
Enhancing Second/Foreign Language Education through the Lens of Positive Psychology

Positive Psychology in Second and Foreign Language Education

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Positive psychology (PP), formally established as a branch of psychology since 2000, supplements the traditional focus on the negative—what is the problem with people—with a focus on the positive human experiences, including positive emotions, character traits, and institutions that contribute to people’s prosperity and wellbeing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). When it encounters the field of second language acquisition, where growing attention has been witnessed these decades to the affective factors of language learners and teachers, what would be the spark? The answer is the integration of PP-related concepts, empirical approaches, and pedagogical practices into language learning psychology studies (MacIntyre et al., 2019). This integration is conducive to not only throwing new light on learner- and teacher-related psychological factors and their potential influences on language learning but also updating the ultimate purpose of language education. As one of the latest collection of PP studies in SLA, this edited volume, *Positive Psychology in Second and Foreign Language Education*, expands further previous topics with new perspectives or methods and carries forward a largely uncharted line of research.

The volume is divided into three parts: theoretical, empirical and practical. The theoretical part begins with an overview of PP applications in SLA by MacIntyre, the founder of the field. After introducing the initiation of PP as a scientific field of study and its three pillars, the author calls for the wariness of “tyranny of positive thinking” (p. 7), a common misconception about PP, and thus brings into focus “a more socially contextualized and dialectic description” (p. 13) as embodied by second-wave PP. This description involves balancing research concerns for positive and negative experiences and exploring how the two work together for individuals in social contexts. Such a balanced view can be observed in studies of emotions in second language (L2) learning. For example, Dewaele and Dewaele (2017), using a pseudo-longitudinal design, conducted a quantitative study of how Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) of 189 foreign language pupils in UK secondary schools, the relationship between the two emotions, as well as their relationship with other factors changed

over time (across age groups). ANOVA showed that FLE changed significantly over time while FLCA did not; correlational analyses revealed a stable negative relationship between the two emotions over time; FLE's dependence on attitudes towards the FL teacher grew over time while the effect of relative standing in the class kept quite stable on FLCA, as shown by multiple regression analyses; and independent T-tests displayed a limited gender effect on both emotions over time. To get a finer-grained and process-oriented view of inter-emotional relationships in L2 learning, Boudreau et al.(2018) applied the idiodynamic approach to delving into the changing relationship on a moment-to-moment timescale between enjoyment and anxiety. Specifically, 10 Canadian university FL learners were asked to give per-second self-ratings of the two emotions while watching a video recording of their performance in two L2 oral tasks. Correlation data showed that the relationship between the two emotions fluctuated not only within individuals but also across individuals and tasks. In general, both studies, acknowledging the contextually-dependent, co-present, and co-dependent nature of positive and negative experiences of human beings underpinning second-wave PP (Lomas & Ivztan, 2015), suggest a complex and dynamic pattern of interaction between enjoyment and anxiety, which sheds further light on the construct of emotions as a complex dynamic system (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) in L2 learning. nally, summarizing the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications emerged to date from PP applications in SLA, MacIntyre expresses a belief in a promising outlook for this particular field.

Following this are three chapters addressing different PP-related theoretical concepts. Based on previous studies on teacher wellbeing and its relevant factors, Jin *et al.* proposes a conceptual framework of foreign language teacher (FLT) wellbeing from an ecological perspective, with the language learning domain and the career stage as two ecological factors on the one hand, and on the other, social-psychological capital that teachers can draw on to manage their wellbeing. Teacher wellbeing in this framework is treated as an emergent, dynamic, and adaptive concept under the influence of the interaction of contextual and socio-psychological factors. Therefore, as noted by the authors, to fully understand and better promote teacher wellbeing, a conceptual framework alone would not suffice; empirical validation of key constructs (i.e. social-psychological capital) in the framework across career stages and instructional contexts is highly necessary. Also taking the teacher perspective, Seidl explores teachers' role in promoting positive international higher education. According to the author, as positive psychology and international

higher education share the same ultimate purpose—fostering wellbeing and flourishing, principles of the former can be applied to the latter. Specifically, three approaches to teaching are offered: 1) promoting culturally responsive teaching through developing positive interpersonal relationships across cultures; 2) enhancing emotionally responsive teaching by drawing on positive emotions and traits of teachers; 3) nurturing a caring and empowering atmosphere that can only be afforded by positive institutions. Turning to the learner perspective, Mierzwa-Kaminska, in the last chapter of Part 1, focuses on a key positive emotion—foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and reviews studies on gender differences in FLE. Finding no clear-cut relationship between FLE and gender, the author calls for future studies on other potentially influential factors than gender and the mechanism underlying the functioning of FLE.

While the production of theoretical constructs is necessary for PP in SLA, the collection of evidence-based support by means of scientific methods is also indispensable. Part 2 presents five empirical studies that examine the relevance of PP concepts applied to learners, institutions, and teachers respectively. The first is a quantitative study by Kikuchi and Lake on the relationship among three levels of positive-self variables (i.e., positive self, positive L2 self, and L2 self-efficacy) of Japanese undergraduates as well as the change of these variables over two academic years. Correlation analysis of Rasch-calibrated self-report measures of these variables indicate positive self variables are more strongly related to positive L2 self variables than to L2 self-efficacy variables. Corroborating results from previous studies, these correlation differences suggest a trend of relationship among the variables: the distance grows as the level rises or falls. Changes of these variables across five occasions, on the other hand, show learners' positive self and positive L2 self are more stable than their L2 self-efficacy. This stability, as argued by the authors, suggest development of positive self and positive L2 self takes time and effort.

The next study by Mystkowska-Wiertelak turns to other two psychological constructs—willingness to communicate (WtC) and classroom engagement and examines their relationship with communicative behavior of advanced English learners in a Polish university. Quantitative analyses reveal only one significant correlation, that is, the one between unplanned in-class WtC and turns taken; qualitative analyses of post-task interviews identify good relations with conversation partners as a noticeable contributor to learners' positive affect, suggesting the importance of social context and learners' social engagement for language learning.

Follows a study by Budzinska, also being mixed-method, which delves into what positive institutional factors contribute to learner and teacher wellbeing. Involving 33 learners and 15 instructors in a private language school in Poland, the study, based on the PERMA model, extracts out of the participants' narratives ten positive institutional features. Six of them, i.e., L2 as a language of instruction, instruction tailored to student level, small class size, lack of mixed levels, positive evaluation, and little emphasis on grades, are subsequently rated quantitatively by learners as helpful or very helpful for English learning. Contributing positive institution, the third pillar of PP, to the framework of Positive Language Education (PLE), the study sets an example of fostering PLE in specific institutional contexts.

The remaining two studies in Part 2, both qualitative in nature, focus on prospective language teachers. One study by Werbinska explores PP-related preservice language teacher identity by means of duoethnography in which 10 pairs of participants talk with each other sharing their biographical experiences and views about language learning and teaching. Data analysis generates ten themes and seven discourses, indicating that language teacher identity is shaped by ownership, sense-making, agency, attachment and autonomy; moreover, these shaping factors interact with each other, supporting the conclusion that teacher identity is in a state of emergence and continuous change.

In the other study, Majchrzak and Ostrogska investigate how preservice language teachers view the teaching profession by asking them to produce "a teacher is like..." metaphors. Interpretation of these metaphors locates various factors as important for teaching, including quality of teacher-student relationships, teachers' demeanors, and their understanding of and respect for individual learner differences in learning, etc. Thus the authors recommend the incorporation of elements of PP, educational therapy, and neurodidactics into teacher training programs.

The robustness of theoretical constructs requires not only empirical validation but also field testing. And Part 3 provides two fieldworks that implement empirically-supported PP-related ideas in Polish college contexts and evaluate their outcomes. One, by Gabrys-Barker, introduces a PP course to an EFL teacher training module. Trainees' feedback shows that they benefit from the course in terms of developing a deep understanding of the emotions and a different way of approaching both their future work as EFL teachers and their personal life.

Lasocinska and Zaorski-Sikora's project, in the last chapter of the volume, reforms the traditional teaching method of the philosophical anthropology classes by applying biographical narrative and metaphor tasks. Its purpose is to foster learners' reflectiveness, self-cognition, and their ability to perceive the world and their own lives from different angles. Confirming the efficacy of these tasks for the intended purpose and recommending their use in different areas of adult education, the authors point out that the smooth and effective implementation of these tasks demands mindful, supportive and empathetic teachers as well as appropriate preparation of biographical activities.

Overall, bringing together up-to-date theoretical, empirical and applied studies on PP in SLA, this volume provides a much-needed extension of previous works (Gabryś-Barker & Galajda, 2016; MacIntyre et al., 2016) from three aspects. First, in terms of perspectives, this volume answers the call for more teacher focus by incorporating theoretical (Chapters 2 and 3), empirical (Chapters 8 and 9), and practical (Chapter 10) studies oriented towards teachers. Another aspect lies in the use of novel approaches, as exemplified by duoethnography in Chapter 8, and biographical narrative and metaphor in Chapter 11. Last but not least, given the scarcity of studies on positive institutions, this volume fills the gap by including one in Chapter 7 that not only delves into institutional elements conducive to learner and teacher wellbeing but also associates them with the ultimate goal of PLE—promoting both linguistic skills and lifelong wellbeing of learners.

Meanwhile there is some room for improvement. If there is a second edition of the volume, it would be preferable to incorporate, among others, 1) studies with a balanced treatment of positive and negative experiences, given the positive focus in this volume, 2) those conducted in more diverse cultural contexts, considering the predominance of Polish contexts observed in this volume, 3) contrastive studies of positive factors across cultures or traditional vs. technology-assisted instructional settings (Wang et al., 2021), and 4) those on new topics such as wellbeing literacy (Oades et al., 2020), introduced as the language-use capability for wellbeing that is assumed to exert an influence on the relationship between positive psychology interventions and wellbeing outcomes.

All in all, as a resonant echo of MacIntyre's firm belief in the immense potential of PP in SLA conveyed at the start of the volume, the rest of it keeps track of what has been explored and also sheds light on what is yet to be conquered in this broad territory. As a valuable addition to the

field, this volume will be a preferred read for PP researchers to advance their studies of the psychological mechanism underlying SLA, for newcomers to set out on their exploration in this field, as well as for language teachers and school administrators to understand their roles and responsibilities in promoting positive language education.

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