Exploring the Role of Emotions, Motivation, Self-efficacy, and Flow in Second Language Learning

Mingjie Zou

Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine, Guangzhou, China

zoumj@gzucm.edu.cn

Abstract. Second language learning is a multifaceted and dynamic process involving numerous individual difference factors. These cognitive, conative, affective, and social factors influence, predict, or even sometimes determine the outcome of second language learning. This paper attempts to explore the role of emotion, motivation, self-efficacy, and flow in second language learning by reviewing Albert's book, including the research context, affective factors, an overview of second language learning tasks, three empirical studies, and pedagogical implications. The summary and review of the findings provide insights and suggestions for second language teaching.

Keywords: affective factors, second language learning tasks, second language learning

1. Introduction

Second language learning is a complex and dynamic process, encompassing a multitude of diverse factors, which intricately interact to shape learners' experiences and significantly impact their learning outcomes [1]. The variation of success, especially through formal education, prompts research on individual differences, which are "powerful background learner variables with potential make-or-break quality" (p.5) [2]. Li and colleagues divide them into four categories: cognitive, conative, affective, and sociocultural differences [3]. Among them, affect has gradually received more attention in language learning research for its crucial role in determining learners' experiences and the inseparable relationship with cognition [4,5,6]. Albert's *Investigating the Role of Affective Factors in Second Language Learning Tasks* offers an in-depth analysis of the relationship between affective factors and second language learning tasks. It aims to "bring together various levels of analysis and data sources to provide a more comprehensive account of the language learning process" (p.ix) and "to do justice to the affective determinants of language learning and bring them to the forefront" (p.1) [7]. It consists of eight chapters, presenting the research background, theoretical constructs, and three empirical studies.

2. Review of the Research Context and Affective Variables

Chapter 1 introduces the research context. The studies were situated in Hungary, where learning an additional language mainly takes place in classrooms, regulated by the Hungarian National Core Curriculum. Teachers have limited freedom in deciding what to teach and how to teach. Furthermore, foreign language grades affect students' admission to university and B2-level proficiency is needed to receive a university degree. After explaining the learning context, the timeline of this research project and its correspondence with the following three studies were specified. The division of a complete research project into three studies could help readers focus on one of them without having to attend to the details of other parts. However, owing to the overlaps of participants and some of the instruments across studies, the separation of presenting three studies also gives rise to confusion in understanding the overall research and the intricate connections of the findings.

Regarding theoretical constructs of affective factors, Chapter 2 first looks at the definition, stability and variability, and categorization of individual differences. Emotions, motivation, self-efficacy, and flow are the key affective factors in the book. Emotions are defined inclusively and are linked to language learning experiences to incorporate both affective and cognitive aspects. This book has examined nine emotions, including enjoyment, curiosity, boredom, and apathy. Additionally, this part includes the recent development of emotion research inspired by Positive Psychology.

Positive Psychology (PP) is dedicated to the flourishing of individuals, communities and societies by creating a shift away from human weakness to human strengths [8]. It is a shift from the dominant preoccupation of pathology, which is the diagnosis of negative factors and weakness in life, to more positive human qualities and strengths. Resonating with the positive trend in psychology, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has also witnessed a "positive turn". MacIntyre and Gregersen first focused on positive emotions related to language learning [9]. Then two influential anthologies edited by MacIntyre, Gregersen and Mercer and Gabrys-Barker and Galajda were published to introduce diverse topics and research methods [10,11]. In the context of second language learning, MacIntyre and Mercer clarified three areas of potential topics: 1) the workings of positive language learner-internal experiences including emotions; 2) individual strengths including EI, perseverance, personality, esteem, grit; 3) positive institutions that enable L2 learners to flourish such as social capital, positive classroom climate at the contextual level [12].

Next, definitions of motivation and its development in research are discussed. The theoretical framework of motivation is based on Dörnyei's L2 motivational self-system [13,14]. Then the chapter moves on to the definition and components of self-efficacy, features of flow, and flow models. Self-efficacy refers to one's description of perceived self and judgment of self-worth [15]. Flow is a subjective self-absorbing state, in which one is completely involved in the activity with intense concentration associated with confidence and control [16].

3. Theoretical Overview of Language Learning Tasks and Studies on Affective Factors

Chapter 3 presents a theoretical overview of language learning tasks, starting with the definition of task in task-based language teaching (TBLT), task types, and important task features. The author reviews studies on two fundamental requirements of tasks: interactional activity and communication goal, and points out their limitations on restricting the scope and neglecting a range of other factors, such as individual differences. In task difficulty, Skehan's and Robinson's frameworks are explained and compared [17,18]. The author then deals with task content, which is pervasively linked to affective aspects. The preferred task content includes the effect of control, important life themes, and familiar, personally relevant, and emotionally engaging tasks. At the end of the chapter, the measurement of task performance is discussed and a variety of indices of linguistic complexity, accuracy, and fluency are reviewed.

Chapter 4 reviews studies connecting affective factors with task performance and identifies a research gap. In emotions, only anxiety has been studied with lexical richness, in different modalities of communication tasks, task types, and task complexity. Anxiety can have both facilitating and hindering effects on linguistic performance. In motivation and task performance, previous studies focus more on task motivation rather than the general language learning motivation. Moreover, self-efficacy and flow experiences are rarely linked with linguistic performance. The author emphasizes the need to explore the relationship between these affective factors and learners' performance on tasks. So far, the theoretical overview of affective factors and language learning tasks lays down a solid foundation for the following discussion of their impact. The comprehensive and in-depth explanations of theoretical constructs and the extensive discussion of research literature serve as valuable resources for readers seeking to enhance their understanding of affective factors and language tasks.

4. The Role of Affective Factors on Language Learning

Based on the aforementioned overview of affect and tasks, three empirical studies were presented to comprehensively explore the role of varied affective factors on language learning. They offer a multi-layer investigation of affective factors at the macro, meso, and micro levels. Chapter 5 investigates learners' motivation, emotions, and self-efficacy, as well as their interaction. The author first describes the research design, including participants, instruments, and procedure, followed by a detailed analysis of the results. At the macro level, it was found that language learning experiences in the Hungarian context were less favorable and deteriorated as students advanced in their learning. Additionally, the author reports that motivation, self-efficacy, and positive emotions were rather stable, while negative emotions were more transferable from general classroom experiences to specific tasks. However, the strength of the relationship reduced over time, revealing the malleability and variability of affective factors from a longitudinal perspective despite their relative stability in the short run.

With regard to the interaction among the affective factors, curiosity, hope and learning experiences contributed to learners' enjoyment of English learning; and their learning experiences were found to be more favorable if there was more enjoyment, less boredom and less apathy. Ideal L2 self, pride, and enjoyment positively contributed to motivation, which means the more ideal learners projected themselves as successful L2 speakers, the prouder they were of themselves, the more enjoyment experienced, and the more motivated they were. There is an interesting finding in the interactions of various affective factors. Learners were motivated 'not because of but despite their language learning experience' (p.85) [7], meaning less positive learning experiences might lead to higher motivation. This might be possible in EFL (English as a foreign language) context where learners are motivated because the additional language learning is associated with exams and more opportunities in education. However, this phenomenon needs to be replicated and investigated in other EFL contexts in future studies.

Chapter 6 examines the effects of affective factors on task performance, following a similar structure in presenting research design, results, and analysis. At the micro level, learners' affective state was associated with particular language tasks and

impacted linguistic performance. However, there was no significant difference in emotions, motivation, self-efficacy and state of flow and no statistically significant variance could be identified in the linguistic performance between the two writing tasks in the book. The investigation of affective state and tasks suggested that when learners experienced more enjoyment, more curiosity, and higher motivation, they were more likely to experience flow, as compared to those who had more anger and apathy. This finding supports the claim that positive emotions were seen as precursors to flow experience [19]. However, the differences in flow experience did not bring about significant differences in task performance.

Chapter 7 reports qualitative analyses of interviews with teachers' views on affective factors and learning tasks, supplementing the above quantitative findings. At the meso level, different school climates contributed to different interactive patterns among emotions, learning experiences, and motivation. The author explains reasons for unfavorable language learning experiences by attributing to the conflict between desired enjoyable activities and actual choices in tasks. Distinct approaches were adopted by the three schools in the studies, ranging from traditional grammar-focused, and communication-focused to exam-oriented, resulting in different patterns in the interaction among affective factors.

5. Pedagogical Implications

Chapter 8 synthesizes the results of these studies and draws a coherent and comprehensive picture of the findings. The author focuses on the learning experience, especially explaining the negative correlation with motivation; the school climate, emphasizing the impact of context on language learning; the flow state, particularly associated with learners' emotions; and emotions, underscoring their primary role in affecting all the macro, meso, and micro levels of learning an additional language. The book concludes with pedagogical implications and future research directions. First and most importantly, the prominence of affective factors including emotions, motivation, self-efficacy, and flow in language learning should be recognized by language teachers. Positive emotions associated with language learning contributed to motivating language learners, thus boosting their self-efficacy and increasing the likelihood of the flow state in the learning process [7]. In addition, teachers should endeavor to create a supportive emotional climate in the language instruction and more favorable learning environment, despite the constraints posed by the macro socio-cultural context. This chapter is an insightful discussion and conclusion of the three studies, helping readers to connect the dots and understand the complex interplay between affective factors and contextual variables.

6. Conclusion

Overall, the book provides a comprehensive investigation of affective factors in second language learning and offers thought-provoking insights into the complex dynamics among motivation, emotions, self-efficacy, and flow. The studies are solid and diverse since they incorporate quantitative and qualitative approaches for data collection. The explanations for their interaction are thorough and inclusive because the book incorporates the impact of sociocultural contexts. It is innovative to study these affective factors in connection with tasks and task performance and probe into their association with and effects on linguistic performance. However, it would be more valuable to include learners' affective experiences in the interviews. Learners' accounts of their lived affective experiences could have provided a fuller picture of affective factors. Furthermore, the connections among diverse affective factors and their patterns in the three schools are so complex that illustrations showing their relationship should have been supplied in the book. In conclusion, Albert's book is a timely and valuable addition to the growing literature on affective factors in second language learning by bringing together the in-depth examinations of motivation, emotions, self-efficacy, and flow with the help of learning tasks. It is an excellent resource for graduate students, researchers, teachers, and institutions who seek to deepen their understanding of the role of affective factors in language learning.

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