

# Language Learning in Crisis Mode: The Connection Between LX Grit, Trait Emotional Intelligence and Learner Emotions

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## ABSTRACT

When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, the education sector soon faced the unprecedented challenge of moving courses online within no time. The rapid implementation of emergency remote teaching (ERT) led to students and teachers alike being thrown into an emotional terra incognita. This paper sets out to explore if foreign language (LX) grit, learners' passion and perseverance for LX learning, is a predictor of learners' foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and their foreign language anxiety (FLCA) in LX classes taught remotely due to COVID-19. Additionally, the role of trait emotional intelligence (TEI) in mediating the connections between LX grit, FLE, and FLCA is investigated. With a web survey, data were collected from 481 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Europe. Regression analyses indicated that LX grit was a reliable predictor of FLE and TEI. TEI functioned as a partial mediator in the model, explaining a significant proportion of variance (14.3%) in FLE scores. Thus, grittier students, who were also more emotionally intelligent, reported enjoying their English classes more. LX grit was also shown to be a reliable predictor of FLCA. In this case, TEI functioned as a full mediator in the model, explaining 22.5% of the variance in FLCA scores. Therefore, lower TEI scores were linked to higher levels of FLCA. Less gritty EFL learners scored lower on TEI, which consequently determined higher levels of FLCA. Data from two open-ended questions revealed that particularly enjoyable or anxiety-provoking episodes during ERT were similar among all learners. While positive group dynamics, teachers' forgiving nature and easy-going disposition, humor as well as the innovative use of technology were mentioned as common factors boosting their FLE, speaking in front of strangers, overwhelming workload and technology-related aspects were frequently mentioned sources of anxiety.

*Keywords:* COVID-19, foreign language classroom anxiety, foreign language enjoyment, LX grit, trait emotional intelligence

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## INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, the world came to an abrupt halt when the World Health Organization (2020a) declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Social distancing measures were adopted to contain its spread. Schools and universities consequently faced the challenge of having to rapidly move their classes online. Hodges et al. (2020) coined a new term for this unique, crisis-related change in teaching mode, emergency remote teaching (ERT). The suddenness with which the transition to the online mode happened, i.e. the lack of time resources to adjust to an entirely new context, is one of the aspects which make ERT fundamentally different from regular online classes (Gacs et al., 2020). Additionally, the insecurities and the emotional burden experienced by both learners and teachers are unique in this setting (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021).

This radical change in teaching made teachers and learners face challenges that possibly impacted their well-being (WHO, 2020b). While MacIntyre et al. (2020) found that ERT caused teachers to feel stressed, a study into tertiary-level learners' coping with ERT during the first lockdown in spring 2020 revealed that students' well-being was greatly affected too (Schober et al., 2020). Thus, the rapid implementation of ERT in crisis mode led to students and teachers being thrown into an emotional *terra incognita*. A recent study by Resnik and Dewaele (2021) has furthermore shown that learners' emotions are dulled in ERT, as though the sudden shift from a three dimensional classroom to a two dimensional screen also flattened a certain emotional dimension. In this study, students' foreign language enjoyment (FLE) (Botes et al., 2020a) and their foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Horwitz et al., 1986) were significantly lower in ERT than in learners' regular English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes before the outbreak of the pandemic. Furthermore, the well-established negative link between FLE and FLCA (see Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016) was no longer observable in ERT.

A psychological characteristic which has recently gained more attention in scholarly discourse is second language (L2) grit, learners' perseverance and passion for L2 learning (Teimouri et al., 2020). While previous studies have investigated links between grit, FLE, and FLCA, all of which are influential in learners' achievements (cf. Botes et al., 2020b; Lee, 2020; Li, 2020; Sudina et al., 2021), its links

to the same learner emotions in ERT settings have not been investigated. This is crucial due to the context-specificity of both FLE and FLCA (see, e.g., Resnik & Dewaele, 2020). Thus, one of the aims of this paper was to investigate if foreign language (LX) grit is a predictor of the enjoyment and anxiety experienced by LX learners in ERT classes. As previous studies showed links between students' trait emotional intelligence (TEI), which refers to learners' emotionality, self-control, well-being and sociability (Petrides, 2009), and learners' FLCA and FLE in regular and ERT settings (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021), we also investigated its role in mediating the connections between LX grit, FLE, and FLCA. The quantitative analyses were complemented by a qualitative analysis of data obtained from two open questions. This allowed participants to share their own views and experiences on sources of FLE and FLCA in ERT.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### LX Grit

Duckworth et al. (2007) suggested that one personality characteristic which makes some people accomplish more than other equally intelligent people is grit. According to them, grit is defined as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1087). The focus on long-term goals makes grit different from, for instance, conscientiousness as it implies that gritty people maintain their interest and put effort into reaching these goals over years despite obstacles, failing, or not making any progress at certain points. The "persistence in the face of setbacks" (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009, p. 173) and long-term focus also lead to it differing from mere striving for achievement, which is usually related to immediate positive feedback. Grit is related to resilience as "part of what it means to be gritty is to be resilient in the face of failure or adversity" (Duckworth, cited in Perkins-Gough, 2013, p. 14); however, grit includes more than this. Gritty people are exceptionally committed to achieving their goals, have the stamina needed, and do not give up or change course easily, making them more likely to become high achievers than others. According to Duckworth and Gross (2014), we need to distinguish grit from self-control, "the capacity to regulate attention, emotion, and behavior in the presence of temptation" (p. 319), too. While both play a key role in success, self-control is usually more transient than grit.

Based on their assumptions, Duckworth et al. (2007) developed a 12-item grit scale, consisting of the two factors ‘Consistency of Interests’ and ‘Perseverance of Effort’ (see Duckworth & Quinn, 2009 for its shortened version). Their investigation of 1,545 participants showed its positive links to level of education and age (see also Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Previous research did not reveal gender-based differences in grit (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Hodge et al., 2017). In further studies, investigating the relationship between grit and the Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999), above all personality traits, conscientiousness emerged as strongly linked to grit (Duckworth et al., 2007; see also Credé et al., 2017; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014).

Research on the effect of grit on achievement and student outcome has yielded generally positive yet mixed results. Duckworth et al. (2007) revealed a positive link between grit and performance and a negative one between grit and intelligence. Research into spelling bee finalists, i.e. a study on links between extracurricular achievements and grit in children, revealed that grittier kids tended to learn longer and harder to achieve their goals and outperformed their peers. Additionally, Eskreis-Winkler et al. (2014) found that high levels of grit increased the likelihood of finishing high school. Generally, Duckworth et al.’s (2007) series of studies revealed that grit explained more of the variance in achievements than IQ or conscientiousness.

Further research into tertiary-level students showed grit’s negative relationship to anxiety and depression (Musumari et al., 2018), meaning that grittier students tended to fare better in terms of mental health. A study of Australian university students’ grit additionally stressed its crucial role in students’ productivity and showed that engagement is a mediator between grit and academic productivity (Hodge et al., 2017). However, while studies have shown its relevance in tertiary-level students’ academic outcomes, it has been repeatedly stressed that the impact of grit on academic performance may be, in fact, quite small (cf. Credé et al., 2017).

Overall, research interest in grit has increased recently. Still, the concept is not without controversy and has been criticized too. For instance, Muenks et al.’s (2017) research into high school and college students revealed an overlap of grit, self-control, learners’ engagement, and their self-regulated learning. Whereas learners’ perseverance of effort

predicted their grades, their consistency of interest did not and grit, overall, was a weaker predictor of grades than engagement and self-regulation. A meta-analysis of 584 effect sizes from 66,807 individuals from 88 independent samples also made Credé et al. (2017) question the construct validity. Their analyses revealed a much higher validity of the perseverance of effort facet and showed strong links between grit and conscientiousness and moderate links between grit and performance. This made the authors question the measurement of grit as such (cf. Feng & Papi, 2020; Kramer et al., 2017), its predictive power and its distinctness from other personality traits (cf. Credé, 2018).

A number of studies have also investigated the role of grit in the LX learning trajectory. Changlek and Palanukulwong (2015) identified a positive correlation between high achievers’ motivation and grit. In their examination of LX learners of Chinese, Feng and Papi (2020) found that the perseverance of effort factor “along with future selves form a strong motivational force” (p. 1). Lee’s (2020) study on Korean EFL learners’ L2 willingness to communicate (WTC) furthermore demonstrated the predictive power of learners’ perseverance of effort and their classroom enjoyment on their L2 WTC. Conversely, consistency of interest was no predictor of L2 WTC. Wei et al. (2019) investigated the impact of grit on Chinese middle school EFL students’ performance in the LX. Their findings show a positive effect of grit on performance, with FLE mediating the effect and the classroom environment moderating the links between grit and performance as well as grit and FLE. Robins (2019) too found a positive, yet weak relationship between Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking English as a Second Language (ESL) students’ language achievement and grit in an online learning environment, and a moderate relationship between grit and vocabulary learning was shown too in previous work in the field (Kramer et al., 2017). Additionally, their study supports the inclusion of both dimensions, i.e. perseverance of effort and consistency of interest, in the scale. Based on their study of 1,178 tertiary-level students’ general grit, Khajavy et al. (2021) argue for a componential analysis of general grit as they, for instance, found weak positive links between a growth language mindset and perseverance of effort. A fixed language mindset was shown to be a negative predictor of consistency of interest only. With regard to LX achievement, no significant links to grit or its two components were shown in this study.

However, as mentioned by Teimouri et al. (2020), these studies were based on measuring grit with global grit scales, which do not focus specifically on LX learning. Teimouri et al. (2020), consequently, argue that this “global-local inconsistency existing between the measures of grit and language achievement in those studies could be argued as a potential reason for [...] inconclusive results” (p. 7). In line with this suggestion, the present study explores the role of grit based on Teimouri et al.’s (2020) L2 grit scale to avoid this inconsistency. Not only did their research demonstrate that L2 grit differs from other personality traits, but it also showed that the relationship between “language-domain-specific grit” (p. 15) and language joy, anxiety, and language achievement was stronger than when measuring grit globally. Similar links between L2 joy and L2 grit were revealed in Wei et al. (2020), which points to the relevance of exploring such links in ERT, too.

### Trait Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to how adaptable people are and how well they manage their social surroundings (Bar-On, 2006; Goleman, 1995). Mayer and Salovey (1997) proposed a four-factor model of EI comprised of four key cognitive-emotional abilities: (1) emotion perception and expression; (2) ability to access and produce feelings that facilitate thought; (3) accurate emotional understanding; and (4) effective managements of emotions in oneself and others.

The question of whether EI should be considered an ability or trait has been debated (Gkonou & Mercer, 2017; Mayer et al., 2000). Petrides and Furnham (2001) distinguish between trait EI (TEI) and ability EI, with TEI being more personality-related, pertaining to an individual’s behaviors and ability to recognize and understand the emotions in oneself and others, cope appropriately, and exercise emotional self-control. Thus, TEI can be considered an expanded version of Mayer and Salovey’s (1997) model, to include social and personal intelligence. A key difference between measuring TEI and ability EI is that the former relies more on self-reported tests, while the latter relies more on the assessment of performance tasks (Petrides et al., 2007).

Research on TEI as it relates to LX learning is still evolving, though some key findings have emerged. TEI has

been most strongly linked to negative classroom emotions, particularly anxiety, showing an inverse relationship, meaning that learners with higher TEI tend to experience less LX anxiety (e.g., Resnik & Dewaele, 2020; Dewaele, 2013a). In terms of the relationship between TEI and positive emotions in second language acquisition (SLA), Li (2020) found that Chinese high school students with higher TEI tended to enjoy LX learning more and had more optimistic views of their English ability. A recent study into the links between TEI, FLE and FLCA in ERT settings revealed that the previously established positive link between TEI and FLE was stronger in crisis mode than in regular EFL classes and that less emotionally intelligent students experienced more FLCA in ERT (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021).

### Foreign Language Enjoyment and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

Traditionally, the field of psychology has focused on pathology and trying to understand what is wrong with human beings. Mirroring this tendency, past SLA research has focused primarily on negative emotions such as foreign language anxiety (Gkonou et al., 2017), or has tended to avoid the complicated topic of emotion altogether. Positive Psychology (PP), which focuses on human flourishing as opposed to suffering, is gaining ascendancy in SLA research (e.g., Dewaele et al., 2019; MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014) as there is increased recognition that positive emotions can enhance LX learning by, for instance, maximizing awareness and attention paid to input (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). This shifting trend has been marked by some recent important contributions on positive emotions in LX learning (e.g., Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Dewaele et al., 2016, 2018, 2019; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, 2016). The turn towards positive emotion research does not mean that attention to negative emotions is forsaken, rather there is an appreciation of the interplay of positive and negative emotions, which could be seen as an invigorating force in LX learning (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

Our study was inspired by PP, too, and more specifically, we investigated possible links between LX grit and learners’ FLCA and FLE in ERT. In their seminal study, Horwitz et al. (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as a “distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors

related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). Thus, FLCA is a specific state anxiety experienced by learners while learning and/or using an LX (Horwitz, 2017, p. 33). Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) defined FLE, on the other hand, by distinguishing it from pleasure. Enjoyment is more complex and associated with achievement of a challenge. Another crucial distinction between these two concepts is that enjoyment is usually sparked by the novel, spontaneous, or unexpected, such as performing better at a task than one had hoped.

In their research into FLE and FLCA, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014, 2016) found a moderate negative correlation between both and found that variables predict the two differently, though there is some overlap. Generally, for FLCA, both learner-internal variables and learner-external variables have been shown to play an important part. In contrast, the strongest predictors of FLE are teacher characteristics such as predictability and LX use (Dewaele et al., 2018; Dewaele et al., 2019), which are also weak predictors of FLCA. Other predictors of FLCA include sociobiographical variables (e.g., education level, age) (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), and psychological variables, such as neuroticism (e.g., Dewaele, 2013b). Key predictors of both include LX proficiency (e.g., Botes et al., 2020b; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019; Li, 2020; Saito et al., 2018), relative standing in the group (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Dewaele et al., 2018), number of languages known (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), and TEI (e.g., Li, 2020; Resnik & Dewaele, 2020). Gender differences were shown, too, with females reporting slightly, yet significantly higher levels of FLE and FLCA than males (Dewaele et al., 2016).

A recent study demonstrated the context-specificity of positive and negative emotions in the LX class (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021), revealing that in ERT classes, both positive and negative emotions were generally dulled, pointing to a lower emotional resonance of these classes.

### The Current Study

This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the role LX grit (Teimouri et al., 2020) plays in times of crisis by exploring its connection to learners’ positive and

negative emotions experienced in the LX class and TEI in ERT settings.

### Research Questions

The present study investigates the following research questions:

RQ1: Is LX grit a predictor of the enjoyment and anxiety experienced by EFL learners in ERT classes?

RQ2: Is this relationship mediated by TEI?

RQ3: What characterizes positive episodes of FLE and FLCA in ERT, according to the learners?

RQ3a: Do the emerging themes differ according to respondents’ level of LX grit?

## METHOD

### Participants

Respondents were 481 EFL students who all studied in Europe at the time the data was collected. Their EFL classes were taught remotely due to COVID-19. Of these, 68 (14.1%) were male and 406 (84.4%) were female. Seven students (1.5%) did not disclose their gender. This distribution displays a common pattern in web-based SLA research (Wilson & Dewaele, 2010). On average, the participants were 22.15 years old ( $SD = 4.25$ ), ranging from a minimum of 17 to a maximum of 48 years. Most students were Austrian ( $n = 376$ , 78.17%), followed by Spanish ( $n = 40$ , 8.3%), Croatian ( $n = 11$ , 2.3%), German ( $n = 7$ , 1.5%), Polish ( $n = 7$ , 1.5%), and Italian ( $n = 5$ , 1%) learners. The remaining participants were from various other nations, including Romania, France, and Hungary. The most common first languages (L1s) were German ( $n = 379$ , 78.79%), Spanish ( $n = 39$ , 7.9%) and Croatian ( $n = 15$ , 3.12%). They were all LX users of English and rated their proficiency in English on average as 4.98 ( $SD = .802$ ) on a scale from 1 (“beginner”) to 6 (“advanced user”). Additionally, they described themselves as frequent users of the language on a scale from 1 (“hardly ever”) to 5 (“almost always”), the mean score being 4.06 ( $SD = .714$ ).

Overall, 38 (7.9%) of the students spoke four LXs, 124 (25.78%) knew three, 229 (47.61%) spoke two, and 90 (18.71%) spoke one LX in addition to their L1(s).

## Procedure

The survey, which ensured participants' anonymity (Dörnyei, 2007), was made accessible online. After the survey had received ethical approval from the first author's research institution, it was distributed at the beginning of November 2020 and remained online for six weeks. Via snowball and convenience sampling (Dewaele, 2018), teachers and lecturers were asked to forward the survey to their intermediate to advanced EFL learners from diverse L1 backgrounds but also a variety of EFL settings, including teacher trainees, students of English Studies and Business Studies, to name but a few. By targeting participants from diverse backgrounds, who all had ERT classes due to second lockdowns taking place in their countries, we aimed at reaching a broad spectrum of learners of English, who shared a similar lockdown experience. As the targeted participants were all intermediate to advanced users of EFL who were enrolled in EFL classes at that level, the decision was made to ask them to complete the survey in English. They were informed about the study and asked for consent. Overall, it took an average 25 minutes to complete, which we deemed acceptable (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). As in other web-based surveys, self-selection bias is an issue as we depended on learners' willingness to devote their time to completing it (Dewaele, 2018), which was particularly challenging in times of crisis.

## Instruments

The first part of the survey included questions on the participants' demographic background, which was followed by questions on their language learner history (e.g., which languages they spoke, self-rated proficiency and their frequency of use of English). Participants were then asked to complete a set of questions capturing their LX grit, which was followed by other scales measuring their FLE and FLCA in ERT classes and their TEI. These are described in detail below. At the end of the survey, two open-ended questions were included: the first, which was answered by 227 students, asked the participants to describe an enjoyable episode in their ERT LX class in as much detail as possible;

the following one, answered by 233 learners, focused on an episode in this context which made them anxious. Overall, the responses to the two open-ended questions yielded a corpus of 15,568 words.

## LX Grit

Students' LX grit was measured with a previously tested nine-item scale (Teimouri et al., 2020; see Appendix), which captures the personality trait as being composed of learners' persistence of effort and their consistency of interest in LX learning. The first sub-component is measured with five items and the other one is based on four items. The items reflecting consistency of interest (items 2, 4, 7, 8) were negatively phrased and had to be reverse-coded. Thus, higher overall scores rated on 5-point Likert-type scales (ranging from 1 = "Not like me at all" to 5 = "Very much like me") reflect higher levels of LX grit with an average score of 5 equaling being extremely gritty in the LX learning trajectory and 1 reflecting not being gritty at all in LX learning. Scale analysis revealed high internal consistency (LX grit: alpha coefficient = .81,  $k = 9$ ) (Field, 2014).

## Foreign Language Enjoyment

Learners' enjoyment of EFL classes in ERT was measured with the *Short Form Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale* (Botes et al., 2020a). This scale (see Appendix) consists of nine items extracted from the original scale developed by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). The items are all positively phrased and capture three dimensions of enjoyment in the LX class based on three items each: teacher appreciation, social enjoyment, and personal enjoyment. Some items were slightly adapted to the new teaching mode and "online English class" was used instead of "foreign language class". Respondents were asked to rate their enjoyment of English classes on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree". Internal consistency was high with an alpha coefficient of .80 ( $k = 9$ ) (Field, 2014).

## Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

FLCA was captured with eight items (see Appendix) which were extracted from Horwitz et al.'s (1986) *Foreign*

*Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (cf. Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), which was slightly adapted in this study: again, “online English class” was used instead of “foreign language class”. Two of the items were negatively phrased and had to be reverse-coded so that higher scores reflected higher levels of FLCA. Generally, the scale captures the anxiety experienced by LX users in the situation of learning the LX and, consequently, includes, e.g., items which reflect physical symptoms experienced, learners' nervousness and self-confidence in the LX class. Participants rated their FLCA on the same 5-point Likert scale used to measure FLE (from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”). Internal reliability was very high (alpha coefficient = .89,  $k = 8$ ).

**Trait Emotional Intelligence**

To measure learners’ TEI, the *Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire – Short Form* (Petrides, 2009) was used. It

consists of 30 items (see Appendix) extracted from its original 153-item scale. This widely used psychometric scale captures participants’ well-being, self-control, sociability and emotionality on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “completely disagree” to 7 “completely agree,” leading to a global TEI score. Half of the items needed reverse coding so that higher scores reflected higher TEI. Scale analysis revealed high internal reliability with an alpha coefficient of .86 ( $k = 30$ ).

Despite skewness being borderline for LX grit and TEI and kurtosis being borderline for FLCA (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics), other variables were within acceptable ranges. Quantile-quantile plots showed that, apart from the extreme tails, the variables follow the normal distribution reasonably well. Thus, we opted for the more powerful parametric procedures.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for LX Grit, FLE, FLCA, and TEI

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Median	Mode	Min	Max	Skewness	SE	Kurtosis	SE
LX Grit	481	3.96	.59	4.00	3.89	2.33	5.00	-.435	.111	-.408	.222
FLE	468	3.62	.57	3.67	3.44	2.11	5.00	-.021	.113	-.319	.225
FLCA	456	2.88	.93	2.88	2.75	1.00	5.00	-.071	.114	-.769	.228
TEI	436	147.98	21.05	149	162	94	198	-.234	.117	-.351	.233

*Note.* FLCA = foreign language classroom anxiety, FLE = foreign language enjoyment, LX Grit = foreign language grit, TEI = trait emotional intelligence.

The qualitative data obtained from two open-ended questions sought to add a different angle to the questionnaire data by providing insight using respondents’ own words, thereby adding a human flesh and blood touch to the quantitative data (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), as well as for the purpose of finding common themes, identified through close reading, i.e. derived inductively (Dörnyei, 2007). Thus, thematic analysis was performed by two of the authors. Both researchers coded the data manually. After having coded 20% of the responses individually first (Kuckartz, 2014), the researchers

convened to discuss their coding to find a consensus. They did so again after having coded all data and discussed and resolved disagreements. The frequency of occurrence of the codes applied allowed us to filter the five most frequently occurring enjoyable and anxiety-provoking episodes in EFL classes according to participants’ LX grit scores. Extracts from learners’ responses will be used to illustrate commonalities in the experiences of LX learners in ERT.

## RESULTS

### *Relationships Between Learners' LX Grit, FLE, FLCA and TEI*

A series of correlation analyses were run in order to explore the links between LX grit, FLE, FCLA, and TEI. Highly significant correlations emerged between all the variables (Table 2). In particular, LX grit was positively linked to FLE ( $r = .35$ ,  $CI = .257, .420$ ) and TEI ( $r = .22$ ,  $CI = .257, .420$ ), and negatively linked to FCLA, ( $r = -.17$ ,  $CI = -.412, -.128$ ). Additionally, with high levels of reliability, TEI emerged as positively linked to FLE ( $r = .23$ ,  $CI = 5.27, 12.08$ ) and negatively linked to FCLA ( $r = -.46$ ,  $CI = -12.4, -8.65$ ). Lastly, a significant correlation emerged between FLE and FLCA ( $r = -.22$ ,  $CI = -.184, -.085$ ). Students with a higher passion and perseverance for LX learning thus experienced more enjoyment and less anxiety in the LX class, also displaying higher levels of EI.

**Table 2.** *Correlations among LX Grit, FLE, FLCA, and TEI*

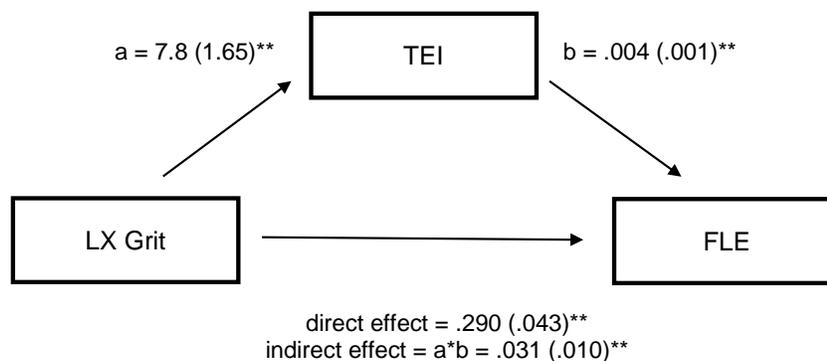
Variable	1	2	3	4
LX Grit	-			
FLE	.35***	-		
FLCA	-.17***	-.22***	-	
TEI	.22***	.23***	-.46***	-

*Note:* \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . FLCA = foreign language classroom anxiety, FLE = foreign language enjoyment, LX Grit = foreign language grit, TEI = trait emotional intelligence.

Two models explaining the interconnections between the variables have been developed, taking into consideration a modest risk of multicollinearity. In the first model (Figure 1) we analyzed the indirect effect of LX grit on FLE, as mediated by TEI, whereas in the second model (Figure 2) we investigated the indirect effect, still mediated by TEI, of LX grit on FCLA. As shown in Tables 3 and 4, the values for the Durbin-Watson's tests were acceptable, being included between 1 and 3 (Field, 2014). Likewise, tolerance eigenvalues from collinearity diagnostics were all above the threshold of .20, meaning that the independent variables were not too highly correlated (Szmrecsanyi, 2005).

Regression analyses revealed that LX grit was a reliable predictor of both FLE,  $\beta = .35$ ,  $t(466) = 13.72$ ,  $p < .001$ , and TEI,  $\beta = .22$ ,  $t(434) = 17.62$ ,  $p < .001$ . Also, when controlling for LX grit, the mediator (TEI) was a significant predictor of FLE,  $\beta = .17$ ,  $t(433) = 8.1$ ,  $p < .001$ , without affecting the reliability of LX grit ( $p < .001$ ). A Sobel test confirmed the significance of the standardized indirect effect ( $z = 3.05$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Hence, TEI functions as a partial mediator in the model, explaining a significant proportion of variance (14.3%) in FLE scores (Plonsky & Ghanbar, 2018):  $F(2, 433) = 36.08$ ,  $p < .001$  (Table 3). Grittier students, who were also more emotionally intelligent, reported enjoying their EFL classes in ERT settings more. In detail, their level of EI was partly favored by their tenacity to learn and determined higher levels of FLE.

**Figure 1.** *The Relation Between LX Grit and FLE, Mediated by TEI*



**Table 3.** Regression Analysis Conducted on FLE

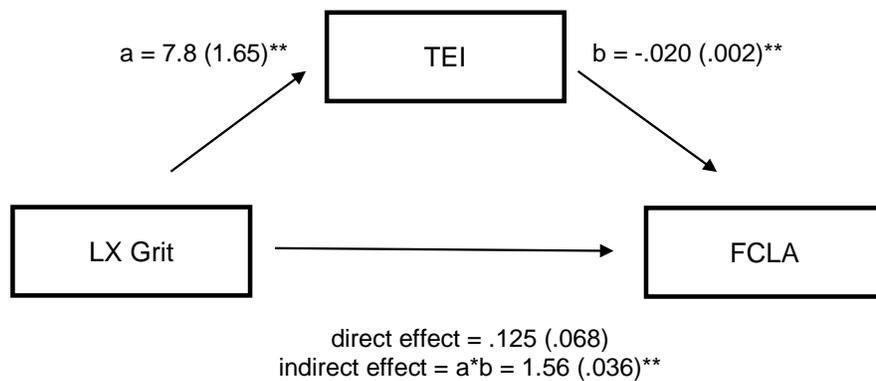
Predictor(s)	$R^2$	$F$	$p$	$\beta$	Durbin-Watson	Collinearity diagnostics Tolerance	BCa 95%	
							Lower	Upper
LX Grit	.11	57.24	< .001	.305	1.969	.951	.205	.375
TEI	.14	36.08	< .001	.166		.951	.002	.007

Note. Dependent variable: FLE. Independent variable: LX Grit, TEI (mediator).

Considering FCLA as a dependent variable (Figure 2), regression analyses indicated LX Grit as a reliable predictor:  $\beta = .35, t(454) = 13.66, p < .001$ . When controlling for LX Grit, the mediator (TEI) revealed a significant effect on FCLA's scores,  $\beta = -.45, t(433) = -10.38, p < .001$ , affecting the reliability of LX Grit as a predictor ( $p = .068$ ). A Sobel test confirmed the significance of the standardized indirect effect of LX Grit on FCLA, as mediated by TEI ( $z = -4.27,$

$p < .001$ ). In this instance, TEI functions as a full mediator in the model, explaining 22.5% of the variance in FCLA scores (Plonsky & Ghanbar, 2018):  $F(2, 433) = 62.08, p < .001$  (Table 4). Less emotionally intelligent learners reported higher levels of anxiety in their ERT English classes. In other words, lower levels of grit seemed to negatively affect students' TEI, consequently determining higher levels of FCLA.

**Figure 2.** The Relation Between LX Grit and FCLA, Mediated by TEI



**Table 4.** Regression Analysis Conducted on FCLA

Predictor(s)	$R^2$	$F$	$p$	$\beta$	Durbin-Watson	Collinearity diagnostics Tolerance	BCa 95%	
							Lower	Upper
LX Grit	.03	13.98	.068	-.125	2.02	.951	-.259	.009
TEI	.22	62.80	< .001	-.020		.951	-.024	-.016

Note. Dependent variable: FLCA. Independent variable: LX Grit, TEI (mediator).

### Qualitative Analysis: Learners' Views on Enjoyable and Anxiety-provoking Episodes in ERT

The open-ended questions asked respondents to describe a particular incident that was enjoyable, and one that made them anxious. Close reading of the responses led to an inductive category formation (Dörnyei, 2007) of the most prominent themes. Due to an unavoidable overlap between certain categories, in some of the responses two of the following themes were coded, e.g. in case a learner mentioned that humor in the ERT class led to teacher appreciation. The following five most common themes emerged as episodes of enjoyment in ERT: "Social enjoyment: group feeling," "Teacher appreciation," "Use of technology," "Humor" as source of social and/or private enjoyment, and "Comfort/Convenience of learning from

home". The top five episodes of anxiety in the EFL class were: "Speaking in front of others/being put on the spot," "Not being prepared well enough" due to overwhelming workload, the "Use of technology," "Uncertainty/insecurity" with regard to what is expected from them in ERT classes and the "Embarrassment/fear of making mistakes". Table 5 lists the main themes in descending overall order of frequency and relative proportion. Additionally, the frequencies and proportions are listed according to respondents' LX grit level which were put into three categories here. As the number of participants differed substantially in each group (LX grit > 4:  $n = 230$ ; LX grit  $\leq 4$  and > 3:  $n = 207$ ; LX  $\leq 3$ :  $n = 44$ ), listing the proportions was crucial. In the following, the themes are illustrated with selected quotes.

**Table 5.** *The Top Five Enjoyable and Anxiety-provoking Episodes in ERT EFL Classes*

Enjoyable aspects	Frequency	Percentage	Anxiety-provoking aspects	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Social enjoyment: group feeling</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>28.1%</b>	<b>Speaking in front of others/being put on the spot</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>26.3%</b>
LX grit > 4	35	26.5%	LX grit > 4	23	21.5%
LX grit > 3, $\leq 4$	22	27.5%	LX grit > 3, $\leq 4$	19	28.4%
LX grit $\leq 3$	9	39.1%	LX grit $\leq 3$	8	50%
<b>Teacher appreciation</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>22.1%</b>	<b>Not being prepared well enough/workload</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>24.2%</b>
LX grit > 4	25	18.9%	LX grit > 4	19	17.8%
LX grit > 3, $\leq 4$	19	23.8%	LX grit > 3, $\leq 4$	22	32.8%
LX grit $\leq 3$	8	34.8%	LX grit $\leq 3$	5	31.3%
<b>Use of technology</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>20.4%</b>	<b>Use of technology</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>23.2%</b>
LX grit > 4	30	22.7%	LX grit > 4	30	28%
LX grit > 3, $\leq 4$	15	18.8%	LX grit > 3, $\leq 4$	13	19.4%
LX grit $\leq 3$	3	13%	LX grit $\leq 3$	1	6.3%

<b>Social + private enjoyment: Humor</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>Uncertainty/ insecurity (expectations)</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>18.9%</b>
LX grit > 4	29	22%	LX grit > 4	26	24.3%
LX grit > 3, ≤ 4	15	18.8%	LX grit > 3, ≤ 4	9	13.4%
LX grit > 2,	3	13%	LX grit ≤ 3	1	6.3%
<b>Comfort/convenience of learning from home</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>9.4%</b>	<b>Embarrassment/Fear of making mistakes</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7.4%</b>
LX grit > 4	13	9.9%	LX grit > 4	9	8.4%
LX grit > 3, ≤ 4	9	11.3%	LX grit > 3, ≤ 4	4	6%
LX grit ≤ 3	-	0%	LX grit ≤ 3	1	6.3%

*Note.* Words in bold indicate main overall themes; Frequency refers to the frequency of occurrence; Percentage refers to the frequency of occurrence in relation to the overall number of instances per group. LX grit = foreign language grit.

## FLE

The most frequently mentioned theme (see Table 5) that emerged is the importance of group dynamics, and a sense of social connection to peers, which seemed pressing in online classes given the general isolation and privation of social connection during lockdown. Evident in describing FLE is how a sense of unity has mitigated negative feelings during an otherwise stressful time. Participant no. 264 (LX grit = 5.00) mentioned that despite online classes, they were able to maintain a “group feeling,” a sentiment echoed by participant no. 107 (LX grit = 3.00), who spoke of the comfort of working within a small group, while they would “never say something in front of the whole class.” Another participant, no. 366 (LX grit = 4.78) said their most enjoyable experiences were the lively group discussions that “flowed without ever really stopping. Everyone participated and there were no awkward pauses.”

Aligning with previous research on teacher influence promoting enjoyment, respondents, grittier and not so gritty alike, often mentioned their teacher’s sense of humor, easygoing disposition and forgiving nature as factors in increasing enjoyment, and in promoting a sense of solidarity.

As participant no. 58 (LX grit = 4.78) pointed out, “the atmosphere was relaxed, I didn’t feel like I was being judged. The professor never forces anyone to speak, she kindly asks for volunteers.” A sense of empathy on the part of teachers was also mentioned in relation to FLE, as participant no. 89 (LX grit = 4.11) described being pleased with “having teachers admit that they are having a hard time too and encouraging us to speak up if there is something they can help with.”

The use of technology was also mentioned repeatedly (see Table 5) as an influential factor in student enjoyment because it offered a sense of refuge to shy, introverted students, as well as a connection facilitator among the members of the class. Technology was mentioned as a catalyst for social connection that may not have otherwise been possible. Participant no. 262 (LX grit = 4.89) pointed out that “seeing all the faces of the group (gallery viewing), it makes you feel connected to the group/colleagues/teacher and makes you realize that we are all in the same boat.” The proportions in Table 5 indicate that grittier students seem to enjoy the use of technology slightly more than those with lower levels of LX grit.

Furthermore, participant no. 123 (LX grit = 4.33) described the joy of a lighthearted interaction with peers in a breakout room:

*I was put in a breakout room and a girl and a nice looking guy were there. After explaining the lecture relevant stuff we went on and talked about our personal lives, gossiped about others etc. It gave me a sense of normality [...] laughing with these almost strangers made me happy.*

Generally, one prevailing theme was humor (see Table 5): learners across all LX grit levels seemed to enjoy a good laugh in the ERT class, possibly pointing to everyone needing some comic relief to deal with the challenging circumstances, as participant no. 334 (LX grit = 4.67) explains: “One must value humor in these trying times, so any joke or an anecdote is frankly quite welcome.”

Respondents also often mentioned being able to take classes in the comfort of their own homes as an enjoyment factor as well as being able to avoid long commutes and other practical conveniences of studying from home, such as participant no. 127 (LX grit = 4.56), who enjoys that “you can still wear your pajamas in the morning class.” It seems, grittier students enjoy this more than others (see Table 5).

## FLCA

Participants were asked to describe a particular incident from their online LX classes that caused them anxiety. As expected, the typical culprits were named: being put on the spot, called on unexpectedly, and fear of embarrassment and ridicule, which squares with past FLCA research (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, 2016; Horwitz et al., 1986; see Table 5). Participant no. 81 (LX grit = 3.22) expands on this sentiment, also mentioning the specific nature of online classes:

*I feel very anxious if I feel like I'm being put on the spot in an online class, especially if there is the need to present something... I also get anxious in a normal class setting if I have to speak up or say something, but it seems even more so in the online classes.*

As illustrated in Table 5, grittier students seem to be less bothered by having to speak in front of the group. Based on the responses, remote learning seems to have also spawned a new breed of anxiety, with typical characteristics of FLCA such as loss of face usurped by the anxiety associated with new technology and its attendant uncertainty. Respondents reported worrying about wi-fi connections, microphone and camera malfunctions, and being flummoxed by unfamiliar technological tools.

On the high end of the grit spectrum, participant no. 369 (LX grit = 5.00) felt anxiety “every time the connection is low or we can't hear the videos or materials that our teachers are showing us,” as did participant no. 366 (LX grit = 4.78) who mentioned that “I frequently have issues turning on the microphone or camera. We had a group presentation and I had to hope that the microphone would work without the video...it's a pity I couldn't show the gestures that had been part of the presentation.”

Technology as a cause of anxiety was also mentioned on the lower end of the grit spectrum, such as participant no. 11 (LX grit = 3.00) who said that “every time my teacher asks me to turn my camera on I feel strong anxiety.” As Table 5 indicates, technology-related issues were overall more frequently mentioned by grittier learners though.

In contrast to the responses to the question of FLE which often mentioned technology as a facilitator of connectedness, when asked about FLCA some respondents mentioned that technology had an isolating effect, which increased anxiety. Respondents such as participant no. 140 (LX grit = 4.22) felt that in their online class “there is no interaction between the teacher and the students,” which caused anxiety. Due to little interaction with teachers, grittier students, especially, frequently mentioned insecurities and uncertainty as to what is expected from them in order to pass a course, as participant no. 128 (LX grit = 3.56) who said their class “is a lot to study and very detailed... you can't ask the professor if you don't understand something”.

Less gritty students, however, were more worried about not being prepared well enough and were struggling more with the workload than learners on the high end of the grit spectrum (see Table 5).

## DISCUSSION

Grit is developed long term and grittier people are said to keep striving towards their goal, in this case LX learning, despite setbacks and possible obstacles (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). ERT poses unexpected challenges and this study showed that students with a high passion and perseverance for learning the LX seem to be able to enjoy online classes during the pandemic more, pointing to them being able to cope with EFL classes in crisis mode better. This might be partly based on LX grit being related to resilience (Duckworth, cited in Perkins-Gough, 2013) too, both of which might help and make gritty students not give up easily when trying to reach their goals despite facing such a difficult, unprecedented, sudden and emotionally challenging situation.

The predictive power of grit was shown to be partially mediated by TEI, meaning learners' level of TEI was partly favored by their tenacity to learn and it too determined higher levels of FLE. While this is in line with the previously established positive links between TEI and FLE in EFL classes taught remotely during the pandemic (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021), the quantitative findings from the present study expand our knowledge in demonstrating that LX grit affects FLE too. In short, grittier students, who were also more emotionally intelligent, reported enjoying ERT classes more. This finding demonstrates to a certain extent the previously mentioned link between grit and self-control, which is included in TEI, too but the present study also supports Duckworth and Gross' (2014) claim of them being distinct.

Regression analyses furthermore indicated that LX grit is a reliable predictor of learners' FLCA in EFL ERT classes. In this case, TEI functions as a full mediator in the model. Thus, less emotionally intelligent learners reported higher levels of FLCA and less gritty students reported lower levels of TEI, which then inversely affected learners' FLCA. The negative link between TEI and FLCA corroborates findings from previous research (Dewaele, 2013a). Additionally, the findings mirror previously established links between LX-specific grit and learners' positive emotions linked to the LX as well as their language anxiety in regular LX classes (Teimouri et al., 2020). In short, the statistical analyses demonstrate the crucial role of learners' consistency of interest and perseverance of effort

(Duckworth et al., 2007) as well as their TEI (Petrides, 2009) in this unique setting.

This study has demonstrated a weak to moderate negative correlation between FLE and FLCA in EFL classes in crisis mode approximately eight months into the pandemic. This link has been shown in previous studies for regular EFL classes too (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). However, based on data collected from a fairly comparable sample after one month in distance mode because of COVID-19, Resnik and Dewaele (2021) found that the negative relationship between FLE and FLCA breaks in crisis mode. This raises the question if classroom emotions and their links "normalize" again, meaning that they approximate the well-established patterns from regular LX classes, at least to a certain extent, after having gotten used to being taught remotely.

The present study furthermore aimed to explore the role of LX grit in particularly enjoyable and anxiety-provoking episodes in online classes by using qualitative data collected from open-ended questions. The analysis reveals a curious finding: although levels of FLE and FLCA are affected by LX grit, the emotional triggers of enjoyment and anxiety in online classes are similar. Thus, while the extent to which learners experience FLE and FLCA in ERT seems to be influenced by their personality, it does not seem to explain what makes them anxious or enjoy ERT classes.

The qualitative findings seem to point towards a new set of technology-specific emotional precipitates, both positive and negative. Respondents reported experiencing FLE from seeing peers and feeling a sense of connection enabled by technology that may not have been possible otherwise. This highlights the crucial role of social enjoyment (Botes et al., 2020a) in ERT mode. In some cases, respondents who described themselves as shy or introverted found the online format to be a safer way to speak up in class, or to even avoid speaking up altogether.

Just as with FLE, increased reliance on technology was also cited as a cause of FLCA; respondents described anxiety associated with slow internet connections and technological malfunctions. As with past research on FLCA (cf. Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, 2016; Horwitz et al., 1986), the fear of being put on the spot and looking foolish in front of the class was mentioned often, but the added fear of not being able to use the technology correctly added a new facet of anxiety across LX grit scores. Interestingly,

while remote learning was described as a facilitator of social connection for some respondents, other respondents described the opposite. Learning online and being forced to interact with peers and teachers on a screen was described as being isolating, and increasing self-consciousness.

Overall, the qualitative data hint at a new type of emotional experience taking place in online LX classes. Language learners seem to have an ambivalent relationship with technology when its use becomes indispensable, thus the new dependence on technology is something of an equalizer qualitatively, causing similar episodes of FLE and FLCA across LX grit levels.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of LX grit as a predictor of learners' FLE and FLCA in EFL classes taught remotely during a pandemic. Additionally, the function TEI plays in mediating the links between LX grit, learners' enjoyment and anxiety experienced in ERT was investigated. Regression analyses confirmed that LX grit predicts students' FLE in such learning environments and TEI was furthermore shown to partially mediate this link. As previous research has shown a direct link between the experience of positive emotions and learners' achievements in LX classes (Li, 2020; Saito et al., 2018), investigating such links further could help us understand if grittier students are higher achievers in crisis mode too (see e.g., Kramer et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2019 for regular classes).

LX grit also reliably predicted FLCA (see Teimouri et al., 2020), where TEI functioned as a full mediator though. Consequently, less emotionally intelligent students reported being more anxious in ERT LX classes. Lower LX grit scores were linked to lower TEI, thereby determining higher levels of FLCA. Overall, grittier students seem to be able to cope with learning in crisis mode better, as is reflected in

them being less anxious in EFL classes and enjoying them more. In these processes, learners' TEI is crucial too though.

Thematic analysis of the responses to two open-ended questions revealed similar sources of enjoyment and anxiety in ERT, independent of learners' LX grit level, with the former being mostly linked to social enjoyment and teacher appreciation. With regard to their FLCA, entirely new, ERT-specific triggers were frequently mentioned, namely technology-related ones.

The present study is not without some limitations. Due to an unavoidable self-selection bias, grit scores were skewed positively. Furthermore, interviews would have captured the complexity and dynamic development of learners' FLE and FLCA in crisis mode in greater detail. Longitudinal investigations would be much needed too to investigate if ERT develops into the new normal over time, also on the level of classroom emotions. Additionally, a componential analysis of LX grit and learner emotions would be much needed to see to what extent perseverance of effort and consistency of interest play a role. Furthermore, it would be interesting to study the role of grit in ERT LX learning trajectories differently too in the form of researching the impact of variables related to LX learning and use on LX grit and future research could also focus on how and to what extent learner personality interacts with teacher and teaching characteristics as the latter shape learners' emotions, too.

While these links need to be explored further, the results from this study also have some pedagogical implications: Teachers need to be aware of the great relevance of learners' wellbeing in crisis mode and should include it as a teaching objective (Mercer et al., 2019) in ERT, too. This wellbeing is not only linked to learners' LX grit but also their experience of positive and negative emotions in LX classes, which might well affect learners' performance in the ongoing real-world experiment of ERT.

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## Authors' contributions

PR, SM, and AP participated in the design of the study and PR and SM completed the data collection. PR, SM, and AP worked on data analysis and drafted the manuscript and PR and SM participated in the interpretation/discussion of the results and revised the article. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

## Ethics Approval & Consent to Participate

This study was approved by the University Research Ethics Committee from the first author's research institution. All participants provided informed consent prior to participating in the study.

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## APPENDIX

### LX Grit Scale

1. I am a diligent English learner.
2. My interests in learning English change from year to year.
3. When it comes to English, I am a hard-working learner.
4. I think I have lost my interest in learning English.
5. Now that I have decided to learn English, nothing can prevent me from reaching this goal.
6. I will not allow anything to stop me from my progress in learning English.
7. I am not as interested in learning English as I used to be.
8. I was obsessed with learning English in the past but have lost interest recently.
9. I put much time and effort into improving my English language weaknesses.

### ERT Enjoyment Scale

1. In my online English class, I feel proud of my accomplishments.
2. I enjoy it.
3. It's fun.
4. The teacher is encouraging.
5. The teacher is friendly.
6. The teacher is supportive.
7. There is a good atmosphere.
8. We form a tight group.
9. We laugh a lot.

### ERT Anxiety Scale

1. Even if I am well prepared for my online English class, I feel anxious about it.
2. I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.
3. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in my online English class.
4. I don't worry about making mistakes in my online English class.
5. I feel confident when I speak in my online English class.
6. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my online English class.
7. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in my online English class.
8. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my online English class.

### TEI Scale

1. Expressing my emotions with words is not a problem for me.
2. I often find it difficult to see things from another person's viewpoint.
3. On the whole, I'm a highly motivated person.
4. I usually find it difficult to regulate my emotions.
5. I generally don't find life enjoyable.
6. I can deal effectively with people.
7. I tend to change my mind frequently.
8. Generally, I find it difficult to know exactly what emotion I'm feeling.
9. On the whole, I'm comfortable with the way I look.
10. I normally find it difficult to stand up for my rights.
11. I'm usually able to influence the way other people feel.
12. On the whole, I have a gloomy perspective on most things.
13. Those close to me often complain that I don't treat them right.
14. I often find it difficult to adjust my life according to the circumstances.
15. On the whole, I'm able to deal with stress.
16. I often find it difficult to show my affection to the people close to me.
17. I'm normally able to "get into someone's shoes" and experience their emotions.
18. I normally find it difficult to keep myself motivated.
19. I'm usually able to find ways to control my emotions when I want to.
20. On the whole, I'm pleased with my life.
21. I would describe myself as a good negotiator.
22. I tend to get involved in things I later wish I could get out of.
23. I'm generally aware of my emotions as I experience them.
24. Given my circumstances, I feel good about myself.
25. I tend to "back down" even if I know I'm right.
26. I don't seem to have any powers at all over other people's feelings.
27. I generally believe that things will work out fine in my life.
28. I find it difficult to bond well even with those close to me.
29. Generally, I'm able to adapt to new environments.
30. Others admire me for being relaxed.