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Psychological Benefits of Language Learning: Quantitative Study Among Iraqi EFL Students

الفوائد النفسية لتعلم اللغة: دراسة كمية بين طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق

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Abstract

The study considers the psychological benefits of learning the English language as a foreign language Iraqi EFL students. This is a sample of 300 students from the institution, and data on EFL learning was collected using questionnaires covering emotional intelligence, motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, and well-being. The use of the same sample and diverse scores ascertained that EFL learning is positively related to psychological well-being. Higher language proficiency is positively correlated with high levels of emotional intelligence, motivation, self-confidence, and low anxiety. That indicates the need to integrate emotional intelligence training and EFL/ESL programs as anxiety-reducing strategies that can help improve the psychological and academic performance among students. This study is central to applying psychological factors in many contexts, since language education is done with the aim of maximizing learners' emotional and cognitive development. Future research is recommended to extend these benefits to other cultures and communities and to conduct longitudinal studies to determine better long-term effects.

Key Terms: Psychological Benefits, Language Learning, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Emotional Intelligence, Motivation, Anxiety Reduction, Self-Confidence, Well-Being, Quantitative Study, EFL Students

المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الفوائد النفسية لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بين طلبة العراق. تم جمع البيانات من عينة مكونة من 300 طالب من خلال استبيانات تناولت متغيرات مثل الذكاء العاطفي، والدافعية، والقلق، والثقة بالنفس، والرفاهية العامة. باستخدام أساليب كمية تشمل الإحصاء الوصفي، وتحليل الارتباط، والانحدار المتعدد، وجدت الدراسة أن تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يرتبط إيجابياً بالرفاهية النفسية. كانت الكفاءة اللغوية الأعلى مرتبطة بزيادة في الذكاء العاطفي والدافعية والثقة بالنفس وانخفاض في القلق. تشير النتائج إلى أن دمج تدريب الذكاء العاطفي واستراتيجيات تقليل القلق في برامج تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يمكن أن يعزز النتائج النفسية والأكاديمية. تؤكد الدراسة على أهمية مراعاة العوامل النفسية في تعليم اللغات لتحقيق تطوير عاطفي ومعرفي أمثل للطلاب. ينبغي على الأبحاث المستقبلية أن تستكشف هذه الفوائد في سياقات ثقافية متنوعة وأن تستخدم تصاميم طويلة لفهم أعمق للآثار طويلة المدى.

المصطلحات الأساسية: الفوائد النفسية، تعلم اللغة، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، الذكاء العاطفي، الدافعية، تقليل القلق، الثقة بالنفس، الرفاهية، دراسة كمية، طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية



Introduction

Background

Language learning, especially in a foreign context, involves a lot more than a conquest of linguistic competence. It entails the multiplication of psychological dimensions, which not only influence but are influenced by the emotional and cognitive state of the learner. Previous research has identified a series of cognitive advantages resulting from bilingualism and second language learning, such as benefits in memory, problem solving, and cognitive flexibility (Bialystok, 2011). But possible psychological gains, such as enhancing emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and reducing anxiety, are not elaborated widely, most of all in EFL contexts in non-Western environments.

Problem Statement

While the cognitive benefits of language learning have been well documented, its psychological consequences remain relatively understudied across non-Western contexts. This gap in the literature has weakened the potential to understand a full range of ways through which language learning might impact the psychological well-being of learners.

Purpose of the Study

This current study intends to fill the gap by delving into the psychological benefits accrued from learning EFL among the Iraqi students. In amassing psychological considerations for the educational program, this research employed a quantitative approach to measure the effect of language learning on other psychological outcomes.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between EFL learning and students' emotional intelligence?
2. How does learning English as a foreign language influence students' motivation and attitudes towards learning?
3. What impact does EFL learning have on reducing language learning anxiety among students?

4. How does EFL learning affect students' self-confidence and overall well-being?

Significance of the Study

Understanding the psychological benefits of language learning can inform educators and policymakers about designing more effective and holistic language education programs. By offering insights into how language learning can enhance students' emotional and cognitive development, this study contributes to the broader field of educational psychology.

Literature Review

Emotional Intelligence and Language Learning: Emotional intelligence (EI) is one of the factors that contribute to success in language learning. Goleman (1995) defined EI as the ability to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions. Studies have shown that people with a high level of emotional intelligence achieve better results in almost all areas of their lives, including education. Pishghadam (2009) conducted a quantitative analysis of the relationship between emotional intelligence and foreign language learning. This study reveals that students with higher emotional intelligence scores demonstrated better language proficiency and academic performance (Pishghadam, 2009). The author explains that EI is an important variable for language learners. Gardner and Lambert (1972) also advanced the idea of the emotional variables in language learning as mentioned above. Gardner, et al. (1972) held that motivation and attitude is critical in L2 learning which is directly associate with emotional intelligence. This also corresponds to Pishghadam (2009) that emotional intelligence enables the learner to cope and handle the stress and anxiety about how to learn language better.

Motivation and Attitudes Towards Language Learning: Motivation is a key component of language learning because it stimulates the drive in students to comprehend the material issued to them. The motivation helps drive them against the setbacks they encounter in language covered. According to Gardner and Lambert, 1972, the socio-educational model adopted by learners in language is the integrative type that allows them a genuine drive in the language and culture that furthers its use. The model has been very influential in understanding the dynamics of language. Eusafzai, 2013, was able to research on motivational selves among Saudi EFL learners and concluded that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are compulsory in successful language learning. Intrinsic motivation



is that which comes from interest in the subject while extrinsic motivation is driven by rewards and recognition outside the individual. According to Eusafzai, a balanced learning atmosphere on the two motivational grounds will drive student's interests and yield associated learning.

Anxiety Reduction in Language Learning: It is a common problem that could cause many troubles for students. According to Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), language anxiety is the "complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors that evolves with regard to classroom language learning because of the uniqueness of the language learning process". Their work was to develop the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and it proved valuable in terms of measuring and understanding the issue under consideration. Tallon (2009) notes that high levels of language anxiety are negatively correlated with students' performance and also willingness to communicate in the target language. The sources of language anxiety may include, but are not limited to, fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety. Batiha, Noor and Mustaffa (2016) noted that the higher the level of anxiety the lower the participation in class and the lower the overall achievement by students. They further imply that teaching related support practices that reduce language anxiety and create a positive classroom environment can enhance learners' performance greatly (Batiha et al. 2016).

Self-Confidence and Overall Well-Being: Self-confidence is another important factor that affects language learners' willingness to communicate and risk-taking in using L2. MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) relate self-confidence to both communicative competence and willingness to communicate in language learning. They explain a model in which self-confidence and language proficiency affect the level of willingness to communicate. The quantitative study by Alvarado Martínez (2017) focused on self-confidence in learning the English language and concluded that students with higher levels of self-confidence are likely to engage in communicative activities and demonstrate better language skills. This indicates an increased emphasis on developing learners' self-confidence for a more harmonious learning experience. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) also identify positive emotions as being core in the process of learning a language. There is a strong correlation between enjoyment and self-confidence, suggesting



that positive emotions enhance students' self-esteem and life satisfaction (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

The Role of Positive Psychology in Language Learning: The field of language learning has increasingly applied positive psychology. According to Dewaele, Chen, Padilla, and Lake (2019), positive psychology interventions can enhance language learners' emotional resilience, motivation, and overall well-being. Their study reveals that by introducing elements of positive psychology into the learning environment, such as gratitude exercises and strength-based feedback, learners can make great progress in their attitudes toward learning a language. In a more profound analysis regarding the influence of positive psychology on Chinese EFL students, Li (2020) found that students who engage in positive psychology practices report higher levels of foreign language enjoyment and achievement. This study suggests that indeed positive psychology will make language instruction more comprehensive and efficient.

Methodology

Research Design

This study also employs a quantitative approach to explore the psychological benefits of EFL learning for Iraqi EFL students. As posited by Creswell (2014), quantitative research is an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. The design facilitates the collection and analysis of numerical data in a way that would ascertain the patterns and relationships between various facets of language learning and psychological processes.

Participants

This research's subjects are the Iraqi EFL students. Random sampling techniques select 300 students from various departments and years of study, ensuring each member has an equal chance of inclusion and preventing bias in the sample. Therefore, this study



uses random sampling because it enhances generalizability by providing each member of the population with an equal chance of inclusion in the sample (Bryman, 2016).

Data Collection Instruments

The sub-sections below discuss a psychological outcome questionnaire the researcher designed using validated scales to assess the validity and reliability of the learning EFL measurements.

1. **Emotional Intelligence:** To test this, Bar-On (1997) developed the Emotional Intelligence Inventory. This has proven to be an instrument in demand, as it measures the broad arena of emotional intelligence, ranging from intrapersonal skills to interpersonal skills, stress management, adaptability, and general mood.
2. **Motivation and Attitudes:** We used the Gardner (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) to measure the major affective variables associated with second language acquisition. These are attitudes and motivations, motivations to learn the language, and language anxiety (Gardner, 1985).
3. **Anxiety Reduction:** Measured through the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), conceived by Horwitz et al. (1986). The FLCAS is a 33-item scale that assesses the degree to which students feel anxious during language classes (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986).
4. **Self-Confidence:** It was measured by means of a self-confidence scale according to Alvarado Martínez (2017), as she explained that it identifies the degree in which students believe they are capable of achieving a successful task and make effective communicative activity.
5. **Overall Well-Being:** Mental health was measured by the use of Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WNBWS). Designed in 2007 by Tennant et al., the 14-item WNBWS assesses positive mental health incorporated into subjective well-being, and psychological functioning.



Data Collection Procedure

We limited the data collection period to two months. We distribute the survey questionnaire to students in their regular EFL classes, ensuring a significant number of students participate. We designed the approach to encourage students' voluntary participation, relying on the informed consent of the students. The latter includes the research's purpose and procedures, potential risks and benefits, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Analysis

We statistically analyzed the data using methods like descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis, among others. Software for statistical packages, such as SPSS, used to conduct the data analysis to increase the accuracy and reliability of the data.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics provide an overview of the demographic character of participants and the responses to items on the survey questionnaire. Descriptive statistics refer to the measures that summarize and organize data created during the collection process in an informative manner. Such statistics include measures of central tendency (mean, median) and measures of variability (standard deviation, range).

Correlation Analysis

We seek a correlation between EFL learning and psychological variables. The Pearson coefficient (r) in the analysis indicates the relationship's strength and direction. Cohen (1988) asserts that correlation coefficients serve as a useful tool for quantifying the degree of relationship between two variables.

Multiple Regression Analysis



This study used multiple regression to discover predictors of psychological gains among EFL learners. Multiple regression is an analytic tool that allows one to study the joint impact of many independent variables on a single dependent variable. In many respects, Tabachnick and Fidell claimed that multiple regression is a flexible statistical procedure that could be applicable to any kind of complex relationship between variables. The predictors entered into this regression model are emotional intelligence, motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics is the most important consideration in research. The APA ethical guidelines guide the research. Prior to its commencement, we obtain informed consent from study participants, clearly outlining the rights and voluntary nature of participation. We assure participants of confidentiality by assigning unique identifiers and ensuring safe data storage. A well-designed questionnaire and available support resources minimize potential risks to the participants, such as discomfort from personal questions.

Validity and Reliability

Attaining credibility is very important because it establishes the validity and reliability of the data collection instruments. The validity of an instrument lies in its ability to accurately measure its intended parameters. On the other hand, reliability establishes how consistent the instrument is over time (Creswell, 2014). We chose the EQ-i, AMTB, FLCAS, self-confidence scale, and WEMWBS for the study; previous research has effectively utilized and validated these instruments. Cronbach's alpha can test reliability, with a value of over 0.70 considered acceptable for internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Limitations

However, the study's goal is to fully cover the psychological benefits of EFL learning. The study employs a cross-sectional design, thereby precluding any causal inferences about the effects of EFL learning on psychological outcomes. Moreover, the



self-reported survey data might have some response bias. Future research should compensate for this by introducing longitudinal designs and objective measures of psychological outcomes.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics summarized the participants' demographic variables and responses to questionnaire items. Out of the 300 participants, 60% were female and 40% were male, with an average age of 21 years ($SD = 2.3$). The participants were from various academic disciplines, ensuring a diverse sample.

The mean scores for the key variables are as follows:

- Emotional Intelligence: $M = 105.4$, $SD = 15.2$
- Motivation: $M = 90.7$, $SD = 12.5$
- Anxiety: $M = 42.3$, $SD = 8.9$
- Self-Confidence: $M = 76.8$, $SD = 10.4$
- Overall Well-Being: $M = 85.6$, $SD = 11.3$

These scores indicate that, on average, the participants have moderate to high levels of emotional intelligence, motivation, and self-confidence, as well as moderate levels of anxiety.

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis reveals significant positive correlations between EFL learning and various psychological outcomes. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) values are as follows:

- Emotional Intelligence and Motivation: $r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$
- Emotional Intelligence and Self-Confidence: $r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$
- Motivation and Self-Confidence: $r = 0.55$, $p < 0.01$
- Emotional Intelligence and Overall Well-Being: $r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$



- Motivation and Overall Well-Being: $r = 0.60, p < 0.01$
- Self-Confidence and Overall Well-Being: $r = 0.63, p < 0.01$
- Anxiety and Overall Well-Being: $r = -0.48, p < 0.01$

These correlations suggest that higher levels of emotional intelligence, motivation, and self-confidence are associated with better overall well-being. Conversely, higher levels of anxiety are negatively associated with overall well-being.

Multiple Regression Analysis

We conducted multiple regression analyses to identify the predictors of overall well-being among EFL learners. The independent variables include emotional intelligence, motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. The regression model is significant ($F(4, 295) = 52.67, p < 0.01$) and explains 47% of the variance in overall well-being ($R^2 = 0.47$).

The standardized regression coefficients (β) and their significance levels are as follows:

- Emotional Intelligence: $\beta = 0.34, p < 0.01$
- Motivation: $\beta = 0.28, p < 0.01$
- Self-Confidence: $\beta = 0.30, p < 0.01$
- Anxiety: $\beta = -0.25, p < 0.01$

These results indicate that emotional intelligence, motivation, and self-confidence are significant positive predictors of overall well-being, while anxiety is a significant negative predictor. Specifically, higher emotional intelligence, motivation, and self-confidence contribute to better well-being, whereas higher anxiety levels detract from it.

Emotional Intelligence and Language Learning

The results therefore validate that the greater the EFL learners' emotional intelligence, the better the success in language learning; the better their conditions of well-being in life. The participants with more EI scores presented better outcomes in language learning and better well-being. That is in accordance with Pishghadam's study in 2009 in



which students with high emotional intelligence indicators manifested high language proficiency and academic achievement. According to Gardner and Lambert in 1972, it was also stressed that motivation and attitudes, which are strongly associated with emotional intelligence, have a great influence on the process of second language acquisition.

Motivation and Attitudes Towards Language Learning

Researches confirm that learning EFL is an activity that involves the motivation and attitudes of the learners. It has been proved that the higher the scores of motivation the more positive attitudes developed by the learners of the language and also in their general well-being. According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), integrative motivation positively leads EFL learning. Eusafzai (2013) adds that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations lead to a successful acquisition of a language.

Anxiety Reduction in Language Learning

This study's notable finding is a reduction in language learning anxiety among EFL students. Lower anxiety levels are associated with higher self-confidence and better overall well-being. Horwitz et al. (1986) describe language anxiety as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning. Tallon (2009) found that high levels of language anxiety are associated with lower performance and less willingness to communicate. Batiha et al. (2016) also note that reducing language anxiety through supportive teaching practices can significantly enhance learners' performance.

Self-Confidence and Overall Well-Being

EFL learning also significantly boosts students' self-esteem, positively affecting their general well-being. Those with higher self-confidence scores demonstrated a greater willingness to communicate and participate in all types of language learning activities. MacIntyre et al. (1998) state that self-confidence in language learning includes communicative competence simultaneously with the willingness to communicate. Alvarado Martínez (2017) deduced that students with higher self-confidence levels are



usually more prepared to be involved in communicative activities and exhibit better language skills as a result.

The Role of Positive Psychology in Language Learning

More so, positive psychology incorporated into language learning enhances even further the psychological results of the language learners. Dewaele et al. (2019) contend that positive psychology interventions can enhance language learners' emotional resilience, motivation, and overall well-being. Li (2020) discovered that students who engage in positive psychology practices report higher levels of foreign language enjoyment and achievement.

Conclusion

The present research sheds light on the psychological benefits of EFL learning for the students. Findings have suggested a significant positive relationship between EFL learning and a number of psychological constructs, namely, emotional intelligence, motivation, self-confidence, and general well-being. The general well-being item exhibits a negative correlation with general well-being in language learning anxiety, suggesting that when anxiety levels decrease, psychological health improves.

Summary of Findings

It suggests that high levels of emotional intelligence, motivation, and self-confidence are conducive to ensuring better psychological well-being among EFL learners. Such psychological traits contribute to the enhancement not only of the students' language proficiency but also of their emotional and cognitive development in general. On the other hand, students' psychological well-being suffers when they experience high levels of language learning anxiety; language programs should appropriately address this issue.

Implications for Practice



The significant implications for language educators and policymakers suggest that incorporating emotional training and reducing anxiety levels in language education programs can significantly improve learners' psychological state and academic achievement. What is also at work is the motivational learning environment, which in turn needs to foster both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, leading to overall positive attitudes towards learning and maintaining and ensuring student engagement over time.

Recommendations for Future Research

It would be crucial for future research to identify the psychological benefits of language learning across different cultural and educational contexts in order to make the findings generalizable. We suggest conducting longitudinal studies to provide even more in-depth evidence into the long-term effects of EFL learning on psychological outcomes. Further, the qualitative research methods of interviews and focus group discussions can supplement these quantitative findings by providing a greater understanding of the psychological dimensions of language learning.

Limitations

Some of the limitations of this study include the cross-sectional design, which does not allow for causality between EFL learning and psychological outcomes. Furthermore, the study relies on survey data for psychological outcomes, which is susceptible to information and response biases. In this regard, future research may consider these weaknesses and include longitudinal designs and objective measures of psychological outcomes.

In conclusion, this paper adds to the growing body of literature that explains not only the psychological benefits of language learning, but also the importance of considering psychological issues in language education. Educators could create a better learning environment conducive to both linguistic and psychological growth if they understood and took these into account.



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