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Investigation of motivation and anxiety in Macedonia while learning English as a second/foreign language

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Abstract

The use of modern communicative language teaching approaches in the language classrooms and the wide-spread use of English language have increased the demand to learn good communication skills but the existence of feelings as anxiety, apprehension and nervousness in learners may prevent them from learning to speak a second/foreign language. This study has attempted to investigate the factors that language anxiety can possibly stem from, both within the classroom environment and out of classroom in the wider social context, and the motivation needed for improving that anxiety by giving recommendations of a variety of strategies to cope with it. The past researchers, considering it a complex and multi-faceted psychological phenomenon, have suggested using a variety of perspectives and approaches to investigate the subject. A total of 50 participants, ESL/EFL learners participated in the investigation by answering the statements provided in three questionnaires. The findings suggest that language anxiety can originate from learners' own sense of 'self', their self-related cognition, language learning difficulties, differences in learners' and target language cultures, differences in social status of the speakers and interlocutors, and from the fear of losing self-identity. The pedagogical implications of these findings for understanding second/foreign language anxiety for enhancing learners' communication abilities in the target language were discussed in accordance to the anxiety level with the motivation needed, as are suggestions for future research. Furthermore, considering the crucial role of teachers in second or foreign language pedagogy, a need was felt to investigate the beliefs and perceptions of language teachers about learning and teaching a second or a foreign language.

Keywords: Anxiety, motivation, second/foreign language learning, teaching;

1. Introduction

Language is a truly human characteristic. Our self-identity is intermingled with language. When people say, "That does not sound like me", they are indicating simply that their self-perceptions include a heavy language component. As a consequence, the language class is an interesting if not traumatic experience. Because communications in the second language are seldom true personal communications, it is just possible that this permits students to form a kind of armor for themselves (Gardner 1985). For many students, learning more than one language is simply a matter of routine (cf. Tucker 1981). That is probably because of the accident of their birth, so, they are placed in a situation to learn more languages at the same time. For other children, as in our country, a foreign or second language is a school subject introduced between the first and last years of their formal education. Like many other subjects, second language represents a material that must be learned, understood, or memorized in order to pass the exam, please the teacher, make parents proud and happy, satisfy some inner curiosity, and many other feelings and states.

Teaching ESL is a very complex process because of a numbers of variables involved with the teacher assuming multiple roles. Foreign language teachers, including ourselves, have on many occasions observed apprehension and

discomfort experienced by many students who attempted to acquire and produce a foreign language. In the process these teachers become responsible for much of the learners' motivation for learning. Under scrutiny of the students is the teacher's power to motivate them and his/her ability to facilitate meaningful learning which is also attractive or fun (Chambers, 1999, p.137). The teacher's main role is to find and create powerful learning environments that allow this to happen.

The primary purpose of this paper is to examine motivational patterns in relation to the anxiety of Macedonian learners of English, as well as individual and sociable variables in learning English as a foreign language, and to investigate the domains of English relevant to the undergraduate students of the 'Goce Delcev' University in Stip, Macedonia. Why do learners feel anxious while studying English and what are the factors or sources that make speaking English more stressful in some situations than in others?

This investigation will hopefully give us the answers concerning the level of motivation and anxiety and provide additional insight into a better identification of the existing motivational challenges and into taking a more realistic perspective of English Language Teaching in the country.

2. The role of English in Macedonia

The role of English in Macedonia is only functional as English is used as an international link language. Here, English is not used as an interpersonal and inter-institutional means of communication and there is seemingly little possibility for English to become a lingua franca in Macedonia. But English has been used for years for different purposes and it has become a part of socio-cultural life in the country. As the use of English is increasing day by day in different forms there is significant evidence of using English along with Macedonian.

3. Motivation and anxiety

All the studies have shown that both self-esteem and anxiety have played a significant role for the second language learners. In learning a foreign language, it is important to understand how anxiety and low self-esteem interact to negatively affect progress. Research has shown that self-confidence, a good self-image and low anxiety are key factors that relate to success in language learning. To reduce learner's anxiety and increase their self-esteem, educators should also consider the affective atmosphere. In the environment where students can learn freely, they display positive attitudes, self-confidence, and low anxiety. Attitude is an important affective factor. Good language learners usually have positive attitude toward the second language and its native speakers. Moreover, there are some effective suggestions having impact on the affective climate in the second language classroom: encourage and support students at all times by using positive language, be energetic and enthusiastic, create a relaxed environment, avoid overly competitive activities, give students opportunities to talk about themselves, and create reasonable challenges.

4. Research methodology and instruments

- What is the level of anxiety in Macedonian university English classrooms?
- What are the motivational patterns of Macedonian university students for learning English? Which motivations are stronger?
- Is there a relationship between English language learning anxiety level and motivational patterns of Macedonian university students?

Three instruments were used in the study: a background questionnaire, and modified anxiety and motivational questionnaires. The background questionnaire consists of questions about students' age, gender, years of studying English, field of study and the importance of English in our country. There was a focus group of 50 students from the Faculty of Agriculture and the Faculty of Economics. Their age ranges from 19-21, the average age is 20 and male and female participants are 23 to 27, which in percentage is 46% males and 54% females. The average period

of learning English is 9 years. Most of them do not answer the question about the importance of English in our country, probably because they have not faced the need for English in their future careers yet.

The Horwitz's 33item Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was modified to anxiety questionnaire with 20 questions and it was used to assess the second language learning anxiety. The five point Likert scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" is used to evaluate the students' anxiety. Questions 4, 6, 10, 14, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33 are dropped because they are modified in the rest 20 questions.

The motivational questionnaire was carefully adapted from the motivation surveys administered in foreign language settings by Clément and Kruidenier (1983), Clément et al. (1994) and Ely (1986) in such a way that the items were deemed concise, explicit and characteristic of the Macedonian settings. The questionnaire was modified into 16 questions and the students again answered from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Items 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12 were adapted from Ely (1986), with "Spanish" replaced by "English". Items 1, 2, 5, 7, 10, 16 were adapted from Clément and Kruidenier (1983), with "French" changed into "English". Items 13, 14, 15 were adopted from Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994). The respondents were asked to rate each of the 16 statements about the reasons for English learning on the same 5-point interval scale as used for the FLCAS in terms of their agreement with the statement in descending order.

5. Data collection and analysis procedures and discussion

Table 1. Anxiety questionnaire results evaluated in percentages.

Anxiety questionnaire	SA	A	N	D	SD
1 I often feel like not going to my English classes.	6%	14%	26%	42%	30%
2 I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.	8%	46%	20%	22%	4%
3 I feel confident when I am on English class.	10%	48%	34%	8%	/
4 It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English classes.	16%	36%	20%	14%	14%
5 I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.	8%	34%	30%	18%	10%
6 I worry about the consequences of failing my English class.	12%	52%	14%	20%	2%
7 I don't worry about making mistakes in English class.	10%	22%	24%	36%	8%
8 During English class I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	20%	12%	22%	34%	12%
9 I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.	10%	28%	30%	24%	8%
10 I always feel that other students speak English better than I do.	20%	24%	26%	20%	10%
11 I don't understand why some people get so upset over English classes.	14%	50%	28%	8%	/
12 I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class.	22%	24%	22%	26%	6%
13 I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for English class.	10%	40%	28%	20%	2%
14 It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English.	12%	26%	24%	36%	2%
15 When I am on my way to English class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	12%	36%	30%	8%	14%
16 I am usually at ease during tests in my English class.	10%	22%	30%	30%	8%
17 Even if I am well prepared for English class I feel anxious about it.	14%	26%	22%	32%	6%
18 I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.	10%	18%	30%	32%	10%
19 I would not be nervous speaking in English class.	10%	44%	32%	8%	6%
20 I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English.	26%	36%	30%	6%	2%

According to Horwitz (1986), and later confirmed in our testing, the testing with FLCAS affords an opportunity to examine the scope and severity of foreign language anxiety. Our results demonstrate that students with debilitating anxiety in foreign language classroom setting share many common characteristics. They endorse FLCAS items indicative of speech anxiety such as “I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class” (38%), “I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class” (42%). Anxious students feel very self-conscious about speaking a foreign language class, but, the fact that 58% of them want to be present is very encouraging. Another fact that anxious students fear is that they will not understand all the language input so, 38% of them approve of the statement that “It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in English.”, and 54% “I get nervous when I don’t understand every word the English teacher says.” The students believe that in order to comprehend all the questions they receive and answer them they need to know all the words that are spoken on class. Anxious students also fear being less competent than other students or being negatively evaluated by them. They answer that “I always feel that other students speak English better than I do.” (48%), or “I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.” (28%). The result of that is skipping class, overstudying, or trying to escape to the last row so they can avoid the humiliation or embarrassment of being called on to speak. Anxious students also feel nervous when they make mistakes in English so 44% of them disagree with the statement “I don’t worry about making mistakes in English class.” It appears to these students that they are constantly tested and evaluated by their teachers and they perceive every mistake as a failure. All these results lead to the fact that foreign language anxiety is a distinct set of beliefs, perceptions and feelings in response to the foreign language anxiety in the classroom and not merely a composition of other anxieties. The findings of these questionnaires show that our students experience a significant foreign language anxiety. The majority of the statements in this questionnaire were supported by third or more of the students and five statements were supported by half of the students. Encouraging from these questionnaires are the positive answers to questions 13, 15, 19 and 20. These answers are a huge improvement in lowering the level of students’ anxiety while learning foreign language, but, the other results imply that, at least in the beginners’ classes at university, anxious students are common in foreign language classrooms.

Table 2. Motivational questionnaire results evaluated in percentages.

Motivational questionnaire	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. It will be helpful for my future career.	44%	54%	2%	/	/
2. I feel English is an important language in the world.	74%	24%	2%	/	/
3. It may make me more qualified job candidate.	36%	56%	6%	2%	/
4. I need it to fulfil the university foreign language requirement.	24%	30%	30%	10%	6%
5. I may need it to be admitted to a higher school.	10%	46%	24%	18%	2%
6. I feel it is mentally challenging.	14%	18%	34%	26%	8%
7. I want to understand English films/videos, pop music or books/ magazines.	36%	34%	26%	/	4%
8. I can get pleasure from learning English.	30%	40%	10%	18%	2%
9. I want to be able to use it with English-speaking people.	44%	44%	8%	4%	/
10. I need it for study abroad.	32%	44%	16%	6%	2%
11. I have to take the State language exam.	8%	26%	48%	16%	2%
12. It helps me understand English-speaking people and their way of life.	24%	62%	10%	2%	2%
13. I want to acquire new ideas and broaden my outlook.	28%	46%	22%	4%	/
14. I am interested in English culture, history or literature.	16%	40%	20%	22%	2%
15. I would like to travel to an English-speaking area.	50%	34%	10%	6%	/
16. I feel English is an important language in the world.	70%	22%	4%	/	4%

6. Conclusion

Students gave different answers to different statements, but for some of them the level of anxiety and motivation is very high. Even though the level of anxiety is high, the percentage is not bigger than 70%. On the other hand, the percentage of the motivational questions is raised to 99% (It will be helpful for my future career), or 98% (It may make me a more qualified job candidate). The statements in the questionnaires are clear, understandable, with common words that are familiar to all students (with intermediate and advanced level of English), and provide answers which are closely related to the nature of learning the English language. The students answered both of the questionnaires (anxiety and motivation) by putting a tick to the answer they think is more suitable to their opinions and feelings about the statements. When the motivation is as high as in these statements, the level of anxiety must be very low, as for example if we get those 99 percentages of the statement “It will be helpful for my future career” we can say that the anxiety level is only 2%. And, reversely, if the level of anxiety is high as in the “I worry about the consequences of failing my English class” where 64% of the students strongly agree and agree with the statement, the level of motivation is low.

This study aimed at understanding the extent to which anxiety and motivation affect English learning at Macedonia’s institutions of higher learning. In conclusion, the results indicated a moderate anxiety level and a moderately high motivation level, the former being negatively related to the participants' proficiency.

The results of this study suggest that learners’ motivation and identities are rooted in their historical background and influenced by both social and contextual factors. The findings support other researchers’ views that motivation is not a static element, but is shaped by previous and ongoing activities and changes corresponding to the broader social context. It seems that, in the English language learning process, the more learners engage in learning activities, the more actively they locate themselves in the social context and make efforts to align with social discourses, and the more they experience personal transformation.

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