

Revealing and Healing Students' Needs and Anxiety in the EFL Classroom: Navigating the Wartime Context in Ukraine

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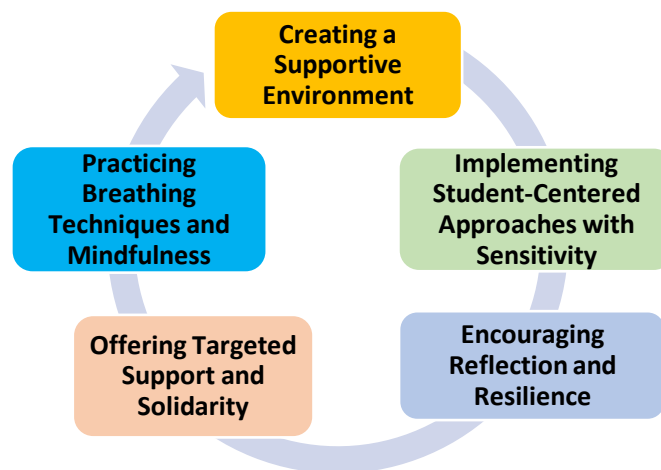
In the middle of the ongoing war and uncertainty in Ukraine, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms serve as crucial sanctuaries where students seek refuge from the chaos of war while striving to learn a foreign language. However, the wartime context worsens students' needs and anxiety, posing unique challenges to Ukrainian educators.

In the current situation, educators serve as beacons of hope and resilience for students impacted by war. By acknowledging the realities of the wartime context in Ukraine and implementing comprehensive strategies for the support and healing, teachers can create a nurturing learning environment that empowers students to navigate the challenges of conflict with resilience and determination. Through compassion, empathy, and solidarity, educators can play a transformative role in healing and rebuilding the lives of students amidst adversity.

In this article, we explore strategies for revealing and healing students' needs and anxiety in the EFL classroom within the backdrop of the wartime situation in Ukraine.

Displacement, disruptions to education, loss of resources, and limited access to support services further compound students' needs and challenges in the learning environment. And teachers must foster a sense of safety and belonging by acknowledging students' experiences and incorporating their emotions. Establishing clear routines, maintaining open lines of communication, and providing reassurance can help reduce students' anxieties and instill a sense of stability and normality.

The following approaches and techniques can be widely used in an ESL classroom to support learners.



Creating a Supportive Environment is vital in the current situation where a teacher can easily incorporate - *Icebreaker Activities*: start each class with icebreaker activities that

encourage students to interact and get to know each other, fostering a sense of belonging and camaraderie; - *Positive Feedback*: provide regular positive feedback and praise to students, highlighting their progress and efforts rather than focusing solely on mistakes; - *Group Work*: incorporate group work, collaborative activities and projects where students can support each other and work together towards common goals.

In the face of adversity, adopting **Student-Centered Teaching Approaches** becomes paramount, albeit with heightened sensitivity to students' emotional and psychological needs. Teachers should consider flexibility and adaptability in lesson planning, considering students' varying levels of emotional resilience and readiness to engage in learning activities. For example: - *Choice-based Assignments*: offer students choices in assignments or topics for presentations, allowing them to select tasks that align with their interests and strengths; - *Task-Based Learning*: design tasks that require active participation and problem-solving, such as role-plays, simulations, or real-life language tasks, which promote engagement and reduce anxiety; - *Flexible Learning Pathways*: allow students to progress at their own pace and provide flexibility in learning pathways, accommodating diverse learning styles and preferences.

Encouraging students to **reflect on their experiences, emotions**, and coping mechanisms can also facilitate resilience and emotional healing. Teachers can integrate reflective activities that allow students to process their thoughts, share their stories, and find strength in solidarity with their peers. Emphasizing the importance of self-care, empathy, and mutual support fosters a culture of resilience and collective healing within the classroom community. For instance: - *Journaling*: introduce regular journaling activities where students can reflect on their language learning journey, express their thoughts, and identify areas of strength and areas for improvement; - *Peer Feedback Sessions*: organize peer feedback sessions where students can give and receive constructive feedback on their language skills, encouraging self-reflection and awareness of strengths and weaknesses; *Mindfulness Exercises*: incorporate mindfulness techniques, such as deep breathing or guided relaxation, at the beginning or end of class to help students manage stress and develop self-awareness.

In times of crisis, offering **targeted support and solidarity** is essential for addressing students' specific needs and nurturing a sense of hope and resilience. Teachers can collaborate with school authorities, counselors, and community organizations to provide access to resources such as trauma-informed support services, mental health counseling, and humanitarian aid. Organizing peer support groups, facilitating discussions on coping strategies, and advocating for students' needs at the institutional level are essential steps in building a supportive ecosystem for students affected by conflict. Moreover, such strategies as *One-on-One Conferences*, *Resource Sharing*, *Referral to Support Services* can be helpful and curing.

Thus, by acknowledging the realities of the wartime context in Ukraine and implementing tailored strategies for support and resilience-building, teachers can create a

special learning environment that empowers students to navigate the challenges of conflict while striving for academic success and personal growth. Through compassion, empathy, and solidarity, educators can play a transformative role in healing and rebuilding the lives of students impacted by war.

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