

“TO TEACH AND DELIGHT”? EMOTIONS AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: ONSITE AND ONLINE PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

Sir Philip Sidney’s words quoted in the title envisaged the general all-encompassing idea that teaching and learning should go hand in hand with positive emotions. Several education experts have pointed out that emotions are directly associated with and affect learning performance. Emotion and cognition are strongly interrelated processes, meaning that thought is imbued with emotion and vice versa. In a learning context, motivation, the direction of attention, the stored contents and how they will be understood and retrieved will be influenced by an emotional component.

Therefore, students’ emotional state and learning are strongly intertwined. In the case of second language acquisition, feelings and emotions assume particular relevance, as has been amply demonstrated. Language influences how we think, interact, apprehend our surroundings, and feel and express our emotions. The alterity produced (and that underlies) communication in a second language contains a vast number of emotions, both positive and negative, which are also present in a classroom, whether onsite or online. Garrett & Young (2009), Bown & White (2010), Lopez & Aguilar (2013), among others, demonstrated the determining role of emotions and theoretical analysis of their importance in understanding bi- and/or plurilingualism.

Studies on online second language acquisition using synchronous communication concluded that sets of positive emotions, with corresponding negative emotions, might be relevant to learning, namely anxiety-confidence, boredom – fascination, frustration –

euphoria, and discouragement – enthusiasm. This paper aims to identify the emotional state of second language students in an online (e-learning) environment (totally asynchronous) and to analyse whether there are differences between the emotions experienced in a face-to-face learning model and an online learning system. It is also the purpose of our paper to detect any emotional variations according to gender and age.

A questionnaire with two Likert scales (Well-being and Emotional discomfort) was applied in two higher education institutions for data collection. The results clarify any requirements on adjusting classroom dynamics, teacher-student interaction and teaching methodologies.

Keywords

emotions; second language acquisition; teaching, in-person learning; e-learning

INTRODUCTION

Emotions are universal and are directly associated with and affect learning performance, as several education experts and studies have pointed out (Horwitz, 2002; Nummenmaa, 2007; Rager, 2009; Runa, 2015, Kormos, 2017).

Sir Philip Sidney's words, "to teach and delight", included in the title and quoted from his sixteenth-century essay, *An Apology for Poetry* (1595), convey a compelling idea: teaching, and learning, should be associated with positive emotions. According to the courtier, diplomat, and poet, "[to] delight [meant] to move men to take that goodness in hand; to teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved" (103). In other words, Sidney's defence of Literature encapsulated a powerful concept, which ties effective teaching to 'delight'. He was referring to the power of Literature to move men towards good and virtue, "Poesy is full of virtue-breeding delightfulness" (141). In the context of second language learning, we evoke that concept to emphasise that we will

be more efficient at teaching the more we are able to delight or stir positive emotions in the class associated with the contents to be studied and the activities we expect students to perform.

As teachers for nearly three decades and researchers on the role of emotions in education, we believe that identifying and understanding the emotional state of second language learners in a given activity will help adjust classroom dynamics, teacher-student interaction, and teaching methodologies. To that end, the present study has a two-folded purpose. First, to identify second language learners' emotions and the frequency of those emotions concerning speaking and written production and listening and reading comprehension activities. Second, to analyse the differences between the emotions experienced by students in a face-to-face learning environment and those in an e-learning environment.

1. EMOTIONS AND TEACHING

Emotions are present in every classroom, whether onsite or online. Analysing students' emotions when performing a comprehension or a production activity is crucial if we are to create more efficient teaching approaches. As Damásio (2013) pointed out, "a well-directed emotion seems to be the support system without which the building of reason cannot function effectively." (p. 62). In fact, Damásio has not only exposed Descarte's error in asserting, "I think; therefore I am", but he has also demonstrated that emotions are central to cognition, thus allowing us to think. Hence the reformulation, "I feel; therefore I am", is much in line with Spinoza's (1677) proposition that feelings are first and foremost primarily reactions of the body, acknowledging that we feel before we think (comprehension); we feel before we communicate (production).

Emotions are triggered by what surrounds us, be it a given task in the classroom, an impressive and glorious sunset, a musical composition, or any other work of art. As Bradberry and Greaves (2017) observed, all the stimuli, that is, everything we see, hear,

smell, taste, and touch, travel through our body in the form of electric signals that enter the brain at the spinal cord (6,7). Then, they proceed their journey through the brain, reaching, for example, the Broca and the Wernicke areas, which are crucial for decoding language, analysing the syntax of a sentence or the semantics of a word and processing speech and interpretation (Bradberry and Greaves 2009; Friederici 2011). However, to do so, they must first go through the limbic system, where emotions are produced. This physical journey ensures we experience things emotionally before we can reason about them.

Therefore, since emotion and cognition are strongly interrelated processes (Damásio, 1995), the student's emotional state and learning process are intimately intertwined. In the case of second language acquisition, feelings and emotions assume particular relevance. Language influences how we think, interact, apprehend our surroundings, and feel and express our emotions. The alterity generated (and that underlies) communication in a second language incorporates a vast number of emotions, both positive and negative, which are also present in a classroom. Several studies have indicated the determining role of emotions and the theoretical analysis of their importance in understanding bilingualism or plurilingualism. To name but a few examples, how learners' emotions become apparent in their verbal communication (Yasuhiro Imai, 2010); how activating positive emotions by imagining future states broadens the learners' perspective, opening the individuals to absorb the language (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012); how Foreign Language Enjoyment and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety is linked to the learners' perception of their relative level of Foreign Language proficiency (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014); how Foreign Language teachers' emotions and their impact on their beliefs about teaching approaches enhance or inhibit student learning (Kırmızı & Sarıçıban, 2020).

2. METHOD

This exploratory-oriented study emerges as a significant line of enquiry in light of the scarce research in the field of emotions towards

class activities in Portugal. As Almeida and Freire (2008) have pointed out, this kind of study entails the juxtaposition of the inductive-level discovery of points of continuity in a given exploratory reality with a more deductive level in which it is necessary to test already adequately studied cause-effect relations (p.24).

The present study's theoretical frame of reference involved analysing and reviewing the literature and empirical studies on emotions, teaching, and second language acquisition. Our purpose was to assess students' emotional state (positive and negative) in a second language acquisition environment, explicitly concerning their performance in the four communicative skills: speaking, listening, writing, and reading.

2.1. Procedures and instruments

We applied a questionnaire with two Likert scales to our e-learning students at Universidade Aberta and the onsite students at Instituto Superior de Educação e Ciências (ISEC Lisboa) at the end of the second semester of the school year 2020/21. The Well-being and the Ill-being scales had been previously validated for the Portuguese population (Runa & Miranda, 2015) in order to assess the emotions involved in teaching/learning in a virtual environment. The Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of both scales is 0.94 and 0.948, respectively, considered equally optimal values in terms of reliability since, according to Maroco (2007), the Alpha value greater than 0.9 is regarded as "Excellent".

The Well-being emotional scale included the following positive emotions: satisfaction, enthusiasm, optimism, competence, companionship, relief, security, serenity, confidence, and recognition. The Ill-being scale, in turn, comprised the ensuing negative emotions: boredom, frustration, insecurity, loneliness, anguish/anxiety, despair, shame, disorientation, powerlessness, and tension/concern. The study also presupposed the analysis of how often students experience positive and negative emotions. Thus, we used

a measure of 4-point Likert scales with the anchors: zero, they never felt that particular emotion; one, they occasionally felt it; two, they felt it on many occasions; and 3, they felt it all the time (Table 1).

Table 1. Scales of Emotional Well-Being and Ill-Being

Positive Emotions	0	1	2	3	Negative Emotions	0	1	2	3
Satisfaction					Boredom				
Enthusiasm					Frustration				
Optimism					Insecurity				
Competence					Loneliness				
Accompaniment					Anguish/Anxiety				
Relief					Despair				
Security					Shame				
Serenity					Disorientation				
Confidence					Powerlessness				
Recognition					Tension/concern				

In our study, a total of 112 participants, current English B.1 learners, filled out our Google form questionnaire, 56 students from Universidade Aberta and 56 from ISEC Lisboa. From the demographics section, we extracted a series of independent variables used

to create groups for data analysis (Table 2).

Table 2. Information extracted from the demographics section

	ISEC Participants (face-to-face learning)	UAb Participants (e-learning)
Gender: mostly female	58,9%	66,1%
Age	91,1% from 18 to 25	85,7% older than 30
Working students	23,2%	89,3%
Did not start university directly after secondary school	25%	87,5%
Ten years or more without studying	6,7%	76,5%

Most of the participants are female in both questionnaires: 66,1% in the e-learning system (UAb) and 58,9% in the face-to-face learning system (ISEC Lisboa).

The participants' average median age is relatively young in the face-to-face learning system, with 91,1% of the respondents ranging from age 18 to 25. On the contrary, 85,7% of the participants in the e-learning system are older than 30.

The vast majority of the e-learning participants, 89,3%, are working students. Conversely, working students represent approximately one-third of the face-to-face learning system respondents, 23,2%.

Additionally, the vast majority of the e-learning participants (87,5%) did not start university directly after secondary school. In fact, 76,5% of the respondents spent ten years or more without studying. Contrastingly, only 25% of the face-to-face learning system students did not start university right after concluding the 12th grade, and of those, only 6,7% spent ten years or more without studying.

In effect, 86,7% spent one to five years away from their studies.

3. RESULTS

Immediately after the demographics section containing the items we have described, the questionnaire asked participants to indicate the frequency in which they experienced the ten positive emotions when performing the activities of oral and written production and listening and reading comprehension (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3. E-learning system (UAb respondents)

Positive Emotions	Speaking			Listening			Writing			Reading		
	A	SD	NA	A	SD	NA	A	SD	NA	A	SD	NS
Satisfaction	1,83	,732	47	2,12	,696	49	2,02	,714	50	2,21	,683	48
Enthusiasm	1,94	,827	49	2,12	,754	49	2,06	,775	49	2,24	,771	50
Optimism	1,94	,759	51	2,20	,728	50	2,09	,775	47	2,27	,785	49
Competence	1,82	,720	50	2,13	,733	48	1,98	,729	48	2,18	,727	49
Accompaniment	1,87	,869	45	1,96	,824	45	1,93	,789	44	2,02	,762	44
Relief	1,41	,774	41	1,79	,833	43	1,73	,872	44	1,79	,898	42
Security	1,76	,822	46	2,00	,775	51	1,91	,775	47	2,10	,722	48
Serenity	1,70	,726	46	2,06	,785	51	1,92	,752	50	2,11	,759	47
Confidence	1,87	,768	52	2,08	,737	52	1,88	,726	49	2,12	,718	50
Recognition	1,93	,780	45	1,95	,785	43	1,95	,722	43	2,12	,705	42

A = Average; SD = Standard Deviation; NA = Number of Answers.

Table 4. Face-to-face learning (ISEC Lisboa respondents)

Positive Emotions	Speaking			Listening			Writing			Reading		
	A	SD	NA	A	SD	NA	A	SD	NA	A	SD	NS
Satisfaction	1,81	,681	53	1,94	,818	53	1,78	,769	54	1,88	,784	52
Enthusiasm	1,67	,747	55	1,74	,836	53	1,56	,777	52	1,75	,868	51
Optimism	1,70	,822	53	2,04	,766	52	1,80	,756	50	1,82	,817	51
Competence	1,90	,869	52	2,06	,770	53	1,89	8,47	53	2,09	,766	53
Accompaniment	1,67	,909	51	2,02	,812	51	1,69	,927	51	1,86	,890	49
Relief	1,55	,945	51	1,83	,868	47	1,56	,796	48	1,76	,797	50
Security	1,61	,856	54	2,11	,800	53	1,87	,841	52	1,90	,831	51
Serenity	1,58	,915	52	2,14	,808	50	1,87	,793	52	1,98	,828	52
Confidence	1,75	,927	55	2,08	,724	50	1,77	,807	52	2,04	,766	52
Recognition	1,69	,761	51	1,79	,798	48	1,69	,748	48	1,76	,855	49

A = Average; SD = Standard Deviation; NA = Number of Answers.

Regarding the positive emotions experienced in Oral production or Speaking activities, results show differences depending on the learning regimes. In e-learning, “Enthusiasm”, “Optimism”, and “Recognition” have higher scores, followed by “Confidence”, “Companionship”, “Satisfaction” and “Competence”. In face-to-face respondents, “Competence” and “Satisfaction” were the emotions with the highest score.

Concerning the Listening comprehension activities, both e-learning and in-person students experienced positive emotions “on many occasions”. However, we see differences in Written Production activities, since e-learning students experienced positive emotions, such as Optimism, Enthusiasm and Satisfaction, on “many occasions” but the levels drop in face-to-face students that felt these same

emotions “occasionally”.

Finally, concerning “Reading activities”, most of the ten positive emotions were experienced by e-learning students on “many occasions”, except “Relief”, which was experienced “occasionally”. As for the in-person students, only “Competence” and “Confidence” were experienced “on many occasions”. The remaining positive emotions were felt “occasionally”.

Focusing on the Ill-being data, we observe significant differences regarding the occurrence with which e-learning students and in-person students experience negative emotions in all four skills activities (Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5. E-learning system (UAb respondents)

Negative Emotions	Speaking			Listening			Writing			Reading		
	A	SD	NA	A	A	SD	NA	A	A	SD	NA	A
Boredom	,54	,657	46	,40	,648	47	,57	,715	47	,38	,606	48
Frustration	,69	,763	45	,40	,681	47	,50	,772	48	,34	,635	47
Insecurity	1,04	,862	52	,55	,757	51	,70	,696	53	,47	,644	51
Loneliness	,60	,734	42	,44	,590	43	,41	,658	44	,35	,573	43
Anguish/Anxiety	,81	,880	43	,56	,796	43	,52	,799	48	,36	,645	45
Despair	,49	,779	41	,36	,750	44	,38	,747	45	,24	,576	42
Shame	,79	,771	48	,39	,538	44	,32	,471	44	,26	,441	43
Disorientation	,59	,622	44	,47	,757	45	,51	,748	47	,39	,649	46
Powerlessness	,52	,671	42	,31	,604	42	,41	,757	44	,30	,638	43
Tension/concern	1,04	,898	53	,63	,698	49	,88	,824	50	,60	,728	50

A = Average; SD = Standard Deviation; NA = Number of Answers.

Table 6. Face-to-face learning (ISEC Lisboa respondents)

Negative Emotions	Speaking			Listening			Writing			Reading		
	A	SD	NA	A	DP	A	DS	NA	A	M	A	SD
Boredom	1,04	,781	50	1,13	,841	52	1,17	,901	52	1,23	,942	52
Frustration	1,08	,956	51	,74	,858	53	,84	,784	51	,82	,974	51
Insecurity	1,38	,945	53	,83	,923	52	1,06	,850	52	,94	,818	53
Loneliness	,70	,886	50	,57	,935	49	,58	,859	50	,54	,813	50
Anguish/Anxiety	1,30	1,030	53	,92	,986	50	,90	,886	50	,87	,886	52
Despair	,70	,953	50	,54	,908	50	,76	,847	50	,53	,857	51
Shame	1,52	,947	54	,84	1,076	50	,76	,916	50	,87	,962	53
Disorientation	1,04	,849	48	,82	,842	51	,82	,774	50	,79	,848	52
Powerlessness	,86	1,000	49	,64	,921	50	,70	,839	50	,58	,883	50
Tension/concern	1,49	,857	51	,88	,981	48	1,13	,908	52	1,04	,925	50

A = Average; SD = Standard Deviation; NA = Number of Answers.

In general, e-learning students rarely experience negative emotions, except for the occasional experience, for example, of “Insecurity” and “Tension/Concern” in Speaking activities. Contrarywise, in the same competence, face-to-face students experience more negative emotions, although occasionally, such as “Shame”, “Tension/concern”, “Insecurity”, and “Frustration”. Regarding the skills of Writing and Reading, in-person students experience “Frustration” and “Tension/Concern” “on many occasions”.

CONCLUSIONS

Although our study is a work in progress and much remains to be analysed, these findings' previews help shed light on the different patterns of positive and negative emotions among e-learning and in-person Second Language Learners.

Overall, participants reported experiencing higher levels of positive emotions in Listening and Reading activities, and negative emotions are especially experienced in Speaking activities, mostly by students in a face-to-face learning environment.

These results may be explained by the fact that the e-learning participants are older and predominately constituted of working students, familiar with the challenges associated with professional careers. The e-learning respondents also include a significant number of students who have only now resumed their academic studies. That can be a discouraging factor to production activities in a Second Language. Nonetheless, the in-person participants have higher scores on negative emotions.

Regarding Speaking activities, we suggest that two factors may help understand these results. First, although e-learning respondents spent many years away from the school system, they keep permanent contact with the English language in multiple ways: through the media, social media, the film and music industries, and sometimes even as a job requirement, amongst others. Second, flexibility is one of the main paradigms in Universidade Aberta's Virtual Pedagogical Model. It means that the students learn whenever and wherever is convenient for them, anytime and anywhere. As a fundamental presupposition of distance learning, flexibility allows students to work on their production assignments without the pressures of time and space. They do not have to produce extended stretches of language with very little hesitation after a long and stressful day at work, which would only contribute to the emotions of frustration, insecurity, shame, tension/concern, that is, the negative emotions that in-person students experience.

In her study *Competitiveness and Anxiety in Adult Second Language Learning*, Kathleen Bailey (1983) shows how anxiety and fear of failing in the presence of their peers (even more than in the presence of their teachers), especially felt in moments of oral verbal

communication, particularly in a second language, contribute to the creation of a self-image of failure and for low levels of self-esteem and focus on the learning process. Activities that empower student choices, such as a topic of discussion or debate according to their concerns and interests, might help overcome the experience of negative emotions associated with speaking assignments. Allowing students to have a sense of autonomy and use their imagination to make progress in the Second Language can also motivate learners, including in group projects, since they involve different skills and offer multiple options.

The classroom environment should also facilitate and promote positive emotions. That can be more challenging late in the day, since as Shiv (2020) noted, serotonin levels decline, which means that the individual will shift to the “fear of making a mistake” mode. According to Ghua, Spielberg and Lake (2019), anxious individuals generally perform more slowly and frequently show an impaired ability to inhibit distractors, both externally generated (e.g., loud noises) and internally generated (e.g., thoughts).

To counter these natural reactions of the body, we can bring a state of comfort to the brain through familiar topics since familiarity comforts the brain. Shiv's study (2020) also suggests other approaches, like trust, validation, testimonials, and laughter, the latter being one of the fastest ways to alleviate stress. According to Dewaele's and MacIntyre's study (2014), teachers who were positive, humorous, happy, well-organised, respectful of students, and praised for good performance were appreciated since they motivated students to keep a positive attitude in the class. In an e-learning environment, promoting the use of emoticons in classroom forums, for example, may help perceive students' emotions on a given activity and adjust approaches and practices.

Our ongoing study will undoubtedly allow us to reflect further on emotions in a Second Language Learning environment. However, if we are to adjust classroom dynamics, teacher-student interaction and teaching methodologies, we have to go back to the beginning. Understand that emotions are first and foremost at the core of students' performance in class, and in order to teach and delight, we must pursue our research on emotions, for emotions are universal.

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