CHAPTER 5

INVESTIGATING THE EFFECT OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY BASED CHARACTER STRENGTHS ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN CHILDREN

Metin TAYTAŞ[1]

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, a time of dizzying change and innovation, where a single foreign language is no longer sufficient, keeping up with the digital age, not falling behind the times, and knowing more than one foreign language are becoming indispensable criteria. As a matter of fact, Köksal (2000) states that it is essential to know a foreign language at a very good level in order to keep up with the changing paradigms in a world that is globalizing online and inevitably turning into an electronic village. In the literature, it is known that the individual differences of students are extremely important in the process of foreign language learning, that each individual's learning style is different from the other and that individuals' learning styles are unique to them (Batumlu, 2006; Boydak, 2008). However, it is stated that individuals should have various qualities in order to adapt to this process (Aydemir, 2007) and that the individual differences of individuals learning a foreign language are important in the language learning process (Aydın & Zengin, 2008). On the other hand, students are not taught a permanent language due to problems arising from the system, educational programs and individual differences (Bağçeci, 2004). Similarly, individual characteristics such as interest, ability, intelligence, attitude and motivation are affective factors that affect the learning process (Yeşilyaprak, 2011). These factors can have positive or negative effects on the individual's learning directly or indirectly.

[1] Asst. Prof., Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, metin.taytas@yyu.edu.tr, ORCID iD: 0000-0003-3585-7357

In addition to these factors in foreign language learning, the anxiety level of individuals can also affect learning positively or negatively. As a matter of fact, many researchers (Ganschow & Sparks, 1996; Von Wörde, 1998; Aydın, 1999) have stated that anxiety level plays a role in learning. Similarly, it has been stated that anxiety level is an important factor on individuals' foreign language achievement (Aydın & Zengin, 2008; Çelebi, 2009).

The process of learning a foreign language is a very complex process consisting of many different factors such as readiness, motivation, anxiety level, learning style and learning environment (Gaonac'h, 2006). On the other hand, due to many reasons such as the fact that the phenomenon of learning a foreign language has positive consequences on the development of the child and regulates the mental development of the child, the question of under which conditions the foreign language learning process can be successful is important. For this purpose, the effect of positive psychology-based character strengths on the cognitive processes and motivation of children with foreign language anxiety was investigated.

Seligman et al. (2005), one of the pioneers of positive psychology, found that well-being is positively related to gratitude and positive thinking (Watkins et al., 2003), and that long-term increases in positive emotions can be achieved through love and compassion meditation (Fredrickson et al., 2008).), that negative emotions can be reduced through mindfulness (Jislin-Goldberg et al., 2012), that high levels of hope are associated with lifelong life satisfaction (Bronk et al., 2009), that spirituality and faith-related practices reduce emotional distress (Ai et al., 2005), and that gratitude is an emotion and a personality trait that expresses satisfaction for a benefit obtained (Kardaş & Yalçın, 2019).

This study, which investigated the effects of character strengths exercises on language learners' anxiety and motivation, parallels Deci and Ryan's (1985) assertion that competence, relatedness and autonomy, which are the necessary elements of character strengths-based education in positive psychology, are necessary for children's motivation. Therefore, the effects of the character strengths exercises proposed in the field of positive psychology on students' anxiety levels and motivation and how they can be applied in foreign language teaching were investigated.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY

Anxiety, which disrupts our lives as one of the problems experienced by every person in almost every age, has been defined as an individual's feeling of inadequacy in a threatened environment, restlessness arising from fear or delusions, an unpleasant feeling and a reaction to dangers (Yüksel & Kurt, 2003; Karataş, 2009), a state of arousal manifested by physical, emotional and mental changes experienced by the individual when faced with a stimulus (Taş, 2006) and an emotional state in which a sense of perceived powerlessness is experienced during a perceived danger (Aydın & Zengin, 2008).

As it is understood from different definitions, anxiety, which is accepted as one of the basic emotions of human beings, is also accepted as one of the individual differences affecting learning. In addition, anxiety, which is considered a universal and basic emotion, is an emotion that is experienced by everyone in varying situations and amounts and is considered normal. Therefore, although its level varies from person to person, if it is at a high level, it negatively affects individuals' lives and academic lives (Aksoy, 2012).

When the related literature is examined, factors such as individuals' perception of themselves as inadequate in foreign language learning, negative teacher behaviors, difficulty level of language courses, age and culture can be the reasons that increase anxiety in foreign language learning (Aydın, 1999), which can negatively affect individuals' attitudes towards foreign language courses. In addition, it has been observed that there is a negative relationship between anxiety level and foreign language achievement, the higher the level of anxiety an individual has, the lower the level of success in learning a foreign language, students with high levels of anxiety have problems learning English, and students with low scores on the foreign language skills scale experience high levels of anxiety (Akpur, 2005; Öner & Gedikoğlu, 2007). Based on these results, it can be said that students who face major problems in foreign language learning also experience high levels of anxiety, in other words, negative anxiety experiences are a major barrier in foreign language learning. In this context, it is thought that determining and understanding children's foreign language learning anxiety levels in foreign language learning environments will bring about a more effective foreign language learning and teaching process.

THE EFFECT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS ON CHARACTER

According to the principles published in the MEB Journal of Communiqués (2000), all activities in the foreign language education process should be done in the form of songs, games, competitions, and activities that children will gladly participate in to make them eager to learn a foreign language. This, as can be expected, positively affects children's mental development, cognitive and language development, strengthening memory, attention and focus, socialization, self-confidence, learning and academic success. For this reason, it is aimed for children to be eager to learn a foreign language at an early age, to be sociable in terms of communication, to understand what they hear and to improve their speaking skills.

German linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt argues that language is an activity and determines the character and emotions of people, while Whorf argues that grammatical structures and the views and thoughts of the people who speak them develop in close connection with each other (Whorf 1963). On the other hand, Vogel argues that children gain experience and social identity in the process of acquiring their mother tongue, Jampert states that the mother tongue has important functions on affective, communicative and intellectual areas (Çelebi 2007), while Leibniz sees language as the mirror of the mind (Aktaş, İşigüzel 2013). According to Buss (2008), in foreign language learning processes, people's emotions and personality traits (psychological variables, self-confidence, motivation, anxiety, introversion and extroversion) directly affect foreign language learning success. n the same parallelism, Kasap (2021) stated that the way of language learning varies depending on individual characteristics, that there are individual differences such as personality, intelligence, ability, motivation that affect the success of the person in foreign language learning processes, and that one of the most important of these is personality traits. In addition, it has also been suggested that personality traits have a significant effect on foreign language learning (Ünsal, 2021), that students have different personalities and that personality traits affect foreign language learning (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006). From this point of view, when we consider that learning a foreign language increases children's self-confidence, increases the child's expressive power in the child's mother tongue and enables the child to express himself better, the effect of positive psychology-based character strengths on language learning is once again reinforced.

In summary, it is seen that those who are engaged in language learning and teaching adopt the humanistic approach theory initiated by Rogers, and that the variables brought by the individual's mental and affective qualities to the educational environment in the learning process are important. With the change initiated by Rogers, individual differences have become effective as a new approach in foreign language teaching. Therefore, it is a matter of curiosity whether psychological barriers such as anxiety, fear, lack of self-confidence, low motivation and learned helplessness due to false beliefs are the main causes of foreign language anxiety in children and what solutions can be offered for this. In this respect, the possible causes of language anxiety, which is an important problem in children's foreign language learning processes, are important.

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN CHILDREN

To date, many researchers have examined the causes of foreign language anxiety and at this point, many basic factors that cause foreign language anxiety have been put forward. When we look at the individual or subjective causes of language anxiety in children, we can see that the reason for anxiety in writing in a foreign language is that students feel inadequate and speaking without preparation causes anxiety (Horwitz et al, 1986), that anxiety is caused by comparing themselves with others, high expectations, and false beliefs about language learning (Aydın, 1999), that it arises from lack of self-confidence, comparing themselves with others, and students' thoughts about language (Öztürk, 2003), and that anxiety in listening and speaking situations in the classroom leads to learned helplessness, avoidance behavior, and silent behavior to avoid making mistakes (Horwitz et al., 1986). In the same vein, students having to speak in front of their peers, fear of ridicule, being laughed at, being laughed at, being made fun of and not being able to express themselves (Price, 1991), students' feelings, thoughts and beliefs can be a cause of anxiety, students who believe that they have to speak with a perfect accent and without mistakes are afraid of making mistakes (Horwitz, 1988), students' personal problems, communication problems, low self-esteem, fear of losing their identity, (Young, 1990), conflicting learning and teaching styles of teachers and students in foreign language classrooms, self-esteem, tolerance to ambiguity, risk-taking, competitiveness, social anxiety, test anxiety, identity and culture shock, and beliefs about language

learning skills (Oxford, 1999). In this context, it is thought that understanding students' foreign language learning anxiety levels in foreign language learning environments and producing intervention skills for the intrinsic factors of these causes will bring about a more effective and anxiety-free foreign language learning process.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND CHARACTER STRENGTHS

Positive psychology, which focuses on the positive instead of treating negative feelings and thoughts, explains its mission as "making people stronger and realizing high human potential" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In addition, Seligman (2002) argues that developing positive traits creates a buffer against psychological problems, that action stems from character, that character emerges in the form of bad character and good virtuous character, and that human strengths (courage, optimism, faith, hope, perseverance, flow) serve as a buffer against negativity.

Seligman et al. (2005) suggest that positive emotions in positive psychology include satisfaction, happiness, and hope, while positive individual characteristics include strengths and virtues such as love, courage, compassion, flexibility, creativity, curiosity, self-knowledge, moderation, and wisdom. Because, in the same parallelism with many researchers, well-being is positively related to gratitude and positive thinking (Watkins et al., 2003), long-term increases in positive emotions can be achieved through love and compassion (Fredrickson et al., 2008), negative emotions can be reduced through mindfulness (Jislin-Goldberg et al., 2012), high levels of hope are associated with lifelong life satisfaction (Bronk et al, 2009), spirituality and faith-related practices reduce emotional distress (Ai et al., 2005), hope, optimism, resilience and self-efficacy are highly effective on performance (Avey et al., 2010), subjective well-being is positively correlated with grade point average, reading and math test scores (Suldo et al., 2011), and those who feel gratitude are more helpful, more empathetic and more forgiving (Kardaş & Yalçın, 2018). As a result, many studies show that positive psychology constructs positively affect life satisfaction, happiness and performance. In this context, positive psychology is specifically addressed in the context of character strengths to shed more light on its personal and motivational implications.

THE EFFECT OF CHARACTER STRENGTHS ON CHILDREN'S PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MOTIVATION

In the literature, many researchers agree that students do not learn not because they cannot learn to learn, but because they do not want to learn, and the reason for this is a lack of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Lepper & Hodell, 1989). According to the Self-Determination Theory, this motivation arises when the individual is given a sense of competence, relatedness and autonomy and leads to higher quality performance. According to the theory, motivation in individuals is achieved by meeting three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness, while character strengths are provided by six basic virtues: wisdom, courage, justice, temperance, humanity and transcendence (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Peterson and Seligman (2004), based on positive psychology, have argued that these six virtues (wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, transcendence) and twenty-four character strengths (creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, perspective, courage, perseverance, honesty, integrity, love) are the most important character strengths for a positive psychology-based organization, kindness, social intelligence, teamwork, fairness, leadership, forgiveness, humility, common sense, self-control, beauty, appreciation of excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality) are very important for personal development. A review of the literature on how to use these character strengths in intervention shows that strengths and personal development are strongly linked (Passarelli et al., 2010), and that intervention with character strengths is highly effective in increasing life satisfaction (Proctor et al., 2011), growth (Louis, 2011) and self-awareness (Stebleton et al., 2012). Similarly, Gillham et al. (2011) found that students who participated in a character strengths-based intervention had increased well-being after one year. Another study with interesting findings (Witvliet et al., 2010) found that training people in emotion regulation helps them to empathize and forgive and reduces their negative emotions. In the same parallel, there is a strong relationship between school achievement and character strengths, perseverance character strength contributes to school achievement, there is a positive relationship between character strengths and academic achievement (Smith, 1967), good character leads to good behavior, (Weber & Ruch, 2012), that positive interventions improve learning (Seligman et al.,

2009), and that creating more positive emotions in children positively affects school satisfaction and student engagement (Huebner et al., 2009). In addition, two approaches are emphasized in the sources referring to the development of compassion in the context of character education: Role-modeling and student participation (Nas & Kardaş, 2022). In this study, the authors stated that compassion can be brought to students within the scope of educational activities, compassion education can be realized in the school environment, through in-class activities and by educators/teachers being role-models, students' sensitivity can be increased by preparing trainings and programs based on compassion, and practices related to compassion within values/character education can be provided with the active participation of students.

As can be seen, positive psychology can teach positive emotions and behaviors, provide a positive school environment, increase school satisfaction and students' learning capacity. Considering all these, an increase in the frequency of the use of character strengths can minimize negative emotions and result in more positive effects on personal development, life satisfaction and cognitive processes. Because the use of character strengths can help individuals to know themselves better, to develop themselves more and to have more self-control, it can also make them more independent, competent and motivated to learn a foreign language. At this point, character strengths-based foreign language learning strategies are of utmost importance.

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES TO CHILDREN WITH CHARACTER STRENGTHS

As it is understood from the above researches, if students do not feel comfortable and safe in the foreign language learning environment, their anxiety levels increase and accordingly, they exhibit behaviors such as false beliefs, inadequate, insecure, low motivation, learned helplessness and avoidance in the language learning process. These behaviors may vary from person to person depending on individual factors. Indeed, according to Rubin and Thompson (1982), the most important factor in the language learning process is the individual himself/herself. Therefore, they argue that everything depends on the individual himself/herself and that children who learn a foreign language are creative, enjoy a second language and empirically follow their own learning with curiosity. In the same vein, MacIntyre and Mercer (2014) also found a positive relationship be-

tween the personal characteristics and character strengths of children learning a foreign language and foreign language learning. Similarly, Krashen (1985) argued that there is a positive relationship between positive emotions and foreign language learning, and Gardner (2010) suggested that positive attitudes facilitate foreign language learning in the relationship between motivation and foreign language learning. Therefore, Oxford (2016) designed a language learning model based on positive psychology called EMPATHICS, which consists of nine dimensions. It is suggested that the model should be presented to students within the framework of the following character strengths.

1. E: Emotion and Empathy.
2. M: Meaning and Motivation.
3. P: Hope, Optimism, Perseverance.
4. A: Agency and Autonomy.
5. T: Time.
6. H: Habits of Mind.
7. I: Intelligence
8. C: Character Powers
9. S: Self-Efficacy and Self-Esteem

Considering the character strengths in the model, we can say that the use of character strengths at school within the framework of this model will positively affect children's foreign language learning processes, academic motivation and proficiency perception levels. For this reason, we can say that the techniques and activities used in language teaching to children should generally be given within the framework of this approach.

As can be seen from the above research, positive psychology interventions have a positive impact on foreign language learning and teaching. Indeed, Gregersen (2016) showed that the use of gratitude and altruism exercises, music, laughter and physical exercise improved language learners' well-being and facilitated their learning. Another study found evidence that teachers' positive thoughts and attitudes develop similar positive attitudes in foreign language learners, that character strengths contribute significantly to positive classroom behavior and in turn to children's school achievement, that achievement is related to love of learning, perseverance, gratitude, and hope, that there is a strong correlation between perseverance and hope and positive classroom behavior, and that teacher attitudes have direct or indirect effects on positive classroom

behavior and thus school achievement (Wagner & Ruch, 2015). At this point, Gabrys-Barker (2016) adapted the six virtues and character strengths to the EFL classroom as follows and suggested to teachers that using them in this way can facilitate foreign language teaching to children.

1. Wisdom; to foster creativity, curiosity and a desire to learn in children
2. Courage, to encourage persistence, originality and enthusiasm in children
3. Humanity; expressing kindness, generosity and compassion in children, for emotional intelligence
4. Justice; to create conditions for justice and autonomy in children
5. Moderation; to instill self-control and humility in children
6. Transcendence; for humor, appreciation of aesthetics, optimistic attitudes and spiritual values in children

Considering its importance in education, we can say that positive psychology interventions have a positive impact on foreign language learning and teaching. Therefore, we can say that providing character strengths to students in the classroom in the above-mentioned adapted way will positively affect foreign language learning processes and levels of proficiency perceptions and increase students' motivation to learn foreign languages.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Positive psychology claims that people will feel better and function better if their psychological needs are met and they are supported by their strengths. In line with this purpose, virtue and character strengths aim to explain motivation issues in relation to character strengths, emphasize the functions of character strengths in educational processes and their effect on foreign language anxiety, empower people with high levels of character strengths and produce positive results in terms of motivation. One of the most effective ways to ensure this motivation in children in educational environments is undoubtedly a vision created by the teacher. At this point, the teacher should make the child feel a desire to learn a foreign language and create the appropriate environment for this. The most effective way to do this is to instill in the child the need to know the language in order to participate in fun activities or games planned with the child's natural needs in mind. Considering this situation, it is very important to use the applications of the data obtained from positive psychology studies in education and training by providing learning environments where students can seek and

find opportunities to meet their psychological needs and realize themselves and use their character strengths in the classroom (Güler, 2018). Güler stated that the character strengths she gave to the foreign language experimental group students changed their perceptions of learning at a moderate level, and as a result of this increase, the students became more aware of their own selves and established a more positive relationship with others, and as a result, their sense of autonomy in the learning environment increased. In addition, in this study, it was stated that although most of the students reported that they enjoyed learning a foreign language, they had not made much effort to learn a foreign language before, and thanks to this study, the students believed that they could be successful in learning a foreign language, so the reason why the students did not make an effort despite their high level of interest and self-efficacy was related to social relations. As a result, Güler stated that character strengths exercises help students avoid negative emotions such as boredom and anxiety while learning a foreign language, and the reason for this is that students' well-being increases thanks to positive psychology exercises and as a result, their negative emotions decrease, and the effects of character strengths exercises on foreign language learners' motivation are positive.

Considering its importance in education, it is seen that motivation is a very important element of learning (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004), using character strengths at school increases students' life satisfaction, positive emotions, positive relationships and academic motivation (Bono et al., 2014), there is a positive relationship between gratitude and emotional and social well-being (Froh et al., 2010), and spirituality provides solutions to people's problems (Emmons, 2009). Therefore, Güler (2018) suggested character strengths exercises to guide students to think about why they learn a foreign language and how it can affect their lives, and to make students realize that they are active agents of their own behavior. In this sense, he stated that giving the virtues of humanity and transcendence to students through character strengths exercises was effective on their perceptions of choice and autonomy. In addition, within the scope of these two basic virtues, love, kindness, social intelligence, appreciation of beauty and perfection, gratitude, hope, humor and spirituality are the forces that enable people to realize their own selves in the whole universe and help them to positively associate their selves with others, and the effects of character strengths exercises on foreign language learners' motivation are positive (Güler, 2018). In the same parallel, Wu (2003) stated that learners become more independent when they are given the

freedom to choose the content, methods and outcomes of learning. Therefore, considering their life satisfaction, positive emotions, positive relationships, academic motivation and proficiency perception levels, we can say that character strengths play a very important role in determining students' motivation to learn a foreign language.

In conclusion, considering the importance of positive psychology-based character strengths interventions in education, it is seen in the research findings that positive psychology-based character strengths interventions have a positive effect on foreign language learning and teaching. Therefore, we can say that adapting positive psychology-based virtues within the framework of character strengths and giving them to students in classrooms will positively affect foreign language learning processes, proficiency perception levels and increase students' motivation to learn foreign languages.

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