

Relationship Matters

Teacher Variables and Learner Emotions
in the Foreign Language Learning Process



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Czesław Kiński

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With a foreword by Przemysław E. Gębal

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*For my Mum, Marianna
for nurturing the love of books and knowledge*

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Foreword: Positive Relationships and Positive Emotions in the Context of Contemporary Concepts of Language Education

The authors of most modern concepts of language education concentrate their attention on the linguistic and personal development of learners of an increasing number of languages. Focused on the development and support of the potential of all actors of the didactic process, the philosophy of language education expands the previously dominant canons of theoretical considerations and empirical inquiries into new areas. These include, among others, the search for learners' and teachers' personality factors that influence educational success and issues related to the well-being of learners and teachers.

The theoretical background for this type of inquiry is found in the constructivist theories of learning and teaching, dominant in the academic discourse, which perceive language learners as individual units with a specific cognitive potential, the use of which becomes the fundamental goal of most of the adopted curricular and methodological solutions. This linguistic and personal development of individual learners takes place during interactions with other actors in the didactic process, who provide the social communicative and relational context for the language activities undertaken in class (Gębal, 2019).

The constructivist teaching process involves perceiving, experiencing, acting, communicating with others and establishing relationships. Emotions are of particular importance in this process. After all, effective learning and development of language competence is only possible if one is aware of one's emotions (Arnold, 2019).

In the educational construct outlined in this way, specialists in language learning and teaching recognize the multidimensionality and individuality of learners and teachers, that is, a range of cognitive and cultural personality conditions and the resulting expectations, attitudes and feelings. An important element that integrates and conditions the effectiveness of learning and teaching is the psychological well-being expressed in the social and individual context. Its perception is influenced by a person's experience of positive emotions, low levels of harmful moods and high levels of satisfaction with life (Seligman, 2002).

Psychological concepts of well-being distinguish its specific components that provide a person with a eudaimonistic sense of happiness and personal devel-

opment. They include, among others: positive emotions, strong commitment, a sense of deeper meaning, achievements and positive relationships (cf. Seligman, 2011). These components are also spaces constituting research on the well-being of language learners and teachers. This line of inquiry conducted as part of language education, which founds the concept of the so-called positive language education, popularized primarily thanks to the studies by Peter MacIntyre and Sarah Mercer, finds its continuation in the study by Czesław Kiński.

The main goal of his monograph is to examine how the teacher-learner relationship influences the latter's subjective sense of well-being. There are several surprises that await the readers, making the book a novel and important study for the further development of the concept of so-called positive language education. These include a meticulous study of key studies dealing with the issue of teacher-learner relationships in the stream of positive psychology, as well as the presentation of research and concepts on the meaning of emotions in the context of language education. Both spaces of modern, humanistically oriented language learning and teaching also take into account Polish studies that are less known in the consciousness of modern researchers, thus including them in the international scientific circulation.

The empirical part of the work presents a research project whose aim was to examine the well-being of young people learning English in Poland. The author of the study examined the level of satisfaction of people learning this language, comparing it with the anxiety that accompanies the language learning process. This important and innovative research project, from the perspective of developing research on learning and teaching English in this part of Europe, ultimately identifies teaching factors that should be promoted or avoided in the educational process aimed at supporting learner well-being. Thus, it includes specific didactic, pedagogical and psychological arguments in current discussions on the effectiveness of the language education process.

Preparing such a comprehensive dissertation requires extensive experience from its Author – not only of a theoretical nature, but also related to the practice of teaching and teacher education and training, which cannot be denied to the Author, whose professional activity began with teaching English and conducting seminars and workshops for teachers. In recent years, Czesław Kiński has had the opportunity to implement his concept of positive language education into the everyday practice of academic education of future English teachers in Poland. The publication of his monograph as part of the InterVAL series is an important addition to the series with a transdisciplinary perspective, bringing applied linguistics into a dialogue with pedagogy and psychology (mainly in its positive stream).

Przemysław E. Gębał

Warsaw, January 2024

Introduction

The book is organized as follows. Chapter 1 begins with a short section in which I explain my motivation for writing this book and introduce the main concepts used herein, such as teacher-student relationship, well-being, foreign language classroom anxiety, and foreign language classroom enjoyment. Next, I provide an explanation why I believe that the last two notions might be replaced by the respective terms of Foreign Language Ill-Being (FLIB) and Foreign Language Well-Being (FLWB) in order to capture the wide range of negative and positive emotions experienced by foreign language learners. At the end of the chapter, I also present an overview of language levels, introduce the notion of subjective versus objective language level, and explain the choice of English as the foreign language studied by the research participants.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the teacher-student relationship as perceived by the major theories in psychology, psychology of education and foreign language teaching. In this chapter, I present the changing historical perspective on the roles of the teacher and the student in the educational process. It has to be noted, however, that this presentation should on no account be treated as chronological per se, as certain trends in psychology, e.g., cognitivism and humanism, developed simultaneously, while others, such as social interactionism, received renewed interest in the world of science many years after they were originally introduced. While discussing the roles of the teacher and student and the relationship between them, I have decided to use the behaviourist and neo-behaviourist theories by Pavlov, Skinner, and Bloom as the starting point. My intention is to present a relatively large number of applications of these theories in the educational process, concurrently pointing to their deficits and limitations.

In the next part of this chapter, I discuss the cognitivist and constructionist theories, commenting not only on the changing attitude to the roles of the teacher and the student, but also on the revised perception of the environment in which the educational process occurs, and the significance of personal meaning as a necessary element of all learning. Furthermore, I examine the notion of educa-

tion as a dialogic process with its social dimension, with particular reference to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development and Feuerstein's concept of education as a mediated experience. The penultimate part of chapter 2 provides an overview of the humanist theories by Maslow, Rogers and Erikson, and their influence on the perception of the teacher-student relationship. The chapter closes with a summary of the various models of the relationship proposed by Polish scholars, such as Grucza, Woźniewicz, Pfeiffer and Gębal.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the role of emotion in the educational process, a subject that was initially perceived in cognitive terms. The theoretical framework for understanding the key role of affect and emotion is outlined by three positive psychology theories: Fredrickson's broaden-and-build, Csíkszentmihályi's flow and Seligman's PERMA. In this chapter, I also discuss the specific applications of the abovementioned theories in general education as well as foreign language education. A particular reference is made to Oxford's EMPATHICS model, stemming from Seligman's PERMA, but specifically intended for FLE purposes. In addition, the chapter presents the main criticisms of positive psychology and an attempt to find a balanced approach to the role of affect and emotion in learning, which, on the one hand, would take into consideration both the contributions and limitations of positive psychology, and on the other – would take advantage of the possibilities provided by the rigorous research methods that have successfully been employed in second language acquisition studies for many years. Finally, the chapter examines the present state of studies into well-being, teacher-student relationship in the learning process, as well as student FLE and FLCA, which may serve as the starting point for my own research. In a selected number of cases, these studies aid the formation of relevant research hypotheses for the present study.

The fourth chapter outlines the methodological aspects of FLT research, such as levels of FLT considerations, typology of T-S contexts, levels of FLT research, and the ethical aspects connected with conducting FLT studies. Furthermore, I present my research methodology, the tools employed in the present study, and formulate the research questions and hypotheses.

The last chapter of this book is concerned with the presentation of research results. After the presentation of the demographic profile of study participants, I provide an overview of general life well-being levels among the population studied, as well as their foreign language enjoyment and foreign language anxiety levels. The final part of this chapter is devoted to how specific teacher variables influence the student's subjective classroom well-being and ill-being. The aim is to familiarize the reader with the variables which should be promoted as well as the ones that should be avoided or dismissed. The chapter ends with a conclusion, in which I summarize the research results, as well as outline possible future research areas.

It is my observation that a large number of teacher training workshops and conferences focus on the strategies and materials which a modern language educator could employ in their working practice in order to make their teaching more appealing to the learner. Simultaneously, the academic world offers a rather limited amount of research regarding which teacher variables may effectively influence student language enjoyment or anxiety. As a result, teachers may find themselves in situations where they utilize certain strategies and make use of specific strategies or materials hoping that their students will find their efforts sufficiently engaging. The intention underlying this book is that the conclusions of my study might lead to specific, in-context applications which might be of use not only to fellow academics, but also to practising foreign language teachers.

It has to be noted here that selected fragments of the study were published previously in Polish and in German (Kiński, 2020, 2021). However, this book presents the full results in their unabridged form, together with the extensive theoretical background, extended discussion of results as well as a number of pedagogical implications.

