

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AS A DETERMINING FACTOR IN ANXIETY FROM LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE

DESEMPEÑO ACADÉMICO COMO FACTOR DETERMINANTE EN LA ANSIEDAD ANTE UN SEGUNDO IDIOMA

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Recibido: 15 de noviembre de 2023

Aceptado: 27 de noviembre de 2023

Abstract

KEY WORDS:

Engagement,
anxiety, second
language,
psychology.

Introduction: Panamanian law #2 from 14th of January 2003 makes teaching English at school from 1 to 12th grade mandatory (Asamblea Nacional, 2003, p.1), but studies found a significant percentage of college applicants lacked the necessary language skills (Guadamud, 2019) (Kaur, 2020). **Objective:** This study focuses on academic achievement and its relationship with anxiety from learning a second language. **Method:** This is explored from the theoretical framework of

Coello y Cachón (2017), which define “academic achievement” as grades plus student engagement. This experiment adopts a structure inspired by Phillips findings (1992) correlating a negative relationship between grades and anxiety from second language, but focusing in engagement instead. Control and experimental groups were exposed to a 1-hour English language workshop. The control group followed the book guidelines, while the experimental group followed the ESA model (Engage, Study, Activate). Both groups filled engagement (UWES-S-9) and anxiety (FLCAS) inventories. **Results:** This failed to reveal any statistically relevant Pearson correlations between engagement and anxiety ($r=-0.307$) ($p=0.266$). Comparing the mean engagement results between the post-test of both experimental and control groups showed negligible differences between each other de 39.12 y 38.14, which fall within the 2.24- 2.82-point margin of error. Anxiety results behaved similarly between groups with mean scores of 91.12 and 93.14. **Conclusion:** The engagement results suggest that the experimental stimulus failed at inducing any engagement changes compared to the control group. These results could be due to a number of affecting variables such as the small sample size, insufficient mastery over the experimental stimulus from the research team or the very nature of the stimulus requires exposure over a longer period of time before it takes effect, making a single session model ineffective. Inconclusive though they might be, the resulting negative correlation leaves room for more thorough experimentation.



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Resumen

PALABRAS

CLAVE:

compromiso,
ansiedad, segundo
idioma, psicología.

Introducción: La ley #2 del 14 de enero de 2003 de Panamá hace mandatorio la enseñanza del inglés a nivel escolar (Asamblea Nacional, 2003, p.1), pero estudios realizados a nivel universitario (Guadamud, 2019) (Kaur, 2020) encontraron un porcentaje significativo de aplicantes manejan insuficientemente el idioma. **Objetivo:** La el desempeño académico y su relación con la ansiedad aprendiendo un segundo idioma. **Método:** Sigue al marco teórico de Coello y Cachón (2017) interpreta el desempeño académico como calificaciones más el nivel de engagement. Adoptamos la estructura experimental con una correlación inversa entre calificaciones y ansiedad ante segundo idioma basada en la de Phillips (1992), pero enfocados en engagement. Un grupo control y uno experimental recibieron el mismo temario basado en un libro de gramática para un taller de aprendizaje de inglés de una hora. El grupo control tuvo una metodología siguiendo los lineamientos del libro mientras el grupo experimental siguió el modelo ESA (Engage, Study, Activate). Aplicamos inventarios para engagement (UWES-S-9) y ansiedad (FLCAS). **Resultados:** las correlaciones Pearson entre los pre y post test y esta reveló no ser estadísticamente significativa ($r=-0.307$) ($p<0.266$). Los grupos experimental y control presentan valores media de engagement 39.12 y 38.14 respectivamente, con margen de error de 2.24 a 2.82 puntos. Ansiedad presentó resultados similares con medias de 91.12 y 93.14 respectivamente. **Conclusiones:** La falta de cambio en engagement nos indica que el estímulo experimental fallo en producir cambios significativos comparados con un modelo tradicional. Esto se puede deber a varios factores como el muy pequeño tamaño de muestra, falta de manejo del estímulo experimental de parte de los evaluadores o que la naturaleza de su efecto requiere una exposición acumulativa a lo largo del tiempo y no surge efecto tras una sola sesión. Por otro lado, la naturaleza de la relación inversa da indicios de apoyar la hipótesis de intentarse de nuevo con las modificaciones.

Introduction

Panamanian law #2 from 14th of January 2003 makes teaching English at school from 1 to 12th grade mandatory. This would imply all university applicants locally educated would possess adequate English proficiency (Asamblea, 2003) however, the Universidad Especializada de Las Américas (UDELAS) assessed the English proficiency of applicants in 2015 (Kaur 2020). With a sample size of 1700 applicants from around the country, 47% failed the test, with a score of 71/100 or lower (Kaur 2020). The total average score of all applicants was 68/100 puntos, which suggests most applicants have an insufficient understanding of the language. Guadamud (2019) conducted a similar study in the West Panama province for students attending the Universidad de Panama. With a sample of 30 out of the 80 students from the primary education course, ages 17 to 49, she

found 40% the sample felt some anxiety when studying English and another 13.33% felt a lot of anxiety. 60% of the sample suggested their oral comprehension and speaking would probably improve if the program was more interactive (Guadamud 2019).

Based on these observations, the interest in a more interactive experience, and the nature of language being a dynamic process that demands a practical component for language acquisition, the purpose for this study is to test the possible negative relationship between academic performance and anxiety when learning a second language given that studies such as Phillips (1992) already found a negative relationship between grades and this type of anxiety. Many studies have been conducted on the relationship between grades and academic anxiety, so for this study we focus on engagement as another component of academic performance, as proposed by Coello & Cachon (2017) whom define academic performance as the grades attained within the context of classroom engagement. Engagement is defined here through Schaufeli, Salanova, González -Romá & Bakker's interpretation as a "positive mental state which brings satisfaction and is related to a task. It's characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption... It's a cognitive-emotional state that is not focused on a single object, person or behavior in specific" (Benevides-Pereira, Fraiz, de Camargo, Porto-Martins & Paulo, 2009, p.6).

Methodology

A quantitative experimental model with control and experimental groups. Both groups undergo 1 90-minute English class workshop in separate but identical classrooms and identical syllabi following the topics of direct objects, indirect objects, what is a clause, independent clause, and subordinate clause as stated in "Elements of Language: Second course (Odell, Vacca, Hobbs, Irvin & Warriner, 2007, p.401-404, 439-443). Additionally, the workshop included a 12-word vocabulary obtained from the professor's version of the grammar book: adaptable, insulate, deplete, lethal, relish, dynamic, appease, intimacy, perspective, stimulant, deliberate, and inhibited. The control group's class structure follows a traditional model guided by the recommendations and exercises from the grammar book used, while the experimental group's class follows the ESA (Engage Study, Activate) model for learning English. Both teams were told that at the end of their workshop there would be a mandatory oral evaluation, which was just deception

to act as the anxious stimulus. Engagement and anxiety measurements were taken pre and post workshop (before the alleged oral evaluation), using the UWES-9-S and FLCAS inventories for engagement and anxiety respectively. These results are processed through Pearson correlations to reduce variable by replicating the methodology of a similar study By E. Phillips (1992), which revealed a negative correlation between English grades and anxiety learning a second language on Spanish speakers. The ESA model was chosen as the experimental engagement stimulus given its intended design to generate engagement in the students and its primary setting being English oral language skills, as seen in studies conducted in a broad variety of diverse cultures (Chimboleda, 2019), (Fithria & Ratmanida, 2019) (Ikhrom & Fadlilah, 2018).

The ESA model is made up of 3 stages which are flexible in their application, since they can be repeated and exchange order depending on the situation:

- Engage: The instructor inquiries about the students interests to establish a link with the English language in hopes of generating motivation in the student to study. This is done by adapting the lessons into the interests of each student to make it a more personalized learning experience. This stage frequently uses music, discussions, narrative, audiovisual material, anecdotes, or games as tools to get the students engaged (Fithria & Ratmanida 2019, p.161).
- Study: Once invested in the subject of study, the student is taught the designated material for the class, be it grammar, vocabular, pronunciation... The objective at this stage is for the student to understand the theoretical aspect of language (Fithria & Ratmanida 2019, p.162).
- Activate: The student is given the opportunity to practice the oral skills involved in the lesson through activities that facilitate free and fluid speech of whatever topic they choose. Some techniques used at this step are roleplay, dialogue, debate, poetry, and oratory (Fithria & Ratmanida 2019, p.162).

Participants are told after the initial evaluation, at the beginning of the workshop that the alleged oral evaluation at the end will follow Phillips' (1992, p.16-17) structure, in which they will be individually evaluated over two 5-minute exercises. During the first 5 minutes the participant

speaks freely about any of the topics discussed in class so long as they utilize the vocabulary words at some point. The evaluator shouldn't assist beyond short clarifications when student has shown to have a clear idea of what they mean to say but has forgotten the specific word or conjugation. During the second 5-minute period, the participant will sustain a conversation with the evaluator pertaining to one of 5 possible topics selected at random by them, all of which involve day to day situations that don't demand overly complicated language.

The sample used for this study is not statistically representative, as it focused solely in university students attending Universidad Interamericana de Panama (UIP) and possessed limited English language skills. The sample inclusion criteria were: being an active UIP student, having studied English for at least 1 year or 2 college terms, not having English as your native language, being between the ages 18 and 15, not having a learning or intellectual disability, not having a social anxiety or ADHD diagnostic. The age criterion was enacted to limit the sample to the same age ranged studied previously (Phillips, 1992, p.16). Sample size was N= 15 students, whom were distributed as evenly as possible according to their sex and age to stay balanced in both the control and experimental groups.

Materials

- 2 classrooms
- Red and Black markers
- 2Whiteboards
- Elements of Language (Odell, et al., 2007, p.401-404, 439-443) chapters 13 and 15 copies (26 sets)
- Informed consent forms (26)
- FLCAS inventory (26)
- UWES-S-9 inventory (26)

Operational Definitions

Academic Performance: Focused in the engagement aspect of the Coello & Cachon definition, is operationally defined through Schaufeli, Salanova, González -Romá & Bakker's

UWES engagement inventory, which divides it into three components (Benevides-Pereira, Fraiz, de Camargo, Porto-Martins & Paulo, 2009).:

- Vigor: The effort involved in sustaining the will to finish a task despite difficulty.
- Dedication: Degree of sustained focus on a task associated with positive feelings of enthusiasm, pride, or inspiration because of the challenge.
- Absorption: State of flow in which time seems to pass by quickly while focused on a task.

Schaufeli & Bakker's Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) student version (UWES-S-9) is a shorter version adapted for an academic context. It's made up of 9 items with answers in a 7-point scale between 0 and 6. Each item is associated with one of the three components of engagement. The scale can be evaluated assessing each of the 3 aspects separately or as a final total score. For the purposes of this study the final overall score was used. The version of this test was Schaufeli & Bakker's Spanish translation intended for tests in Spain. The UWES-S-9 shows a high reliability score with an alpha Cronbach value of 0.84.

Anxiety Learning a Second Language: Horwitz (1986) identifies this concept as a specific combination of auto perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviors displayed when learning a second language in a classroom environment because of the learning process. It's made up of three components:

- Communication Apprehension: Type of shyness resulting from a fear or anxiety involving talking to people.
- Test Anxiety: Type of performance anxiety stemming from fear of failure.
- Fear of Negative Evaluation: Apprehension or avoidance of evaluation related situations.

Horwitz designed an inventory called the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure this type of anxiety and its components. It's made up of 33 items with answers in a 1 to 5 scale which is measured in a single final value. This study used the 2001 Perez y Martinez Spanish translated version of this scale adjusted for Mexican students.

Ethical research measures

Permission to recruit participants within campus was obtained from the university before conducting any experiments. All potential participants were given an informed consent form, reiterating their right to stop and exit from the experiment at any point for whichever reason, the measures in place to secure the confidentiality of their personal data, the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participation, potential risks such as mild classroom anxiety, and the potential benefits such as learning or reviewing English class material. All informed consent forms were signed by the participant, a member of the investigation team and a third-party volunteer student from campus. The syllabus for this experiment was designed in collaboration with an accredited high school English teacher whom reviewed it before issuing it to participants.

Results

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale UWES-S-9

Following Schaufeli & Bakker's manual for the application of UWES (Benevides-Pereira, T., María, Fraiz de Camargo, Débora, Porto-Martins, C., Paulo. 2009), the results of our sample (N=15) are displayed in table 1 across the different levels of engagement as established in Schaufeli & Bakker's Spanish parameters. According to their engagement levels, they are categorized as follows: very low 0-15, low 16-26, medium 27-42, high 43-49 & very high 50-54.

Table 1

Experimental Group Engagement Scores Pre and Post Workshop

Participant	Pre-Test	Post Test
E-1	32	32
E-2	54	53
E-3	35	42
E-4	51	47
E-5	32	29
E-6	33	34
E-7*		37
E-8*		39

Note. Participants E-7 y E-8 lack their Pre-Test due to logistical complications causing them to arrive late to the classroom and missing out that part of the experiment, as the stress stimulus was already introduced to the class. Participant C3 is not being considered for the result analysis as they later disclosed to have a learning disability.

Table 2

Control Group Engagement Scores Pre and Post Workshop

Participant	Pre-Test	Post Test
C-1	27	29
C-2	33	32
C-3*	40	38
C-4	38	47
C-5	47	46
C-6	43	43
C-7	40	40

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

Using Beck's Anxiety Scale's ranges as a reference, the FLCAS results are organized into 6 categories: 33-53 no anxiety, 54-74 low anxiety, 75-95 moderate anxiety, 96-116 high anxiety y 117-165 extreme anxiety.

Table 3

Experimental Group Anxiety Scores Pre and Post Workshop

Participant	Pre-Test	Post Test
E-1	101	112
E-2	89	67
E-3	113	117
E-4	72	55
E-5	93	76
E-6	112	111
E-7		118
E-8		73

Note. Participants E-7 y E-8 lack their Pre-Test due to logistical complications causing them to arrive late to the classroom and missing out that part of the experiment, as the stress stimulus was already introduced to the class. Participant C3 is not being considered for the result analysis as they later disclosed to have a learning disability.

Table 4

Control groups anxiety scores pre and post workshop

Participant	Pre-Test	Post Test
C-1	98	96
C-2	102	115
C-3*	93	91
C-4	85	69
C-5	115	115
C-6	95	107
C-7	60	59

Note: Participant C3 is not being considered for the result analysis as they later disclosed to have a learning disability.

Table 5

Pearson Correlations Between Anxiety and Engagement (Using SPSS)

Engagement Pre		Engagement Post	Anxiety Pre	Anxiety Post
Engagement Pre	Pearson Correlation	1	.946**	-.336
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	.262
	N	12	12	12
Engagement Post	Pearson Correlation	.946**	1	-.204
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		.504
	N	12	12	12
Anxiety Pre	Pearson Correlation	-.336	-.204	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.262	.504	
	N	12	12	12
Anxiety Post	Pearson Correlation	-.448	-.307	.889**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.124	.266	<.001
	N	12	12	12

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Results did find a negative correlation between engagement and anxiety ($r = -0.307$) but it is not statistically significant ($p < 0.266$).

Table 6
Group Statistics

Group N			Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Mean Error
Engagement Post	Experimental	6	39.1250	7.98995	2.82487
	Control	6	38.1429	5.92814	2.24063
Anxiety Post	Experimental	6	91.1250	25.82047	9.12891
	Control	6	93.1429	22.01839	8.32217

Discussion

Having the pre and post scores for engagement resemble each other so closely, while also approximating 1 so closely as portrayed in table #5, would suggest there wasn't much change between initial and final levels of engagement. This observation is complimented by the meager change in means both for engagement and anxiety in both groups as portrayed in table #6. Comparing the mean engagement results between the post-test of both experimental and control groups showed negligible differences between each other de 39.12 y 38.14, which fall within the 2.24- 2.82-point margin of error. Anxiety results behaved similarly between groups with mean scores of 91. 12 and 93.14. The engagement results suggest that the experimental stimulus failed at inducing any engagement changes compared to the control group. Similarly, the stressor stimulus of the alleged oral evaluation seems to not have caused much of an impact in participants either.

These results could be due to a few confounding variables such as:

- Small sample size: The experiment was run with a sample size of 15 participants; however, we had procured supplies and sufficient space for up to 26 participants in case there was a surge in interest. This did not happen as there was little external rewards that would motivate participation beyond reviewing or learning the material discussed in the workshop. With a more enticing reward it could be possible to procure more willing participants. Additionally, this experiment was conducted with only UIP students as our demographic due to security protocols for the facility used for the experiment. Ideally

recruiting participants at other universities would increase the sample size and make it more representative of the population.

- **Logistical complications:** The classrooms procured for the experiment were not assigned to the team by the university staff until 5 minutes prior to the allotted time for the experiment to commence. Once the classrooms were procured, the team had to rush the participant distribution process between the experimental and control rooms to stay on schedule as the classrooms were reserved for a specific time slot. This led to some confusion between some participants as they were asked to change rooms in the last second.
- **Environmental stressors:** The delay forced the team to gather participants at the main lobby where they could clearly see them distressing over procuring the classrooms. Once inside, some participants were arriving late since they couldn't be informed which were the correct classrooms with sufficient time in advance. This wasn't just stressful for the participants arriving late, but also for those already in the classrooms whom had their workshop interrupted in the introductory phase.
- **The Nature of the Stimulus:** The experiment was conducted over a single session because easter break during the time when the experiment could be run would have derailed the rhythm of a workshop consisting of multiple sessions. This however seems to be necessary for the ESA model. Regardless of it being student centered and its flexibility, it would seem a single 90-minute session is not long enough to form rapport with the class, get them sufficiently engaged with the topic and learn the material. This is especially true when that 90-minute period needs to also accommodate for both inventory assessment rounds. The stressor stimulus of the fake oral evaluation might have been eclipse in its effect by all these confounding variables also agitating participants.

Not everything seems to have been a loss, regardless of the complications the results did reveal a negative correlation between engagement and foreign language anxiety even if it wasn't statistically significant. This opens the room for further study to follow up these observations, as well as correcting the confounding variables discovered here.

Conclusion

Findings reveal a negative correlation between engagement and foreign language anxiety; however, these are not statistically significant. due to the small sample size and a lack of impact from the experimental stimulus. The lack of changes between pre and post engagement results in both groups suggests the experimental stimulus of the ESA was ineffective, most likely due to requiring a longer exposure for it to influence the participants. Further testing of the theory (Coello & Cachon, 2017) is necessary as, should it be correct, other studies in the same vein (Phillips, 1992) would support it partially as do several others linking academic grading and academic anxiety.

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