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EMOTIONS AS LEARNING ENHANCERS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION

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From the first motivational studies, affective aspects have been considered to be as important as language aptitude in language learning success (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985). However, no consideration was given to these until humanistic education brought attention to the affective domain. Affective factors research in foreign language learning has concentrated on constructs such as self-esteem and learners' beliefs (Aragão, 2011). Although this research has advanced our knowledge of these factors, emotions have not yet been given enough attention in foreign language learning research (Imai, 2010).

Although the introduction of the humanistic methods e.g. The Silent Way, Community Language Learning and Suggestopedia acknowledged the important role of affect in language learning, some scholars did not consider this approach beneficial for language learning. While some authors favoured the use of affective strategies or humanistic activities in language classes (Arnold, 1998; Arnold & Brown, 1999), others state that English language teaching (ELT) teachers should be more concerned with the language they are supposed to help students learn (Gadd, 1998).

Currently, researchers recognize the need to review motivation from an affective perspective (MacIntyre, 2002; Dörnyei, 2005, 2007; Meyer & Turner, 2006). Nevertheless, motivation research in foreign language learning has largely focused on studying it as if motivation were a stable, non-dynamic construct which is not developed through interaction with teachers, peers, subject content and context (Dörnyei, 2000; Larsen-Freeman, 2001; Ellis, 2004; Shoaib & Dörnyei, 2004). Some studies have concentrated on establishing correlations between motivation and language proficiency (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2006), while other studies have focused on identifying and analysing diverse motives and validating motivational theories, instead of concentrating on the development of motivational strategies that can help students to cope with the process of learning a foreign language (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007). Consequently, motivation has largely been researched within a quantitative approach which has provided diverse results in the field of English language teaching.

Although some studies have been done on emotions in ELT (Hurd, 2008, Garret & Young, 2009; Bown & White, 2010; Imai, 2010, Aragão, 2011), they have not concentrated on the connection of these to the motivational behaviour displayed by foreign language learners. Due to this situation, our research question was: What effects do emotional experiences have on foreign language learners' motivation? Thus, this study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on how foreign language learning motivation is shaped by emotions.

The motivation construct is a very complex one that cannot be analysed from an isolated angle (Dörnyei, 2001). Different motivational approaches have been developed in order to try to understand this multifaceted construct. Four motivational psychology theories have been selected as those informing the interpretation of this study's results: self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997), attribution theory (Weiner, 1992), self-worth theory (Covington, 1998) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

According to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy refers to "(...) people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 71). These beliefs are the ones that shape how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. According to this theory, people with a high level of self-efficacy engage in tasks with the conviction that they possess the capabilities needed to succeed in them. In contrast, a person with a low level of self-efficacy avoids difficult tasks and resorts to their personal weaknesses to justify their lack of effort to pursue certain goals.

Self-efficacy beliefs affect human activity cognitively, affectively, motivationally and socially. People tend to plan what to do and how to achieve their goals, so this planning is shaped by the beliefs people have about their abilities to achieve such goals. Self-efficacy beliefs influence people affectively because, as a result of their ability assessment, some people are more prone to suffering from depression when involved in a challenging or threatening situation. However, positive self-efficacy feelings can encourage people to continue making their best effort in order to achieve specific goals. Thus, a person's life course is determined by the abilities they believe they possess.

Attribution theory assumes that human motivation is a result of the need to know the reason why something has happened. Thus, causal attributions of a phenomenon can be given to a person or to environmental factors. If a student, for example, has had very bad learning experiences which he or she attributes to his or her capacities, he or she might not be willing to participate in any learning activity again because he or she considers that the cause of failure is something he or she cannot change (his or her cognitive ability); however, if a learner considers that the reason for failure is that he or she did not make his or her best effort, then he or she could go into a new learning situation with the disposition to make his or her best effort so he or she can have better results this time. According to the most well-known scholar Weiner (1980), "The most salient

causal inferences are ability and effort, but many other factors are also influential" (p. 393).

According to Covington (1992), self-worth theory "(...) assumes that the search for self-acceptance is the highest human priority, and that in schools self-acceptance comes to depend on one's ability to achieve competitively" (p. 74). Thus, in schools learners are considered as worthy as their abilities to achieve educational goals imposed by schools and teachers. As such, a student's value is measured only through school achievement. This being the case, in school achievement, the focus of student life, different actions are performed by students in order to protect their self-image. Ability equals worth in schools, and it is this premise that makes students develop strategies such as over striving or cheating to protect themselves from negative appraisal of their ability by their peers.

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), self-determination theory focuses on "(...) investigating people's inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs that are the basis for their self-motivation and personality integration" (p. 68). They consider that the construct of motivation lies in a continuum of self-determination that goes from amotivation (lack of motivation) through external, introjected, identified and integrated regulation (externally regulated) to intrinsic motivation (intrinsically regulated). Ryan and Deci's (2000) final type of motivation on the continuum, intrinsic motivation, is "(...) the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn" (p. 70). In order for this type of innate motivation to be maintained, Ryan and Deci identify three conditions that need to be present: competence, relatedness and autonomy. Thus, it is not only that people need to feel competent in the different actions they perform throughout their lifetime, but they also need to feel that these actions are self-initiated in a supportive environment. Relatedness refers to the need people have to be accepted, respected and connected to significant others in their social environment. According to the above-mentioned authors, the social environment in which people grow is a crucial determinant

Emotional experiences were identified as having a significant role in Mexican students' motivational behaviour during classroom instruction. Educational scholars have affirmed that emotions play a significant role in motivation to learn (Garret & Young, 2009; Bown & White, 2010; Imai, 2010). In fact, participants in this study reported that attention to affect was the difference in the motivational behaviour they displayed in their language classes. Emotional experiences had a significant influence on students' motivation. Emotions, both positive and negative, have an important impact on foreign language learners' motivation, since they can activate or deactivate motivational behaviour (Pekrun et al., 2002). Experiencing both types of emotions was considered significant for students' language learning process since they helped them to regulate learning, as well as to regulate emotions. Motivation was revealed as dynamic and

evolving. Diverse emotional influences impacted the motivational behaviour of this study's participants. Although students experienced more negative situations than positive ones, they turned these into positive outcomes. The predominance of negative activating emotions (fear, worry and sadness) in this study might have triggered students' motivational behaviour to overcome those negative emotions in future academic tasks, and this might explain their motivation maintenance.

The frequent and sometimes intense negative emotions reported to be felt by participants in our study were not enough to diminish their overall motivation, since all the participants revealed themselves to be highly motivated to finish the ELT programme (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Negative emotions had the negative effect of causing demotivating behaviour in some students. However, students revealed that negative emotions led them to reflect on the situation experienced, which allowed them to re-evaluate the event and adjust their motivation accordingly. The reflection process described by participants included an attribution stage in which learners gave themselves an explanation of why the event resulted in that emotion (Weiner, 1992).

Participants of this study realised that although there were many factors influencing the way they reacted to emotional experiences, they could only change similar events in the future by improving their language level. As students attributed these negative feelings to their language proficiency, they immediately resorted to the use of learning strategies that helped them face negative emotions and kept them motivated. We believe this realisation during the reflection process is the one that led students to focus on those areas they needed to improve upon in order to enhance their language learning process. Thus, although negative emotions had an immediate negative effect on students' motivational energy, causing such behaviour as task avoidance and withdrawal from class participation, subsequent reflection allowed students to overcome that negative impact and to reenergise in order to continue their learning process.

Motivation in language learning cannot be developed in a vacuum; certain conditions need to be present before motivation can be initiated. Language learning is a process replete with negative and positive emotions, thus appropriate management of students' emotions is necessary for language teachers to enable them to help their students make their emotions work for them and not against them. The creation of a positive learning environment should therefore be the first aim language teachers strive for. This can be created through promoting group cohesion and establishing good teacher-student relationships. By showing genuine interest in students' learning processes, teachers will inspire trust, confidence and a motivating learning environment.

Reflection should also be encouraged so learners can understand their emotions better as learners, and this can help students set individualised goals to work toward. A peer-support scheme could be set up so students have a space to talk about their learning worries, and where feelings of affiliation can be

promoted. Self-evaluation should be encouraged on a weekly or monthly basis so students can review the strategies they are using, the success—or lack of success—they are having with them, and can set new objectives to work towards.

More research needs to be carried out in diverse contexts in order to find out what outcomes are derived from negative emotions and how specific contexts modify their impact on motivation. Future research also needs to make a comparison of the emotional experiences encountered by lower-level and proficient learners. Do students at different levels react differently to the same emotional experiences?

This research has uncovered a range of context governed factors affecting language learning motivation. It also provides evidence for understanding the developmental process of motivation.

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