AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS OF L2 LEARNING

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Abstract
The present study investigated emotions of university students based on their answers to a scenario-based questionnaire (Gkonou & Oxford, 2016, in Oxford, 2017). The four scenarios concerned writing in class, being corrected in an oral activity, grammar rule repetition and going to class unprepared. The overall aim was to investigate the emotions evoked in these situations and the emotion-regulation strategies that students employed. Results showed that everyday classroom situations may trigger more negative (anxiety, nervousness, self-derogation) than positive emotions (self-confidence, empathy, encouragement). The students’ most frequent emotion regulation strategy was positive self-talk which activated supportive emotions, beliefs and attitudes.

1. Introduction
With the introduction of positive psychology in the last decade, research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has made a move toward a wider range of emotions involved in L2 learning, besides anxiety, which had previously dominated the field (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Imai, 2010; Ross, 2015). Learning a second language is admittedly an emotionally demanding experience (Dörnyei, 2009), and Scovel’s (2001, p. 40) statement that “[emotions] could very well end up being the most influential force in language acquisition” may not be an exaggeration.

How, then, are emotions defined? For MacIntyre (2002, p. 61), “emotion is the primary human motive” which “functions as an amplifier providing the intensity, urgency, and energy to propel our behaviour” in this world. Reeve (2005, p. 294) has opted for a multidimensional definition of emotions: “Emotions are short-lived, feeling arousal-purposive-expressive phenomena that help us adapt to the opportunities and challenges we face during important life events”. These definitions
highlight the link between emotions, behaviour and their interaction with the circumstances of the social context. Consequently, emotions pertaining to L2 classroom learning, can be defined “as affective experiences that are tied directly to language learning activities and resulting learning outcomes, a dynamic process which is determined by appraisals of socio-culturally shaped L2 learning tasks” (Shao et al., 2019, p. 2).

With regard to L2 learning classroom situations, researchers have recently called for a shift of attention to student engagement and “emotional experience” or “lived experience” (Al-Hoorie et al., 2021, p. 142) in specific tasks. Against this backdrop, we checked the emotional experiences of students, both positive and negative, in four most frequent classroom scenarios the students acknowledged as such, using a scenario-based questionnaire (Gkonou & Oxford, 2016, in Oxford, 2017). The rationale behind the study was to delve into students’ affect (emotions and emotion-regulation strategies) in order to investigate the emotional load placed on students (on top of the cognitive one), which their language teachers should take into consideration while assigning tasks or assessing student performance.

2. Affect in language learning

Many SLA scholars have acknowledged that L2 learners’ emotions are important predictors of their success or failure in their long and often frustrating journey to acquire the language (Dörnyei, 2009; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 2002). Both negative and positive classroom emotions interact in varied dynamic and complex ways, besides constructs such as motivation and attitudes (Dewaele & Li, 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Imai, 2010; MacIntyre, et al., 2016; Prior, 2019). Bown and White (2010) argued that the study of emotions should include both positive (e.g., enjoyment of learning, hope, pride, satisfaction, happiness, relief) and negative emotions (e.g., anger, boredom, shame) as the two different constructs counterbalance each other. MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) argued that positive and negative emotions have different functions and, although related, they remain independent, as absence or presence of enjoyment does not automatically suggest presence or absence of, say, anxiety. On the other hand,
Oxford (2017, p. 219) argues that an *a priori* distinction between positive and negative emotions is rather simplistic, as emotions function in specific contexts, created and evaluated within the circumstances in which they occur. These varying views indicate the complexity and elusiveness pertaining to the study of emotions and the difficulty of assigning emotions under general umbrella categories such as positive and negative (Mercer, 2015). Moreover, through a poststructuralist approach such categories may even be inappropriate (Benesch, 2012). However, we decided to use them to facilitate understanding by both student participants when they read the questions they had to answer, and teacher-readers of the article (see also Miller & Gkonou, 2018). In the present study, we will examine students’ affect (emotions and emotion-regulation strategies) based on the *Strategic Self-Regulation model* (Oxford, 2017, see section 2.3) which will provide the framework of analysis of results and discussion.

### 2.1 Negative emotions

Initial research on emotions in L2 learning focused predominantly on negative emotions, specifically on *anxiety*. Findings showed that Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) is a relatively common but largely unwelcome emotion. It is associated with inadequacies in listening comprehension, shortage of vocabulary learning, impaired speech production, dissatisfaction from performance in tests, and low grades in general (Gardner et al., 1997). Gregersen and MacIntyre (2014, p. 3) describe FLCA as reflecting “the worry and negative emotional reaction when learning and using a second language, and is especially relevant in a classroom where self-expression takes place”. Gkonou et al. (2017) view it as a pervasive emotion which affects both teachers and learners of a second or foreign language across many different settings, but while its negative aspect should be examined, its facilitative role in language learning is also an area worth-studying.

Gkonou (2011) found that speaking anxiety is directly influenced by the classroom context and writing anxiety is related to issues such as attitudes towards writing in English, derogatory feelings about one’s own ability to write in English, and fear of negative evaluation. L2 writing anxiety, being a language-skill-specific type of anxiety, may also influence learner achievement (Cheng et al., 1999).
Looking for specific stressors provoking anxiety in L2 communication, Tzoannopoulou (2016) investigated the sources causing FLCA and fear of negative evaluation of a group of Greek university students attending a compulsory ESP course. She found that the main anxiety provoking sources were fear of communicating in the L2 with teachers, peers and native speakers, fear of tests and of speaking in public, and teachers’ questions and corrections.

In the last ten years or so, however, other so-called negative emotions, such as *shame* and/or *guilt*, that L2 learners experience in their everyday efforts to achieve L2 proficiency, have also attracted research interest. Unfortunately, the two terms tend to be used interchangeably in layperson speech, although they are quite distinct in mainstream psychology (Dearing et al., 2005). They are both self-conscious emotions but *shame* focuses on the whole self, hurts more, creates a feeling of hopelessness, and causes the individual to become defensive, while *guilt* focuses on a specific behaviour, hurts less, creates remorse and regret and drives the individual to invest more effort in order to repair the damage (Teimouri, 2018).

Galmiche (2017, p. 45) investigated *shame* by interviewing thirty participants from different language backgrounds in France, who narrated their stressful shame experiences in the FL learning classroom. Their narratives suggested that shame may trigger feelings of inferiority, incompetence, lack of confidence in their linguistic ability, affect their self-esteem, and may lead to the development of “self-defense” or “self-handicapping” strategies which may not be conducive to successful language learning. It was also reported that classroom shame pertains to all levels of proficiency and it is a debilitative emotion that may be responsible for the learners’ avoidance of interaction and speaking activities, contemplation of failure and even withdrawal from the L2 learning process. Speaking in the FL in class was found to accentuate feelings of shame the most.

Along similar lines, Teimouri (2018) investigated the effects of *shame* and *guilt* on L2 learners’ motivation and language achievement. Shame was found to be a strong negative predictor of L2 learners’ Willingness-To-Communicate (WTC) and attention, and was positively related to externalisation of blame. Specifically, these attributes negatively influence L2 learners’ language achievement as they impede motivation to participate in L2 communication, engage in L2 learning activities and pay attention
to classroom L2 processes. Guilt, on the other hand, activated corrective actions and motivation to repair misbehaviour or bad performance, as learners felt that they should find new ways to remedy their previous misconduct (i.e., lack of effort, coming to class unprepared). Moreover, guilt was not found to show any negative effects on L2 learners’ language achievement. The results suggested that negative emotions may not always have harmful effects on learners’ L2 learning, triggering corrective self-regulation moves instead.

In a study of Polish English majors Bielak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2020) found that negative emotions (anxiety, shame, anger, sadness) outnumbered positive ones (enjoyment, interest, hope, gratitude, pride) during classrooms interactions.

### 2.2 Positive emotions

Recent developments in positive psychology have increased interest in positive emotions (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014; MacIntyre et al., 2016) thus shifting focus towards such emotions and their effect on FL acquisition and performance, and any interaction between negative and positive emotions (Dewaele et al., 2018).

In an effort to reduce the negativity of the L2 experience, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) linked Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and FLCA to several independent variables. Their results revealed that, FLE was related to teachers’ professional and emotional skills and to there being a supportive peer group.

Another study (Dewaele et al., 2018) examined FLE and FLCA among 189 British high school students learning various foreign languages in class. The results showed that students’ FLE and FLCA were negatively correlated, whereas FLE was positively related to their achievement. Student-related and teacher-related variables contributed to the enhancement of FLE.

Similar results were attested in a study of 1,307 Chinese EFL university students in relation to FLE, FLCA, and EFL achievement (Li et al., 2019). FLCA and self-perceived EFL proficiency were found to be negatively related, whereas FLE was significantly positively related to self-perceived EFL proficiency. Moreover, FLE was a stronger predictor of self-perceived language proficiency than FLCA. Bad test results and strict
criticism by the teacher accentuated FLCA, while good test results, cordial words from the teacher and good social relations in the classroom promoted FLE.

Saito et al. (2018) investigated how Japanese high school students’ L2 emotion and motivation related to their oral proficiency. Results showed that enjoyment and motivation were positively related to students’ studying, practising and using the target language and to prediction of their language achievement, whereas anxiety was not related to studying and practising and was negatively related to their long-term attainment.

Enjoyment and love were the most frequently experienced positive emotions of four high school EFL Romanian students in Pavelescu and Petric’s (2018) qualitative study. The students were able to cope with the language learning process either because they experienced strong and stable love toward English or because they enjoyed learning English, which can be related to the intrinsic motivation of these students.

A study on pride by Ross and Stracke (2017) further elaborates on positive emotions within the educational context. These scholars explored how 12 university students in Australia, taking courses in English for Academic Purposes, experienced pride in the classroom and in their social interactions outside the classroom. In the classroom environment feelings of pride were triggered by receiving good grades in class activities or in exams and being praised by others. In the social interaction context, students felt pride when they were able to use the target language successfully in communication and the feelings of pride they evoked in others (i.e. their parents) – external sources – from their achievements. Understandably, positive emotions like enjoyment, pride, and hope have a positive effect on performance and long-term achievement as they complement both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, activate the use of learning strategies, and enhance self-regulation.

In conclusion, we argue that for language achievement to be successful both types of emotions should be present, as a manageable level of anxiety can keep learners vigilant while enjoyment and satisfaction from the learning process can increase their motivation.
2.3 Emotion-regulation strategies

Self-regulation refers to a person’s ability to act in a way that helps them take control of their behaviour in various settings (Gkonou, 2018). L2 learning is undeniably a highly emotional state involving both negative and positive emotions. Teachers and learners should find ways to combat stressful situations and boost pleasant experiences. In this vein, emotion-regulation strategies assist learners to control their affect and increase their self-confidence and willingness to learn. Gross (2014) features reframing as one such family of strategies encompassing cognitive change, and modification or change of either internal or external states. Oxford (1990, 2017) has repeatedly pointed out the importance of the much-neglected category of affective strategies, which Psaltou-Joycey (2019) also confirmed. Affective strategies undoubtedly “help learners directly accomplish the work of emotion-regulation” (Oxford, 2017, p. 227). Initially Oxford (1990) listed five sets of affective strategies. In her more recent publication (Oxford, 2017), the Strategic Self-Regulation model added a meta level to the affective, motivational and social dimensions of learning. Thus, she introduced meta-affective strategies (the ‘master framer’), emphasising their executive control and management function by paying attention to, planning for, using resources for, monitoring and evaluating affect.

Several scholars have suggested specific tips and teaching suggestions to help teachers mitigate their learners’ emotional states (Gregersen, 2007; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). However, to the best of our knowledge, empirical research in how learners confront and manage their negative feelings during FL learning by employing self-regulation strategies has not been very productive (Gkonou, 2018), a fact that makes our study on such a topic even more interesting. Below we report on few such relevant studies.

Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) investigated the anxiety-coping strategies of students enrolled in EFL classes at two universities in Japan. The results showed that the students used five strategy types: developing study techniques to cope with English and diminish anxiety, employing relaxation, making positive thoughts, seeking peer support, and resigning by refusing to take any measures to alleviate anxiety. Gkonou (2018) explored the anxiety-coping strategies of Greek EFL learners in order to find out how important it was for these learners to manage their negative emotions. The
results indicated that the students deployed a range of affective, meta-affective and metacognitive strategies to minimize their FL anxiety. Bielak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2020) categorised the emotion-regulation strategies of their Polish university students according to Gross’s (2015) taxonomy into strategies relating to cognitive change (e.g., acceptance, reassurance, effort-oriented decision), situation modification (social support, task management), attention deployment (comparison with peers, distraction, savouring success) and response modification (breathing, resting, emotional release). Cognitive change of emotions was found to be far more frequent than other reported strategies.

Concluding, emotions are important to language learners’ everyday experiences. Identifying emotions across the spectrum and being aware of a range of emotion-regulation strategies may enable EFL teachers to provide more effective practice in emotion-regulation to their learners. Similarly, the realisation of ‘troublesome’ emotions may trigger students to search for their cause and eventually to their more positive interpretation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research goals

The present study explores the emotions evoked in students during four frequent classroom scenarios (according to their ranking) and the emotion-regulation strategies that students employ to deal with these emotions.

The specific research questions are:

1. What are the frequency and range of emotions experienced in four classroom situations in two student groups?
2. What emotion regulation strategies do the students employ in the four classroom situations?

3.2 Participants

A hundred and six first semester Greek university students participated in the study. They represent a convenience sample as they were the students who were willing to respond. Ages ranged from 18 to 30 years, as it was predefined in the questionnaire.
There were more females in our sample ($N_{\text{male}}=24$, $N_{\text{female}}=80$, two students did not state their gender). The participants’ level of language competence was defined according to the language certificates they reported holding. Their self-reported level of competence was C2 level: 52.9%, C1 level: 4.5%, B2 level: 33.7%. They attached high importance to language learning (71.3%) and the great majority (86.5%) could use another FL as well.

3.3 Instrument

The instrument used is the *Managing Your Emotions for Language Learning* questionnaire, (Gkonou & Oxford, 2016, version 4.1, in Oxford, 2017, p. 317). It is scenario-based and incorporates elements of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Scenarios have recently been used as an innovative mixed-method research tool in student emotions (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020), teacher education (Borg, 2009; Teimouri, 2018) and management (Ramirez et al., 2015), allowing for more emotional nuances to be recorded than from previous taxonomies.

There are ten scenarios of hypothetical yet realistic classroom situations in the questionnaire. We focused on the four most frequent scenarios the students reported they had actually experienced, a fact that reflected their L2 classroom reality rather than a hypothetical situation: *writing in class* (S1), *teacher correction in an oral activity in class* (S2), *coming to class unprepared* (S3) and *grammar rule repetition* (S4) (see Appendix).

Each scenario is followed by the same nine questions, four of which are close-ended, where students select one of the options. The remaining five questions are open, providing room for the students to express their emotions in whatever way they feel appropriate. The close-ended questions ask students a) to label their emotions (positive or negative), b) to state whether they have actually encountered such a situation in class, c) to record any teacher help they felt was provided on the situation, and d) whether they handled their emotions consciously. Some of the close-ended questions are followed by open questions in which students state their specific emotions and describe the way they deal with them. The fact that the students reported having experienced the above mentioned scenarios in the
classroom (high frequency) led us to consider that the emotions and emotion-regulation strategies expressed are more realistic (retrospectively) than the ones reported in the less frequently encountered scenarios in which students would have hypothesised their emotions and emotion-regulation strategies. The questionnaire was translated and adapted for the Greek context and piloted before it was administered and completed online by the students in Greek. The statistical analysis of the four close-ended type questions of the questionnaire indicated quite high internal consistency (Cronbach $\alpha=.891$).

### 3.4 Data analysis

Frequencies were calculated in the close-ended questions. Answers to the open-ended questions were grouped based on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Frequencies in emotion words were counted first and then grouped according to the Geneva emotion wheel (Sacharin et al., 2012) and Plutchik’s (1980) wheel of emotions. As student statements of emotions did not immediately fit the existing emotion terms, affinity in meaning and generalisation were attempted such as confusion (insecurity, wonder, uncertainty), self-derogation (shame, guilt, low self-esteem, inferior, not worthy, not knowledgeable enough), and joy (self-confidence and encouragement). Open coding was applied in the open question 3 asking for strategies to deal with emotions. The preliminary themes derived were then grouped into strategies and metastrategies of the Strategic Self-Regulation model (Oxford, 2017), continuously checking and verifying them through students’ actual phrases (axial coding, Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

### 4. Results

Regarding the specific emotions that students mentioned, we should note that students were not clear about their emotions in the sense that they used words in the layperson meaning rather than in their strict psychological definition. For instance, they mentioned self-confidence and encouragement as emotions referring to the joy experienced when building self-efficacy beliefs, self-worth or self-esteem. Similarly, the word ‘shame’ was over-mentioned but without the pain and
hopelessness it includes as a psychological term (“a little shame...but it is OK, I will try more next time”). The context provided by their answers and basically their remorse and effort to do better next time led us to classify such answers as ‘self-derogation’ using it as an umbrella term for feelings of shame, guilt, belittlement, denigration with a hint of ridicule and scorn.

Negative emotions prevail when writing in class (74.7%), when being corrected in an oral activity (64.9%) and above all when going to class unprepared (95.5%). On the positive side, more positive emotions are reported in grammar rule repetition (60.6%). The percentages were calculated based on students’ label of their emotions in each scenario.

As for the range of negative emotions (Table 1), anxiety and self-derogatory feelings of shame and guilt were by far the most frequent emotions reported in writing in class, being corrected in front of the class and going to class unprepared. Related emotions such as nervousness, insecurity or confusion were also mentioned, as were statements of sadness and anger.

The high frequency of self-derogation in being corrected in an oral activity in class (61) and going to class unprepared (50) scenarios indicates their face-threatening aspect. As one student reported, “I do not feel comfortable with this scenario at all”. This is further supported by the other extreme negative emotions indicated in these two scenarios such as anxiety, nervousness, sadness and fear of failure.

Table 1: Variety and frequency of negative emotions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative emotions</th>
<th>S1</th>
<th>S2</th>
<th>S3</th>
<th>S4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-derogation</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervousness</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity/confusion</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boredom, loss of interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panic/desperation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness/ Disappointment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of failure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alertness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is an interesting variety of positive emotions (Table 2): mainly joy from the self-confidence in one’s abilities to get over the challenge at hand, and from participating in a caring learning environment; encouragement, meaning that the teacher cares for the students’ performance or progress and that conveys strength for future improvement. Joy may also spring from the realisation that you have already mastered something, while at the same time empathy is evoked for the classmates who still struggle with it.

The emotion regulation strategies that the students reported are presented in Table 3. The numbers represent the frequencies of each strategy for the total population. In *scenario 1*, students resorted to the meta-affective strategy of monitoring affect by avoidance of social comparison ("I would concentrate on my writing and not the students around") and concentration on the task to regulate their emotions by deep breathing to lower anxiety, positive self-talk ("I think that we do not all handle the task in the same way"). They also mentioned the importance of the metacognitive strategy of planning before writing, and of time management. Teacher support in this scenario mainly indicated the encouragement and calmness the teacher tried to convey to help students focus on the task.

In *scenario 2*, students mainly activated the affective strategy of positive self-talk through their belief in the importance of mistakes during the learning process and
the need to take them lightly and overcome the embarrassment. Students also mentioned the teacher support they had into framing their mistakes in a positive manner, which also reinforced the metacognitive strategy of monitoring future performance:

- “I would laugh and think that nobody is perfect and that it is absolutely reasonable to make mistakes.”
- “She corrected me and immediately added that we shouldn’t be afraid of mistakes because this is the way to learn.”

The importance of meaning over form in oral communication came up in the students’ answers in relatively low frequency.

In scenario 3, the students mentioned the meta-cognitive strategies of time management and monitoring in order to avoid similar incidents in the future. Due to the severely negative emotions generated in this scenario (see Table 1) some students (N=14) adopted a self-forgiving attitude to justify their ‘unpreparedness’ on the grounds that their performance is generally conscientious and this specific occasion was the exception rather than the norm for them (“I would think that I am generally conscientious and it is human to leave some things behind”). It was interesting that some students (N=22) accepted responsibility for their action and apologised to the teacher before the start of the class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion regulation strategies</th>
<th>S1</th>
<th>S2</th>
<th>S3</th>
<th>S4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M-AFF: Monitoring affect</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFF: Lowering anxiety by deep breathing</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFF: Empathising with others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFF: Positive self-talk:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The distinctive way of thinking of each individual</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistakes as part of the learning process</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking it lightly: ‘no big deal’</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of meaning over form</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-forgiving attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness of repetition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Affective dimensions of L2 learning

M-CO Planning: Emphasis on the importance of outline 10
M-CO Planning: Time management 6 15
M-CO Planning: goal-setting for independent practice and focused attention 2 5 - 9
M-CO Monitoring: avoidance of the same mistake in the future 19 3
M-CO Evaluating cognition: self-assessment 8
CO Activating previous knowledge 5
CO Conceptualise with details 3
SO Working with mentor or tutor 5 4

M-AFF: meta-affective, AFF: affective, M-CO: meta-cognitive, CO: cognitive, SO: social

In scenario 4, most students referred to the conventional educational attitude that repetition facilitates consolidation of knowledge and sympathised with (even offered to help) their classmates who had not yet grasped the specific grammar rule (“I could have been in their place”; “I would try to help my classmates”). The usefulness of repetition was also combined with students’ belief in the teacher’s duty in class to cater for all students (“I appreciate the teacher’s duty”). Students also reported monitoring or evaluating cognition by making a judgment of learning or through a feeling of knowing. They also mentioned the strategy of cognitive reassurance (“I realised that it was easier for me to understand it. I will pay more attention to the details in the repetition”).

5. Discussion

5.1 RQ1: Frequency and range of emotions
The frequency and severity of negative emotions generated in these four common classroom situations ran against our expectations as teachers. This seemed especially true in the case of going to class unprepared but it was also indicated when performing a writing task or being corrected in an oral class activity. Only the repeating grammar rules scenario seems to invoke more positive feelings as students enjoy the reassurance they experience from the feeling of knowing or having mastered the building blocks of the language. Bielak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2020), who used the same instrument with Polish university students, found similar percentages of positive and negative emotions evoked by the respective scenarios.
According to the literature (Cheng et al., 1999; Gkonou, 2011), writing apprehension should be considered a specific, situation-type anxiety, stemming from the learners’ attitudes towards composing in an L2, their self-derogatory feelings and their fear of negative evaluation, all of which are present in our students’ negative feelings. Writing in class indicated mainly anxiety, insecurity, self-derogation, and even feelings of panic and desperation, as it is related to time-limits and inaccessibility of reference materials. On the other hand, it also generated self-confidence, concentration on the task and hope and optimism for a good outcome, as well as alertness, calmness or even emotional detachment.

Going to class unprepared and being corrected during an oral activity in class were indicated as the most face-threatening situations (Dörnyei, 2001) due to the high frequency of self-derogation and anxiety indicated in the students’ answers. The English language classroom is “a source of speaking anxiety” (Gkonou, 2011, p. 267) and evidently being corrected while speaking augments the levels of anxiety, shame, and fear of losing face. Our results agree with Cook (2006) and Galmiche (2017) who also found that speaking in class creates strong self-conscious feelings of shame, and with Tzoannopoulou (2016) who reported that fear of teachers’ corrections among others was a main source of anxiety in L2 communication. On the positive side, there were a number of students who appreciated the teacher’s manner of correction and felt encouraged by it. This obviously implies that teachers should not be judgmental in their correction practices, especially when performed in front of the class.

Going to class unprepared makes students feel anxious, ashamed, guilty, embarrassed, afraid, irresponsible, but they try to mask it behind an air of nonchalance, fake confidence, or lack of concern. Similar to Teimouri’s (2018) study, our participants experienced emotions of guilt but they also admitted insufficient effort and made a personal promise to monitor future homework tasks. It seems that learners experience a form of emotional labour in trying to manage their failure to perform their duties in a socially appropriate manner, similar to the type experienced by language teachers when trying to manage their students’ affect in the classroom (Miller & Gkonou, 2018).

Grammar rule repetition was the only one of the four scenarios that invoked more positive than negative feelings. Students felt joy and self-confidence by the
reassurance of knowing the rule. Moreover, they empathised with their still struggling classmates, recognising not only the challenge of learning but also the possibility that they could be in such a position on another occasion. Students obviously felt reassured by the fact that they had mastered a language issue while their peers still struggled with. Their perceived language proficiency boosted their self-positive emotions in this scenario (Dewaele et al., 2018; Li et al., 2019).

The frequency and range of negative emotions experienced in the four classroom situations may be associated with the Greek diction and a certain degree of risk-avoidance characterising its L1 speakers as it may be a cultural issue related to tolerance of ambiguity. In Hofstede’s (1991) well known cultural dimensions, Greece was indicated as extremely avoidant of uncertainty compared to English speaking countries (Greece: 100, Australia: 51, UK: 35, USA: 46, scale max: 100). Another possible explanation may indicate lack of awareness of finer distinctions in expressing meaning. This explanation may be supported by the very small number of students who distinguished between the facilitative and debilitative aspects of anxiety and the difference in word counts between the English anxiety and its Greek equivalent αγχος [’aŋxos] in English and Greek corpora. The Greek word diverges in meaning in relation to the English anxiety as it has a much wider semantic range, which probably makes it less precise than its English equivalent. For example, a Greek person may have αγχος to catch the bus in the morning (relatively low intensity) or their αγχος may not let them sleep at night (on the high intensity extreme). The cross-linguistic difference is supported by data comparing the frequency of the words αγχος and anxiety in newspaper text corpora for the two languages, available respectively at the Portal for the Greek language (http://www.greekLang/modern_greek/tools/corpora/index.html) and the British National Corpus (https://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/). The Greek word and its conjugated versions appear three times more (45.39) than the English equivalent (14.43) per million words of text.

Overall, it seems that emotions work in a complex dynamic network (Dörnyei et al., 2015) with each other and other diverse factors in the classroom, personal, social and cultural. However, as positive emotions such as enjoyment, pride, and/or self-confidence are strong predictors of language achievement and WTC (Dewaele et al.,
2018; Li et al., 2019; Ross & Stracke, 2017; Saito et al., 2018), we should work towards increasing such emotions in the FL classroom environment.

5.2 RQ2: Emotion-regulation strategies employed by students

It is interesting to note that the students used a wide range of emotion-regulation strategies as it is indicated in other studies (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020; Gkonou, 2018; Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004). The affective strategy of positive self-talk (Oxford 1990, 2017) was by far the most common emotion-regulation strategy that students employed in these scenarios. As a strategy, self-talk has the strength, through effort-directed decisions, reassurance, and acceptance, to regulate students’ emotional load. Similarly, Bielak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2020) also refer to the strategy of reassurance, as a form of self-talk, from the family of ‘cognitive change’ strategies which was also found to be one of the most frequently used emotion-regulation strategies in their study. The emphasis on the importance of effort and the belief that mistakes are part of the learning improvement process imply an internal locus of control according to Weiner’s (1985) attribution theory on educational psychology, which is a healthy attitude to learning. ‘Taking it lightly’ to minimize the damage from the mistake also provides support towards this direction. Another relevant research strand concerns learners’ implicit theories or mindsets (Dweck, 2006), which refer to their beliefs about language aptitude. Mercer and Ryan’s (2009) exploratory study placed them on a continuum from fixed (innate language gift determines competence) to growth (language capacity improved by effort) and related them to cultural differences, learner goals, social comparison processes and strategy instruction. They also emphasized the importance of explicitly discussing such beliefs in the classroom.

A self-forgiving attitude is very important in the going to class unprepared scenario given the severity and strength of the negative emotions experienced by the students. For the students who mentioned it, it indicated that they consider themselves as conscientious and generally prepared in their homework tasks, but they also recognize the possibility that something may go wrong. They do not dwell on or ruminate over a negative experience while at the same time they recognize their fault (Hall & Fincham, 2005; Teimouri, 2018). Disposition to forgive is also
related to a more agreeable and emotionally stable personality (McCullough, 2001). Self-forgiveness in combination with the metacognitive strategies of monitoring to avoid such situations in the future and better time management set the necessary framework for the students’ overall well-being (Exline et al., 2003).

Metastrategies of the cognitive and the affective domain also provided support in the students’ emotion regulation efforts. Using Oxford’s metaphors (2017, p. 160) for them we can illustrate that the “master builder” and the “master framer” respectively provide the necessary support for the students’ emotions. Moreover, affective, cognitive and social strategies are additionally employed in the effort to regulate emotions. Their reference and use in these scenarios demonstrate Oxford’s (2017) sense of the fluidity of strategies.

6. Pedagogical implications

As indicated in the present study, a wide variety of both positive and negative emotions may be experienced during FLL, not all of which are triggered by classroom-related factors. Emotions are caused by a wider dynamic in students’ social, personal and academic life. Our concern here is the way the EFL teacher can handle them in the classroom while being untrained in the psychological discipline (Al-Hoorie et al., 2021). There are mainly three suggestions we can offer: establish positive beliefs about LL, learn more about student psychology from educational psychology, and detect and handle detached or indifferent students. Although our study is based on university students, these suggestions could apply to all levels of education from primary to tertiary and in private and public schools.

Our results showed that the affective strategy of self-talk was the most frequently used emotion-regulation strategy mentioned by the students. This is an area that teachers can work on more by using the reframing strategy, resorting to a cognitive strategy to boost students’ self-confidence as they may feel more competent in understanding the FL (Gross, 2014). Once teachers realise the degree of support self-talk provides, they should promote a variety of positive, language-learning-related beliefs in their classrooms (e.g., mistakes are part of the learning process and they should be taken lightly, the self-forgiving attitude, the usefulness of repetition), in
order to help students develop effective strategies to sustain the long-term and emotionally-loaded process of language learning. Teacher-student discussions can also assist learners in becoming more agentic in dealing with their emotions related to language learning (Oxford, 2015). This applies mainly to those scenarios that evoked more negative emotions: writing in class, teacher correction in an oral activity in class, as well as coming to class unprepared. Teacher support as perceived by students in the latter scenario is also related to the idea of (self-) forgiveness either by extending the deadline of the assigned task or by setting the norms for proper social behaviour in general through showing understanding for the unexpected situation that deterred students from completing their duties.

Despite the multiple, more communicative roles that teachers may take in the classroom today, they still represent a figure of authority and they should set the example and model the behaviours they expect their students to follow. The finding that students managed to develop adaptive emotion-regulation strategies means that they have experienced well-functioning classroom environments with respect to social norms. This is further supported by the students’ mentioning of their teacher’s forgiving attitude and teacher understanding through dialogue and the importance of time management (“The teacher helped me by showing understanding and allowing me to bring the assignment next time”). Students also mentioned teacher support in reinforcing the belief in the importance of mistakes in language learning when this teacher support is offered in a congenial and kind manner. Thus, teachers should assume responsibility of creating a well-functioning classroom environment by updating their knowledge of educational psychology and language learning psychology in particular (Al-Hoorie et al., 2021). Furthermore, a friendly, cooperative atmosphere in the FL classroom may increase the students’ willingness to engage in the use of the FL in the classroom and eliminate their avoidance behaviours, thus contributing to their WTC in their social interactions.

Moreover, the low, yet registered, appearance of indifference and detachment from any emotional loading in the classroom situations we examined indicates a need for teacher vigilance. Once teachers recognise such emotions, they should strive to direct them into positive paths. Studies in educational psychology have shown that indifferent or emotionally detached students do not ascribe to any
dominant goal orientation, whether mastery-, performance-, success- or avoidance-oriented, and despite having accepted the ‘higher’ goals of learning, they are “reluctant to invest effort in their attainment” (Tuominen-Soini et al., 2012, p. 300). They may have high or low perceived competence in the task (Legault et al., 2006) but they may demonstrate equally high school-related cynicism (Tuominen-Soini et al., 2012). All these are mainly attributed to the conflict between personal interests and social norms that young adults and adolescents experience. Such feelings definitely deserve further investigation through personal interviews. It is such outliers that escape statistical analyses and make the contribution of qualitative methods significant.

7. Conclusion and further suggestions

The present study has investigated the affective aspect of L2 learning focusing on the emotions generated in four frequent classroom situations. Extreme negative emotions were demonstrated in most scenarios and self-talk proved to be the most frequent emotion regulation strategy used by students. Joy from self-confidence and encouragement the students received were the most frequent positive emotions.

As people in general are not particularly willing or even able to express their emotions accurately, practice is needed in completing questionnaires on the affective domain. In this respect, a possible limitation of the present study could be the online administration of the questionnaire. Although it provided students with the necessary time to contemplate on their emotions, it also led to certain misunderstandings and repetitions in their answers. Another limitation was the imbalance in gender, which may have affected our results. Moreover, the initial dichotomy of emotions into positive or negative may also need refinement in order to better cater for instances of facilitative anxiety and alertness or detachment and indifference.

Future research could also include personal interviews of selected students to gain further insight into the precision and severity both of the emotions evoked and the strategies applied to deal with them. An emotion might be regulated in many different ways which will work for some learners and not for others, so one has to
consider the learners’ individual characteristics, e.g., gender, and/or different academic specialisations and contextual priorities which require the use of emotion-regulated strategies. Moreover, research into diverse learning contexts (e.g., immigrants, adult professionals, compulsory vs elective EFL courses or in adolescent populations) and educational backgrounds could further illuminate the affective dimension of L2 learning. Finally, investigation of how emotions experienced by language teachers unfold during their teaching and how they affect their relationships with students may lead to handling sensitive classroom situations in a more positive way (Miller & Gkonou, 2018).

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Appendix

Scenario 1: The teacher assigns an essay writing task in class and allows 60 minutes for completion of the task. After a couple of minutes, you notice that your classmates have already started writing while you still work on the outline of your essay.

Scenario 2: You make a mistake during a classroom oral activity. Your teacher corrects you in front of the class.

Scenario 3: You go to your language class unprepared because something happened and you didn’t have time to complete your homework.

Scenario 4: The teacher repeats a grammar rule which certain students in the class found hard to grasp. However, you have understood the rule and such repetition might not be useful for you. Instead, you would prefer some more practice with the grammar point.