

Gender-related Emotionality in EFL Students' Classroom: An Experience Sampling Analysis

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Abstract—This study addresses one of the neglected issues in second language acquisition (SLA) research namely emotionality in EFL students. Based on domain specificity dimension of social-cognitive model of emotions, this study aims to capture students' ongoing and spontaneous emotions through experience sampling method. That is, it analyzed 96 forms which students completed at random times and upon receiving random signals in the EFL class. The forms were then analyzed based on the difference between females and males in the following areas: 1) EFL-related activities vs. non-EFL-related activities; 2) the frequency of different emotions; 3) the antecedents of students' emotional states; 4) students' use of emotion regulation strategies and the valence of emotions. The overall results indicated that females and males differed in significant ways in diverse facets of emotional experience. First, females outperformed in the amount of involvement in EFL-related tasks and thinking. Second, they reported experiencing the class emotionally different. Particularly, they experienced greater amount of anxiety and hope comparing to males. Third, they differed in the degree to which they attributed their emotions to teachers meaning that teachers have a more crucial role in emotional dispositions of female students. The implications were then discussed in the light of teachers' responsibility in facilitating communication of emotion and creating positive emotional climate.

Index Terms—academic emotions, EFL context, emotion antecedent, emotion regulation strategies, experience sampling method

I. INTRODUCTION

Emotion is an integral part of learning. It can have important consequences for students' academic performance (Mega, Ronconi, & De Beni, 2014). Furthermore, emotion affects students' cognitive processes and their psychological and physical health (Romero, et al., 2014; Villavicencio, 2011). Positive emotions enhance cognitive processes particularly on tasks which require creativity and fantasy (Fredrickson, 2001). Negative emotions, on the other hand, have a negative influence on learning by directing learners' attention to themselves, rather than to the task, while learners are in the search of a way to get rid of their negative feelings (Hascher, 2010). Converging evidence from other lines of research has also shown that emotional competencies are particularly related to behavioral tendencies in academic life.

Qualter and colleagues (Qualter, Whiteley, Hutchinson & Pope, 2007), for instance, demonstrated that students with higher emotional capability (defined in term of emotional intelligence) were better able to cope with transition to high school. Teacher concerns about effort, home study and behavior, grade point average, number of unauthorized attendances, and late arrivals during the year were the measures of transition to high school. Petrides, Fredrickson & Furnham (2004) also indicated that high levels of emotional intelligence were negatively correlated with unauthorized absences and exclusions from school even after controlling for personality variables.

Except for the significance of emotions in students' learning and academic performance, the topic is under-researched particularly in second language acquisition. There is a serious dearth of research on learners' emotional states while they embark on second language learning. This is especially surprising given that the journey of learning a new language carry with itself such heavy emotional loads that scholars in the field recommend lowering the affective filter in order to facilitate learning and receptivity to input (Krashen, 1977). Theoretically, the area of SLA suffers from the lack of a comprehensive validated theory that explains the role of emotions and different emotion qualities (positive or negative) on learning (Bless & Fiedler, 1999). However, "SLA researchers have hardly brought the integral component of affect-emotions in their own right—to the foreground of their research foci in a holistic manner (Imai, 2010, p. 278)".

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to first, fill the gap in SLA research by documenting EFL students' emotional states as they are involved in foreign language learning. Second, a situated view of emotions is adopted in order to depict students' in-moment emotions. To this aim, experience sampling method was used as a means to capture students' ongoing

spontaneous emotions through the use of forms which they were required to fill out at random times during English class. It was believed that a domain-specific study of EFL emotions (Goetz, Pekrun, & Zirngibl, 2003) is demanded as the area has been only inadequately explored.

Domain-specific emotion research has been primarily carried out in relation to mathematics (e.g. Evans & Morgan, 2006) and music (e.g. Zentner & Grandjean, 2008). Yet, only a handful of empirical studies exist on emotionality in language classes (Mercer, 2005; Imai 2010) which present a fragmented, incomplete picture of the status of emotions involved in language learning. It is assumed that the exploration of EFL students' emotions will inspire increased attention to students' emotional state and communication of emotions among teachers and students. If this communication is handled properly, it can result in increased receptivity to language input, target culture, and eventually increased levels of language learning. Therefore, the following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. Is there any significant difference between females and males in the degree of involvement in EFL-related thoughts and activities?
2. Is there any significant difference between females and males in the experience of different emotions?
3. Is there any significant difference between females and males in the antecedents of their emotions?
4. Is there any significant difference between females and males in the use of different emotion regulation strategies?

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the prevalent literature on SLA, the term emotion is incorporated under the umbrella term affect which covers a wide range of constructs and definitions including emotion and motivation (D'oronyei, 2005; Gardner, 2001) as well as personality factors (Dewaele & Furnham, 1999; Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003). From among the affective variables involved in language learning, only anxiety has been extensively examined. That is the reason why Schutz and Pekrun (2007) criticized the status quo on the grounds that we know much more about anxiety than any other emotional tendencies.

However, in spite of substantial amount of studies on the topic, anxiety research has ended up with conflicting results concerning the relationship between anxiety and language achievement. Scovel (1978) attributed the existing inconsistencies to the different measures and conceptualizations of anxiety and proposed that one had to differentiate between facilitating and debilitating anxiety if the contradictions were to be resolved. Facilitating anxiety arises as a result of a complete match between task difficulty and the amount of anxiety triggered. Debilitating anxiety, in contrast, emerges when the excessive amount of anxiety aroused leads to work avoidance or insufficient work performance.

Motivation, has captured considerable scholarly attention among SLA researchers. Traditionally, it has been categorized as binary classifications: integrative/instrumental and intrinsic/ extrinsic (e.g. D'oronyei, 1998; Gardner, 2001). Later, it was conceptualized in terms of alternative constructs such as self-determination theory (e.g., Noels, 2001), attribution theories (e.g., Williams, Burden, & Al-Baharna, 2001), and willingness to communicate (e.g., Clément, Baker, & MacIntyre, 2003). Except for anxiety and motivation, other emotions (positive and negative) have been largely sidelined (Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, & Perry, 2002). Imai (2010) disapproved the mainstream SLA research for limitations on several grounds and deemed a fuller understanding of the complexity of affective variables involved in language learning necessary.

First, he contended that the overemphasis on the role of anxiety has caused other emotions, particularly positive ones, to be remained intact. Second, emotionality has been manifested as an individualistic construct disregarding its interpersonal and communicative dimensions. Third, cognitive appraisal has been considered as the sole antecedent of the emotions while research in psychology provides evidence on the importance of mood in emotional arousal. Finally, methodologically too, the available research is restricted to retrospective reflection and participants' self-report rather than naturalistic observation of emotional behaviors of learners.

Put differently, in the mainstream SLA research emotions are treated as independent and detachable from the particular context in which they are experienced. This way, an important part of information about subjects' emotional experiences are lost since students' interpretation and appraisal of emotional events are geared to the context in which they arise. This is due to the fact that not only the different components of the immediate context are the object of interpretation and appraisal but also the meaning attached to the situation is based on individual knowledge about that situation (Op't Eynde, De Corte & Verschaffel, 2006). This view calls for the study of emotions of learning as they occur in educational arena i.e. the classroom setting.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

Participants of this study consisted of 35 English learners aged between 11 and 40 years, consisting of 12 (34.3%) boys and 23 (65.7%) girls who attended different English institutes in a small city in South Khorasan province in Iran. The sample was recruited randomly from a list of the 6 available English institutes in the city. The researcher randomly visited several classes in each institute, described the project and invited volunteered learners to take part in the study. They were from different proficiency levels including elementary to advanced ones. Given that the participants were

required to keep a diary for the duration of one week and upon receiving the signals and in order to achieve sound information about learners' emotions, only volunteered students were asked to participate in the study.

B. Instrumentation

1. Academic Emotions

In order to examine students' EFL emotions, the category of emotions extracted from academic emotion questionnaire (Pekrun, Goetz, & Perry, 2005) was employed. Academic emotions are defined as those emotions experienced in a variety of achievement-related situations including attending class, taking tests and exams, studying and doing homework by oneself, studying or doing homework in a learning group, and other situations in which individuals are cognitively occupied with academic achievement (Goetz, et al., 2003). The category consists of nine emotions including enjoyment, hope, pride, relief, anger, anxiety, hopelessness, shame, and boredom. The selection of these emotions for the questionnaire was based on the results of several exploratory studies documenting emotions that occur most frequently in students (Pekrun, 1992; Pekrun et al., 2002; Titz, 2001). Additionally, the selection of emotions was informed by a three-dimensional taxonomy (Pekrun, Goetz, Frenzel, Barchfeld, & Perry, 2011) including activity emotions (enjoyment, boredom, and anger), prospective outcome emotions (hope, anxiety, and hopelessness), and retrospective outcome emotions (pride, relief, and shame). Participants were asked to circle the emotions they were experiencing at the moment on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

2. Emotion Regulation Strategies

The emotion regulation strategies students employed were assessed using a reduced version of the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003). It comprises cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression strategies with 2 items included in each category. Sample items of cognitive reappraisal strategies include ('I control my emotions by changing the way I think about the situation I am in' and 'When I am faced with a stressful situation, I make myself think about it in a way that helps me stay calm') and two expressive suppression strategies also include ('I control my emotions by not expressing them' and 'I keep my emotions to myself'). Students were required to indicate the degree to which they subscribe to each strategy using a seven-point rating scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

C. Procedure

We used experience sampling method (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987) to probe students' emotional state in EFL class. Participants received electronic pagers which sent signals on a random schedule two times during every two-hour time block that they were in English class. A training session was also scheduled in the first week of December to instruct students on how to carry the pagers and respond to the experience sampling form (ESF). At each signal, they were asked to respond to an ESF with open-ended and scaled items for the duration of one week (from 17th to 24th in December). Approvals were also obtained from English teachers as well as institute officials. The form contained several demographic questions such as participants' age, gender, and the English level (elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper intermediate, advanced) they were studying.

Item 1 in the ESF asked participants about the activity in which they were involved at the time they received the signal. The second item asked about participants' thoughts at that moment. Information about participants' emotional tendencies was obtained using a 7-point Likert scale on which they were required to indicate the academic emotions they were experiencing. The next section asked respondents to reflect on their emotions and describe who elicited those emotions and how. Finally, they replied how they dealt with their emotions at that moment through the emotion regulation strategies scale explained earlier. Overall, the procedure resulted in an average of 2.7 completed questionnaires per person or 96 forms in general. From these, girls provided 62 (64.6 %) completed forms and boys 34 (35.4%).

D. Data Analysis

First, in the ESF responses to the questions "What were you doing?" and "What were you thinking about?" were coded as either a) EFL-related activities (e.g. exams, answering teacher's questions, homework) or b) non-EFL-related activities (friends and family affairs, business, other courses at university and school) and the frequency of each category was tallied for females and males. Second, the frequency of those emotions having the highest intensity was tabulated across each questionnaire and the significance of the difference between females and males was checked using X^2 test. Third, the antecedents of students' emotional states were analyzed through calculating the frequency of students' referral to themselves, teacher, and classmates as the sources of their emotions and X^2 's were performed to check the significance of the differences between genders. Finally, students' use of emotion regulation strategies was examined with reference to both gender and the valence of emotion (positive vs. negative) through two-way MANOVA with gender and emotion being set as the independent variables and strategy types (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression) as the dependent variables.

V. DATA INTERPRETATION AND RESULTS

A. Students' Activities and Thoughts in EFL Class

Analysis of students' activities and thoughts at the time they received the signal reveal that participants referred to EFL-related activities in 69.8% and to EFL-related thoughts in 57.3% of their reports. Sample replies for EFL-related activities include "I was reading the passage; I was answering teacher's questions; I was checking the meaning of some new words in my cell phone dictionary." EFL-related thoughts also include "I was searching the meaning of some familiar words in my mind; I was thinking it's a good idea to read the lesson in advance before the class". Non-EFL-related activities and thoughts comprise 3.1% and 24% (respectively) of the students' reports. Examples of non-EFL-related activities are reading the SMS just received and laughing at the teacher. Non-EFL-related thoughts varied widely from the football match shown the day before the class to money making, romantic relationships, and the classmate's appearance. There were also cases where the coding of the thoughts and activities was not attainable due to the ambiguous replies students provided (such as I was thinking; I was speaking) or not replying at all. Chi-square tests used to check the significance of the difference between genders and the results indicate that females significantly involved in more EFL-related activities and thought than males did. Table 1 presents the distribution of activities and thoughts across females and males and the chi-square results.

TABLE 1:
FREQUENCY OF EFL-RELATED AND NON EFL-RELATED ACTIVITIES AND THOUGHTS AND CHI RESULTS OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GENDERS

	EFL-related activities	Non-EFL-related activities	Ambiguous cases	EFL-related thoughts	Non-EFL-related thoughts	Ambiguous cases
females	74.2%	1.6%	24.2%	62.9%	22.6%	14.5%
males	61.7%	6%	32.3%	47%	26.5%	26.5%
Total	69.8%	3.1%	27%	57.3%	24%	18.7%
Chi-square	.002*	.56	-	.002*	.29	-

B. Students' Emotions in EFL Class

Participants score highest on enjoyment and anxiety both accounting for 29.1% of the emotions they experienced. Other emotions in the order of frequency include hope, relief, boredom, pride, hopelessness, shame, and anger. These results show that while the EFL class is generally perceived positively by the students (given that their top 3 priorities are positive emotions), there is always an amalgamation of enjoyment and anxiety reducing on their positive emotionality. Anger, too, is the emotion with the least frequency of occurrence implying that EFL students rarely experience it during the class. Furthermore, a closer look at the percentages of positive and negative emotions indicates that there are significant differences between the two genders in their perception of some emotions. The results of X^2 tests also shows that females significantly experience greater hope and anxiety during the EFL class ($df=8$, $p=.014$ and $.002$ respectively). Table 2 portrays the percentage of different emotions as well as the results of chi-square tests.

TABLE 2:
FREQUENCY OF STUDENTS' EMOTIONS AND CHI SQUARE RESULTS OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GENDERS

	Enjoyment %	Hope %	Pride %	Relief %	Anger %	Anxiety %	Boredom %	Hopelessness %	Shame %
Females	27.4	29	4.8	16.1	4.8	35.5	14.5	8	4.8
Males	32.3	17.6	17.6	17.6	2.9	17.6	11.7	8.8	8.8
Total	29.1	25	9.4	16.6	4.1	29.1	13.5	8.3	6.2
Chi-square	.257	.014*	.317	.317	.317	.002*	.166	.480	1.000

C. Antecedents of Students' Emotions

The most frequent source of students' emotional state is student themselves though teachers are also influential in almost half of the students' emotional arousals. Particularly, cross-gender comparisons through Chi-square tests indicate that female students significantly outnumber in the amount of self- and teacher- instigated emotions. Put differently, teachers, while being the antecedent of half of the females' emotional dispositions, exert a less obvious influence on males. They instigated students to feel in a positive way through praising them and being energetic and positive towards them. In addition, giving students opportunities for extra credits, disciplined class management system, student-centered teaching, and good explanation and elaboration were the sources of students' positive emotions. On the contrary, belittling students and scolding them for the mistakes they have committed, making students anxious through demanding tests and tasks, reminding students of the time limit and frequently looking at their watch while they were on exam, and lack of preparation for teaching were mentioned as sources of negative emotions.

Students' self-induced antecedents of negative emotions also include lack of time and planning, lack of self-confidence and ability in handling particular tasks, heavy burden of out-of-class tasks and duties which prevented students from concentration and preparation, and boredom. On the other hand, their intrinsic motivation towards language learning, adequate forethought and organization, and goal attainment provoked positive emotions in students. Respondents' classmates also activated their positive emotions through being cooperative, leading classroom discussions, and commenting on ongoing tasks and topics. By contrast, classmates' reviewing questions and answers

when the exam was over prompted students' anxiety and stress. Table 3 depicts different antecedents of students' emotions in percent. Some participants referred to more than one source of arousal which resulted in total score to be greater than 100%.

TABLE 3:
FREQUENCY OF THE ANTECEDENTS OF STUDENTS' EMOTIONS AND CHI SQUARE RESULTS OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GENDERS

	Students themselves	teacher	Classmate
females	50%	50%	17.7%
males	47%	35.3%	20.5%
Total	49%	44.8%	18.75%
Chi-square	.029*	.004*	.34

D. Students' Emotion Regulation Strategies

Finally, to probe the significance of difference between genders in the use of emotion regulation strategies for positive and negative emotions a two-way MANOVA was run. The findings show that the use of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression strategies is not significantly different either for the two genders or for the particular positive and negative emotions. In other words, not only isn't there any association between the valence of emotions (being positive and negative) and retrieval of particular strategies, but also the use of strategies is not significantly different between females and males. The interaction effect of gender and emotions is also insignificant (Wilks' Lambda $p = .46$). Table 4 displays the results.

TABLE 4:
MANOVA RESULTS OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GENDERS AND EMOTION TYPES IN THE USE OF EMOTION REGULATION STRATEGIES

Source	Dependent Variable	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
gender	cognitive reappraisal	1	2.334	.196	.659
	expressive suppression	1	3.563	.208	.650
emotion	cognitive reappraisal	1	10.478	.880	.351
	expressive suppression	1	18.730	1.092	.300
gender * emotion	cognitive reappraisal	1	2.841	.239	.627
	expressive suppression	1	26.722	1.558	.216

VI. MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated gender-related emotionality in EFL students through experience sampling method. Analysis of results obtained from students' forms completed during EFL class indicated that females and males differed in significant ways with respect to different dimensions of emotional state. First, females significantly involved in more EFL-related activities and thoughts while in class than males did. By the same token, based on a meta-analysis of 502 effect sizes drawn from 369 samples, Voyer and Voyer (2014) found a female advantage particularly for language courses. This perseverance from the part of female learners can be due to being more goal-oriented and serious in pursuing their objectives. It may also indicate their higher self-efficacy beliefs since students with higher self-efficacy are reported to pursue mastery goals involving challenge and gaining new knowledge as well as performance goals including good grades and outperforming others (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). However, definite conclusions in this regard demand further research and exploration.

Second, it was demonstrated through our data that learning a foreign language is primarily accompanied with enjoyment and anxiety. That is, while the experience was self-rewarding and joyful in itself, students constantly reported feeling anxious during the class. In the same way, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) reported that foreign language enjoyment was significantly higher than foreign language anxiety in 1746 foreign language learners from around the world and similar to our findings, female participants reported both more anxiety and more enjoyment. The females in Park and French's study (2013) too, reported higher anxiety levels compared to males. Anxiety has been always reported as one of the most dominant emotions whose reference can be traced mainly to expectancies of failure (Pekrun et. al, 2002).

Females' anxiety can come from a variety of sources including tests, speaking in front of the opposite gender, speededness of listening files (Price, 1991) as well as other components of reading and writing skills (Hilleson, 1996). Nonetheless, analysis of the activities in which students were involved at the moment they reported anxiety revealed that they were either taking or thinking about exams or were afraid of being questioned in front of others. As such, it seems that the main reference of females' anxiety is oral and written tests. In fact, the results obtained from other studies also corroborate that even enjoyment itself is a by-product of positive learning results such as good grades (Pekrun, 1998).

Our results may justify in part the findings of the previous studies (Goetz, Frenzel, Stoeger, & Hall, 2010) that achievement-related situations have a negative effect on students' enjoyment. Particularly, the anxiety accompanying achievement settings may give rise to negative emotionality in students with the resultant reduction of enjoyment. In addition, achievement-related settings are evaluative by nature leading to a feeling of threat to self-worth (Covington 1992). Such threats can potentially bring about a decrease in enjoyment. Moreover, in our study female participants reported significantly greater feeling of hope in comparison to males. One explanation may be that females tend to interpret the experience of language learning as a path for future achievement and success. For instance, one of the participants explained that she was learning English so as to perform better at university entrance exam and to be accepted in her favorite academic major.

By and large, the most frequent types of emotions in this study (enjoyment, hope, anxiety), according to Pekrun's (1992) cognitive-motivational model of emotions, were all activating emotions. In his model, Pekrun proposed that academic emotions influence academic performance through the mediating mechanisms of motivation, strategies for learning, cognitive resources, self-regulation, and external regulation of learning. In other words, activating emotions enhance learning through stimulating motivation, facilitating the use of flexible and creative learning strategies, and directing attention towards academic tasks and hence, improving task-related thinking. This explanation account for the other findings of this study that having been instigated through these emotions, students substantially focused on EFL-related tasks and thoughts. However, the exact mediating mechanisms which motivated students to concentrate on academic tasks and thinking remain to be explored. Future lines of research can scrutinize the relationship between students' emotional state and their level of motivation, strategy use, and class-related achievement.

Students' perception of the locus of emotional arousal also indicated that while their own propensities were the source of almost 50% of their emotions, teachers also played a significant role in encouraging students' emotions accounting for nearly 45% of emotions experienced in class. In Hascher's study too (2007, 2008) 59% of emotions were attributed to teachers implying that teachers have a critical role in students' emotional predispositions. With respect to the choice of emotion regulation strategies, our data showed that neither participants' gender nor emotion valence were influential in the retrieval of particular strategies. This is unlike other studies which report greater use of regulatory strategies by women (e.g. Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012).

VII. CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study revealed that experience sampling method provided us with the added advantage of probing students' real-life and real time EFL emotions which might have evaded through other retrospective recall methods. In addition, the weeklong sampling period deepened our understanding of the frequency of emotions which could not have achieved otherwise. The overall conclusion obtained from such an analysis is that females and males not only are different with respect to the amount of persistence they allocate to language learning but also perceive the experience emotionally different. They also tend to seek the reference of their emotional orientation in different sources.

Considering these findings, teachers have to acknowledge that emotions are an integral part of the profession and that teaching involves complex inter-relationships with students. This view requires them to set realistic views about teaching and sensible expectations from students. Additionally, they are demanded, through reflective practices, to accurately identify their own emotions as well as students' emotional experiences and deal with them in the most appropriate manner. Without doubt, teachers' emotions are as important to students' emotions as teachers' instructional behavior (Becker, Goetz, Morger, & Ranellucci, 2014). Their ability to create a positive emotional climate in the classroom is critical to the learning that occurs in schools and students' academic success. Furthermore, the characteristics of teaching have been shown to have a strong effect on students' emotions particularly enjoyment and hope as well as students' perceived control (Muntaner-Mas, Vidal-Conti, Sesé & Palou, 2017).

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