EMOTIONAL FACTOR, LEARNER AUTONOMY, AND GENDER-SPECIFIC ATTITUDES IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

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Abstract. In ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms, students' learning outcomes and attitudes are profoundly influenced by their emotional experiences, perceptions of autonomy, and gender-specific factors. This articl examines the role of emotions and learning autonomy in shaping high school students' engagement, motivation, and self-confidence in ESL contexts, with particular attention to gender differences. The findings suggest that female students, while generally less confident in their language abilities compared to male students, demonstrate greater independence in learning and rely less on teacher approval. In contrast, male students, although more self-assured, tend to depend more on teacher support. The article also addresses teachers' roles, emphasizing the importance of strategies that promote learner autonomy while accommodating the unique emotional needs of both male and female students. The study's implications highlight the need for psychological and gender-responsive methods in ESL instruction to strengthen students' emotional resilience and foster autonomous learning.

Keywords: Emotions, learning autonomy, ESL, gender-specific attitudes, English language teaching.

ЭМОЦИОНАЛЬНЫЙ ФАКТОР, АВТОНОМИЯ УЧАЩЕГОСЯ И ГЕНДЕРНО-СПЕЦИФИЧЕСКИЕ УСТАНОВКИ В КЛАССЕ ESL

Аннотация. В классах ESL (английский как второй язык) результаты обучения и установки учащихся находятся под сильным влиянием их эмоционального опыта, восприятия автономии и гендерно-специфических факторов. В этой статье рассматривается роль эмоций и учебной автономии в формировании вовлеченности, мотивации и уверенности в себе учащихся старших классов в контексте ESL, с особым вниманием к гендерным различиям. Результаты показывают, что учащиеся женского пола, хотя в целом менее уверены в своих языковых способностях по сравнению с учащимися мужского пола, демонстрируют большую независимость в обучении и меньше полагаются на одобрение учителя. Напротив, учащиеся мужского пола, хотя и более уверены в себе, как правило, больше зависят от поддержки учителя. В статье также рассматриваются роли учителей, подчеркивая важность стратегий, которые способствуют автономии учащихся, при этом учитывая уникальные эмоциональные потребности как учащихся мужского, так и женского пола. Выводы исследования

подчеркивают необходимость психологических и гендерно-чувствительных методов в обучении ESL для укрепления эмоциональной устойчивости учащихся и содействия автономному обучению.

Ключевые слова: *эмоции, автономия в обучении, английский как второй язык, гендерно-специфические установки, преподавание английского языка.*

1. Introduction

Understanding how emotions, learning autonomy, and gender-specific attitudes shape students' experiences in the ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom is essential for improving learning outcomes. Research shows that emotions like anxiety, confidence, and motivation play a central role in academic success. According to Pekrun's (2007) Control-Value Theory of Achievement Emotions, these emotions are influenced by students' sense of control and the importance they attach to tasks, which directly impact their motivation and engagement in language learning. This theory aligns with the work of Schutz and Pekrun (2007), who found that emotional experiences in language classrooms significantly influence cognitive processes and, ultimately, academic success.Motivation and learner autonomy also play a crucial role. Dörnyei's (2005) research highlights the importance of fostering self-regulation and goal-setting in language learners, demonstrating that students who take more responsibility for their learning tend to achieve better results. Yet, autonomy can manifest differently among male and female students. Studies on gender differences in learning strategies, such as those by Tran (2010) and Oxford (1990), suggest that female students often adopt more interactive, social strategies, while male students might lean towards independent or analytical approaches, shaping how they engage with language learning.Anxiety is another factor deeply intertwined with gendered attitudes. Additionally, Engagement and Autonomy in L2 Learning which is the research on Chinese high school students found that a positive classroom environment supports learner autonomy .Female students often had a better understanding of learning goals than males, suggesting that gender-sensitive approaches may benefit student autonomy. (Zhao and Young , 2022).Howe's (1997) classroom observation studies suggest that teachers may unconsciously favor one gender, impacting students' emotional comfort and confidence, and thus their autonomy. Without realizing it, teachers might reinforce gender-specific behaviors that influence students' reliance on teacher feedback and their independence in learning.Collectively, these findings underscore the need for ESL teachers to adopt gender-sensitive, autonomy-supportive teaching strategies that acknowledge students' unique emotional and motivational needs. By drawing on these insights, educators can create learning environments that encourage all students to develop resilience, independence, and a positive relationship with language learning.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Pekrun's (2007) Control-Value Theory of Achievement Emotions explains how students' feelings in academic contexts are shaped by their perception of control over their learning and the significance they attach to their academic tasks. This theory categorizes achievement emotions—emotions felt during the learning process—according to their impact on motivation and performance. Positive emotions, such as enjoyment and pride, boost motivation and enhance learning, while negative emotions, including anxiety and boredom, can diminish motivation and negatively affect performance.

The theory focuses on two main dimensions: perceived control and perceived value. Perceived control pertains to an individual's belief in their ability to influence outcomes; when students feel a high degree of control, they are more likely to experience positive emotions, whereas a low sense of control can lead to feelings of anxiety and frustration. On the other hand, perceived value refers to how important students find their tasks; tasks viewed as valuable tend to elicit positive emotions, while those seen as insignificant may result in indifference or negative feelings.

This theory has important implications for education, as it underscores the importance of creating classroom environments that enhance students' sense of control and the value they place on learning activities. By doing so, educators can promote more positive emotional experiences, foster greater motivation, and improve overall academic performance.

2.2 Zoltán Dörnyei's "The Psychology of the Language Learner: Individual Differences in Second Language Acquisition" focuses on synthesizing existing research rather than offering new empirical findings. This theoretical framework incorporates various studies from psychology and second language acquisition (SLA) to explore the individual differences that exist among language learners.

The primary research emphasis is on individual differences, examining how various learner traits—including motivation, personality, anxiety, self-esteem, and learning strategies—affect language acquisition outcomes. Dörnyei highlights the diversity among learners and stresses the importance of addressing these differences within educational settings. He draws on psychological theories, particularly those related to motivation, to develop a thorough understanding of how these factors shape second language acquisition. The book reviews several models and frameworks, including Gardner's socio-educational model and self-determination theory, to place individual differences within the context of SLA.

A key contribution of Dörnyei's work is the L2 Motivational Self System, which is comprised of three elements: the Ideal L2 Self, which reflects learners' aspirations and goals regarding their language skills; the Ought-to L2 Self, which relates to the learners' perceptions of

the qualities they should possess to meet external expectations; and the L2 Learning Experience, which encompasses factors associated with the actual learning process, such as the classroom setting and teacher support. Additionally, Dörnyei examines the impact of affective factors, such as anxiety and motivation, on learning, suggesting that a deeper understanding of these elements can assist educators in fostering a more supportive and effective learning environment.

The text also investigates the various strategies that learners apply according to their unique characteristics, advocating that effective language instruction should cater to diverse learner strategies. Dörnyei conducts an extensive review of literature from SLA and psychology, analyzing empirical studies, theoretical articles, and models to construct a holistic understanding of individual differences in language learning. The book includes examples and case studies that demonstrate how theoretical concepts can be applied in practice, effectively connecting research to real-world teaching situations.

Dörnyei's work emphasizes the necessity for additional empirical studies to further investigate the complexities of individual differences in SLA. He advocates for research that examines the interactions between various individual difference factors, explores the influence of cultural and contextual elements on language learning motivation, and evaluates the effectiveness of teaching strategies aimed at accommodating individual differences.

2.3 Tran, L. T. (2010), in "Learning Strategies and Language Proficiency: The Mediating Role of Motivation," examines the connections between learning strategies, language proficiency, and motivation within the framework of educational research. Tran analyzes various learning strategies that language learners employ and investigates how these strategies relate to their overall proficiency in the language. A key focus of the study is the exploration of motivation as a mediating factor that influences the effectiveness of different learning strategies on language proficiency. Tran argues that a deeper understanding of how learning strategies and motivation interact can help educators create more effective teaching methods and support systems tailored to individual learners' needs. The research generally employs quantitative methods, such as surveys and assessments, to gather data on learners' proficiency levels and the strategies they apply.

In her influential work, "Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know," Oxford, R. L. (1990) provides essential insights into the role of learning strategies in acquiring a new language. Oxford presents a detailed framework for understanding these strategies, dividing them into direct strategies (including memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies) and indirect strategies (like metacognitive, affective, and social strategies). The book highlights the importance of teaching learners to recognize and effectively use these strategies in their language studies, asserting that those who possess the right strategies can achieve greater

independence and success. A significant aspect of Oxford's work is the practical guidance offered to teachers on how to integrate strategy training into their teaching practices, which includes fostering awareness among learners about various strategies and encouraging their use in different contexts. Oxford supports her arguments with empirical research and theoretical insights regarding the benefits of strategy-based instruction in language learning.

In summary, both Tran (2010) and Oxford (1990) make significant contributions to understanding language learning strategies and their effects on language acquisition. Tran focuses on the influence of motivation in enhancing the effectiveness of these strategies, while Oxford provides a thorough framework for categorizing and teaching them, thereby promoting learner autonomy and proficiency. Together, their works highlight the importance of strategic and motivational factors in language education.

2.4 Zhao, Y., and Young, S. (2022) investigate the roles of engagement and autonomy in second language (L2) learning in their work titled "Engagement and Autonomy in L2 Learning." They focus on how these two factors are interconnected and their impact on language learning outcomes, emphasizing the importance of creating an environment that fosters both engagement and autonomy among learners, which is vital for achieving proficiency in a second language.

The authors define engagement as the active participation of learners in the learning process, which includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects. They reference various models to demonstrate how engagement appears in L2 learning contexts. In contrast, autonomy refers to the learners' capacity to manage their own learning by making decisions about what, how, and when to learn. Zhao and Young discuss different theoretical perspectives on autonomy and stress the significance of self-directed learning.

They argue that engagement and autonomy are interrelated; increased learner autonomy often enhances engagement, while engaged learners are more likely to develop autonomy. The authors explain that when learners have autonomy, they feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for their education, which in turn boosts their engagement. They also examine the pivotal role that teachers play in promoting engagement and autonomy, emphasizing the necessity for educators to cultivate supportive learning environments that facilitate learner autonomy through options, relevance, and collaboration.

Furthermore, Zhao and Young analyze how various educational settings—whether formal, informal, or digital—affect the development of engagement and autonomy in language learners. They provide practical recommendations for language teachers, suggesting ways to enhance learner engagement and autonomy, such as incorporating technology into lessons, enabling personalized learning experiences, and creating opportunities for collaborative learning. They encourage instructors to design activities that allow learners to make choices about their learning

paths, thereby strengthening both engagement and autonomy.

Using a mixed-methods approach, Zhao and Young gather quantitative and qualitative data to investigate the connections between engagement, autonomy, and L2 learning outcomes, utilizing tools such as surveys, interviews, and classroom observations to collect insights from both learners and teachers. Their study highlights the essential roles of engagement and autonomy in L2 learning, indicating that understanding the relationship between these factors can help educators more effectively support learners in reaching language proficiency. Their findings stress the importance of instructional strategies that not only engage students but also empower them to take charge of their own learning experiences, which is crucial for fostering effective and meaningful language acquisition.

2.5 Colin Howe's 1997 research explores gender bias in classroom settings through observational studies, revealing that teachers may unconsciously favor one gender, which can significantly affect students' emotional comfort, confidence, and autonomy.

In his investigation, Howe observed various classrooms to analyze the interactions between teachers and students, particularly focusing on gender dynamics and potential biases. His findings indicate that teachers might not be aware of their favoritism towards a specific gender, which can manifest in various ways, such as providing more attention, praise, or support to students of that gender. As a result, students who do not receive this favoritism may feel undervalued and unsupported, leading to emotional discomfort and a perception of being less capable or deserving of attention.

This emotional discomfort can greatly influence students' confidence; those who feel overlooked may become reluctant to participate actively in discussions or classroom activities. The interplay between emotional comfort, confidence, and autonomy is critical, as Howe suggests that when students lack confidence due to perceived bias, their sense of autonomy also decreases. Consequently, they may be less inclined to take initiative in their learning, seek assistance, or engage in self-directed activities.

Howe stresses the importance of teacher awareness regarding gender dynamics in the classroom, urging educators to recognize their biases and cultivate an inclusive environment where all students feel equally valued. To promote equity, he suggests strategies such as engaging in self-reflection, implementing structured group activities to ensure balanced participation, and offering professional development programs that educate teachers on the effects of gender bias on student experiences.

His observational studies involved systematically monitoring classroom interactions over time, with a focus on how teachers engaged with students of different genders. The research collected data on verbal and non-verbal cues, levels of engagement, and overall classroom

dynamics. The significance of Howe's findings lies in their ability to highlight the impact of teacher biases on student experiences, emphasizing the necessity for educators to create supportive learning environments that enhance emotional well-being, confidence, and autonomy for all students.

In summary, Colin Howe's 1997 classroom observation studies offer valuable insights into the unconscious gender biases present in educational settings. By examining the effects of these biases on students' emotional comfort, confidence, and autonomy, the research calls for heightened awareness and proactive measures from educators to develop inclusive classrooms where every student can succeed. For a comprehensive understanding of the methodologies and findings, consulting the original study is recommended, as it provides additional context and examples.

3 Methodology

3.1 Conceptual framework and theoretical analysis

Pekrun's theory is based on a conceptual framework that categorizes achievement emotions experienced by students during learning, focusing on two key dimensions: perceived control and perceived value. The study primarily involves theoretical analysis rather than empirical data collection, exploring how these dimensions influence students' emotional experiences, motivation, and academic performance.

3.2 Dörnyei's research emphasizes the synthesis of existing studies in psychology and second language acquisition (SLA) to create a comprehensive theoretical framework regarding individual differences in language learning. He utilizes key psychological theories and models, including Gardner's socio-educational model and self-determination theory, to elucidate how different learner traits affect language acquisition. Furthermore, the text features practical examples and case studies that illustrate the application of these theoretical concepts in educational contexts.

3.3 Tran (2010) uses quantitative surveys and assessments to explore how motivation mediates the relationship between learning strategies and language proficiency, collecting data on learners' proficiency and strategy use. Oxford (1990) provides a theoretical framework for language learning strategies, dividing them into direct and indirect types, supported by empirical research and offering practical guidelines for teachers to incorporate these strategies into instruction.

3.4 Zhao and Young (2022) employ a mixed-methods approach, utilizing surveys, interviews, and classroom observations to examine the relationship between engagement, autonomy, and L2 learning outcomes. Their research gathers insights from both students and teachers for a comprehensive understanding of these factors in language learning.

3.5 Howe conducted observational studies in various classroom settings to analyze teacher-

student interactions with a focus on gender dynamics. He systematically monitored verbal and non-verbal cues, levels of engagement, and overall classroom dynamics over time to identify any patterns of favoritism toward a specific gender.

4 Results

4.1 The results indicate that emotions significantly impact learning outcomes. Positive emotions, such as enjoyment and pride, boost motivation and enhance learning, while negative emotions, including anxiety and boredom, diminish motivation and negatively affect performance. Furthermore, the dimensions of control and value play a crucial role in this dynamic. A high sense of perceived control is correlated with positive emotional experiences, whereas a low sense of control is linked to feelings of anxiety and frustration.

4.2 Dörnyei highlights the impact of individual learner traits—such as motivation, personality, anxiety, self-esteem, and learning strategies—on language acquisition, underscoring learner diversity. He introduces the L2 Motivational Self System, which comprises the Ideal L2 Self (aspirations and goals), the Ought-to L2 Self (external expectations), and the L2 Learning Experience (influences from the learning environment). Dörnyei emphasizes the role of emotions like anxiety and motivation in learning, stressing the need for supportive environments, and advocates for diverse learning strategies to meet individual learner needs effectively.

4.3 Tran (2010) shows that motivation significantly enhances the effectiveness of learning strategies on language proficiency, with motivated learners better utilizing strategies to improve their skills. Oxford (1990) provides a structured approach to language strategies, illustrating that effective strategy use fosters learner autonomy and improves outcomes by helping learners choose methods suited to various contexts.

4.4 The study reveals a close link between engagement and autonomy in L2 learning, where increased autonomy enhances engagement, and high engagement fosters autonomy. When learners feel responsible for their education, their motivation and participation increase. The research also emphasizes the teacher's role in promoting both engagement and autonomy through supportive and flexible learning environments.

4.5 The research revealed that teachers may unconsciously favor one gender, leading to unequal attention, praise, and support. Students who do not receive this favoritism often experience emotional discomfort, resulting in decreased confidence and a reduced sense of autonomy. This lack of confidence may discourage active participation in discussions and learning activities.

5 Conclusions

5.1 The theory highlights the significance of developing educational environments that enhance students' perceived control and the value they assign to learning tasks. By cultivating such environments, educators can promote positive emotional experiences, foster greater

motivation, and ultimately improve overall academic performance.

5.2Dörnyei's work calls for more empirical research to explore interactions among individual differences in SLA, particularly considering cultural and contextual influences on language learning motivation. He highlights the importance of developing teaching strategies that address these differences to create more effective and supportive learning environments tailored to diverse learner traits.

5.3 Tran and Oxford both stress that motivation and strategic awareness are crucial in language learning. Tran highlights the need to support motivation when teaching strategies, while Oxford emphasizes strategy training for learner autonomy and success. Together, they underscore the role of motivation and strategy in effective language acquisition.

5.4 Zhao and Young conclude that engagement and autonomy are crucial for successful L2 learning. They stress the need for instructional strategies that promote active participation and independent choices. The study suggests using technology, personalized learning, and collaboration to enhance these factors, ultimately improving language proficiency. The authors recommend designing activities that empower students to take ownership of their learning, fostering greater engagement and autonomy in language acquisition.

5.5Howe stresses the need for teachers to recognize their biases and create inclusive environments where all students feel valued. He recommends self-reflection, structured group activities for balanced participation, and professional development on gender bias. His findings highlight the importance of fostering supportive learning environments that promote emotional well-being, confidence, and autonomy for every student.

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