



***Emotions Experienced by English Teachers While
Taming the Unknown (Distance Learning) During
the COVID-19 Pandemic***

***Emocje doświadczane przez nauczycieli języka angielskiego
w trakcie osvajania nieznannej edukacji na odległość
w okresie epidemii COVID-19***

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The aim of the current study was to investigate emotions accompanying teachers in the process of getting accustomed to the new situation of distance learning during the COVID-19 lockdown in secondary schools in Poland.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The research questions concerned the type of emotions teachers experienced, the triggers provoking most positive and negative emotions, as well as factors influencing teachers' emotional states. The tool used in the study was the questionnaire by means of which the teachers were to identify emotions they had towards people who took part in the lesson, the lesson itself, the equipment used and other interrelated issues in line with Yik's circular model of affect.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: Distance learning causes many different emotions. The way teachers reach students remotely, often unfamiliar and unknown to many of the educators, has been further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to fulfilling their teaching duties, the teachers had to face extra-curricular difficulties and dangers, such as infection, isolation and quarantine, and gradually get used to the new situation.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The obtained results indicate emotional changes at each stage of getting accustomed to the new situation. The tendencies observed could be described as increasing negative feelings experienced by the sample at the very beginning of distant education that lowered towards the end of the school closure periods, and/or were replaced with positive ones.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS: The author presents measures to be used to improve the school situation, among which an immediate solution lies in the courses currently offered by many institutions, and IT support offered by schools. Also, ideas on how to expand the current study, involving those allowing for a comparison between different levels of education

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and among other participants of distance learning, such as primary/university teachers as well as learners and their parents and siblings.

→ **KEYWORDS:** **EMOTIONS, DISTANCE LEARNING, TEACHERS, COVID-19, TEACHER OF ENGLISH**

STRESZCZENIE

CEL NAUKOWY: Celem niniejszego artykułu było zbadanie emocji towarzyszących nauczycielom w procesie osvajania się z nową sytuacją uczenia na odległość podczas lockdownu z powodu COVID-19 w szkołach średnich w Polsce.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Pytania badawcze dotyczyły rodzaju przeżywanych przez nauczycieli emocji, wyzwalaczy wywołujących najwięcej pozytywnych i negatywnych emocji oraz czynników wpływających na stan emocjonalny nauczycieli. Narzędziem użytym w badaniu był kwestionariusz, za pomocą którego nauczyciele zostali poproszeni o określenie emocji wobec osób biorących udział w lekcji, samej lekcji, używanego sprzętu i innych kwestii zgodnie z kołowym modelem afektu Yika.

PROCES WYWODU: Edukacja zdalna niesie za sobą wiele różnych emocji. Sposób nauczania i dotarcia do uczniów na odległość, często obcy i nieznan wielu nauczycielom, został dodatkowo skomplikowany w okresie pandemii COVID-19. Oprócz wypełniania swoich obowiązków dydaktycznych nauczający musieli stawiać czoła dodatkowym trudnościom i niebezpieczeństwom, takim jak zakażenie, izolacja, kwarantanna i stopniowo oswajać się z nową sytuacją.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: Uzyskane wyniki wskazują na zmiany emocjonalne na każdym z etapów osvajania nowej rzeczywistości. Zaobserwowane tendencje można opisać jako narastające negatywne odczucia doświadczane przez próbę na samym początku edukacji na odległość, które malały pod koniec procesu zamykania szkół i/lub były zastępowane pozytywnymi doświadczeniami.

WNIOSKI, INNOWACJE, REKOMENDACJE: Autorka przedstawia środki zaradcze wobec zastanej sytuacji szkolnej, spośród których najbardziej pilnym rozwiązaniem wydają się kursy oferowane obecnie przez wiele instytucji i wsparcie informatyczne oferowane przez szkoły. Zaprezentowany zostaje również zamysł badań poszerzających te obecne, ale przede wszystkim konfrontujących sytuację na innym szczeblu edukacji i wśród pozostałych uczestników edukacji zdalnej (np. nauczyciele szkół podstawowych /wyższych oraz uczniowie, a także ich rodzice i rodzeństwo).

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** **EMOCJE, EDUKACJA NA ODLEGŁOŚĆ, NAUCZYCIELE, COVID-19, NAUCZYCIEL JĘZYKA ANGIELSKIEGO**

Introduction

Distance learning has evoked many different emotions in school environments due to a new way of teaching, often unknown to many teachers who, apart from fulfilling their teaching duties, had to face many difficulties and get used to the new situation consisting

in physical separation of teachers and students during instruction and the use of various technologies to facilitate student-teacher and student-student rapport. Synchronous and asynchronous types are the most basic and frequent in use (Taplin et al., 2013), and have been most often used in Polish schools. A synchronous type of learning is based upon cooperative participation of students in learning activities and requires from them to be present at a given time. The tools used here range from online chats and videoconferences to application sharing, whiteboard, polling and virtual classrooms to serve the real-time ask-answer sessions. An asynchronous mode of learning is time independent. The students work according to their own learning schedule allowing for a more student-centred approach. The teacher/student interaction is executed in different forms, such as virtual office hours or e-mails. A whole range of tools used in asynchronous learning includes reading materials in PDF files, pre-recorded lectures, presentations, Google Drive for group projects, educational games, audio tapes and video (Taplin et al., 2013). A huge advantage is that students can always come back to those materials.

General advantages and disadvantages of distance learning

There are a number of benefits of distance learning. First, it is its convenience as many of the technologies are easily accessible from home and allow students to participate in the school activity whenever they wish, and on an individual basis. As Isik et al. (2010) emphasize, this kind of education is also quite affordable involving low-priced equipment and materials or no cost at all. Also, some teaching aids are granted for free and some are multi-sensory to meet everyone's learning preferences. Moreover, distance learning can offer increased interactions with students, particularly when it comes to introverted students who are too shy to ask questions in class. Last but not least, online courses are characterized by balancing inequalities between age groups, geographical expansion of education access, delivering education for large audiences, offering the combination of education with work or family life, etc.

There is no denying that distance learning is perceived in a positive way, yet, as Christensen et al. (2001) claim, "it may come with hidden costs." First of all, compared with a traditional method of delivery, it imposes a disproportionate amount of effort on the part of instructors. Secondly, it is not only limited to the lesson/session period, but also plenty of time is devoted to student support and preparation, not to mention discipline and Internet connection problems to deal with. Using technology seems to be another important obstacle. It is proved that among both parties (i.e. students and teachers) there is a high percentage of those lacking enough skill and experience in managing or following online courses, including the extreme cases of digital exclusion most frequently identified with systemic differences in the access to and use of new technologies. Last but not least, the greatest drawback is social isolation. The longer the period of off-site classes, the stronger the feeling of no belonging to any social group, and no point in organizing such meetings.

Emotions

According to Richards (2020), the experience of teaching may cover positive and negative emotions among teachers. How emotions go together from a psychological point of view has been interestingly pictured in the circular model of affect by Yik (in Szorc, 2012).

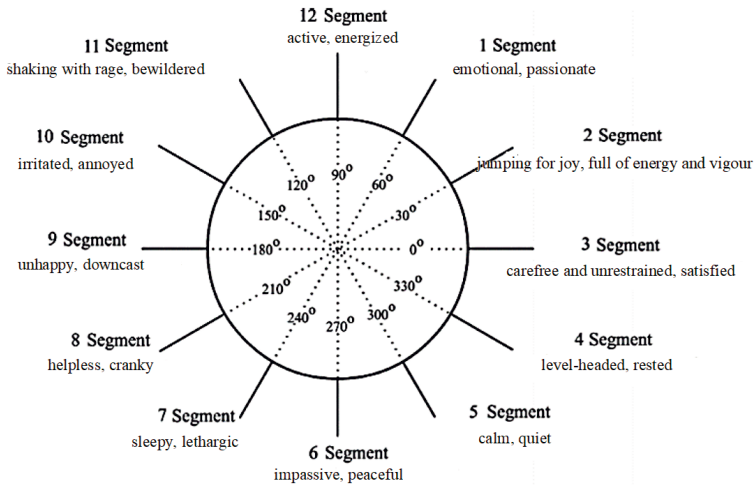


Figure 1. The circular model of affect by Yik

Based on Szorc (2012), the model places emotions in such a way that the closer they are to each other, the stronger the relationship between them. Emotions at opposite ends of the circle are opposite to each other. The circle consists of twelve segments, 6 including positive and 6 negative feelings.

School emotions are the outcome of interactions between teachers and their teaching contexts and include feelings they have about themselves, their fellow teachers, their students, classroom activities, their teaching environment and teaching resources. Emotions can influence the teacher's use of the TL when teaching English, interaction with students, response to unanticipated classroom incidents, rules and procedures for classroom management, activities addressing classroom climate, the choice of colleagues to work with, feedback, activities that involve collaborative rather than competitive learning, and the level of satisfaction derived from teaching (Reeve, 2015).

Teacher emotions at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic

Confusion and stress for teachers have been identified by UNESCO (2020) as one of the most urgent consequences of school closures and problems resulting from the pandemic

situation. The most problematic and emotional issues, experienced by the educators during the COVID-19 schooling appeared with relation to course implementation, student behavior, impossibilities, technology, as well as colleagues and/or supervisors.

Özüdoğru (2021) describes the situations in which instructors feel anxious because they cannot see their students' progress. Teachers also feel stressed because they have a feeling that they cannot motivate their students to learn, do not meet their students' expectations and cannot control their behaviour. Also, teachers' feeling of anxiety is mostly caused by students' negative approaches towards distance learning. As for the situations that evoke anger, lack of homework, disrespect, and students' laziness are mentioned. As regards loneliness, it is students' ignorance, cheating and dishonesty that teachers complain about. As stated by Yin et al. (2017, p. 909) they feel lonely due to the lack of physical interaction. Last but not least is teachers' dissatisfaction with educational policies because they have not been provided with special training concerning online education.

Teacher emotions in Poland

Following Kruszewska et al. (2020) and Buchner et al. (2020), Polish teachers experienced a wide array of negative emotions as a result of IT equipment problems, lack of parental support, low learner motivation and health problems. These go in line with data on Polish English teachers who claimed that they did not know what to do at the very beginning of online education, as they were not offered any training (Papaja, 2021). Also, we learn that teachers often feel angry due to difficulties in organizing their time properly. In a similar vein, the amount of work and hours spent in front of the computer evoke anger, which might be linked to emotional exhaustion. Some teachers also feel angry with parents who do not support them. When asking for help, many parents claim that it is the teachers' responsibility to provide their kids with proper education. As for anxiety, teachers complained about the timetable and its unpredictability/impracticability. Finally, when describing the feeling of sadness, many English teachers point out no cooperation with their colleagues. It is very much similar when it comes to the feeling of loneliness caused by the lack of support from parents, headmasters, colleagues and even school psychologists.

The current study

The aim of the current study was to investigate emotions accompanying teachers in the process of getting accustomed to the new situation of distance learning during the COVID-19 lockdown in secondary schools in Poland. This level of education was marked by a much longer time of distance instruction than pre-schooling and primary schooling, divided into four time spans. The research questions touched upon the emotions (positive/negative) that the teachers experienced in general, the trigger(s) of most positive

and most negative emotions, the emotional states that changed towards distance learning, and the length of teaching experience that influenced teachers' emotions.

Based on the ordinances of the Ministry of Education, the very time spans constituted the first period of school closure from 25 March 2020 to 28 June 2020, the second phase of closing from 26 October 2020 to 30 May 2021, the third period initiated on 20 December 2021 to 9 January 2022, and the fourth one from 27 January 2022 to 27 February 2022.

The participants

The teachers who participated in the study represented 13 schools from the Silesian Voivodeship in Poland, presented alphabetically. The school distribution reflects the numbering preserved in the school register, placed in an orderly manner here, while the number of teachers corresponds to each of the school respectively (Table 1).

Table 1. The sample: background information

City	School	No. of teachers
Będzin	I LO, II LO	5, 3
Bytom	I LO, II LO, IV LO	7, 4, 8
Chorzów	IV LO	5
Katowice	II LO, III LO, VIII LO,	14, 11, 7
Sosnowiec	II LO, VI LO, IX LO	9, 7, 7
Tarnowskie Góry	I LO	7

The sample consisted of 92 teachers altogether. All of them were in-service English language specialists, though, varying in teaching experience and level of professional promotion (Table 2).

Table 2. The sample: specific information

No. of teachers	Age range	Length of teaching experience	Promotion level
12	27-29	2-3 years	Contract teacher
49	31-38	7-10 years	Appointed teacher
31	37-57	12-25 years	Diploma teacher

All respondents admitted working from home during the first and the fourth period of emergency remote teaching, mainly due to the alleged fear of the unknown, that is, a dangerous disease in the former case, and panic before transmission of the virus and quarantine prior to the holiday season in the latter. The middle periods of online education were performed by the staff from home in 50%, and only by persons providing care for their underage children. The other half declared working from school. The subjects used their own laptops or tablets.

The tool

The tool consisted in a questionnaire which, apart from the background information section, included the main part attempting at naming teachers' emotions towards the situation of emergency online classes, i.e., a given distance learning participant and component (see Appendix). The first round of measurement consisted of the table with seven sections to go through. In each, the teachers were requested to identify emotions they had towards learners taking part in the lesson, the lesson itself, the equipment used and other interrelated issues in line with Yik's circular model of affect. Additionally, the informants were to indicate one most negative and most positive emotional reactor / reaction/ from those provided, and briefly justify their choice. The second, third and fourth stages of the questionnaire completion were complemented by open questions concerning teachers' implemented ways of coping with emotions, changes in emotions felt at a given period of time, and potential causes of observed changes over time.

The data presentation and discussion

Based on the data collected, the first period of isolation and distance learning have brought about the strongest negative emotions among teachers. These ranged from being unhappy and helpless to feeling annoyance or impassiveness. The very emotions weakened over time, measured by subsequent school breaks, and/or took on a more positive form. Slight differences were observed as for a particular emotion trigger, and factors being responsible for the status quo. Also, teachers' feelings were in contrast to the level of instructors' seniority/length of service.

Course implementation

The emotions teachers experienced as regards the course coverage varied from being unhappy to being satisfied.

Table 3. The results: course implementation

Component	Unhappy				Helpless				Annoyed				Satisfied			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Lesson aim	20	70		42	70	20	20		2		60			2	12	50
Materials	20	70		42	70	20	20		2		60			2	12	50
Evaluation	20	70		42	70	20	20		2		60			2	12	50
Interaction	20	70		42	70	20	20		2		60			2	12	50
Homework	20	70		42	70	20	20		2		60			2	12	50

As can be seen from the table, all lesson-conduct components were assessed in the same way by the sample. Initially, most teachers reacted with helplessness to what was happening during the lesson, or rather to the efforts related to it. With time, it was unhappiness and annoyance that prevailed among the teachers. In the last period there was less helplessness and more annoyance than unhappiness, and more than half felt satisfaction with the course being conducted. The teachers were not able to identify one “link” that was driving bad and good emotions. Secondly, the feelings that distance learning caused in teachers in the very beginning seemed identical, regardless of seniority. In the end, however, greater satisfaction with getting used to working remotely was noticed among the senior teachers.

Students

Dealing with students is never an easy task. The pandemic period has proven it by multiplying the working time and efforts made by teachers to build relationships with students. The teachers experienced 5 different types of emotions going through this period, from unhappiness to calmness.

Table 4. The results: students

Component	Unhappy				Helpless				Annoyed				Satisfied				Calm			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Attitude			42	42	50	42									50	50				
Contact			42	42	50	42									50	50				
Cooperation			42	42	50	42									50	50				
Attention			42	42		42			32						50	50				
Skills					70				22						80				20	92
Language use					42	42	30	30					50	50	62	62				
Feedback					42	42	30	30					50	50	62	62				
Socialization	70		42		22	40				82					50	50				
Atmosphere	92	80											20	50	92				20	

Based on the data from the study, it was the virtual classroom atmosphere that disturbed the teachers the most in the first period of distance learning. The students’ attitudes to classes, focus or cooperation left a lot to be desired, and provoked negative attitudes among half of the respondents. Being helpless and unhappy about the situation persisted in the second period, too. The time of the third and fourth school closures translated into greater satisfaction with making contact with students. The teachers started complaining about students’ unwillingness to use English or them being muted all the time because of the TL used in class. When asked about the “trigger” of bad emotions, over one-third of the sample pointed to their endless attempts to make students speak English. Paradoxically, it was also the biggest sign of success for the majority of younger instructors that fueled good emotions and translated into successful feedback, better socialization

and lesson atmosphere in general. What seems noteworthy is calmness shown by all respondents in relation to students' IT skills at the fourth break from regular schooling.

Colleagues

When it comes to emotions driven by the type and quality of the relationship with fellow teachers, the sample's feelings were balanced and centred upon 2 negative and 2 positive ones.

Table 5. The results: colleagues

Component	Unhappy				Annoyed				Satisfied				Calm				
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
Contact	12				80					50	22					70	92
Support	12				80					50	42					50	92
Cooperation	12				80					50	42					50	92
Skills		80	62		92					12	30						92
Feedback	12	92	92		80												92

In the beginning, the majority of the sample felt annoyance due to the lack of any relationship with their colleagues, neither a good nor a bad one. What they strongly complained about involved no "helping hand" in the form of a feedback or tips on how to use the platform and/or application. Then, being annoyed was replaced with being unhappy. The third time-period gave rise to teachers' satisfaction with the established cooperation on-site and off-site with their co-workers. Finally, the teachers' emotions subsided, and reached the level of calmness, irrespective of age and experience.

School management

The relationship with the school management was unsatisfactory for the majority, both during the first and second closure (they felt unhappy about it). It was so mainly because of the lack of skills and feedback so much expected by the instructors to be offered by the head of the school. Later on, this situation even caused annoyance among the sample. With time, when the contact was made possible, the ratio of unhappy teachers dropped to slightly above half, and then below half on account of those satisfied in the end. Among satisfied teachers there were more young people who expressed unhappiness at an earlier stage.

Table 6. The results: school management

Component	Unhappy				Annoyed				Satisfied			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Contact	70	70	50	42							42	50
Support	70	70	50	42							42	50
Cooperation	70	70	50	42							42	50
Skills	92	92	50	42			50				42	50
Feedback	92	92	80	42			12					50

School administration

The emotions accompanying teachers with respect to the administrative staff were positive. For most of them, getting familiarized with working in front of the computer was satisfactory. Also, almost half of the respondents were calm as they could always count on help. In the second period this feeling of calmness was even more pronounced because of the flawless cooperation in general. The third period of distance learning was characterized by teachers responding with full energy to the contact with school administration whenever the obstacle appeared. They had the impression that this kind of support made them work despite all adversities. With time, all the subjects highly appreciated the very collaboration (they were satisfied) irrespective of their teaching experience and contact with the administration prior to the COVID-19.

Table 7. The results: school administration

Component	Satisfied				Full of energy				Calm			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Contact	50	42	22	92			70		42	50		
Support	50	42	22	92			70		42	50		
Cooperation	50	42	22	92			70		42	50		
Skills	50	42	22	92			70		42	50		
Feedback	42	50	22	92			70		42	50		

Technology

The greatest range of emotions was observed apropos technology-related issues. These included 5 negative emotions and 1 positive feeling.

Table 8. The results: technology

Component	Unhappy				Helpless				Furious				Annoyed				Impassive				Satisfied							
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4				
Platform	42		50	50		42							50	50													42	42
Connection			42	42	30	62				62									30								50	50
Video			42	42	30	62													30				62				50	50
Sound			42	42	30	62													30				62				50	50
File upload			42	42	62	10							30	82													50	50

What the first period of remote work brought was fury among the majority. Annoyance and unhappiness were experienced by 50 and 42 teachers respectively. Teachers' satisfaction was expressed in relation to video and sound quality only. The second phase was full of problems with everything, that is, connection, upload file function, video and sound quality. Moreover, these were the most disruptive and caused helplessness, and, to a lesser extent, impassiveness. Half of the sample expressed annoyance at the thought of the platform. The third and the fourth periods seemed to be in between satisfaction and unhappiness. When it comes to the differences as regards the teacher groups, the seniors were impassive in the face of technical problems.

Impossibility

Here, the balance of the emotions felt by the sample is 4 negative and 1 positive.

Table 9. The results: impossibility

Component	Unhappy				Helpless				Furious				Annoyed				Satisfied				
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
Access	72	60	60	42									20	32	32	50					
Internet					50	50	50	50									42	42	42	42	
Equipment									42	42			50	50	50	50				42	42

In the very beginning, most teachers were unhappy about their access to distance learning, due to the lack of a business computer. Then, helplessness over an Internet connection, as well as fury and annoyance appeared because of the equipment they were using. Full satisfaction with the Internet (periods 1-4) and equipment (period 1-2) concerned less than half of the informants. Fury was totally eliminated closer the last periods of measurement. These were characterized by the remaining teachers' emotions which were stable, with no division into the age and length of service.

Conclusions and implications

Generally speaking, the respondents experienced seven different types of emotions throughout the treatment period. The tendencies observed could be described as increasing negative feelings among the sample at the very beginning of distant education that lowered towards the end of the school closure periods, and/or often were replaced with positive ones. Compared to the studies conducted so far, the mechanism governing emotions seems to be the same. Favourable contexts, such as students' positive attitude, colleagues' support or a good rapport with the head and administration management have contributed to teacher's fulfillment and general well-being (marked by being satisfied, full of energy and calm). Analogically, unfavourable contexts, illustrated here by the examples of poor facilities and equipment, poor contact with students, mainly because of their L1 instead of TL use, little collaboration with students and teachers as well as unhelpful head and administration management have brought about unhappiness, helplessness and annoyance. The two-fold division of emotions and emotion triggers as provided before, represent what the sample accepted and struggled with most. As regards the differences among the respondents, the study results have proven dissimilarities among teachers related to their job seniority and age factor, which correlates to Nowak's (2021) findings. The instances of slight, yet important, differences include:

- senior teachers more satisfied with successful course implementation at the end of the survey,
- young teachers' failure at making students speak English,
- young teachers more disappointed with school management and its big administrative support in the beginning of school closure,
- senior teachers' impassivity as regards digital technology failure.

It seems that the best and immediate solution to most of the problematic issues lies in the courses currently offered by many institutions, IT support offered by schools (in the form of the IT staff available to teachers at the time of their working hours, to information/experience sharing forums such as Facebook groups).

Further research

One of the ideas for further research is to compare the segments of emotions covered in the above sample with English teachers from elementary schools or higher institutions. On the other hand, researching further the context of secondary schools, one could contrast teachers with learners referred to as the lockdown generation. Also, it seems important to expand the research group to include learners' parents as well as siblings, and examine their perspective, and emotional states.

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Appendix: The questionnaire form

Organization/ Participants	Component/ Reaction	Negative emotions						Positive emotions						
		U ¹	H	L	F	A	I	S	FE	P	C	LH	AT	
Course implementation	Lesson aims													
	Lesson materials													
	Evaluation													
	Interaction													
	Homework													
Students	Attitude													
	Communication													
	Collaboration													
	Attention/focus													
	Skills													
	Language use													
	Feedback													
	Socialization													
Colleagues	Atmosphere													
	Communication													
	Support													
	Cooperation													
	Skills													
School management	Feedback													
	Communication													
	Support													
	Cooperation													
	Skills													
School administration	Feedback													
	Communication													
	Support													
	Cooperation													
	Skills													
Technology	Feedback													
	Platform													
	Connection													
	Video quality													
	Sound quality													
Impossibility	File upload													
	Access													
	Internet													
	Equipment													

¹ U = Unhappy, H = Helpless, L = Lethargic, F = Furious, A = Annoyed, I = Impassive, S = Satisfied, FE = Full of Energy, P = Passionate, C = Calm, LH = Level-Headed, AT = Active