. Method

5.1. Participants

There were seventeen older adult learners of English as a FL from the U3A in Wrocław that took part in this research: eleven participants (referred to as P#, P1–P11) chose the in-class option (64.71%) at the beginner level and six learners (later referred to as "Participant Online," PO#, PO1–PO6) attended pre-intermediate classes in the online mode (35.29%). All the participants agreed to having their information processed and informed written consent was collected. The sample consists of fifteen women and one man. Ten of the respondents (58.82%) are between sixty-one and seventy years of age, and seven (41.18%) fall into the age bracket of seventy-one to eighty. All but one of the older adults are no longer vocationally active. They have either secondary (23.53%) or higher (76.47%) education. Their self-reported proficiency levels vary from beginner (52.94%), through elementary (17.65%), to pre-intermediate (29.41%). They have studied English between six months and ten years (for the average of 4.32 years). Among other languages learnt by the respondents are Russian (41.18%), German (35.29%), French (29.41%), and Latin (11.76%), which is typical for people who attended school between fifty and sixty years ago.

The classes were taught by two different instructors: the online course was designed and taught by a Turkish educator with over a year of experience in teaching and researching older adults, who did not share the L1 with the study participants; the stationary classes, on the other hand, were taught by the author—a Polish teacher with over a decade of prior experience in FLG. However, it should be highlighted that each group had also classes with the other instructor: the online classes, with the same participants, were previously taught by the author (2020/2021 and 2021/2022) and another Polish teacher (2022/2023), and the stationary group was taught by the Turkish instructor in October and November 2023 as part of the staff mobility training programme.

5.2. Procedure and data collection instrument

This qualitative study, whose aim was to identify the emotions associated with in-class and online modes of FL instruction at the U3A, was based on the data gathered from seventeen older adult volunteer participants described above. The data was collected in two ways: in pen-and-paper form during one of the regular meetings, in the case of the stationary classes, and as a Google Form questionnaire

sent to the online course participants. Both questionnaires, which consisted of a short demographic survey with seven questions (the results are presented in the section on participants), and eleven open-ended questions focusing on emotions in one of two modes, were administered the same week in winter term 2023/2024. The open-ended questions elicited responses to emotions regarding the mode in relation to various aspects, such as the process of learning a FL language, the teacher, the other students, and the materials/tasks used. The respondents were first asked to enumerate the emotions and then to justify their answers, as well as to compare their FL experience to the other mode and to classes at the U3A they attended.

5.3. Data analysis

The data set was analysed on the basis of Braun and Clarke's principles of reflexive thematic analysis from 2021. Data coding explored older adult learner emotions pertaining to the two modes of FL instruction. The analysis was based on the identified themes, topics, and patterns of meaning, and was also inspired by the already existing themes, informed by the literature review. The responses of the participants provided in the questionnaires were transcribed, fed into the NVivo software, coded, and translated into English by the author.

6. Research results

The study revealed the presence of both positive and negative emotions in stationary and online classes. However, instead of yielding data related solely to emotions, the questions seemed to evoke various associations with FL classroom experiences (other themes include motivation, engagement, curiosity, kindness, understanding, friendliness, patience, rapport, and rivalry), which were considered important for the better understanding of learning in each mode and are thus included in the results.

6.1. In-person classroom—emotions

The emotions identified in the responses of students attending the stationary course included both positive (e.g., excitement, enjoyment, happiness, satisfaction, self-fulfilment, hope, pride, pleasure) and negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, anger, embarrassment). Overall, the respondents note that the classes caused a mixture of emotions, but the positive experience is more common (e.g., P8: "There are both positive and negative emotions, but there are decidedly more positive ones."). The prevalence of positive emotions relates to the perceived benefits of lifelong learning (P1: "Overall, these positive emotions come from the need to know more, to learn more, to exercise my brain."; P6: "There is just so much pleasure in learning something new, broadening our horizons, listening to other people,

trying to talk in another language. I think it will help me to communicate abroad.")
and is rooted in the constant need for self-betterment (P10: "There are many
more positive emotions. I am interested, engaged, happy, and curious to learn.
The classes are interesting, the teaching style is good for us. This allows for self-
development, self-improvement. I feel that I'm constantly learning, and I already
know something!"). The positive perception of the course can also have its source
in the learners' self-efficacy, best encapsulated by the comment made by P5:
"Enjoyment and satisfaction, because 'I still can' in my age!" and extrapolated
on in the excerpt from P1: "An ability to continue self-development, to learn new
things, to recall what we already know, but also to socialize and spend time with
peers. I am now better able to deal with difficult and stressful situations such as
travelling and talking to other people in English." In addition, during the stationary
FL classes it is also the state of flow, which is an optimal psychological experience
of total immersion, task concentration and the feeling of joy (cf. Csíkszentmihályi)
that seems to emerge (e.g., P4: "I feel great enjoyment when I know something
and when I experience very deep focus and full attention."). Finally, the element
of competitiveness can also be seen as something enjoyable as shown by two
respondents' comments (P1: "It's a great way to enhance memory capacities, to
check your abilities, but there is also an element of rivalry involved—you want
to compare yourself with others."; P9: "I can see my progress in comparison to
others and I am proud of my achievements.").

When the responses concerning the teacher are considered, they can be a source
of positive emotions and alleviate the feeling of shame caused by the learners'
self-perceived inadequate knowledge. This is exemplified by the following two
comments: "I know that the teacher will be helpful, considerate, and won't try
to embarrass me. She is conscientious, has a sense of humour and—what is most
important—a real understanding of older people, but I'm still aware of the questions
I ask …" (P8); "The teacher has great rapport with the group, is engaged and clearly
likes teaching, has a great sense of humour, is really good at this job, thanks to that
I never feel embarrassed or ashamed of myself. I can see the results." (P11). Similarly,
by sharing certain age-related qualities and the experience of learning a FL in later
life, other learners can also positively affect the overall enjoyment of the course
(P2: "These are people in similar age, there is a lot of mutual understanding."; P7:
"I like these classes very much even though I am not always prepared, but I don't
feel anxious about it—other students are my age and also often forget about things
they need to do."). In addition, the commitment to learn the language and the joint
feeling of accomplishment and pride seem to add to the positive atmosphere in the
classroom and can be an additional incentive to learn (P3: "I don't feel any negative
emotions towards them, instead sometimes I feel real sympathy, pride even, when
I see their attitude towards learning English."; P11: "Other learners really want to
learn, and you can see it. It's a very close-knit group. Everyone is really engaged,
and it has a positive effect on others. I feel really motivated by that.").

However, it appears that contextual triggers in the classroom can cause positive and negative responses simultaneously, such as peer-induced enjoyment and FLCA associated with the fear of negative evaluation. Both emotional states can be either learner-induced, as shown in the excerpt from P2: "The friendliness of other learners and a nice atmosphere make me want to be here, but there is also the element of stress related to speaking and answering questions in English. I'm a little concerned about the reaction of other learners when they hear me talk.", or teacher-induced, as shown in the quotes by respondents P1 and P9 (P1: "The enjoyment is coming from the possibility to meet the teacher in person, gratefulness that I can learn new things and motivation comes from the need to perform well, maybe to boast a bit about the newly acquired knowledge. Then, when [the teacher] is listening carefully, there is some stress."; P9: "Stress, but in a positive sense, motivates me to work. Also, meeting expectations—each teacher is pleased with the results of their work, I want to meet these expectations and make the teacher proud.").

Overall, negative emotions are rather few and are mainly associated with learner-internal factors. First, there is boredom resulting from a high degree of individual variation, typical for learners at this age who are said to be a heterogenous group, as shown in the following comment on mixed abilities made by P3: "At times I feel bored because of the pace, but everyone needs to understand before we move on, and that's fine, I understand it.". The individual dimension can also manifest itself in an overall age-related decline in cognitive function that can lead to FLCA or anger (P5: "There is a lot of anxiety caused by my age."; P3: "Nowadays, I'm very forgetful and disorganized, so sometimes I feel angry with myself. It wasn't the case when I was younger."; P8: "I'm angry because it still takes me so long to do all the tasks."), learning difficulties that cause frustration with oneself (P4: "Anger with myself when I can't understand something."; P2: "I'm very impatient and I find it difficult to memorize new words."), or anxiety and shame caused by the fear of negative evaluation (P10: "I feel shame, because I don't want to be worse than others."; P9: "I find it very stressful, because I have just started to learn this language and it seems to me that others know much more, they already have the skills I don't. I keep comparing myself to them."; P8: "Other learners will be surprised and impatient because of the mistakes I make."). Among learner-external factors, there are, for instance, negative associations with homework rooted in school experiences (P3: "Ever since I was a child, I did not like homework.").

6.2. Online classroom—emotions

The themes discerned in the online dataset that are related to FL learning experience were similar to the in-person mode and once again covered the whole range of both positive (e.g., excitement, happiness, joy, self-confidence, satisfaction, and

self-fulfilment) and negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, doubt, uncertainty, shame, discomfort, dissatisfaction, frustration, and anger). The data show that the sources of positive emotions in the online setting are mainly internal to the learner and are associated with the following factors: the feeling of pride caused by one's achievements as emphasized in the comment by PO2: ("Positive emotions but also a kind of 'voluntary compulsion'. I treat learning a language as brain gymnastics and the source of essential knowledge for foreign trips."), an ability to understand other people using English (PO2: "Only positive emotions, whether I'm learning something new or just refreshing my knowledge. The possibility of deepening my knowledge of the language and the joy that I can understand or guess the meaning of English words spoken by the teacher. Curiosity."; PO4: "Interest and satisfaction when I understand the teacher's explanation."), and the satisfaction in the continued efforts to learn the language, though at times followed by an uncertainty of one's actual achievements (e.g., PO1: "I have a sense of fulfilment that I won't forget the language, and I exercise my brain; something will always stay in memory, although I don't have great results."). There are also positive emotions associated with the feeling of freedom, independence, and self-efficacy, as exemplified by the following excerpts: PO5: "Definitely more positive aspects, such as no stress during presentations, I can turn off both the microphone and camera at any time, I manage my own activity during classes."; PO4: "Self-confidence, the ability to overcome problems, and the feeling of fulfilment.".

Among the external sources of positive emotions, common for the majority of the participants, are also the teacher and other students. Although, as shown by later comments, some learners find their teacher's inability to communicate in their L1 very stressful (see below), others point to it as a contextual factor affecting their overall positive perception of FL education (PO3: "Excitement, especially caused by the fact that the teacher is not Polish and doesn't speak our language. Also, the teacher is Turkish, and I am interested in the history and culture of this country."; PO5: "Our teacher, who doesn't speak Polish, conducts classes exclusively in English, which excellently enhances our conversation skills, enriches vocabulary, and opens us up to using English without any stress during, for example, international travel or interactions with English speakers. It allows for increased self-confidence abroad."). Similarly, other learners can cause discomfort and anxiety (see below), but the shared experience of FL learning online can also be the source of positive states (PO4: "Satisfaction, pleasure— the participants in the group are positive and friendly, helping each other."; PO5: "Eliminating the fear of speaking, greater belief in one's ability to use English with other people, motivates me to really learn the language."). Finally, the need to compare one's achievements to other students is also prevalent in the online classroom (PO2: "I observe how others cope with language learning, and sometimes it's admiration for how much they already know, but there's also satisfaction that I'm not the worst.").

However, even though the elicited emotions in the two modes are seemingly alike, as shown in the quote from the respondent who claims that there are no significant differences between the two modes (PO3: "Emotions are similar to the ones in the classroom."), in the online classroom there are more sources of negative states mainly caused by the learner-external factors. As suggested by the data, among them are, for instance, problems with technology which trigger anxiety (PO6: "The emotions are similar, but during the online classes we are really stressed by technological issues."; PO5: "It is stressful when you have to change from listening to speaking—you have to make sure that you switch your microphone on and then off again. Sometimes my hands are shaking when I do that."). Boredom and embarrassment appear mainly due to the form of classes, in which older adults feel as if they are working individually instead of being a part of the group. There are no close bonds with other learners, who are even referred to as "these people" in the following example excerpt from PO6: "I am bored when other students are answering questions as I'm just sitting in front of the computer and waiting, it is somehow different than in class when you as if experience all the interactions. I also feel shame when I am asked a question, and I can't answer it or there are some problems with technology I can't solve, or I don't notice them (e.g., the microphone is off). I don't know what these people are thinking then."). Moreover, tasks and materials are yet another source of negative emotions. The new, perhaps too difficult for the learners, coursebook once again causes anxiety in the learners (e.g., PO1: "I have a textbook in a paper version, and I prepare for classes in advance. Without preparation, I have difficulties with vocabulary."; PO3: "I approach it without any emotions, however another new textbook, different from all used so far, causes stress.").

Teacher-induced FLCA is caused either by their inability to communicate in students' L1 (PO1: "I feel really anxious that I won't understand what the foreign language instructor is saying."; PO1: "Our teacher does not speak Polish, so I feel a bit uncomfortable.") or by a different approach to teaching than the one known by the learners. This last reason is extrapolated on by one of the participants (PO4) in a longer passage which covers a whole range of emotions from more positive ones (related to the current teacher's personality or caused by previous year's teacher's approach to online education) to negative states of discontentment, shame, and frustration (associated with a new approach to teaching):

> I am unhappy about a different teaching style (there is no reading, translation, creating dialogues, asking questions to individual students, all tasks are done together, the answers given together). Students are shy and uncertain, they are mostly quiet, take part in the classes as "passive listeners" and the teacher is not trying to engage them in any way. But the teacher is very nice, friendly, and open, she explains everything well. I could imagine that one-to-one classes with this teacher must be great, but not classes in a group. Here, you never know if the assigned material will be covered as homework. Last year it was different, I was much happier with the [online] classes and I could see the progress I made. Here, I am never sure if I will understand the explanation given by the teacher, I feel ashamed when I give a wrong answer.

With the previous teacher there were more positive emotions, it all depends on the teaching style and the abilities of the teacher. (PO4)

Other learners can also be the external cause of disaffection as online classes may impede the development of social connections and maintenance of interactions, as shown in the next two comments: PO5: "We don't know the other participants, with cameras off, I don't know what the participants look like, sometimes there are some issues and you have to reconnect, you can't hear what they are saying, although it's not really bothering me."; PO1: "After half a year I still don't personally know all the participants.". Due to this lack of a close relationship with the group, others' efforts to take an active part in the classes may seem intimidating and overwhelming, which can lead to an almost hostile response (PO3: "Every time I wonder… Will, as usual, only two or three people be active? What for? They are clearly much stronger that the rest of the group.").

In addition, there are also comments related to both the teacher and other students, which show the lack of negative emotions, but simultaneously do not express in any way the enjoyment ascribed to learning, as exemplified in the following three excerpts: PO2: "I treat it as something to be done."; PO5: "These are not intense emotions, rather a motivation for increased activity during classes and systematic learning. The term 'emotions' is associated with a state stronger than the ordinary. The classes are not something extraordinary for me; I fulfil a previous resolution, and I simply consistently implement my plans."; PO1: "The group has been the same since the pandemic; everyone already knows how to behave, e.g., turn on the microphone to talk. They are ok.").

6.3. EFL vs U3A emotions

According to the in-class participants the emotions are more positive during FL classes due to their different character and the learners' attitude towards them, as shown in the following excerpts: P9: "When I study by myself, or I am sitting in a lecture room, I never feel as many emotions as in here."; P1: "FL classes are much more engaging, help with improving memory, exercising our brains, and give us great satisfaction." P8: "The language classes are much more motivating."). The voluntary aspect of English classes also seems to play an important role in the learners' perception of the course (P5: "The emotions are very different, it's a real pleasure to attend these classes, knowing that I can but, I don't have to."). Finally, both self-factors and a joint learning experience contribute to the more positive reception of the English course (e.g., P6: "English classes allow me to concentrate on myself and my self-development. There is peace and quiet, other people come here to learn this language and not to disturb others and just have a chat with peers, which is the case during many other classes at the U3A."). Among the sources of more negative responses are memory problems (P8: "I'm afraid the emotions are different because of the long time it takes me to memorize words and learn this

language.") and FLCA caused by the novelty related to learning English as a FL (P7: "I feel more stressed during English classes, because I have never studied this language before and I find it very difficult to learn it now.").

In contrast, the data gathered from the online participants show that other classes at the U3A seem to trigger less negative emotions as 1) the educators share the learners' L1 (e.g., PO1: "I prefer classes with someone who can speak Polish."; PO3: "Emotions are very different because the teacher is Turkish and does not speak Polish."), 2) there are problems with participation in this mode (PO4: "When doing homework or attending lectures it is satisfaction; in here, most often dissatisfaction because I feel that I am not participating in the classes 'to the full'."), and 3) they seem to cause more positive emotions (PO4: "In all other classes, I experience only joy and satisfaction."). However, there are also advantages of the online English course, which include course-specific active participation (PO2: "Here I am an active learner, during most other classes at the U3A I'm just a passive listener.").

6.4. In-person vs online classroom preference

The reasons behind the choice of in-person classes result from the need to socialize, including strengthening social connections, and supporting one another (e.g., P8: "A direct contact with people is very important to me."; P7: "It's all very positive from leaving home to getting here and spending time with my friends."; P1: "It is also easier to ask questions and to seek help."). They are also caused by the convenience it offers (P5: "They are more comfortable. Also, the dialogue is crucial here."), or by attention problems in the online mode (P6: "In the classroom we are with other people, online we sometimes don't concentrate on the classes at all, we're doing other things, instead."). The presence of other people is motivating (P9: "Face-to-face contact with the teacher forces me to focus on learning.") and more engaging than the online experience (P2:"There is greater engagement during English classes."; P7: "I'm much more active in these classes."; P4:"They are more interesting—force you to work, no one cares what you do online."). In addition, one does not need to be versed in technology, which might be problematic for some of the older adults (P8: "Also, there is no stress related to problems with technology.").

Interestingly, the choice of the online mode was influenced by a variety of reasons, ranging from convenience (PO2: "It's so much more comfortable! I learn English while sitting at home in my slippers and drinking coffee."; PO3: "I travel a lot to other cities and abroad, it's just easier to join and still take part in the classes."), the necessity caused by problems with attending regular classes due to work obligations (PO5: "I am 76, but I am still working so I can only attend the online classes."), or because of the potential health issues (PO6: "It's just safer like that especially in wintertime—due to the COVID-19 and the flu season"). Other students confessed the online mode was their only possibility to continue FL education (e.g., P3: "There

was no other choice."; PO1: "I couldn't get to a normal group, so I decided to stay [online] so that I can continue learning, but I prefer face-to-face classes.").

7. Discussion

One of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and ERT has been the increased accessibility of new technologies, leading to a proliferation of online courses available to learners worldwide, including those at the U3As. There are clearly many advantages to this shift of modes, but there are also some disadvantages, which might affect the learners' subjective well-being. The aim of this study was, thus, to establish the range of emotions experienced by older adult EFL learners in the in-class and online mode. It should be highlighted that, as stated earlier, the participants did not delimit their answers to emotions experienced in both types of classrooms, but the additional responses seem to deepen the understanding of the nature of FLG in both modes, hence they are included in this study.

The answer to RQ1 revealed a multitude of emotions experienced in both modes, ranging from excitement, enjoyment, happiness, contentment, and gratitude, through pride, satisfaction, fulfilment, curiosity, hope, and empathy, to anxiety, boredom, frustration or even anger, which once again points to a coexistence and interdependence of all emotions (cf. Dewaele and MacIntyre, "The Two"; Dewaele et al.). However, even though the themes identified in both samples are very similar, the accumulation of positive and negative emotions in in-person and online classrooms clearly differ. For instance, enjoyment seems to be a prevalent emotion in the face-to-face classroom mode, while anxiety appears to be rather short lived, emerging mainly in relation to fear of negative evaluation by other students (rarely by the teacher) or is caused by memory problems and poor preparation for the classes, which is in line with the earlier findings (cf. Baran-Łucarz and Słowik-Krogulec). In contrast, the online mode seems to provoke more negative emotions such as frustration, uncertainty, and anxiety, associated with the lack of feedback from others, more passive participation in the classes, and a lack of strong bonds with the group, or problems with technology. Boredom and shame also appear more often in the context of online education and seem to be caused by an atypical form of FL instruction. Positive emotions like excitement, happiness, and joy are not absent from this mode but they appear mainly in relation to FL learning as such. However, there are also emotions that exist equally often across all the dataset, such as, e.g., self-fulfilment and satisfaction, which suggest older adults' overall attitude towards learning a new language in later life— it gives them a sense of accomplishment, is a source of pride, and an important incentive to make continued efforts to learn.

There are also differences in learner emotions associated with various contextual factors, such as the teacher, other students, or the materials used, and late-life EFL learning. Once again, these outside effects were categorized into learner-centred and

learner-external predictors of various emotions. The data show that the respondents seemed to give more credit to the teacher and their peers in the classroom context and were much more critical towards them in the online environment. There are two main reasons that may be inherent in this issue: (1) the lack of direct contact with other people seems to negatively affect the learners' perception of others and create the feeling of isolation and estrangement, (2) technical issues impact communication and create additional obstacles in the process. As a result, the respondents proved to be disapproving of the online learning experience and expressed their discontentment with many of its aspects. The responses to the teachers' L1 seemed to be rather ambiguous and were mentioned only in relation to the online mode. In sum, despite the teacher's inability to use the learners' L1 which causes additional stress for some students, it is also seen as a great opportunity to use English by others. In addition, although each teacher uses their own materials, according to the respondents, a different than usual, and perhaps too difficult coursebook that was chosen in winter term 2023 for the online course also affected their overall feelings. The data yielded from the stationary classes corroborated these findings and clearly showed the importance of face-to-face contact. The respondents were more forgiving of other students' mistakes and behaviours, showed empathy, understanding, and support. They also compared their peers to themselves and viewed their classmates as a group with similar problems. As a result, the described emotions frequently referred to the relationship with peers and the teacher. In contrast, the comments made by the online course participants more often revolved around themselves and reflected their self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-determination to complete the tasks and continue FL education.

With regard to RQ2, both positive and negative emotions in the two modes were revealed, as compared to other classes at the U3A. It seems, however, that once more there is a clear preference of face-to-face interaction with other learners and the teacher. Therefore, the participants who attend classes in the traditional form claim that they experience many more positive emotions during their English classes as they are able to socialize, interact, and provide support to one another. Different reasons are given by the other group of respondents, who argues that other classes at the U3A are more enjoyable than online classes: the learners claim that at the U3A all lecturers speak Polish, and it is easier to participate without the need to rely on technology, hence the classes are anxiety-free. But for some, the online classes are the only ones they can attend due to their other obligations, such as work or travel, therefore, they are grateful to have this opportunity.

The last RQ helped to establish the reasons behind the preferences for the traditional or virtual classes at the U3A. The results show that there were three main criteria for choice: availability, convenience, and preferences. For some of the learners, these were simply the only options still offered by the U3A at the moment of course enrolment. Others find the chosen mode easier because there are no technological issues involved, and leaving home is beneficial for overall health and well-being. The virtual format, however, is more convenient for those who are

still vocationally active or travel frequently and cannot attend stationary classes. Finally, there is a group who prefers face-to face interaction, as it fosters motivation to learn, improves social cognition, and communication skills, as is the case with traditional classes, while some learners value the comfort and safety of home, which is crucial at this age and ensured by the online education.

8. Limitations and recommendations

While this research has provided certain insights into positive language education and FLG, it is crucial to acknowledge and address the limitations inherent in the methodology and scope of the study. First, it should be highlighted that the convenience sample choice might have also affected the emotions elicited by means of the questionnaire, thus the questions should be posed again to students, whose teacher's L1 is the same throughout the study. However, the current choice was dictated by the following factors: (1) it is the only group of older adults that has continued to study online since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, (2) for reasons mentioned in the discussion above, the learners do not want to or cannot attend English classes in the other mode, and (3) it is believed that as both groups had experience of classes with the same instructors and in both modes, the observations are still valid. But despite the careful choice of answers pertaining to the four aspects of two modes of instruction enumerated in RQ1, caution is still needed. Thus, the future study design should ensure that the factors besides the teaching modes were constant, and both groups at the same level of proficiency experienced classes in an online mode and then in the classroom, or vice versa. Second, the instrument may not have yielded as thorough and explicit outcomes as expected. Adding Likert scale questions with a list of emotions would help the learners to concentrate on this aspect of FL education, before sharing their overall impressions of the course. Thus, further triangulation would be of benefit to the research design. Finally, interviews instead of the open-ended questionnaires would ensure a more in-depth interpretation of the results.

9. Conclusions

Although the investigation of emotions in SLA has a long tradition, there is still a scarcity of research on older adults' experience of late-life FL education in this regard. Hence, the findings presented in this paper expand on the results of previous research (e.g., Baran-Łucarz and Słowik-Krogulec) by demonstrating third age learners' emotions experienced in traditional and virtual classrooms. Overall, the data revealed that the emotions in both modes are not dissimilar, they form an interdependent complex network of internal and external factors, but the online

classes seem to weaken positive emotions (cf. Dewaele and MacIntyre, "The Two") and provoke more negative states. Although the feelings of pride and self-fulfil-ment are common for both groups of respondents and show their overall attitude towards late-life education, the absence of face-to-face communication, including the feeling of connectedness, mutual support, and even peer-teaching (see Mur-phey), seems to lower enjoyment and increase anxiety, frustration, and boredom. Through engaging in direct interactions in a FL, social cognition, and communica-tion skills of the learners are enhanced and well-being is stimulated, which seems to positively affect the learners' perception of the language learning experience. Thus, once more it should be highlighted that learning a FL in later life is not an aim in itself. Socializing, strengthening the sense of community, stimulating emo-tional well-being, and promoting harmonious ageing are of equal importance to older adult EFL learners (Liang and Luo; Słowik-Krogulec). Thus, trying to bridge the digital divide (Wu et al.), introduce the principles of Positive Language Educa-tion (Mercer et al.) to FLG, and raise teachers' awareness of the potential problems experienced in both the in-person and online modes, may have a considerable im-pact on both learner cognition and their in- and out-of-class quality of life (Mercer et al.; Pfenninger and Polz; Klímová et al., "Comparative").

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