The social and emotional aspects of learning to speak English as an L2 in the Egyptian primary classroom

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Abstract

Drawing on the framework of Self Determination Theory (SDT), this study investigates the social and emotional aspects of children's experiences of anxiety and agency/autonomy during speaking pairwork activities in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) primary classroom. Nine English language teachers were introduced to the framework of SDT and trained in using it to plan and implement speaking pairwork activities in their classrooms. Using pairwork and focusing on speaking were quite innovative practices in these classrooms where more traditional teacher-centered and grammar–translation approaches to teaching and learning prevailed, which meant that there was limited focus on collaborative learning and development of spoken language skills. Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection tools with a sample of primary-school children (n=281), this

study investigated the interplay between anxiety and autonomy during pairwork speaking activities. Findings indicated that there was a negative correlation between anxiety experienced and a sense of agency/autonomy: children who were most anxious felt reduced agency/autonomy, which made learning to speak English more difficult. However, children felt least anxious and most autonomous when doing pairwork. The study identified factors that could maximize support for children's sense of agency/autonomy and alleviate their feelings of anxiety in the English-speaking classroom. The study concluded by providing some recommendations for teachers and curriculum development.

Introduction

This article draws on the framework of Self Determination Theory (SDT) to investigate primary-school children's social and emotional experiences of anxiety and a sense of agency during lessons for speaking English as a second language (L2). SDT suggests that people can only thrive and learn creatively – as is necessary when learning to communicate with others in an L2 – when they feel sufficiently competent, agentic, and socially related to others. In this article, we describe an intervention in which we introduced simultaneous pairwork into the classes of 281 children in three government primary schools in Alexandria, Egypt. The basis of our intervention was to support communication in L2 learning by attending to its social-emotional dimensions as well as its technical aspects; in particular, children's sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2019) as they learned to speak English as a foreign language (EFL).

Teachers in nine classrooms were introduced to SDT and supported to use simultaneous pairwork for English-speaking lessons (i.e., *all* children speaking in pairs at the same time) with attention to their students' feelings of competence, autonomy, and social relatedness in the classroom. Teachers were provided with techniques they could use to implement pairwork in a way that supported children's sense of competence, autonomy and relatedness. They also practised using these pairwork techniques through intensive microteaching sessions during which they received feedback from their colleagues and the researchers and also reflected on their practices and understanding of SDT. Later, in schools, one of the researchers attended classes with these teachers and observed how they implemented pairwork activities. These observation sessions were followed by feedback and reflection sessions with the teachers.

The aim was to implement SDT, potentially leading to improved English language speaking skills. We also had the long-term social justice goal of improving the children's wellbeing in the broader sense foregrounded by SDG Target 4.7, which might be achieved both by supporting communication through English and through the pedagogy of pairwork specifically:

> Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for … human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence[1]

As in many low- to middle-income countries, EFL classrooms in Egypt tend to be over-crowded and under-resourced. Teacher-centered classes, grammar–translation methods, and teaching to the test are common practices in these classes with very little, if any,

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[1] From SDG Target 4.7: https://indicators.report/targets/4-7/

attention to individual differences or socio-emotional aspects of learning, which ultimately leads these classes to lack features considered necessary for effective language learning (e.g., Dörnyei, 2009; Watanabe & Swain, 2008). Repeated reports in Egypt have pointed to primary-aged learners' failure to develop the necessary interactional foreign language skills they need to function on both the global and national levels (see Hanushek, 2008; ECD/World Bank Review Team, 2014). Less attention, however, has been given to the social and emotional aspects of classroom learning and their influence on L2 attainment and the attainment of greater levels of global peace.

As language researchers and educators, we all work hard to find ways to support pupils' learning and development. Often, we investigate the impact of using different teaching methods, curricula, or technologies and we may overlook the learners themselves, how they are feeling during lessons, and what they can therefore teach us about how to enhance their language learning experiences. In our research, we asked the children *themselves* to tell us what helped them; we guided them to fill in surveys, talk, and draw pictures to convey their responses.

Teaching and developing speaking skills in English

Developing spoken interactional language skills is a particularly steep challenge despite being important for global equality and social justice. More than with other language skills, there are specific socio-cultural and affective factors beyond linguistic and cognitive ones that impact learners' ability to speak and interact in English in the classroom (Shvidko et al., 2015). Our current research investigates the varying factors in relation to foreign language speaking anxiety and learner autonomy that facilitate or hinder pupils who are learning to speak English inside the classroom. Our findings provide responses from pupils themselves about variables that support or hinder the development of their spoken language skills. It therefore emphasizes the views of the pupils, on how to support and encourage their speaking of English, as its main evidence-source.

In terms of children's need for autonomy during L2 acquisition in the language classroom, young learners would develop their own, internal hypotheses about language systems, in order to take the initiative within language usage. However, it is only through meaningful interaction that learners use the language to communicate messages, negotiate meaning, and receive feedback on their use of the language in real-life contexts in which they can test and verify the hypotheses they have developed about its systems. The research therefore suggests that learners must engage in meaningful interactional activities with their peers as they learn to speak. However, young learners often find it threatening to speak in front of their classmates and teachers feel reluctant to promote spoken work in their classes when they themselves have low proficiency levels or lack confidence in relation to listening and speaking. While teachers' language proficiency level is important, other linguistic and non-linguistic factors could impede pupils' speaking of English even more: for example, when the classroom culture is not compassionate, collaborative, and equitable. In particular, classroom environments that do not value pupils' participation and collaborative work may not provide conditions for developing spoken interactional skills. The use of pairwork, then, can contribute to language development and interactional spoken competencies because it allows young learners space to practice and experiment with language in a relatively low-anxiety setting. Pairwork provides peer scaffolding and support especially for struggling

learners and those who may lack the necessary language competencies or self-confidence to speak English in front of the whole class (Hargreaves et al., 2020).

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation by teachers and/or peers, and test anxiety act together to create foreign language classroom anxiety. When students dread interacting with others in the foreign language, believe that their teachers and/or peers see them as less competent, and fear making mistakes, they tend to avoid or withdraw from participating in classroom activities and therefore have fewer opportunities for learning. Several studies have concluded that language anxiety and language learning are negatively correlated (Zhao, Guo & Dynia, 2013).

Language learner competence, autonomy and relatedness (CAR)

Ryan and Deci (2019) highlighted evidence for the critical role of supports for Competence, Autonomy, and Relatedness (CAR) in human development and creative learning, including the processes necessary for initiating speaking in a foreign language. Self Determination Theory (SDT) has been extensively researched in education and proposes 'the importance of autonomous motivation for students' quality of learning and engagement' (Ryan & Deci, 2019, p. 138): that is, for learners to willingly engage in proactively initiating talk in L2. In our research, we explored the relationship between children's perceived autonomy (reflecting their agency) and their experiences of learning to *speak* English through pairwork, in contrast to learning English through their regular recitation practices. By autonomy, Ryan and Deci (2019) mean 'a wholehearted willingness to act' (ibid, 132) and 'willingness, empowerment and volition' (ibid, 123). Agency, as reflected in autonomy (and used interchangeably with autonomy for the remainder of this paper), was described by Helwig (2006) as an essential aspect of the human propensity for curiosity and creativity. Helwig also posited that constraints to agency can lead to a dampening of the child's curiosity, creativity, overall well-being, and sense of community. We suggest that these negative effects may be particularly acute in relation to learning to *speak* a foreign language since this demands curiosity, creativity, overall well-being, and a sense of community in a way that other areas of the curriculum may not.

According to SDT, one's perceived autonomy is inextricably connected to both competence (i.e., in our case, a sense that one is good at speaking English) and a feeling of belonging to a community (in this case, to one's pair or class). If these three needs are met, according to SDT, creative learning is boosted. Competence and autonomy are connected in that one's competence becomes more evident to oneself – and may be actually enhanced – when autonomy operates. Ryan and Deci explained that the highest-quality dyadic relationships, for example pairwork, entail mutuality of autonomy (2019, 114). In other words, a pair of novice English speakers in a pairwork dyad needs to sense their mutual autonomy in order to experience competence and relatedness. Many studies associated with SDT have provided evidence that agency is needed for some aspects of productive learning in many different cultures (Jang, Kim, & Reeve, 2012; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). We were interested to see whether or how this would be manifested within the Egyptian EFL classroom and what role the emotional and social traits associated with a sense of autonomy played in encouraging learning to speak English.

We also highlight in this paper the importance of children's relatedness during language learning in which free and equal relationships between people are needed for success. Ryan and Deci (2019) emphasized how volitional, supportive relationships are essential for high-quality performance; they also stress that this relatedness must be accompanied by a sense of autonomy. Their emphasis links closely to SDG Target 4.7 which promotes 'education for … human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence'.[2] Children's perceptions of their own autonomy and competence are inter-connected with this target of promoting 'a culture of peace and non-violence' which can be fostered by a culture of equality among generations, respect for social groups, and genders, which lies at the heart of the human-rights approach to peace. Pairwork, collaboratively and proactively led by children with the caring support of the teacher, can be one means by which such ideas and practices are nurtured.

We note that the situation in the classrooms described in this article may differ from those in other countries where corporal punishment and bullying are not tolerated. In Egypt, corporal punishment was outlawed but has not been fully eliminated. This appeared to make relatedness between pupils and teachers, and among pupils themselves, more problematic.

Research design

Our research aimed to investigate the social and emotional factors that encouraged and discouraged young learners' learning of spoken English inside the classroom. The study used a research intervention of pairwork use and was carried out in three government primary schools in Alexandria, Egypt, that serve disadvantaged children. The research aimed to investigate the following main question:

In relation to anxiety and autonomy, how do primary pupils experience learning to speak English during classroom pairwork activities?

Research intervention

In September 2019, local authorities in Alexandria selected three government schools to take part in this research project. The schools were in three different locations across Alexandria and were all considered under-resourced schools. Nine classes, with a total of 281 children, from these three schools participated in the study. All consents were obtained from relevant stakeholders following the British Sociological Association guidelines (2017).

At the beginning of October 2019, the project commenced with a two-day training conference which was attended by seven grade 4 English teachers (pupils aged 9), one grade 5 teacher (pupils aged 10), and one grade 3 teacher (pupils aged 8).

The training conference aimed to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills they needed to integrate speaking activities into their daily teaching in a way that maximized speaking time for all children and allowed for both peer support and the teacher's support. The teacher participants at the conference were introduced to the key principles of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2019), followed by hands-on teaching and learning strategies that supported learners' sense of competence, agency, and relatedness (CAR) in the English classroom. Teachers were, particularly, guided on how they could use CAR principles to plan and implement pairwork speaking activities using the coursebooks they already had at school (which actually modelled pairwork, although no teachers followed the coursebook's direction in this). The final part of the training included micro-teaching in which each teacher led a lesson based on the textbook, including pairwork, under observation by the rest of the teachers and the two researchers. Through these means, the researchers were reassured that the teachers had grasped the concepts of the importance of competence, agency, and relatedness in the teaching of speaking.

The nine teachers then applied pairwork in their classrooms, drawing on the textbook vocabulary and dialogues that all teachers had access to. The authors observed their teaching and provided feedback focused on individual teachers' needs and aimed at supporting teachers to evaluate how they were using pairwork and the extent to which pairwork supported pupils' sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, and encouraged them to speak in English. Feedback also aimed to encourage teachers to be creative in using these pairwork activities. While the teachers based pairwork on written dialogues in the textbooks, they also built in opportunities for the children to extend and/or adapt the dialogues. They instructed the whole class to divide into pairs, each of which would practice the dialogue at the same time as all the others, making excellent use of the available time. Each teacher was observed at least twice during the first academic semester (October–December). The classroom observations were planned within the structure of a pre- and post-observation meeting. During the pre-observation meeting, the researchers met with each teacher in private and discussed the textbook lesson plans and how CAR underpinned their activities, and shared suggestions for implementation. The post-observation meeting engaged teachers in reflecting individually – with the authors – on the teaching and learning experiences in their classes. During the post-observation meeting, teachers were encouraged to experiment with different approaches of how pairwork could better support pupils' spoken English skills.

Research methods

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected for this current article through questionnaires [n=243 children] and drawings [n= 107]. During February 2020, 243 pupils responded to three different 4-point-scale closed questionnaires that aimed to assess pupils' classroom experience of a) speaking anxiety, b) autonomy support, and c) autonomy satisfaction. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was used to measure anxiety and the Perception of Autonomy Support (PAS) and Autonomy Need Satisfaction (ANS) surveys were used to capture autonomy. We did not try to measure relatedness but drawings were employed to capture the child's overall social and emotional experiences when doing pairwork. Pupils were asked to sketch a picture of a situation that made them feel anxious during classroom pairwork activities. However, some pupils refrained from drawing and preferred only to respond to the written aspects of the questionnaire. Others also chose to draw situations that made them feel relaxed and supported during pairwork activities. The number of drawings available for analysis was 107.

Findings from the questionnaire data

The foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS)
The language anxiety scale (Nilsson, 2019) asked respondents to identify the level of anxiety they felt during classroom speaking activities that included working in pairs, making mistakes, not understanding the teacher, speaking without preparation, and dealing with peer pressure. As illustrated in Figure 1, the majority of the respondents reported experiencing moderate levels of anxiety during the learning of speaking English. The mean score for girls was slightly but significantly higher than for boys, suggesting that boys were less anxious than girls about speaking English. Girls' and boys' scores are illustrated in the box plots in Figure 2.
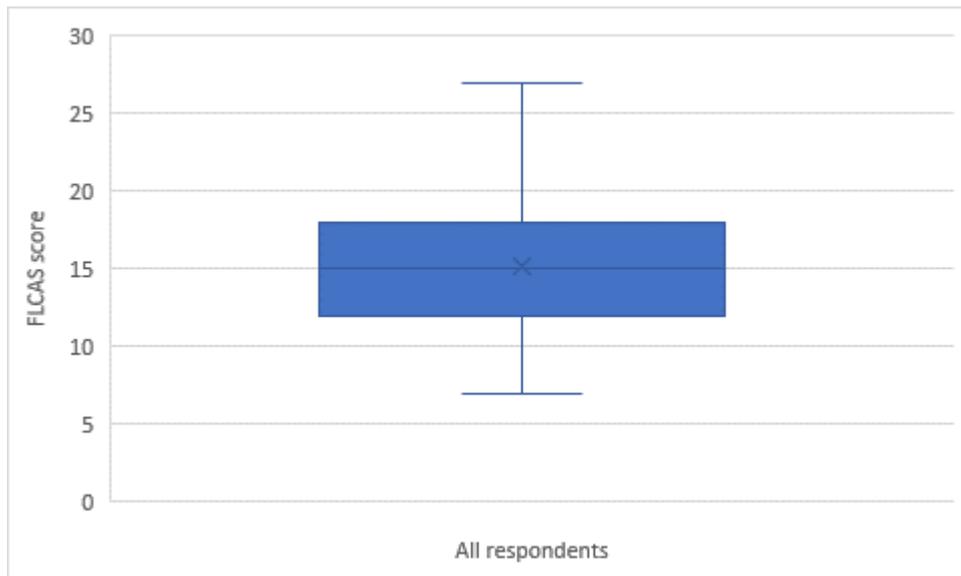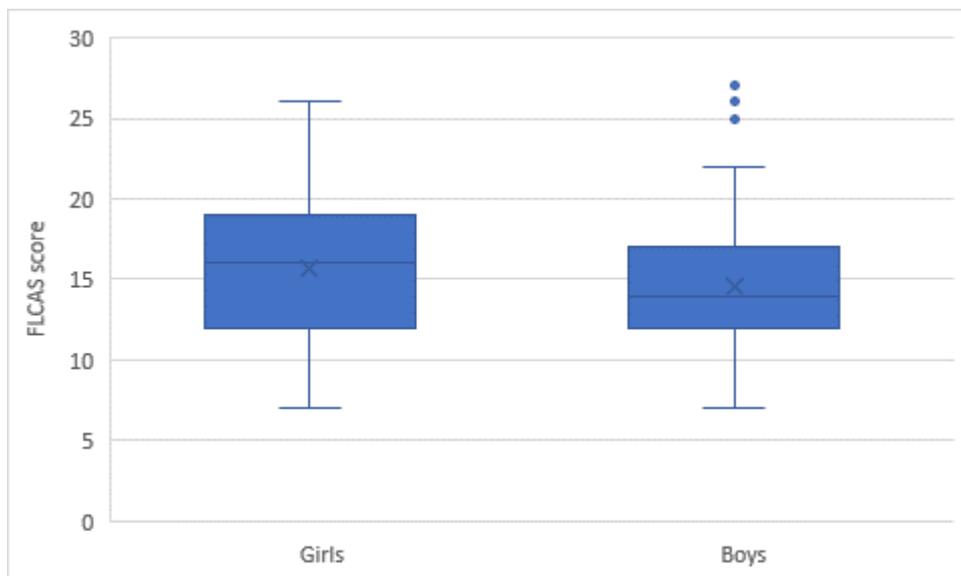
Figure 1. FLCAS scores, all respondents.

Figure 2. FLCAS scores by gender.

Differences in classroom anxiety between girls and boys

Given the focus of the present study on pairwork and specific classroom practices, it was of interest how boys and girls differed in their individual responses within the questionnaire. Statistically significant differences were found for two items: *I am afraid of making mistakes when I speak in English* (t=2.27, df=230.4, p=.02) and *I'm afraid the others will laugh or tease me when I speak English* (t=3.20, df=236.5, p<.01).

In both cases, girls experienced anxiety more frequently than did boys. This finding suggested that the teachers' attitude towards making mistakes and/or how they approached error correction in class acted as a possible trigger of anxiety, especially among girls. It could be that, directly or indirectly, teachers valued accuracy over fluency and encouraged correct answers rather than experimentation with the language and its use to communicate and negotiate meaning, and that girls picked up on this message especially.

This finding also suggested that girls in particular felt more vulnerable to peer pressure as indicated by their fear of peer ridicule when speaking English in class. It is also interesting to note that the item 'It feels ok to speak English in pairs' has *the least anxious responses from girls and boys.* This strongly suggested that pairwork could support learning to speak English with minimal anxiety and provide young learners with an enjoyable and beneficial learning experience. Looking at this item about pairwork and the item about fear of peer ridicule also suggests that peer support is an essential condition for making pairwork successful.

Illustration by Lucy Hunt

Perception of autonomy support (PAS)

Descriptive statistics for the PAS suggested that children's responses were slightly skewed towards agreeing that their autonomy was supported (see Figure 3). These results suggested that girls perceived a lower level of support for their autonomy in the classroom than did boys. This may imply that teachers needed to provide more choices and encourage more questions when working with girls, or that they tolerated more autonomous behaviour in boys because they were boys. However, it should be noted that reliability for this test was low and our classroom observations did not support the conclusion that autonomy was supported in most classrooms. Girls' and boys' scores are illustrated in the box plots in Figure 4.
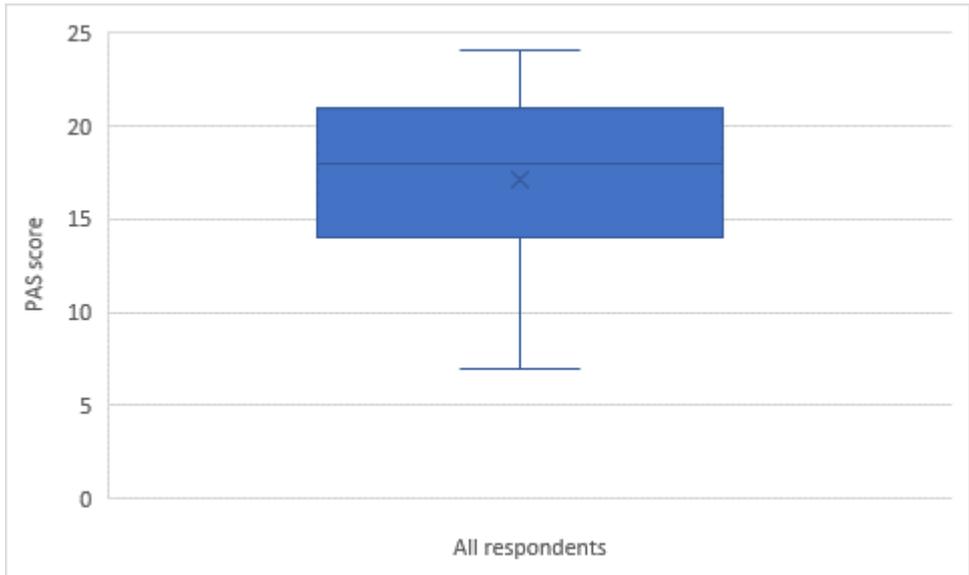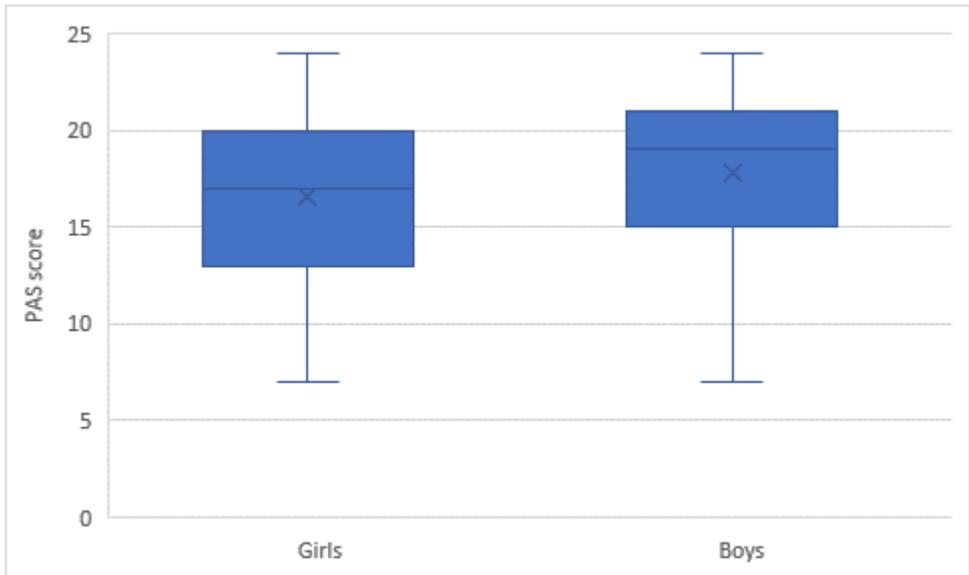
Figure 3. PAS scores, all respondents

Figure 4. PAS scores, by gender

Differences in perceptions of autonomy support between girls and boys

As above, the differences between boys' and girls' responses to individual questions were also explored. Statistically significant differences were found for two items: *My English teacher provides choices and options* (t=-3.67, df=228.2, p<.001) and *My English teacher understands what I need* (t=-2.38, df=240.8, p.02). In both cases boys perceived greater autonomy support than did girls.

Autonomy need satisfaction (ANS)

Descriptive statistics for ANS indicated that children's responses were slightly skewed towards agreeing that their autonomy needs were being met. Mean scores were also calculated separately for girls and for boys but these suggested that, despite the differences in their perceptions of autonomy support, there was no significant difference between boys and girls in their experiences of autonomy-need-satisfaction in the classroom. This might suggest that girls were less willing to express their needs. During classroom observations, we noticed that the girls were more reserved about openly expressing feelings and thoughts
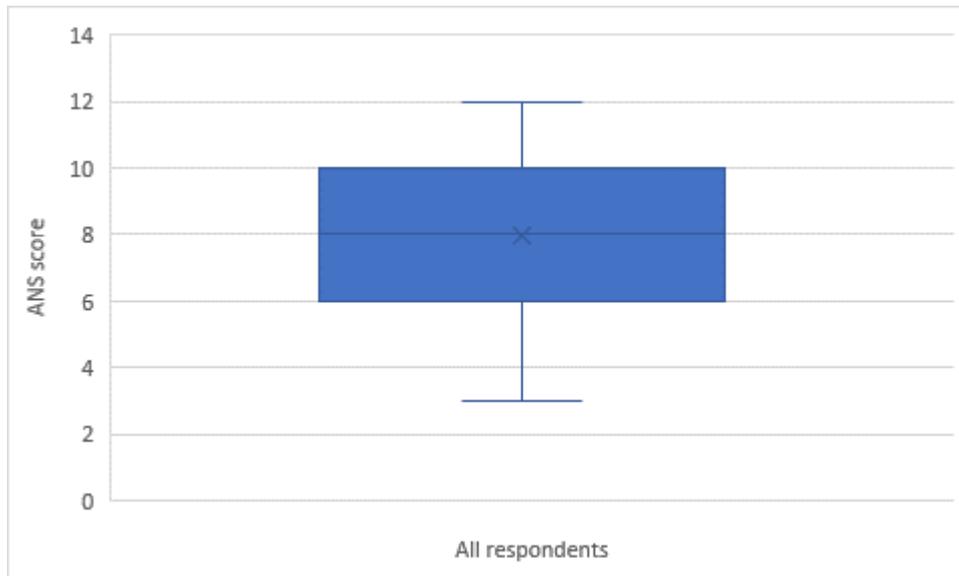

Figure 5. ANS scores, all respondents

Summary correlational analyses
The relationships between the three scale variables were investigated further by using Pearson's r, applying a Bonferroni adjustment for multiple correlations. It was found that responses on all three scales, FLCAS, PAS, and ANS, were correlated with each other. Anxiety (FLCAS) was negatively correlated with both autonomy support (PAS, r = -.25, p<.001) and autonomy need satisfaction (ANS, r = -.37, p<.001), suggesting that more anxious children were likely to have lower perceptions of support for autonomy and less likely to feel that their need for autonomy was being met. Autonomy support was positively correlated with autonomy need satisfaction (r = .55, p<.001), suggesting that pupils who felt that teachers provided them with more support for autonomy were more likely to feel that their needs for autonomy were being met.

Findings from the drawings (qualitative data from 107 girls and 57 boys)

When managed appropriately, pairwork helped children to:

- ➢ Feel competent and valued
- ➢ Feel autonomous and creative
- ➢ Practice speaking skills
- ➢ Feel less anxiety about speaking in English.

Two main themes emerged from analyzing the drawings: these were, predictably, a) fear of peer pressure; and b) fear of making mistakes.

Peer pressure was caused by peer ridicule when a child made a mistake and by feeling less competent than other children in class. Figure 6 below provides a vivid illustration of peer ridicule during a pairwork speaking activity. In this drawing, the child drew herself in tears while the other children in class were laughing at her because she failed to answer correctly. The child wrote, 'I feel afraid when I don't know how to answer in front of my classmates, and everyone starts laughing at me. Then, I feel *broken*!'
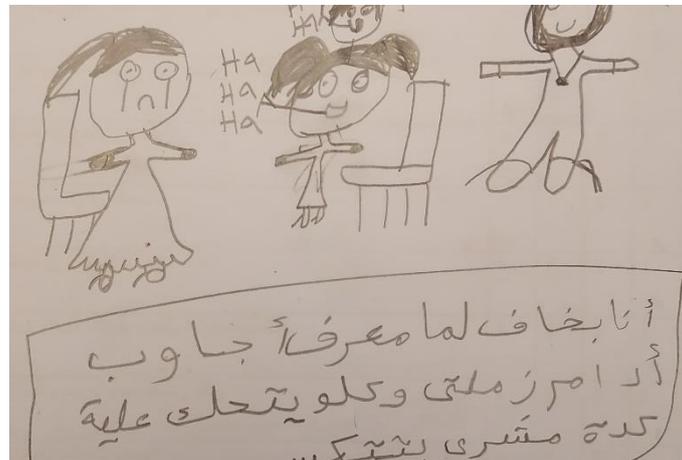
Figure 6. Peers laughing at a child who could not speak correctly

Feeling less competent, in comparison to other peers, was another source of peer pressure. Figure 7 illustrates a child in tears because she could not provide her partner with the correct answer and therefore perceived herself to be 'less' competent, and of a lower status than her partner. The child wrote, 'Rehana, my classmate, asks me about the meaning of a word and I whisper quietly to myself that I don't know the answer.'

Figure 7. A child in tears for not knowing the correct answer

Lack of peer support and relatedness, particularly when a child lacked competence or felt anxious, could impact on children's learning in an obstructive way. On the other hand, peer

support could help children overcome feelings of 'fear' and 'being stuck'. Figure 8 below illustrates how one child was able to complete a task successfully when she shared her worries with a classmate and received support and reassurance in return. The child wrote: "I tell my classmate that I am afraid, but she helps me and tells me the answer and then I can go on."

Figure 8. A child being supported by a classmate

Many of the children's drawings illustrated classroom situations during which teachers' actions were perceived to trigger anxiety and fear. The most frequently illustrated situation was that of a fear of making mistakes and thus being reprimanded by the teacher or failing to gain the teacher's approval. Children's illustrations revealed how children's participation was often curtailed by the prospect of being unable to provide the correct and expected 'model' response. For example, Figure 9 below shows a teacher monitoring a pairwork speaking activity. The child described her feeling about the teacher's monitoring by saying, '… when the teacher is around and I say one word incorrectly, I start to feel nervous, and I feel that the teacher will think that I am useless.'

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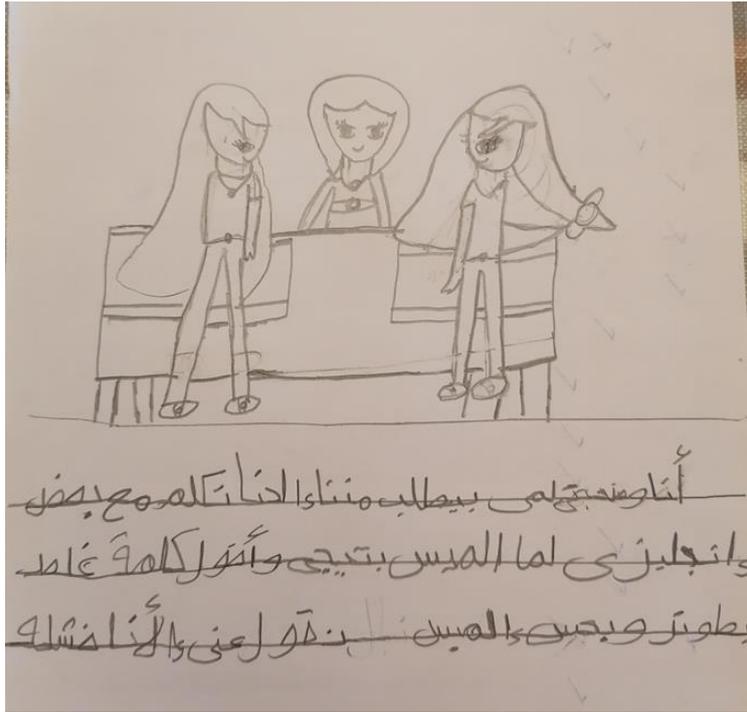بطونر ويحسن الميس نقول عني والأنا مشكلة

Figure 9. A teacher closely monitoring pairwork

Similarly, Figure 10 shows the teacher urging the child to speak in English and the child in tears for fear of the prospect of the teacher's reprimand. The child commented, 'I feel very afraid, and I stutter because I think that the teacher will shout at me and hit me. Then I cannot speak, and I tremble.'

Figure 10. A child in tears for fear of the teacher's reprimand

How teachers monitored pairwork activities and responded to mistakes had effects. Teachers needed to monitor pupils in a supportive, responsive, and non-threatening way, which could mean monitoring from a distance. They needed to embrace and welcome mistakes as learning opportunities rather than intolerable incidents that necessitated punishment. When teachers, directly or indirectly, reinforced the view of mistakes as intolerable and unwelcome, they triggered anxiety and impaired pupils' sense of competence and, therefore, created a classroom atmosphere that was not conducive for learning. On the other hand, when teachers supported pupils' sense of competence, pupils felt happy, reassured, and confident in their ability to learn and succeed that extended beyond classroom time. Figure 11 illustrates how a teacher's encouragement and support prompted a child to feel confident to learn and succeed. The child wrote, 'I feel happy because when I can speak well, the teacher has confidence in me, and I feel that I am good at English and will be good in the future.'
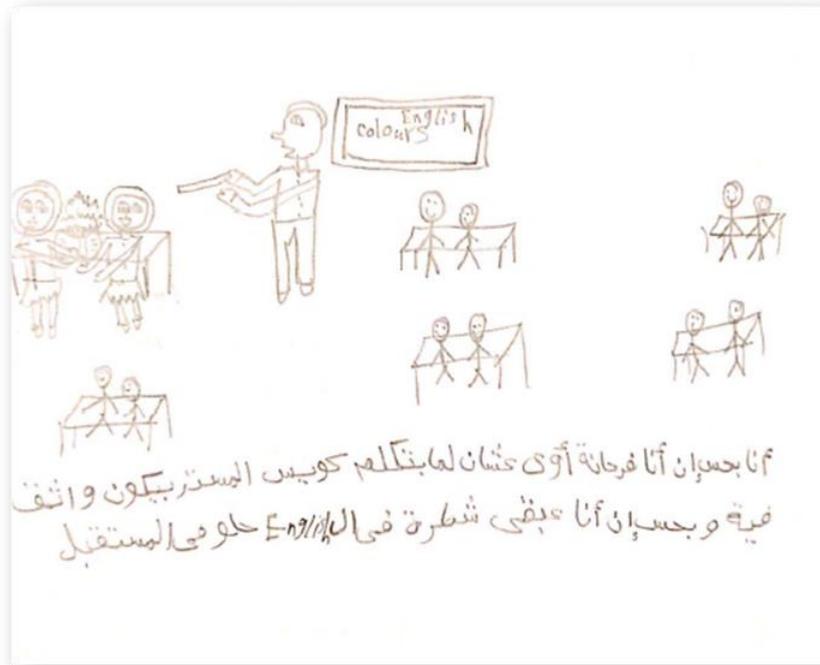
Figure 11. A child feeling happy and confident because of the teacher's support

Discussion

This article drew on the framework of Self Determination Theory (SDT) to investigate primary-school children's social and emotional experiences of anxiety and a sense of agency during lessons for speaking English as a second language (L2). SDT suggests that people can only thrive and learn creatively when they feel sufficiently competent, agentic, and socially related to others. However high quality the textbook or other technical resources, without a teacher who recognizes the fundamental importance of social and emotional issues in the classroom, learning to speak a foreign language will continue to be a particular problem. Our findings have highlighted in particular how children's fear of making mistakes and being subjected to the teacher's reprimand – and peers' ridicule – could curtail pupils' participation and eventually constrain their ability to develop speaking skills in English. As illustrated in the children's expressive drawings, a child who is in tears, or stuttering, or who feels *broken*, finds it difficult to engage in the lesson, or to learn and grow. On the other hand, a child who feels related to peers and feels competent is more likely to be happy and confident to participate willingly and learn eagerly during class time and beyond.

It became clear in our findings, as anticipated by extant literature, that the individual's experience of anxiety during English-speaking lessons could impede their attempts to speak in English. As one child expressed, 'Fear is the biggest obstacle, fear that the other pupils in the class will laugh at me or that the teacher gets upset with me.' The FALCS survey suggested that pupils most often felt anxious when making mistakes. Lack of one's perceived competence was evidently related to anxiety, but lack of perceived autonomy and relatedness were also obstructive. Because attainment in exams was the main driving force behind classroom behaviors, children who struggled with English were constantly reminded of their lack of *competence*, which appeared to provoke anxiety. This curtailment of a sense of competence, leading to increased anxiety, was unsurprising in a context where the

teacher conveyed that making mistakes was a negative event. However, it was striking to note that the scale item with the lowest mean score for anxiety was that relating to working in pairs, suggesting that pairwork was less anxiety-provoking for pupils.

Some implications for classroom practice

With regard to using pairwork in the classroom, our findings illustrate that when carried out sensitively, pairwork reduced anxiety and increased a sense of agency, often through relatedness to the community. However, teachers needed to pay careful attention to how pairs were formed so that children were working with a partner whom they liked and trusted. If they failed to do this, a child's peers could be just as anxiety-provoking as their teachers. While a culture of competitiveness and meritocracy existed in classrooms, pairwork sought to adapt the learning process to focus more on attending to human rights, gender equality, and the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence.

Teachers also needed to make sure that they did not inhibit children's speaking of English by monitoring their performance in a direct way by pointing out mistakes or even hovering too close to a couple engaged in dialogue. Again, attention to this detail was made particularly important, given the pervading classroom emphasis on reaching correct answers and proving oneself better than others, rather than on promoting a culture of peace and equality which might indeed be facilitated more easily through pairwork.

Findings from this research have also highlighted children's capacity for reflecting on their learning and have suggested ways to improve it. We strongly recommend that teachers recognize this capacity and draw on it to increase children's expression of autonomy and their decision-making over how they learn: a manifestation of respect for their human rights as children. It is often the case that young learners' voices are overlooked, especially in educational contexts where greater emphasis is on teachers' performance rather than learning processes. This denies teachers the knowledge and understandings of their pupils' actual needs and hampers their ability to establish effective learning environments and use classroom activities that are responsive and conducive to young learners' linguistic development and feelings of well-being.

We propose that teachers and materials writers can devise simple activities to find out what children think and feel, which could be easily integrated in everyday classroom teaching and learning routines. Next, teachers would need to adjust their teaching to respond to identified learners' needs. When learners feel that their voice matters and that their suggestions are integrated into classroom teaching and learning activities, they are more likely to feel engaged and motivated to learn. To fulfil this requirement, teachers also need to ask for feedback from their learners, and to build opportunities in the classroom to observe learners while they complete tasks and take notice of their engagement across a wide range of tasks and classroom situations, always looking out for how the needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness are being met. Materials writers can include more pairwork and also – very importantly - more support for teachers on how to manage pairwork; and on how to attend to the construction of a social and emotional learning environment that is conducive to learning.

Our findings have highlighted the benefit of children experiencing autonomy in their learning. Based on this, we propose that teachers should:

- Organize pairwork *among all children at the same time*, so that each pair feels comfortable with each other and thereby has anxiety-free space to experiment with speaking, following efficient teacher modelling of the activity;
- Encourage children to reflect on what helps them learn to speak best and give them opportunities to act on their individual preferences; and
- Allow children to tell them when they have grasped what they are learning before moving on to new topics.

Drawing on these findings, we propose that teachers:

- Draw on their own autonomy by acting as models themselves of enjoying the challenge of trying to speak, even if teachers' own English is not fluent;
- Encourage children by seeing them as equal, fellow English speakers in the classroom community and engaging in English conversation with them when possible;
- Avoid threats of punishment for children making mistakes in speaking and, instead, notice and praise improvements in speaking *fluency* rather than *accuracy*;
- Avoid labelling children as 'strong' or 'weak' and instead treat all children as potentially competent, self-directed, and sociable learners;
- Use open-ended questions and tasks that allow children to decide on more than one correct/acceptable answer. This will allow teachers to give feedback on content and ideas as well as allowing the child to draw on their own agency.

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