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A Corpus Based Investigation of Academic Emotions in Foreign Language Learning Environment

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Abstract

Academic emotions refer to various emotions that students experience in their academic activities during their language learning process. Emotions experienced in the learning environment have a great impact on learning. The aim of this project is to investigate students' emotions in the English Language Department of Amasya University and to identify what emotions students experience most in classroom environment. Within this scope, data are collected via emotional experience diaries in which students write their experiences of various emotions each week in a 14-week academic term. Emotions are tagged and analyzed with the help of UAM corpus software. Dominant emotion types are identified and categorized as positive and negative. Findings demonstrate that negative emotions outnumber positive ones, which needs further investigations. Among 15 types of negative emotions, distress, fear, sadness are found to be the most frequent types students experience, whereas happiness is the most dominant one among 10 positive emotions types. Findings of the study will help foreign language teachers to better understand emotional procedures students pass through, and be aware of particularly negative emotions. In addition, teachers can create an educational atmosphere in which students enjoy language learning and use their cognitive skills effectively. The academic emotions model emerging with this study will be of great use to researchers, foreign language teachers and students.

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1. Introduction

Classrooms as educational settings are filled with intense emotional experiences that guide interactions, influence learning and performance, and direct personal development in both students and teachers (Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, & Perry, 2002). In recent years, the role and importance of emotions experienced by students have begun to be considered significant in understanding language learning processes, student achievement and motivation, as well as classroom instruction and efficient teaching

(Aragao, 2011; Goetz, Zirngibl, Pekrun & Hall, 2003; Imai, 2010; Pekrun, Goetz, Titz & Perry, 2002; Schutz & Pekrun, 2007).

Because language classrooms are emotional in nature, academic emotions are sensitive factors that influence students' language learning outcomes. Although students take the same classes from the same teachers, each student's learning outcomes may show difference in relation to their emotional states they experience during lessons. With this respect, it is important for the educators to know what emotions are experienced more frequently in classroom settings. The emotional responses the students reflect in their learning processes help us to have an idea on how they evaluate their experiences and to what they pay attention most in their language classes. In this way, teachers and educators can modify the methods and approaches they adopt, and can develop new strategies on how to decrease the effects of negative emotions. They can also reinforce the emotions that trigger students' motivation. In this regard, this paper aims to investigate university students' emotions in an English Language Teaching Department during an academic term to identify what emotions are experienced most by the students in the learning environment.

Depending on their valence, emotions are commonly classified as positive and negative; or pleasant and unpleasant (Ortony, Clore & Collins, 1988; Solomon & Stone, 2002). Every type of emotion is attached to different patterns of appraisal that result from a person's reaction to an environmental condition that is harmful, and one that is beneficial to the self. As Lazarus states, "[i]f the relationship is appraised as harmful, the basis of a negative emotion is present, say, anger, anxiety, guilt, shame, sadness, envy, jealousy, or disgust. If the relationship is appraised as beneficial, the basis of a positive emotion is present, say, happiness, pride, relief, or love" (2003, p.126). Neutral emotions, on the other hand, are those that can be appraised as either positive or negative depending on the conditions of the environment such as surprise, affectivity or interest.

In an educational setting, positive and negative emotions are composed of a complex process. According to Kelly (2004), positive and negative emotions have an impact on university students' attention, motivation and restrict their performance reasonably. Negative emotions are found to lessen learners' academic success as they influence their concentration on the subject matter, comprehension and other intellectual functions negatively. This interaction shows that both positive and negative emotions have an important role in education process; hence teachers should attend to these emotions to change negative ones into positive.

Garret & Young (2009) investigate a beginning learner's affective responses that emerge during an eight-week Portuguese as a foreign language course. In their study, the researchers give a description of 255 positive affective comments and 162 negative comments on language awareness, teacher voice, social relations and culture learning. They conclude that each student's learning experience is highly subjective and idiosyncratic, and that searching the affective trajectory is important in discovering language learners' affective states throughout the learning process.

Imai (2010) searches the manifestations of emotions during group-work studies of Japanese university students for a foreign language oral presentation. He finds that in the course of collaborative learning activities, students verbalize a number of emotions including confusion, boredom, frustration, regret and empathy, which then turn into common group feelings. The researcher concludes from this

finding that even negative emotions such as boredom and frustration can be a developmental resource for foreign language learners depending on how learners appreciate these emotions interactively.

In her study on the motivational impact of emotions, Mendez-Lopez (2011) asks second year students of an English Language Teaching program to keep an emotional journal for twelve weeks during their third term in order to map their emotions and their sources during instructed language learning. The student journals revealed that fear, happiness, worry, calm, sadness and excitement are the emotions experienced most frequently by students. Students' insecurity about their speaking ability, the teachers' attitudes, comparisons with peers, the classroom atmosphere, and the type of learning activities are identified as five main sources of students' emotions, while the teachers' attitudes, and the classroom climate were found as the two main aspects identified as impacting on students' motivation.

Yükselir ve Harputlu (2014) examine EFL prep-class students' academic emotions in learning and taking a test with reference to departments and gender. They administer Achievement Emotions Questionnaire to investigate nine emotions - enjoyment, hope, pride, anger, anxiety, shame, hopelessness, boredom and relief - before, during and after learning and in taking a test. Findings suggest that there are significant linear relationships among the scores for academic emotions in learning and taking a test. However, since this study takes its data from a questionnaire, it is not clear to what extent it reflects the real emotions of students.

Literature survey reveals that although a number of studies have been carried out in different languages, the studies on the role and importance of academic emotions in Turkish language learning context is restricted. This indicates that in Turkish context, academic emotions have not been given enough importance in the foreign language learning process that continues from nursery school to university. Such studies play a significant role in creating a positive classroom environment in which students feel confident and desire to take risks as well as in encouraging teachers for self-development in this topic.

2. Methodology

Emotions are highly subjective states that may vary depending on the person, time and place. Therefore, in order to understand and examine how emotions arise during the language learning process, it is mandatory to inspect students' experiences within the actual context where these emotions are experienced. For this reason, the data that serve as the basis of this study comes from the emotional experience diaries of students, which are analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The following research questions are designed to guide the study:

1. Which emotions do foreign language students experience over an academic term?
2. How are the emotions distributed according to their frequency and polarity as positive and negative?

2.1 Setting and Participants

The study was carried out at Amasya University, Turkey with a group of 30 students (27 female and 3 male) in the second and third terms of their ELT program. The students were informed about the

study, and voluntarily kept a diary for 14 weeks. Students at this institution are from different social backgrounds, thus they show homogeneity. The students who participated in the study were given extra credit at the end of the term.

2.2 Data Collection Procedure

Since emotions are not always visible, the best way to get into people's emotions is to let them narrate. Narrations of the students are collected through student journals, which we call emotion diaries. Diary entries can be defined as personal reports which provide an introspective account of what a person experiences and affective factors as feelings. As Bailey and Ochsner (1983) point out these reports enable the researchers to access hidden and inaccessible experiences of diary keepers. The significance of utilizing diaries as a research instrument has been underscored by numerous scholars. As Bogdan and Taylor (1975, p.7) state with diaries "[w]e gain an intimate view of organizations, relationships, and events from the perspective of one who has experienced them him- or herself and who may have different premises about the world than we have."

For the purpose of this study, students were asked to write about all kinds of emotions they experience with their reasons freely for a period of 14 weeks in their mother tongue. They were given a handout to guide their writings, and were encouraged to be as clear and as honest as possible (see Appendix-1). They were responsible for sending their diaries to the researchers by email every Friday. It was expected from the students to observe their own emotional states during classroom activities, and to reflect their emotional responses in an introspective way. Each student was given a number and was coded with the initials of their names and surnames. Their diary entries were numbered weekly. At the end of the data collection period, a collection of 163 diary entries was gathered to analyze.

2.3 Data Analysis

The texts that were collected from students' diaries were uploaded weekly on the corpus tool called UAM (Universidad Autonoma de Madrid) (O'Donnell, 2008). The tool allows both manual and automatic annotation of collections of texts at multiple annotation layers. For example, files can be annotated as a whole document (for its language, date, author etc.) or a semantic-pragmatic layer can be created to annotate segments within a text. In addition to segments, single words can be annotated in a lexical layer. The identification and annotation of emotion resources in student journals were performed by an intensive annotation of each text individually by the researchers of this study to extract qualitative and quantitative realizations of emotive resources. For the identification of the emotions encoded in the texts, the emotion categorization model developed by Baş (2015) was used as the basis, and developed in accordance with the needs of the present study. Based on this model, with a bottom up approach, the tool made it possible to create our own emotion typology with its sub-categories for each emotion type. Therefore, whenever a new category emerged, it was added to the existing typology and with a cyclical approach, and it was searched for in all the texts. As a result of this process, the emotion types were identified and tagged in the texts, categorized as positive and negative, and their quantitative distributions were calculated.

It should be noted that while tagging the emotion types, the context of the lexical item was also taken into account. A lexical item that signals emotion can only be positive or negative according to its meaning in a sentence. Therefore, each lexical item was evaluated within the described context reported by the student.

3. Findings and Discussion

Data analysis yields a number of emotions reported in the students' diaries throughout a term. The emotion types identified can be grouped in terms of positive and negative. Among these, our findings reveal that students had more negative emotions than positive ones. Table-1 below presents the distribution of these two groups:

Table 1. Distribution of positive and negative emotions

	n	%
Positive emotions	139	34%
Negative emotions	268	66%
Total	407	100%

Positive emotions are grouped in 12 different emotion types, and 15 types are identified for negative emotions. Table-2 below shows each emotion type and their number of occurrences.

Table 2. Emotion types experienced by students

Positive emotions	References (n)	Negative emotions	References (n)
Happiness (Sevinç)	51	Distress (Sıkıntı)	80
Love (Sevgi)	19	Fear (Korku)	77
Relief (Rahatlama)	18	Sadness (Üzüntü)	31
Curiosity/Interest (Merak/ilgi)	15	Anxiety (heyecan)	21
Satisfaction (Tatmin)	12	Unwillingness (İsteksizlik)	12
Courage (Cesaret)	8	Anger (Öfke)	11
Admiration (Hayranlık)	5	Disappointment (Hayal Kırıklığı)	10
Hope (Umut)	5	Disliking (Hoşlanmama)	8
Surprise (Hayret)	2	Shame (Utanma)	5
Excitement (Heyecan)	2	Lack of Courage (Cesaretsizlik)	4
Desire (Arzu)	1	Hatred (Nefret)	3
Pride (Gurur)	1	Surprise (Hayret)	2
		Longing (Özlem)	2
		Reproach (Kınama)	1
		Jealousy (Kıskançlık)	1
Positive TOTAL	139	Negative TOTAL	268
General TOTAL			407

Table-2 shows that out of 407 emotion instances in the corpus, distress (19%), fear (18,9%) and happiness (12,5%) dominate the emotion types in general. This finding shows similarity with that of Mendez Lopez (2011; 2014) who finds that happiness, fear, worry and nervousness alternately are the emotion types with the highest reference of use in student journals. All of the other emotion types are below 8%. The students' diary entries describe several instances of how these emotions influence their performance in everyday classes.

In most of their narrations, students describe distress in terms of *being stressed, depressed, getting bored, overwhelmed, bothered, desperate, feeling bad, being stuck, having troubles, being tense, feeling uncomfortable, being a nervous wreck, feeling suffocated, and demoralized*. Students generally report these feelings to express their boredom of lessons and the topics, or stress on examinations and presentations as exemplified in the excerpts below:

- (1) "This week we did four presentations since there were presentations from previous weeks. That is why I was *a bit overwhelmed*" [40SK4]
- (2) "I *feel bad* during the tests because in the first two of our exams we were asked questions from unnecessary content. As a result of this, I *felt unbelievably bad*." [18HIK11]

Students reported being afraid of taking new classes from new teachers, being laughed at while participating in class activities and in their presentations, and worried about not being able to pass their exams. Within the fear category they express their *worry, concern, scare, anxiety, nervous, panic, nightmare*, and apprehension as in the excerpts below:

- (3) "During my presentation I forgot to say some of the things because of my *anxiety*. I was *very afraid* that the teacher would ask me something I do not know." [8BC4]
- (4) "Since we learnt on Thursday that we were supposed to lead a session in our class, I feel *anxious and nervous*." [8BC7]
- (5) "The tests of Research Methods and Language Acquisition courses were compelling. Those matching questions were so many that I could say they became *our nightmare*." [11EM5]

Positive emotions were generally experienced due to class activities that students evaluated fun and learn something new. Also, when students are praised and approved by their teachers, they are more likely to feel happy and confident. Within the happiness category they express *feeling good, being happy, rejoice, delight, joy, gratification, having fun and amusement* in their diaries as in the following excerpts:

- (6) "I had very limited information about Edgar Allan Poe and I found out that he was a great author. That is why I *am so happy*." [6MK3]
- (7) "The approval of our proposal which we wrote for the research class made me *very happy* because I was terrified by that lesson." [8BC9]

Our findings demonstrate that context plays a significant role in understanding the emotions and attributing a positive or negative value on them. There are some emotion types that can be classified as either positive or negative depending on the context. Surprise is one of these emotion types. Knowing the situation, which surrounds a specific emotion, makes it easier for the researchers to identify particular emotions as in the examples below:

- (8) “Approaches course *surprisingly* went well” [S11EM3]
- (9) “It is *surprising* but teachers need to appreciate when students fulfill the responsibilities and get angry when the responsibilities are not fulfilled. But they just say “only two students have read it?” and they ignore it. But I have read it and got prepared for it and I was disappointed again because the teacher just ignored it with two sentences” [S48RYC4]

The significance of co-text and context was clear with the use of another emotion type that is “heyecan” which can be expressed as either “excitement-enthusiasm” or “anxiety-nervousness” in English depending on the immediate context. As seen in the examples below a student can be “heyecanlı” both in a positive and negative way.

- (10) “For this reason, while going to school I was so *excited* (heyecanlı) for some classes but so reluctant for some others.” [50OS2]
- (11) “I tried not to show my *nervousness* (heyecan), but my red cheeks gave me away.” [53EBC3]
- (12) “My presentation was in English, and I was unable to get my tongue around some words because of *anxiety* (heyecan)” [8BC4]

The conjunction “and”, which is frequently used in the diaries to express some emotion types together, appears to be very helpful in determining these neutral emotions. Our data show that two emotions are especially used together conjoined with “and” in order to express the intensity of students’ feelings or make themselves clear, such as “*excited and happy*”, “*anxious and nervous*”, “*anxious and stressed*”, “*anxious and tense*”, and so on. These conjoined uses also suggest the presence of semantic networks in the memory for Turkish emotion terms, and needs further investigation.

4. Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of what emotive experiences the students go through in classroom over a period of time. In order to collect data, students are asked to write down how they feel/felt during the classroom and what they experienced in that occasion. Based on students’ self reports, this study has revealed that students felt various emotion types (27) over a term period and negative emotions predominate. Diary entries analyzed include many instances of negative and positive emotions. Negative emotions are distress, fear, sadness, anxiety, unwillingness, anger, disappointment, disliking, shame, lack of courage, hatred, negative surprise, longing, reproach,

jealousy whereas positive emotion types are happiness, love, relief, curiosity/interest, satisfaction, courage, admiration, hope, positive surprise, excitement, desire and pride.

Language learning is a process in which both negative and positive emotions are felt. What educators need to do is to be aware of these emotions and help students minimize the negative emotions so that they do not lose their motivation. Teachers should learn what the main factors are creating the negative emotions. As Arnold (2009) states, an emotionally positive atmosphere prepares the brain for the best position to learn. Such an atmosphere decreases stress and makes the brain more engaged in learning materials. This could be significant particularly in a language-learning environment.

This study can be considered as a call for language teachers and teacher educators to show that students can have vast feelings. The findings of this study suggest that emotions are a significant part of schooling and the daily lives of those involved in the educational process. Gaining awareness of how students feel could be beneficial to create an effective atmosphere particularly in teacher education programs. Considering the importance of emotions in language education, it is significant to understand the reasons of emotional events and how these influence teaching and learning, as well as to better grasp how these events direct students' and teachers' success in the classroom. Therefore, for future studies, it is better to investigate the causes of positive and negative emotions that emerge in classroom setting.

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Appendix 1 - Students' Emotional Experiences Diary Guide

Name: _____ Date: _____

Most learners experience different emotions during their daily learning classes. Please make use the questions below to express your different feelings, emotions, and mood changes, and to reflect on the situations that make you feel that way.

1. What emotions have you felt this week in your English class?

2. Which of the emotions you have noted above did you feel the most strongly?

3. Can you explain what happened and how you came to feel this way?

4. What effects did/has this had on your motivation to learn English?

5. What did you do about it?
