

An exploratory study of Norwegian foreign language teachers' professional wellbeing during a continuous professional development course: evidence of foreign language teaching anxiety?

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Abstract

With Norway facing a need for qualified foreign language teachers, a continuous professional development (CPD) course was developed by six universities in Norway, Germany, Spain, and France to enhance the French, German or Spanish skills and subject didactic knowledge of Norwegian in-service teachers. In this paper, the aim is to present data on the professional wellbeing of foreign language teachers participating in the CPD-course, with a focus on foreign language teaching anxiety. Data was collected from in total 10 teachers attending the course in French, German or Spanish either at the end or the beginning of their academic year. Foreign language teaching anxiety was measured using the Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety Scale (FLTAS) (Ipek, 2006). The results indicate generally low levels of teaching anxiety for Norwegian foreign language teachers. However, less experienced teachers reported higher anxiety scores, a correlation that should be interpreted cautiously given the limited sample size. These findings are discussed in relation to future research on foreign language teaching anxiety in the Norwegian context.

Keywords: foreign language teaching, foreign language teaching anxiety, continuous professional development

1. Introduction

This study aims to present data collected from in-service teachers participating in a continuous professional development program at a Norwegian university, where Norwegian foreign language (FL) teachers can enrol in French, German or Spanish courses. A hybrid design allows both online and face-to-face classes with short-term mobilities in Caen, Freiburg or Valencia as well as in Oslo. This continuous professional development program gives us interesting research opportunities in FL teachers' professional development, such as the influence of short-term mobilities on the professional development of FL teachers (Heggernes et al., 2025; Gretsche & Kniffka, 2025). The current study investigates how these in-service teachers perceive their FL skills (French, German or Spanish) during the course, and whether they report experiencing foreign language teaching anxiety (FLTA). According to Horwitz (1996), a pioneer in FL anxiety research, FL teachers are prone to teaching anxiety partly due to concerns about their performance in the target language, particularly since many are non-native speakers. For non-native pre-service teachers, the fear of making mistakes can lead to target language avoidance in the classroom (Tum, 2015). Recent studies have shown that Norwegian French and Spanish teachers often rely too heavily on their first language in lower secondary school classrooms, which negatively affects the use of the target language (Vold & Brkan, 2020; Askland, 2018).

Language learning anxiety has received massive interest in second language acquisition research (see the meta-analysis by Teimouri et al., 2018), whereas research on teaching anxiety (Ipek, 2016; Aydin & Ustuk, 2020a), the psychology of teachers (Mercer, 2018) or their motivation (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014) is scarcer despite the important role teachers play in the language learning process of FL learners (Dewaele et al. 2023). To the best of our knowledge, no study has yet examined the professional wellbeing of Norwegian FL teachers with a particular focus on FLTA. Over the past few decades, Norway has faced challenges in FL teaching, with declining numbers of both pupils choosing to study German, Spanish, and particularly French at lower and upper secondary schools, and of students in teacher training programs specializing in these FL. In this particular context where FL teachers are becoming scarce, examining their professional wellbeing becomes even more essential (Goetze, 2023).

The current article is organised as follows: First, we provide an overview of the Norwegian context in order to better present the current state of FL learning and teaching, as well as the underlying challenges. We then discuss FL anxiety in relation to both learners and teachers, as our cohort consists almost exclusively of non-native speakers of French, German or Spanish. Next, the exploratory study will be introduced, including a presentation of the Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety Scale (Ipek, 2006) allowing us to measure levels of FLTA among in-service FL teachers attending CPD-courses in FL French, German or Spanish. The teachers participating in the study were already employed in lower secondary schools, where the majority taught the target language while also attending CPD-courses at a Norwegian university. Our research questions are as follows: Do Norwegian foreign language teachers participating in a continuous professional development course experience foreign language teaching anxiety? Is there a correlation between teaching experience and foreign language teaching anxiety? As the cohorts are small, the study is exploratory in nature.

2. Background

2.1 Foreign language learning in Norway

In Norway, the first “foreign” language pupils learn is English, which is mandatory until Y11 in general study programs. Given its ubiquity in Norwegian society combined with high proficiency levels, English could arguably be considered a second language in Norway (Vold & Brkan, 2020). At the age of 13 (Y8), pupils can choose a foreign language, with most schools offering French, German, and Spanish. FL courses are generally optional, except for those wishing to enrol in academic higher education. Pupils can begin learning a FL in lower secondary school or opt for more intensive instruction in upper secondary school. In 2023/2024, 73% of Norwegian pupils chose to study a FL at Y8. However, only 60% of the pupils actually completed the FL courses (the Foreign Language Centre, 2024).

Over the last decades, Norway has faced challenges in FL teaching and learning, with fewer pupils choosing FL such as French or German in lower secondary schools (the Foreign Language Centre, 2024). This may be linked to the high proficiency in English among Norwegian pupils, leading to the perception that other FLs may not be useful enough to justify the effort required to study them. As of 2024, Spanish remains the privileged choice of Norwegian pupils in Y8 grade at 39%, followed by German at 22%. French, however, is chosen by only 11% of pupils nationwide. Significant regional differences exist, with French being more commonly selected in cities and German in less populated areas (Statistics Norway, 2023a). A new regulation due to be introduced in 2027 can lead to even more worrying statistics. Up until now, pupils who study FL at the highest

level (*Nivå III* or level III) in upper secondary school have benefitted from additional points (*tilleggspoeng*) when applying to higher education institutions, but this is set to change (Meld. St. 20, 2023–2024). This could have dire consequences for FL classrooms all over Norway, which are already dwindling in size.

Fewer pupils studying FLs can potentially mean that the number of students studying to become language teachers will diminish even further and lead to a scarcity of future language teachers. A recent report from the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills indicates that the number of students choosing to study languages like German, Spanish, and French during teacher training has decreased, which could result in a long-term shortage of qualified language teachers (Haugen et al., 2024). Norway thus appears to face a shortage of FL teachers, particularly those with formal qualifications. Indeed, around 20% of Norwegian FL teachers have no formal teacher training, though they do have the required 30 credit points in their FL (Statistics Norway, 2023b)¹. As a result, schools may be forced to rely on individuals with little or no teacher training to ensure the continuity of FL classes.

Given the ongoing FL challenges in Norway, where fewer students are choosing to study languages like French or German, it is important to consider how these languages are used in classrooms. There appear to be differences in the rates of target language use across Norwegian classrooms. Brevik and Rindal (2020) found that English was used extensively in seven lower secondary classrooms (Y9-Y10), likely due to the high proficiency in English among Norwegian pupils (Vold & Brkan, 2020). However, in FL classrooms, Norwegian remained the dominant language in French classes, even in Y10 (Vold & Brkan, 2020). Vold and Brkan present this as a paradox, given the communicative dimension of FL teaching in lower secondary schools. Askland (2018) had similar findings in Spanish as a FL in lower and upper secondary school classrooms.

2.2 Design of a continuous professional development course

In response to these challenges, the STELT-project (Strengthening teacher education in lesser taught languages) emerged. It is an international cooperation between several institutions in Norway and universities in Germany (Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg), Spain (Universitat de València) and France (Université de Caen Normandie) and piloted by OsloMet (Oslo Metropolitan University). Its goal was to increase the number of qualified FL teachers in languages other than English, more specifically French, German and Spanish, thereby addressing the recruitment challenges of qualified FL teachers and, potentially, addressing the limitations in classroom target language use. A continuous professional development course was developed at a Norwegian university for teachers of these FLs who often lack formal qualifications in the FL but currently teach or are preparing to teach the FL in lower secondary schools. As such, they attend the course part-time while continuing to work at lower secondary schools. Two different CEFR levels were required upon admission to the course; an A2 level for German and French, and a B1 level for Spanish. The course offers 30 ECTS credit points throughout the duration of an academic year, and the teachers attend online classes with educators (language teachers, lecturers, or full professors) and participate in short-term mobilities to Caen (France), Valencia (Spain), or Freiburg (Germany), depending on the language their target language. There are also on-site sessions at a Norwegian university where educators come in from Caen, Valencia or Freiburg to provide the teachers with face-to-face classes. This hybrid model allows in-service teachers to enhance not only their linguistic skills but also their intercultural competence. For more details, see Heggernes et al. (2025).

3. The professional wellbeing of foreign language teachers

The teachers participating in the CPD-course form an interesting research cohort for several reasons. First, their involvement in a CPD-course is likely driven by the need to enhance their formal qualifications in the foreign language. This raises the question: is it possible that these teachers feel their linguistic skills are inadequate? If this is the case, this might have an impact on their professional wellbeing. A foreign language teaching anxiety scale was designed by Ipek (2006) to detect FL teachers' worry and anxiety regarding their FL teaching and their FL skills. Using this tool, we may be able to address the question of the professional wellbeing of FL teachers attending a CPD-course since high FL anxiety levels have a detrimental effect on FL teachers' wellbeing (Liu & Wu, 2021). Secondly, the FL teachers participating are already employed at Norwegian lower secondary schools and presumably have varying levels of FL teaching experience. Could this variation in teaching experience influence their levels of foreign language teaching anxiety? Before addressing these questions, we shall explore the concept of foreign language anxiety, from learner anxiety to FLTA, the focus of our attention, and examine how such anxiety can be measured.

3.1 Foreign language teaching anxiety

Few individual differences in foreign language learning have been as extensively studied as language learning anxiety (Teimouri et al., 2018), particularly following the seminal studies by Elaine Horwitz and colleagues in the 1980s (for a timeline of second language acquisition studies on language learning anxiety, see Horwitz, 2010). According to Horwitz et al. (1986), the language learning context—especially the classroom—serves as a breeding ground for feelings such as nervousness, tension, or anxiety, as well as specific fears or worries, such as that of speaking in front of others or making mistakes in the target language. Furthermore, the language learning context has been identified as anxiety-inducing even for individuals who are not generally anxious, a key distinction. This type of anxiety, stemming from the classroom context, is considered situation-specific and can be defined as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). Being an anxious language learner is negatively associated with FL achievement, as evidenced by a mean negative correlation ($r = -.36$) between FL anxiety and language achievement found in a meta-analysis by Teimouri et al. (2018). Speaking appears to be the most impacted skill; anxious language learners, even at a high proficiency level, speak at a slower pace and have more filled pauses during a monologue in the FL than less anxious learners (Szyszka et al., 2024).

Despite the massive attention language learning anxiety has received the last decades, little is known about whether, and to what extent, FL teachers are subject to it. Studies aiming at a better understanding of the psychology of FL teachers are few and far between as focus remains on learners and their needs. Teachers are “expected to put their learners first, ‘sacrificing’ themselves for the benefit of their learners”, says Mercer (2018, p. 506). There is a vital need for more research on teacher emotions, especially as teachers play an important role in the language learning process of FL learners. Dewaele et al. (2023) showed that FL teachers have a direct influence on the wellbeing and motivation of language learners. When FL teachers can create the positive atmosphere that the learners need to thrive in the classroom (the so-called language learning flow), learners do identify the teachers as a positive influence, facilitating learning, wellbeing, and flow (Dewaele et al., 2023).

It is reasonable to think that FL teachers themselves must be sufficiently at ease to create this positive atmosphere, which in turn illustrates the need to focus on language teacher psychology. However, the scarcity of empirical research on teacher psychology, motivation and emotions has been stressed by amongst others Mercer (2018), Kubanyiova (2020), Goetze (2023) as well as Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014). Research on language teacher motivation, crucial to create this positive environment in the classroom, is lacking. Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014, p. 123) note that we as language teachers “need to look after ourselves and nurture our own motivational basis” to transform “classrooms into engaging environments for language learning”.

If we accept that teacher well-being and motivation are important factors in the success of teaching and learning, a critical aspect that can directly influence the classroom environment is teacher anxiety. This is particularly relevant in the case of foreign language teaching anxiety (FLTA). As with learner anxiety, Elaine Horwitz’s work has been pivotal in advancing research on the concept. In her seminal article, Horwitz (1996) presents this specific anxiety as being intrinsically linked to target language use by non-native speakers of a FL in the United States. Many FL teachers are non-native speakers² and thus remain learners: “Even though language teachers are supposed to be high-level speakers of their target language, language learning is never complete” (Horwitz, 1996, p. 365). Horwitz (1996) draws a clear parallel between anxious learners and teachers with regards to target language use, especially spoken language. Speaking in front of learners, especially spontaneous speech, is particularly anxiety-inducing for non-native FL teachers. This could cause overuse of the first language in the classroom and of certain activities: “anxious foreign language teachers may tend toward linguistic interactions that are predictable and more easily controlled” (Horwitz, 1996, p. 366). More importantly, highly anxious teachers report avoiding speaking the FL, even though they know this would not benefit their pupils (Horwitz, 1996). Other anxiety-inducing factors cited by Horwitz were student misbehaviour as well as administrative pressure, but language proficiency remains at the forefront of FLTA, likely due to the performative aspect of the teaching profession.

FLTA is generally measured through scales designed to detect moderate to high anxiety levels among FL teachers. In 2008, Horwitz introduced a scale measuring language teaching anxiety (Teacher Foreign Language Anxiety Scale, or TFLAS, an 18-item scale based on a strong parallel between learner and teacher anxiety). It is widely used to this day, but recent studies suggest that the scale does not detect other factors likely to impact anxiety levels such as classroom management (see Goetze, 2023). We can also add that 5 out of the 18 items address potentially anxiety inducing encounters with native speakers, which might be less pertinent in a Norwegian context where encounters with native speakers of the FL may be sporadic. Other scales have been developed such as the 26-item FLTA scale by Aydin and Ustuk (2020) aimed at pre-service teachers, or the 30-item FLTA scale by Kim and Kim (2004) for in-service teachers, but the validity of the latter has been questioned (Aydin & Ustuk, 2020).

In 2006, Ipek designed a 26-item foreign language teaching anxiety scale (FLTAS) based on the analysis of extensive qualitative data from in-service FL teachers in Turkey gathered as part of her PhD. The 26 items were connected to one of the following categories presented in Ipek (2016): worry about target language performance (mainly worry about speaking the FL in front of students in the classroom); fear of making mistakes (making spelling or grammar mistakes in front of the students); being compared to fellow teachers (when their FL skills or teaching methods are compared to those of their FL colleagues); teaching a particular language skill (feeling anxiety when teaching listening, speaking, reading and writing skills as well as grammar), and finally using the first language in the classroom (potentially anxiety inducing as FL teachers should preferably rely on their FL). Its reliability coefficient was found to be at .93. A later study by Kesen and Aydin (2014) confirmed its high reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient computed as 0.98. In their study, the FLTAS (Ipek, 2006) was administered to in-service teachers and the results showed that

increase in years of experience was positively correlated to a decrease in language teaching anxiety, especially after five years of foreign language teaching experience (Kesen & Aydin, 2014).

Although research on FLTA remains limited (Ipek, 2016; Aydin & Ustuk, 2020a), existing studies suggest that various factors can trigger FLTA. In an often-cited study, Kim and Kim (2004) examined FLTA amongst English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers working in primary schools as well as lower and upper secondary schools in South Korea. The results showed that many teachers evaluated their EFL proficiency levels as insufficient, and worried about teaching EFL to high proficiency learners, especially those having lived in an English-speaking country. Teaching EFL in English was also anxiety-inducing, and many teachers feared making mistakes. Moreover, the teachers expressed more concerns about developing their students' productive skills than their receptive skills (Kim & Kim, 2004). Gannoun et al. (2023) observed that fear of making mistakes was a major source of anxiety amongst EFL teachers, whereas Aydin and Ustuk (2020b) revealed worry linked to their pupils not being able to learn the FL well enough, nor being sufficiently interested in class. Öztürk (2016) found that teachers experienced moderate levels of FLTA, particularly when teaching skills in which they felt insufficiently competent.

Worry about target language performance, especially speaking, was also identified as a major FLTA trigger by Liu and Wu (2021). They focused on university EFL teachers in China and observed that many considered their spoken English as insufficient and feared negative outcomes. When asked to describe the effects caused by anxiety, participating EFL teachers reported poor sleep, lack of motivation and even depression (Liu & Wu, 2021). Dewaele and Leung (2022) found that EFL teachers reported higher levels of wellbeing and motivation when their proficiency was at C1-C2 rather than B1-B2, but did, however, stress the complex dynamic between FL proficiency levels and teaching and observed that higher proficiency levels do not necessarily protect teachers from FLTA. Nevertheless, Dewaele and Leung (2022) emphasize the importance of providing in-service training for FL teachers to enhance their proficiency, with the aim of promoting wellbeing, which would ultimately benefit their pupils.

Jean-Marc Dewaele and colleagues emphasize the importance of focusing not only on the challenges but also on the positive aspects of the FL teaching profession. Inspired by the influence of positive psychology on FL learning, Ergün and Dewaele (2021) aimed to assess the enjoyment FL teachers experience in their profession by administering the Foreign Language Teaching Enjoyment scale to Italian teachers. They found high levels of enjoyment and observed that teachers who enjoyed their work were more resilient and had higher levels of wellbeing. Note, however, that the majority were native speakers of Italian and, as Ergün and Dewaele (2021) themselves point out, the teachers responding to their call were probably also particularly motivated in their profession.

3.2 The effect of teaching experience

Teaching experience may play a critical role in determining levels of FLTA, a factor that has been explored in several studies. Pre-service teachers, especially, may be particularly prone to high levels of anxiety due to their inexperience. In 2015, Tum detected high levels of language learning *and* teaching anxiety among 12 non-native pre-service EFL teachers. Through additional interview data, Tum observed that highly anxious pre-service teachers clearly indicated target language avoidance as a conscious strategy to save face, potentially preventing them from using English in the classroom when they began teaching. Merç (2011) found that pre-service FL teachers worry about several aspects of the profession, such as classroom management and the profile of the pupils, having not yet been confronted with the realities of the profession. However, teaching practicum

may cause FLTA for pre-service teachers (Li et al., 2023). 72 pre-service EFL teachers participated in the study, and those who participated in a practicum were significantly more anxious than those who did not. Confronted with pupils in a classroom, pre-service teachers seem to develop higher levels of teaching anxiety related to their FL.

Studies do generally show that teaching experience has a positive impact on FLTA levels. Onan and Aydin (2024), for instance, found a relationship between levels of FLTA and wellbeing, more specifically for inexperienced EFL teachers. The less experience they had, the more anxious they were, and this had an impact on their wellbeing. Kesen and Aydin (2014) discovered that increase in years of experience was positively correlated to a decrease in language teaching anxiety, especially after five years of FL teaching experience among 35 EFL teachers. Indeed, inexperienced or less experienced FL teachers do tend to be more anxious than more experienced ones (Öztürk, 2016; Aydin & Ustuk, 2020ab; Zeng & Cheung, 2025). However, other studies suggest that teaching experience does not necessarily reduce anxiety (Kim & Kim, 2004; Gannoun et al., 2023), which illustrates the complex dynamic between FLTA and teaching experience.

To the best of our knowledge, there appears to be no studies on FLTA amongst FL teachers in Norway. However, in a recent study by Haukås *et al.* (2023), language anxiety was mentioned. The study aimed at measuring autonomy, competence, and relatedness in Norwegian students during teacher training. The students were qualified teachers but lacked the formal qualifications in FL German. Language anxiety was identified as one of the factors indicating a perceived lack of competence in their FL, German, for Norwegian teachers during teacher training. During the academic year, the survey data suggests that a decrease in language anxiety is linked with an increase in German language use during the online classes and with a perceived increase in German skills. The study offers valuable insight into the professional wellbeing of FL teachers in Norway during teacher training, although it is worth noting that the authors did not include an instrument measuring FLTA, likely because the study did not specifically address anxiety.

Building on these findings, the present study aims to explore the professional wellbeing of Norwegian FL teachers attending a CPD-course by administering a foreign language teaching anxiety scale, addressing this gap in the literature and exploring its potential impact on teacher wellbeing.

4. Method

To investigate the professional wellbeing of FL teachers attending a CPD-course, we developed a quantitative and qualitative research design. We designed an online survey with the foreign language teaching anxiety scale (Ipek, 2006), which was administered to two cohorts: 6 FL teachers who attended the CPD-course at the end of the academic year, and 4 FL teachers at the beginning of their academic year. We also included an open question allowing the FL teachers to comment the survey. The goal of the study was to determine whether teachers, with or without prior teaching experience in their FL, experience FLTA. When participating in the course, the FL teachers remained employed at their school and had to balance teaching and studying. Due to the small cohorts, the study is of an exploratory nature.

4.1 Research questions

The present study aims to address the following research questions:

1. Do Norwegian foreign language teachers participating in a CPD-course experience foreign language teaching anxiety?
2. Is there a correlation between teaching experience and foreign language teaching anxiety?

4.2 Participants

10 teachers took part in the survey on foreign language teaching anxiety. The first cohort consisted of 6 FL teachers participating in the CPD-course in either French, German or Spanish at the end of their academic year. All were women between the ages of 31 and 50. As to the proficiency of the teachers, an A2 level for German and French and B1 level for Spanish were required upon admission to the course, but we did not measure proficiency levels. 2 of 6 teachers had formal qualifications in the FL prior to the academic year from Norwegian universities but did not give additional information on the nature of this training. Moreover, 5 of 6 had already taught the FL presumably at the school where they were employed at the time of the study. Teaching experience of the participants varied from a few months to 24 years and concerned lower secondary school (Y8 to Y10). Only 1 out of 6 had no prior teaching experience in the FL but was employed at a lower secondary school and had teaching experience in other subjects. This participant was due to teach Y8 to Y10 upon completion in the CPD-course.

The second cohort consisted of 4 FL teachers participating at the beginning of their academic year at the Norwegian university, 2 men and 2 women aged from 26 to 55. One of the men was a native speaker of the target language, all other participants had Norwegian as a first language. All studied the same FL. Like the previous cohort, the FL teachers had teaching experience in the FL from lower secondary school (*ungdomsskole*) in Y8 to Y10. Their teaching experience ranged from one year to 20 years. Only one had formal qualifications (90 credits) in the FL prior to their participation in the CPD-course.

Due to the small number of participants, no further information will be given to ensure anonymity.

4.3 The Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety Scale

We developed an online survey that was distributed to the FL teachers participating in the CPD-course, built around the Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety Scale (FLTAS). The FLTAS, developed by Ipek (2006), contains 26 items with a 5-point Likert scale. In our study, the 26 items were translated into Norwegian and adapted to each FL (French, German or Spanish). Moreover, one version of the survey was developed targeting teachers with prior teaching experience in the FL, whereas another was adapted to those who had not yet taught the FL. 12 out of 26 items were formulated using the future tense (items 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20 and 23). Differences in the two versions can be seen in statements such as “I feel nervous when speaking French/German/Spanish in class”, formulated in the following manner for the teachers with no prior teaching experience: “I will feel nervous when speaking French/German/Spanish in class”. The Likert-scale was adapted to Norwegian with 5 choices (*Strongly agree; partially agree; neutral; partially disagree; strongly disagree*). A sixth choice was added for those who did not understand the question (*I do not understand the question*). To each of the 5 choices a numeral value for subsequent statistical analysis was attributed (*Strongly agree* = 5, *partially agree* = 4, *neither agree nor disagree* = 3, *partially disagree* = 2, *strongly disagree* = 1). An average score of 3 on the Likert scale indicates slight anxiety, more so above 4 (Liu et Wu, 2021).

The data collection was handled by questionnaires created with nettskjema.no, a survey solution developed and hosted by the University of Oslo (nettskjema@usit.uio.no). Additional questions were added to collect data on their background: the number of years the participants had taught the FL, in which classes (lower secondary or upper secondary school), and whether they had prior formal qualifications in the FL. For the participants not yet teaching the FL, a question was added to investigate whether they were to teach the language and in which classes upon completion. Questions regarding gender and age range were added to both versions of the survey. Finally, an open question allowing them to comment upon the survey they had responded to was included.

5. Results

5.1 Levels of Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety amongst FL teachers

As only 10 teachers took part in the study, the results can simply provide indications and tendencies. The results of the FLTAS are presented in Table 1. Note that the term ‘foreign language’ inserted in the table represents one of the three languages (French, German or Spanish) in the survey.

Table 1 Levels of Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety (N=10)

Items	M	ST
1. I feel uncomfortable when I use Norwegian in the class	2	1.58
2. The thought of making a grammar mistake worries me	1.9	1.20
3. I feel anxious about my students testing my knowledge of [the FL]	2.1	1.37
4. The thought of making a spelling mistake on the board disturbs me	1.8	0.63
5. I get so nervous when I am teaching [the FL] that I forget the things that I know	1.4	0.97
6. I feel nervous when teaching [the FL] to students with an average proficiency level	2.3	1.22
7. I feel tense when I am giving instructions in [the FL]	2.1	0.99
8. I feel uncomfortable when my [FL] knowledge is compared to that of other teachers	2.3	1.41
9. I think my knowledge of [the FL] is not good enough to teach in [FL]	1.5	0.70
10. I worry about not being able to teach grammar effectively	2	0.94
11. I feel uncomfortable when teaching a skill in which I feel I am not proficient enough	3.3	1.58
12. I worry about not being able to teach listening effectively	2.4	1.26
13. I worry about not being able to give clear instructions in [the FL]	2.2	1.55
14. I feel nervous when speaking [the FL] in class	1.4	0.97
15. I feel nervous when teaching [the FL] to students with a high proficiency level	2.4	1.07
16. I worry about not being able to teach speaking effectively	2.2	1.13
17. I feel uncomfortable when I think about having used Norwegian during the lesson	1.5	0.70
18. Teaching [the FL] to students with a high level of language proficiency makes me feel uneasy	2.2	1.30
19. I feel uneasy when my [FL] teaching methods are compared to that of other teachers	2	0.67
20. I feel uneasy when I am teaching speaking topics	1.4	0.70
21. I am afraid of my students criticizing my knowledge of [the FL]	2	1.15
22. I worry about not being able to teach reading effectively	1.9	1.28
23. I feel uneasy when I am teaching listening topics	1.7	1.05
24. I worry about not being able to teach writing effectively	2.3	1.34
25. I would feel uneasy about not being able to answer a grammar question	2.1	1.20
26. I feel anxious about making a mistake while teaching [the FL]	2.1	1.37

Please note that 12 of the 26 items for the teacher with no prior FL teaching experience were formulated in the future tense.

As has already been mentioned, the 5 choices on the Likert scale were attributed a numeral value where 5 represents *strongly agree* and 1 *strongly disagree*. The overall anxiety score is relatively low for the 10 teachers ($M=2.01$, $SD=1.17$) and indicates that the teachers rarely feel anxious as FL teachers or future FL teachers. If we look more closely at the five categories of the FLTAS, the results differ somewhat. Comprising of 8 items, the category *worry about target language*

performance is the most substantial (items 6, 7, 9, 13-15, 18 and 20). The teachers mostly disagreed with the statements ($M=1.93$, $SD=1.12$), indicating low anxiety levels. There are low anxiety levels when the FL teachers are confronted with pupils having an average ($M=2.3$, $SD=1.22$) and a high ($M=2.4$, $SD=1.07$; $M=2.2$, $SD=1.30$) proficiency level. The teachers do not seem insecure about whether their knowledge of the FL is good enough to teach ($M=1.5$, $SD=0.70$), nor are they nervous about speaking the FL in class ($M=1.4$, $SD=0.97$). The specific situation of being confronted with pupils who have attained average to high proficiency levels does not appear anxiety-inducing, but note that high proficiency levels might be the exception rather than the norm in Norwegian lower secondary school classrooms.

The second category was *teaching a particular language area* which comprised of items 10, 11, 12, 16, 22, 23 and 24. The results show that the teachers experience little anxiety about teaching grammar, listening, reading, speaking and writing in the FL ($M=2.09$, $SD=1.20$). They report being confident about teaching reading ($M=1.9$, $SD=1.28$) and listening ($M=1.7$, $SD=1.05$) with very low anxiety levels. Some teachers do report being worried about teaching a skill in which they are not sufficiently proficient ($M=3.3$, $SD=1.58$).

When it comes to the category *fear of making mistakes* (items 2-5, 21, 25 and 26), the teachers mostly disagree with the statements ($M=1.91$, $SD=1.12$). They do not fear spelling mistakes on the board ($M=1.8$, $SD=0.63$) nor grammar mistakes ($M=1.9$, $SD=1.20$). The teachers do not necessarily feel unease about not being able to answer a grammar question ($M=2.1$, $SD=1.20$) nor about being tested by the pupils ($M=2.1$, $SD=1.37$). As for the category *use of the first language* (items 1 and 17), the teachers do not report feeling uncomfortable when using Norwegian in class ($M=2$, $SD=1.58$) or when they think about having used it ($M=1.5$, $SD=0.70$). However, a closer look at the individual results shows that one teacher agreed strongly with item 1. Finally, the category *being compared to other teachers* (items 8 and 19) shows conflicting results. The overall score is low ($M=2.15$, $SD=1.06$), but the two items comprised in this category differ. The FL teachers do not worry about being compared to other FL teachers ($M=2.3$, $SD=1.41$), nor about comparing teaching methods ($M=2$, $SD=0.67$). Upon closer inspection, 3 of 10 teachers agreed that there is discomfort when their FL knowledge is compared to that of other teachers'.

Our two cohorts responded to the survey at two different moments of their academic year: 6 FL teachers participated at the end of the academic year whereas 4 FL teachers participated at the beginning of their academic year. The CPD-course could potentially exert an influence on their professional wellbeing as it aimed at developing both linguistic and didactic skills in their FL. To ensure whether the anxiety levels of the two cohorts could be explained by the moment when they responded to the survey, we conducted a t-test and observed that the participation in the CPD-course did not seem to have a direct influence on levels of FLTA. No significant difference between the two cohorts was found ($t(3) = 0.256$, $p = .815$). The FL teachers thus had similar anxiety levels whether they had participated in the CPD-course for several months ($M=2.04$, $SD=1.13$) or were just starting the course ($M=1.97$, $SD=1.23$).

Amongst the FL teachers, one participant was a native speaker of the target language. In order to examine whether this impacted the average FLTA levels, we removed the participant and observed that the FLTA levels remained low ($M=2.10$, $SD=1.19$).

5.2 The relationship between FL teaching experience and foreign language anxiety levels

Almost all the 10 teachers had already taught the FL they were studying at the Norwegian university when participating in the FLTA survey. Their teaching experience varied from 10 months to more than 20 years. One teacher had no teaching experience in the FL and was to start upon completion of the course. Did FL teaching experience exert an influence on the anxiety levels?

We conducted a correlation analysis using Pearson's correlation coefficient for the two cohorts of FL teachers. As they have similar anxiety levels and no significant differences were found between the two cohorts, they remain grouped together. The results show a negative correlation between their teaching experience (in months) and scores in the FLTA survey ($r = -.536$). The more teaching experience the participants had, the lower their levels of foreign language teaching anxiety were:

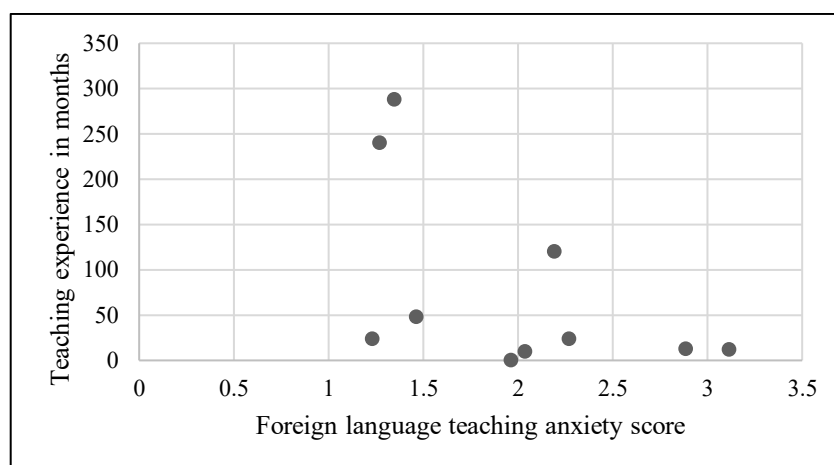


Figure 1 Correlation analysis between teaching experience and levels of foreign language teaching anxiety

Note that one of the FL teachers had no prior teaching experience in the foreign language. Paradoxically, the individual data does not indicate any higher levels of FLTA for this particular 'pre-service FL teacher' ($M=1.96$, $SD=1.15$) compared to the 9 remaining FL teachers ($M=2.02$, $SD=1.20$).

The correlation analysis having been conducted on only 10 participants, the results need to be considered with great caution.

5.3 Qualitative results

The FLTA survey ended with an open question allowing the teachers to comment upon the survey they had just taken. Three replies were collected. One reply was formulated by a teacher with over 20 years of experience teaching a FL at a lower secondary school. The comment has been translated by the author:

1) "Throughout our course I have learned that I need to talk regardless. [Talking in] the foreign language is better than in Norwegian. Other foreign languages are a challenge for the pupils, they do not master that much. I end up talking and repeating several times for them to understand. It is better in the 10th grade and I see that they understand quite a lot. (...) During my course, I have received a lot of training, expanded my vocabulary, and I personally feel much better equipped when it comes to the oral part of the classroom"³.

This comment is interesting for several reasons. First, this particular teacher had over 20 years of experience teaching the FL and their overall anxiety score was low ($M=1.46$, $SD=0.66$). However, they still appear to experience some worry as we can observe in the first sentence: *I have learned*

that I need to talk regardless. The adverb *regardless* is interesting as might indicate an implicit concession: *I have learned that I need to talk regardless [of apprehension in the foreign language].* This is merely hypothetical. Nonetheless, the final clause appears to support the hypothesis as the teacher claims feeling *better equipped when it comes to the oral part of the classroom* due to their participation in the course. As Horwitz (1996) explains it, anxious teachers do appear to have difficulties when having to speak freely in front of their pupils. This statement could also be linked to Ipek's (2006) categories regarding worry about target language performance and fear of making mistakes.

More importantly, the comment gives us some indications as to why the results indicate low levels of FLTA. Indeed, the teacher mentions the continuous professional development course at the Norwegian university as a source of reassurance. This might indicate that their participation in the course had a direct effect on their FLTA.

In the second cohort, one FL teacher stated that being a native speaker had a direct influence on the responses. The comment has been translated by the author:

2) “[*The foreign language*] is my mother tongue. That is why I could tick off “strongly disagree” on most questions”.

Horwitz (1996) did indeed focus on the FL teaching anxiety of non-native speakers as she closely links teaching anxiety to language learning anxiety. Could this comment indicate that the participant, a native speaker of the target language, assumes non-native FL teachers are more susceptible to FLTA? Again, this is only hypothetical. Another teacher with over 20 years' experience teaching had a thought-provoking comment on the source of worry in the FL classroom. The comment has been translated by the author:

3) “I am confident in my [*foreign language*] skills but am worried that [*the pupils*] are not learning enough. I feel that they are not making good enough progress and think it's a shame that the pupils don't feel like they master the language even after 3 years. I would like to learn more about how to teach foreign languages”.

As we can see here, the teacher is not riddled with self-doubt about their knowledge of the FL and expresses confidence. However, the teacher voices concern about not achieving the desired result with the pupils, which is mastering the FL. Whether it is conceivable to master a foreign language by the end of lower secondary school is a question for another study. The fact remains that the perceived lack of motivation of the pupils appear worry-inducing. Paradoxically, several items of the FLTAS (Ipek, 2006) did involve worry about not being able to teach grammar, listening, reading and writing effectively in the individual results. The teacher may have felt the need to provide further information in the comment section due to an inability to voice their concern through the relevant items in the FLTA scale.

6. General discussion

The results presented above do not reveal a clear-cut case of FLTA. Indeed, the data from the 10 FL teachers participating in a CPD-course indicate that the overall anxiety scores are low across the two FLTA surveys. Our first research question addressed the levels of FLTA in FL teachers participating in a continuous professional development course, where the teachers studied three different FL and were nearly all already teaching their FL at a lower secondary school. Low levels

of FLTA indicate that the teachers did not fear speaking the target language in front of the pupils nor of making mistakes, a finding that contrasts with previous studies (Horwitz, 1996; Kim & Kim, 2004; Gannoun, Kunt & Deris, 2023; Liu & Wu, 2023). However, the FL teachers reported some discomfort when teaching skills in which they felt less proficient, consistent with Öztürk (2016). Some of the FL teachers worried about their knowledge of the FL being compared to that of others. The qualitative data shows that one of the FL teachers, even having 20 years' experience teaching the FL, felt "better equipped when it comes to the oral part of the classroom" after participating in the CPD-course. Haukås *et al.* (2023) noted, whilst not addressing FLTA specifically, that teacher training reduced anxiety and thereby increased FL use. Moreover, qualitative data indicated that the native speaker justified their absence of FLTA by being a native speaker, and another FL teacher stated that linguistic skills were not necessarily central to FLTA, but that the slow progression of the pupils was worrying for one particular FL teacher, consistent with Aydin and Ustuk (2020b).

Our second research question addressed the influence of teaching experience on FLTA levels. A statistical analysis showed a correlation ($r = -.536$) between years of teaching experience and levels of FLTA. This indicates that teachers may have benefitted from their extensive teaching experience (up to 24 years) compared to those with none or only just a few years' experience. This is consistent with previous studies on FLTA (Kesen & Aydin 2014; Öztürk, 2016; Aydin & Ustuk, 2020ab; Onan & Aydin, 2024; Zeng & Cheung, 2025).

Most of the FL teachers in our cohorts were non-native speakers of their target language. Horwitz (1996) noted that this is common among many FL teachers, and it can be particularly anxiety-inducing. Even those with high proficiency levels continue to be language learners, as Horwitz highlights. However, we did not assess the proficiency levels of the teachers, which represents a limitation of our study. That said, the teachers were required to meet specific proficiency standards (A2 for German and French, B1 for Spanish). While these levels may seem low for FL teachers, they are sufficient for teaching beginner-level students (Richards *et al.* 2013) in lower secondary schools.

Our study being exploratory in nature, it raises more questions than it answers. First, the tools used in this study may not have been adapted to the stakes at hand. Would another instrument have detected higher levels of teaching anxiety? The FLTAS scale by Ipek (2006) may not be sufficiently precise, especially as it does not allow us to examine avoidance strategies in the classroom. Only guilt regarding L1 use is mentioned, and this did not cause particular FLTA in our cohorts. Moreover, it may not be adapted to the current context, which is FL teaching in Norwegian lower secondary schools (the scale was developed for English as a foreign language, the most widely used language in the world). Asking, however, whether another instrument would detect levels of FLTA implies that in-service teachers attending a continuous professional development course are particularly susceptible to feelings of inadequacy in their target language, which is clearly not the case in our data. As one teacher stated it, the problem is not necessarily their linguistic skills, but the progression of their pupils.

Another clear limitation is the size of the cohorts. They are small, with in total 10 teachers. Our results can only present tendencies, and these show low anxiety levels, but also a correlation between teaching experience and FLTA. As one anonymous reviewer of the article stated, the small sample size could be representative of the population, which is foreign language teachers in higher education. The cohorts did represent the majority of the students participating in the CPD-course at the given Norwegian university. This raises another question: Is it conceivable to find a sufficiently large sample size to achieve representativity given the dire situation of FL teaching and learning in Norway?

Another possible weakness is the presence of an in-service teacher who has no teaching experience in their FL. This teacher already taught at a lower secondary school, but not yet in the FL. We adapted the scale to this situation with a version formulated in the future tense. However, the scale specifically concerns linguistic skills that the teacher could evaluate, but not in the classroom. In other words, the future FL teacher could evaluate their target language skills as sufficient or inadequate, but not in confrontation with pupils. Pre-service teachers tend to have high anxiety levels (Merç, 2011; Tum, 2015) but can also develop FLTA during teaching practicum (Li, Xie & Zeng, 2023). The results, however, showed that the teacher with no teaching experience in the FL had the same low FLTA anxiety levels as the more experienced FL teachers of our cohorts. Be that as it may, Tum (2015) urges researchers to address the anxious pre-service teacher during teacher training to alleviate FLTA levels before they begin their teaching careers.

7. Future research

Further research is needed to better understand the professional wellbeing of Norwegian FL teachers. By conducting a comprehensive study, we aim to explore whether Norwegian FL teachers experience FLTA, and if so, whether this is linked to their FL proficiency, as identified by Dewaele and Leung (2022). Furthermore, this may allow us to address the overrepresentation of Norwegian in FL classrooms (Askland, 2018; Vold & Brkan, 2020), and whether this is a form of language avoidance stemming from feelings of inadequacy in the target language. Most FL teachers in Norway are likely non-native speakers and could therefore be susceptible to FLTA (Horwitz, 1996). Our study also included one native speaker with an absence of FLTA, highlighting the importance of controlling for this variable in future research. According to Goetze (2023), we need to study FLTA in native speakers to better understand how language proficiency impacts teaching beyond actual language use. In other words, could target language avoidance also stem from worry about the linguistic skills of the pupils when the FL teachers are high proficiency or native speakers?

We have seen in previous research that one of the negative consequences, or perhaps regretful coping strategies, for teachers faced with high levels of FLTA is target language avoidance (Horwitz, 1996, Tum, 2015). Our results show that speaking the target language in front of the pupils does not seem to trigger FLTA. This could, on the other hand, indicate high levels of *Foreign Language Teaching Enjoyment* (Ergün & Dewaele, 2021), which also needs to be addressed and measured in the Norwegian context. However, this is where the limit of the current scale comes into light; does fear of speaking the FL necessarily cause target language avoidance? More importantly, how does the scale inform us whether the teachers actually avoid speaking their FL in the classroom? It is impossible to know by using the scale developed by Ipek (2006) as well as other scales used in research on FLTA (the TFLAS by Horwitz, 2008; the FLTAs by Aydin & Ustuk, 2020a). Additional questions specifically addressing avoidance as a regretful coping strategy, such as the interviews conducted by Tum (2015) on pre-service teachers, would allow us to examine the link between target language avoidance and levels of FLTA.

Other factors unrelated to FL may also play a role in FLTA. Goetze (2023, p. 52) stresses that FLTA is an “interdisciplinary, multicomponential construct” and that other variables will inevitably exert an influence on the professional wellbeing of FL teachers (*i.e.* sociocultural, sociocognitive and other affective factors). These can play a significant role alongside perceived or actual language proficiency. In the Norwegian context, where FL programs face ongoing pressure, FL teachers may also feel a heightened responsibility to motivate their learners to continue learning and to attract new learners, a dynamic that warrants further investigation. Moreover, the insufficient cohorts did not allow us to examine a potential difference between the three different FL. Although our study

focuses on French, German and Spanish FL teachers and thus answers the call to go beyond English as a foreign language (Ergün & Dewaele, 2021), we did not have enough teachers to justify a statistical comparison between three separate groups. We do hope to further the investigation on the potential effects of the FL. Specifically, we seek to explore whether there are differences in FLTA levels between teachers of French, German, and Spanish in Norway. Given that Spanish is the most commonly chosen FL in Norway, could this influence the FLTA levels of Spanish teachers compared to those of French teachers, who are facing increasingly empty classrooms?

To achieve representative results, a certain number of variables need to be controlled. Years and depth of experience are essential given our correlation between teaching experience and levels of FLTA. This needs to be explored further and on larger sample sizes. We also need to address whether the formal qualifications of FL teachers as well as their proficiency levels could influence their anxiety levels. In our study, the teachers' proficiency levels were not measured. More importantly, we need to examine the actual or potential effects of language anxiety if FLTA is indeed present. Liu and Wu (2021) found that highly anxious teachers reported having poor sleep or losing teaching motivation. Through instruments such as FL anxiety scales and measures of FL proficiency, combined with diaries or semi-structured interviews, we should be better equipped at studying the professional wellbeing of teachers, which should be of utmost importance during the current foreign language learning challenges.

8. Conclusive remarks

In this exploratory study, we found that in-service teachers enrolled in a continuous professional development course in French, German, or Spanish generally reported low levels of foreign language teaching anxiety on the FLTAS (Ipek, 2006). However, certain teachers exhibited some levels of anxiety, particularly when anticipating being compared to their peers, or teaching linguistic skills where they felt less skilled. Correlational analysis revealed a relationship between teaching experience and foreign language teaching anxiety, suggesting that more experienced teachers may experience lower levels of anxiety. Nevertheless, due to the small sample size, these correlations should be interpreted with caution. Further research avenues have been proposed to address this crucial aspect of the teaching profession: the professional wellbeing of teachers.

On a more positive note, the FL teachers in our exploratory study did seem content and did not find the FL classroom particularly anxiety-inducing. This could indicate that their professional wellbeing is not negatively influenced by a perceived lack of linguistic skills, which should have been detected by the FLTAS (Ipek, 2006), but seems instead influenced by teaching experience. Interestingly, even teachers with more than 20 years of teaching experience continue to seek further development in both target language skills and subject didactics, underscoring the importance of continuous professional development courses. As Dewaele and Leung (2022) stress, it is essential that schools and educational authorities provide opportunities for continuous development of FL teachers as a long-term investment in their emotional wellbeing, which ultimately benefits their students. Tum (2015) emphasizes the value of adopting a positive perspective on foreign language teachers' achievements. He states, "This mindset can be accompanied by a concrete and realistic plan for continual target language improvement; language learning needs to be a lifelong commitment" (Tum, 2015, p. 651).

Endnotes

- 1) The proportion of foreign language teachers without credit points in the language has never been lower at 15%, indicating that the vast majority is somewhat qualified, but there were few respondents in this rapport, and these numbers may not represent the current situation. Moreover, the participants in the survey were employees having at least a 50% teaching position, meaning that part-time employees under this limit were not included.
- 2) Dewaele & Leung (2022, p. 13) stress the fact that the term non-native speaker is problematic, even “toxic”.
- 3) «I løpet av studiet har jeg lært at jeg skal prate i vei uansett. Fremmedspråket er bedre enn norsk. Det er en utfordring med annet fremmedspråk for våre elever. De kan ikke så mye. Jeg ender derfor ofte opp med å snakke og repetere flere ganger det jeg sier for å få elevene til å forstå. På 10. trinn opplever jeg at elevene etterhvert forstår ganske mye. (...) I løpet av studiet har jeg fått mye trening, utvidet ordforrådet mitt og føler selv at jeg står mye sterkere rustet på den muntlige biten i klasserommet».

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