

The Effect of Positivity on Linguistic Learning Experience

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Abstract

Research has demonstrated that being positive has an influence on students' performance. Nonetheless, previous studies have not focused on the effects of positivity on linguistics education experience. Therefore, the researcher sought to assess the impact of positivity on linguistic learning experiences among female college learners enrolled in an English course. The researcher constituted two classrooms: Class A received positivity-enhancement exercises throughout the course while Class B received the exercises for halfway the course period. In addition, the performance of participants was assessed using three English tests, which were administered at the onset, midway, and end of the course period. Further, the students participated in a survey that examined their level of positivity. The results revealed that Class A had a higher improvement in performance than Class B. The researcher concluded that positivity has a significant influence on linguistic learning experience. The study recommended that teachers should work towards improving the learning environment in order to boost students' positivity.

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Introduction:

Positivity is a cognitive state that enables people to focus on and predict favorable outcomes in their lives. By being positive, an individual's mind is set on a continuous progress towards a great future. According to Adler (2016), there is a direct link between positive mentality and performance improvement on intelligence, creativity, engagement, and productivity. Since the beginning of literature, positivity has been part of it. Various references of different teachings, religions, and cultures have cited positivity in many cases. This study analyzed the impact of being positive on linguistic education experience.

Positivity and the Human Condition

Comprehending the impacts of one's activities, by discovering the intentions of each action, is the beginning of understanding positivity. Usually, people are motivated to put effort in order to make an accomplishment. However, lack of purpose, drive or confidence can deter them from applying any effort. Luckily, the education environment assumes a crucial role in the development of individuals' condition. In addition, psychologists propose that the human condition is profoundly moldable, as training methods can genuinely alter any imperfection, particularly at a youthful age. The human condition is greatly associated with positivity since it involves concepts such as discipline, confidence, happiness, aspiration and motivation.

The Gap between Education and Parent Expectation

Dr. Martin Seligman, a pioneer of positive psychology, pinpointed the gap by comparing two questions (Seligman et al., 2009). First, parents were asked to respond, in two words or fewer, what they desired for their children. The leading answers were fulfillment, contentment, meaning, happiness, stick-to-it-iveness,

courage, enthusiasm, and health. Second, they were questioned about what was taught in schools; the top responses were conformity, literacy, science, hard work, numeracy, and discipline. Evidently, education and parents' desire regarding their children do not overlap. Since bridging the gap may necessitate major alterations in the education system, research demonstrates that students' mentality can be improved by focusing on the human condition (Seligman et al., 2009).

Positive Education

Positivity in Learning

Positive learning inspires students' wellbeing and mentality and prepares them to acquire knowledge (Seligman et al., 2009). Parents have demonstrated profound support for positive learning activities. A UK survey uncovered that majority of parents (9 out of 10) are supportive of schools concentrating on personal development and character (The Jubilee Center for Character and Virtue, 2012). Positive learning has attracted significant attention due to the increasing number of depressed young adults. Lewinsohn (1993) argues that one out of five students experience a major depressive instance before they graduate from high school. Undoubtedly, a positive education environment can contribute immensely towards solving such issues since over 40% of students' daytime is spent in school. In agreement, Heckman (2013) highlights that positive instructing practices can enhance the human condition. In this study, the researcher investigates human condition and determines how to energize it positively for a great learning experience.

Positive education began to surface the 1990s when Dr. Martin Seligman, Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, and Joan Girgus began to investigate whether pessimism inclines

youthful learners to depression as it does to grownups. In order to address the issue, Dr. Martin Seligman came up with the Penn Resilience Program to be utilized in youngsters' schools in late 1990. Then, the concept was pioneered as a trial project in a few schools, and because of its ideal results, it was widely adopted as an essential component of schools, universities and organizations globally. Today, positive instruction has traces in the US and UK, with acknowledgment from US's and UK's education departments. Additionally, positive education has been adopted in different nations, for example, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Bhutan, and Wales, and its adoption will spread out globally.

Positivity versus Pessimism

In order to achieve optimism, one should recognize and question unreal negative cognitions. Pessimistic individuals have a tendency of failing to see a positive practical result since their minds are distorted by catastrophic thoughts. However, it has been demonstrated that pessimism can be changed to optimism, and learners can be instructed, from childhood, to be more positive about school and education. One of the key protests to positive learning is that schools are learners' pathway to higher education or joining a workforce and focusing on other matters will compromise that objective. Nonetheless, research has demonstrated that integrating well-being in educational programs increments both academic performance and welfare of learners (Adler, 2016).

A Case Study: Tecmilenio University

The increasing research on positive instruction has influenced institutions to apply the concepts. Utilization of positive instruction in existing schools offers insights into the potency of the model since scholars and researchers can make comparisons of its outcomes and effects. In

2012, the Tecmilenio University used Seligman's PERMA model that consists of components such as relationships, meaning, accomplishment, positive emotions, and engagement. The objective was to educate individuals about living a purposeful life and equip them with appropriate skills. A positive environment was developed throughout the institution, covering learners, educators, alumni and other stakeholders. In addition, a Well-being and Happiness institute was established in 2013 to support all the university's activities. Results on 1,396 learners in the study, which comprised 54% and 46% male and female respectively, with a mean age of 21 years, uncovered a huge enhancement in students' PERMA (5 basis points increase) after attending a positivity course. Furthermore, first-year learners with full orientation to Tecmilenio's wellbeing environment scored a mean GPA of 84.82, contrasted with 81.12 for first-year students without any exposure.

Factors Affecting Positivity

Educators and researchers have generally acknowledged positivity as one of the essential components that influence the success rate in the learning of a second language. Nonetheless, positivity is a cognitive state, which implies that the dimension of inspiration can vary in an individual's lifetime. In addition, every psychologist has an opinion regarding what increases people's positivity; different theories have been formulated in that regard. Dörnyei (1996) points out that, generally, motivational theories attempt to describe nothing less than the key question of what makes individuals act in a specific manner. Fortunately, a considerable measure of research has been done to comprehend positivity. Academic research will be

explored in this study to identify the aspects that influence positivity.

Motivation: The extent of motivation is largely the key element that influences a person's positivity. Albeit both positivity and motivation are viewed as a cognitive state, motivation is a psychological state that drives an individual to apply effort. Besides, it is a characteristic source of energy for achieving a specific objective. In this study, motivation is considered a byproduct of positivity, which implies that being inspired about the current objective can radically enhance human's energy towards the result. People trust that they can achieve significantly more than what is typically expected when they are exceptionally motivated. Motivation gives the key power that drives one to study a foreign language and the energy to persevere through the long and tedious learning process.

Self-confidence: Self-confidence is the conviction that an individual has the ability to produce results, perform duties skillfully or accomplish objectives. Clement et al. (1977) presented, for the first time, linguistic self-confidence in second language literature, which constitutes self-percepts of communicative capability and low anxiety in using the language (Noels and Clement, 1996). The processes of attribution are some of the most essential drivers of confidence. According to the self-worth theory, which is closely associated with confidence, the most vital human need is self-acceptance (Covington's, 1992). Notably, learners may conform to a self-destructive life while attempting to guard their self-worth. In that regard, instructors must establish a setting that reestablishes students' confidence and corrects distorted rationale.

Level of Knowledge: Linked to confidence is one's knowledge level. Individuals with higher information are

more disposed, persuaded, and prepared to learn new abilities. Certainly, studying a third language requires less effort than learning the second. A person who has experienced a learning challenge on different occasions will have the necessary learning stamina to learn a new language. People's judgment on their competence to carry out a particular task is crucial in bringing about positivity in learning, as proposed by Bandura's (1993) self-efficacy theory. The theory maintains that self-efficacy drives the choice of the task assumed by any person, including the extent of effort applied and the individual's behavior.

Optimism: The aspect of optimism is well entrenched in positivity, as indicated by Atkinson and Raynor's (1974) expectancy-value theory. As indicated by the fundamental guideline of the theory, any task is a derivative of two factors: person's hope of achievement - alluded as optimism in this study, and the value appended to a person's accomplishment in the given assignment. The theory highlights that people have a self-drive and inborn curiosity that motivates them to learn and confront challenges. Notably, learners experience numerous upsetting circumstances that distort their human condition; instructors can motivate students by maintaining a schooling environment that promotes self-motivation.

Happiness: Although happiness has attracted considerable interest over the years, it is one of the highly misunderstood elements of human condition. Certainly, happiness is greatly sought by people because it offers a good feeling. Clearly, joy stimulates the creation of new ideas. Happy people have been found to have a sustained endurance on non-pleasant tasks. In addition, they are more mindful, precise, and are better at performing multiple tasks. In positive psychology, happiness is

associated with wellbeing. Positive or negative emotion and satisfaction are considered as factors for happiness.

Happiness = Satisfaction + or – Emotional effect.

Positivity is evident in the daily undertakings of satisfied individuals. Thus, positivity is connected to satisfaction, which is a factor for happiness.

How to Measure Positivity

The most effective method of assessing positivity is to inquire from an individual about their level of positivity. The inquiry will help to show a person's overall state of mind. Being positive is influenced by various elements; however, regarding this study, the aspects that were examined are the level of motivation, happiness, optimism, confidence, and knowledge.

Learning Languages

In order to understand the connection between linguistics and positivity, it is important to comprehend the language learning processes. This section explores mastering foreign languages and highlights the need for social aspects, environment, and communication in a learning foreign language.

Social and Cultural Aspects of Learning Languages

People's social and cultural aspects should be considered when studying a foreign language. Languages facilitate the communication process, which necessitates adoption of the cultural and social aspects of the natives associated with a particular language. Notably, some scholars uphold that the one's entire perspective and self-image can be altered by language. Individuals who can speak in several languages have diverse mental abilities; they can apply different perspectives because of their broadened social and cultural awareness. Mastering a language is highly related to the learner's feelings regarding their community. Gardner (1985) expressed that

learners' attitude towards a particular language group influences their rate of understanding of that language.

Learning a foreign language requires practice, which involves four linguistic skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. While reading and writing are addressed effectively in the academics, speaking and listening are not emphasized. The self-efficacy of learners who fear to speak a language is affected negatively such that their positivity is reduced. Effective language learning requires a combination of all the four linguistic skills. Notably, an individual's human condition can be strengthened by developing speaking and listening skills. Good speaking skills help a person to vocalize their feelings. Further, a good listener can understand issues quickly and solve a problem effectively. Thus great speaking and listening skills have a positive impact on the human condition.

Intrinsic Forces in Language Learning

According to Gardner (1972), there are three elements that help to conceptualize the likelihood of learning a language, which are attitude towards learning, motivation, and desire to study a language. These elements are closely associated with positivity. The learning experience is mainly shaped by free will, task enjoyment, and self-motivation rather than external factors (Gardner, 1972).

Continuity of Learning

There is a key contrast between learning and studying a subject. Learning is to acquire information or expertise in a specific subject, which requires effort, experience, and practice. Studying, on the other hand, involves reading and memorizing information about a subject. To some degree, studying is a fundamental aspect of learning. Nonetheless, learning a language requires more than just studying. In the workplace, one of a

person's greatest assets is the knowledge acquired through studying in school. A culture of learning must be nurtured in linguistic studies such that learners must know how and when to utilize a language and how it can profit them as they advance in life. The other aspect that distinguishes learning from studying is continuity. When students pursue learning, the knowledge they acquire at school will be applicable later on in their lives.

Tools for Positive Learning Environment

Educators are key influencers of any educational experience. There are different course-specific tools that can be utilized to enhance positivity in the schooling environment. The tools considered in this study are teaching methods, instruction materials, syllabus, and learning tasks.

Instructing materials show the resources that are used in teaching. The most essential teaching material is the core textbook selected for a specific course. A syllabus is a great tool that is utilized by instructors to indicate the expectations for assessment and assignments. Ordinarily, instructors set out the outline of the course in the syllabus by indicating the grading policy, project brief, exam dates, and topics. Instructors have significant control over the teaching methods utilized in the classroom. There is a variety of techniques accessible to educators including classroom research, debriefing, collaborating, demonstrating, and lecturing. Setting goal and students' rewards are accomplished through task setting. Each assignment should be conveyed clearly including its due date. An all-around tasks' program should regulate learners' efforts throughout the course period.

Purpose of Study

The study aimed to assess the impact of positivity on the schooling environment. Specific activities that can

boost positivity were performed on controlled groups of learners. Consequently, the impact of certain practices and conditions on learners' positivity was assessed. Then, the researcher analyzed the data collected from the study and came up with the study findings. Finally, recommendations were made based on the findings.

Profiling

The following is a profile of the group that was investigated in this study.

- Gender: Females
- Mean Age: 21 years
- Occupation: Full-time students
- School: College of commercial studies
- Class: Intermediate English
- Year: First-year students
- Mean GPA for school: 75 points
- English level: Low to moderate
- Country: Kuwait

The participants were female students enrolled in intermediate English course, which was taught by the researcher. Notably, the researcher has been instructed the course for more than 24 years. Participants were divided into two classes: Class A and B.

Methodology

During the course, all participants did three exams: T1, T2, and T3. T1 was done at the onset of the course, T2 at mid-way, and T3 before concluding the course. Both classes were treated differently during the research period. The researcher focused on peer projects and conducted positivity-enhancing activities in class A throughout the course. Positivity boosting exercises involved peer projects, provision of feedback, constant engagement between learners and the instructor, and learners'

involvement in syllabus preparation. However, in Class B, the exercises were applied at mid-way the course period. Moreover, peer groups were not assigned in Class B. At the beginning of the course, learners in class A were asked to introduce themselves, provide their reasons for choosing the course and choose a peer. In Class B, the instructor began by introducing the syllabus and proceeded to teach the class. All participants took part in a positivity assessment survey; the subjects responded to six questions that tested their performance, which was determined through their exam grades.

Results

The performance of students in Class A improved significantly during the assessment period. An overall improvement of 4.7% was observed in Class A's test results while Class B's performance decreased by 3.8%, which is attributed to lack of positivity-enhancement activities.

In addition, Class A's grades were considerably higher those of class B. The low scores obtained in Class B were linked to demotivation because learners' positivity was not enhanced. The results indicate that positivity-enhancement activities have a positive impact on learners' performance. In addition, they suggest that teachers have a responsibility of improving the learning environment in order to motivate learners.

Q1: Are you happy?

The level of happiness in Class A was 61% while Class B's was 52%. Evidently, students' happiness was not highly correlated with their progress. Notably, happier learners scored 2.6 points higher than less happy students.

Findings:

- While happiness is important to human condition, it has a significantly low connection with English education progress in the school setting.
- The level of happiness is a good measure of learners' performance.
- Positivity-boosting activities may help to eradicate underperformance issues in less happy learners.

Q2: Are you satisfied with your life?

Majority of the students (96%) were satisfied. Students' satisfaction level in Class A was higher than in Class B.

Finding:

- Satisfaction level had no correlation with students' progress.
- The learners' past experiences do not have a negative impact on their confidence.

Q3: What is your current English level?

Majority in Class A had levels 7 and 8 while most of the learners in Class B had levels 5 and 6. In addition, 8% of students in Class A were at levels 9 and 10 while none of the students in Class B obtained such levels.

Findings:

- Prior knowledge in English is a good measure of students' final grade
- A positive education environment influences students' progress positively
- Students' engagement and peer projects augment students' education experience
- Level of knowledge has no impact on students' progress

Q4: What is your expectation of your English level?

Motivated students scored higher grades (Class A - 2.5 points and Class B - 3.7 points) than demotivated learners. In addition, most of the discouraged students, who thought they would not learn anything in the course, had a low confidence level and less information in English.

Findings:

- Students' motivation determines their performance
- Learners' performance improves with the rise in their motivation

Q5: How positive are you about your life?

64% and 70% of students in class A and Class B respectively were highly positive. Surprisingly, being positive towards life had no association with learners' performance or progress.

Findings:

- Students' performance or progress cannot be measured accurately by positivity
- The learning environment is among the elements that have a major influence on students' positivity.

Q6: How positive are you towards this class?

Being positive towards the course showed the highest correlation; Class A's performance increase was 4.7% while Class B performance decreased by 3.8%.

Findings:

- Learners' progress is influenced by a positive attitude
- The learning environment has a significant effect on learners' positivity towards the course
- Instructors' attitude has a major influence on students' progress
- The learning environment is greatly impacted by teachers' personal motivation

Summary of Findings

- Motivated instructors can stimulate students' positivity, which has a positive impact on learners' progress.
- Instructors' capacity to influence the classroom environment brings about a responsibility to establish a positive setting that addresses the needs of learners.
- Being positive towards the schooling environment is an excellent predictor of learners' performance and progress than overall students' positivity.
- While the learners' overall positivity is shaped by various external factors, instructors can alter and improve students' performance by motivating them.
- A positive learning environment can be established by positioning students based on their abilities. In addition, a student can either learn from or be intimidated by other knowledgeable peers, based on the learning environment and instructor's influence.
- Students' engagement and peer projects are crucial in influencing the schooling environment in numerous ways such as improving learners' attitudes and motivation.
- Learners should be motivated to exercise self-confidence in learning.
- Students' performance can be assessed by determining their level of happiness. While teachers have less impact on students' happiness, they can educate learners about the importance of happiness and direct them to seek professional help when necessary.
- The performance of positive learners is better than that of less positive students.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can be implemented by instructors in order to establish positive learning environments that will motivate students, and enhance their positivity and performance.

Feedback: Teachers should conduct regular exams, preferably at the beginning, midway and conclusion of the course to assess students' performance. The tests can help to identify students' strengths and weaknesses in the English course. Then, teachers should exploit students' strengths in while focusing on improving their weak areas.

Setting Goals: Encourage learners to come up with measurable and attainable goals after obtaining feedback from the first test. Students should set goals that indicate desired progress with regard to the four linguistic skills: listening, speaking, writing, and reading. The process should be repeated after every exam; then, teachers should motivate learners to achieve set goals.

Learners' Engagement: Every student should be assigned a peer. The performance, strengths and weaknesses of a student should be considered the in peers' selection process. Teachers should encourage students to work together on peer projects.

Practical Application: Instructors should educate students on how the English course will influence their future careers. By doing so, learners will be motivated to put effort and improve their performance.

Integrate Speaking and Listening projects: Instructors can come up with a project that integrates listening (as a skill) and speaking (as a feedback).

Student Involvement: Teachers should involve learners in some aspects of the English course such as creating the timetable and setting assignments' submission dates. Such engagements will improve students' positivity

towards the course. In addition, instructors should ask learners to provide feedback regarding the teaching methods.

Building Character: Introducing playbooks in the learning process can offer students with role models that they can emulate. In addition, teachers should behave and handle students responsibly; students often reflect on their teachers' traits.

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