



LINGUISTICS, LITERARY CRITICISM

ენათმეცნიერება, ლიტერატურათმცოდნეობა

Motivation and psychological barriers in the process of foreign language learning

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Abstract

In the modern era, the growth of competitiveness in the labour market and the search for qualified personnel are directly related to foreign language proficiency. Employers' requirements extend beyond narrow specialization to include knowledge of one or several foreign languages, which increases the necessity of language learning.

One of the most important psychological aspects of language learning, as well as other activities, is motivation.

Motivation can lead to successful language acquisition and long-term achievements, help discover abilities within oneself during the learning process, stimulate greater interest in the subject, and ultimately provide an opportunity to implement the acquired knowledge practically.

However, our research has shown that the effectiveness of the learning process depends not only on individual motivation but also on the learning environment and psychological attitudes.

To determine students' psychological disposition during language learning - assessing motivation, anxiety, and interest; identifying gaps in the process; and considering necessary psychological approaches for increasing learning productivity - we conducted a survey among Georgian students studying Turkish and German. The study revealed that students' motivation is directly linked to the personal qualities of the teacher, including positive energy, openness, empathy, and emotional support. Such an approach significantly reduces anxiety and fear, increases trust, and promotes active participation in the learning process.

One of the main reasons for demotivation and anxiety was identified as the fear of making mistakes, which impedes participation in communicative activities. Overcoming this barrier is possible through teacher support, interactive exercises, and appropriate psychological strategies. Therefore, language teaching is most effective when the lecturer's academic competence and professional skills harmoniously combine with personal qualities and strategies for overcoming psychological barriers, creating a result-oriented learning environment. This greatly enhances teaching quality, boosts student motivation, and, most importantly, fosters self-confidence.

Keywords: psychological factors of language learning, motivation, psychological barriers, learning environment, pedagogical psychological approaches.

Introduction

In the modern era, the increase in competitiveness in the labour market and the search for qualified personnel are directly related to foreign language proficiency. Beyond narrow specialization, employers' requirements in the labour market also include knowledge of one or several foreign languages.

Numerous studies have addressed various aspects of the language learning process: linguistic tendencies and perceptions, common mistakes and their underlying factors, the influence of dominant languages, and technical gaps in the process. Recently, the focus has increasingly shifted toward research on the psychological approach to language learning.

As is well known, human psychology is shaped not only by genetic factors but also by the atmosphere and stereotypes prevailing in society, which naturally influence the language learning process.

Although linguistics and psychology are distinct disciplines, their areas of interest overlap significantly. The relationship between language and psychology, studied by psycholinguistics, forms during the personality's development from birth, involving innate language abilities.

Psycholinguistics is a science that studies the psychological foundations of language emergence, structure, usage, and human behaviours. It explores the relationship between language, experience, and

thought, based on biological and psychological aspects, to understand the perception and application of language (Özbay, Barutçu, 2013:3).

The psychological processes that manifest during language learning and use must be examined within psycholinguistics. The scope of research in this field can be outlined as follows: ✓ How should language be perceived by individuals, ✓ How should it be used, ✓ The connection between language and thought, ✓ Psychological processes in a language formation, ✓ The relationship between language and experience (Özkan A., Özkan E., 2024:2).

Linguistic psychology studies the linguistic community during language learning and focuses on: ✓ The state of social formation, ✓ The mental structure of communities, ✓ Societal values, ✓ Cultural conditions, ✓ Customs and traditions, ✓ Social rules and norms, with regard to language teaching (Özkan A., Özkan E., 2024:3).

Therefore, linguistic psychology not only considers effective self-presentation of the individual but also facilitates the development of healthy communication. Teaching a language helps a person not only to accurately express their inner state and self-image but also to perceive their environment correctly.

Linguistic psychology encompasses human relationships, defines their values, and assists individuals in perceiving the world and themselves (Taştekin, 2016:9).

Among the main psychological aspects of language learning, as well as any other activity, are motivation and interest in learning the language.

Motivation is the primary factor in language learning. Only motivation can drive results in language acquisition and achieve long-term success, help discover abilities within oneself during the learning process, stimulate greater interest in the subject, and enable practical implementation of acquired knowledge.

In long-term success, it is understood that if a student studies the subject only out of fear of failure in exams, they may achieve some outcome, but this success will not have a lasting effect. It is clear that goal achievement occurs through motivation, and maintaining that motivation until the goal is reached is essential.

When we talk about motivation, we must also consider the factors that form its basis: these may be related to future plans, which could involve interest in the language and culture, living in a country where the language is spoken, studying at educational institutions of that country, or directly applying language skills in the labour market. Thus, the approach to the language and the prerequisites for motivation are linked to the necessity of having specific goals related to learning the language.

The factors mentioned above can be further broken down into details: What level of language learning do existing goals envisage? For example, a person interested in linguistics may aim for a comprehensive mastery of the language, while someone interested in working in a hotel may only need to learn basic language skills.

However, if motivation is very strong, stress levels tend to increase, and overall work efficiency may decrease, which can lead to undesirable emotional reactions and increased anxiety. Self-confidence significantly reduces students' anxiety. Conducting lessons in a favourable, lively, and harmonious environment, encouraging students, and ignoring grammar, vocabulary, and phonetic mistakes that do not hinder communication can help students overcome psychological barriers and reduce anxiety. The teacher should encourage students through joint projects and discussions, but students experiencing anxiety and fear should not be forced to participate. Instead, these tasks can be replaced with other activities, and shy students should be given opportunities to work in pairs or groups with peers

whom they feel comfortable with in the classroom. The teacher's task is to find the optimal approach in which the language learner can achieve their goals and do so within a supportive emotional environment (Шепеленко, 2017:7).

As we can see, in addition to motivation, it is essential to address the psychological factors that give rise to demotivation and anxiety in the process of language learning. The Bulgarian psychiatrist Lozanov identifies these as:

✓ student's fear of failure, ✓ lack of self-confidence, ✓ belief that one will not succeed or other discouraging thoughts, ✓ self-persuasion that learning a language is excessively difficult.

Depending on their origin, psychological barriers may be classified as psychophysiological, informational, emotional, evaluative, semantic, and intercultural. Psychophysiological barriers occur when there is no rapport between teacher and student, when harmony is lacking between the two linguistic realities, or when there is a marked difference between the temperaments of teacher and student. Informational barriers arise when the curriculum is poorly selected, or when the level and pace of the learning material do not match the learner's initial preparedness. Emotional barriers are primarily linked to negative personal emotions, heightened anxiety, the learner's belief that they lack the ability to speak a foreign language, fear of making mistakes, discomfort in group settings, and an inability to respond quickly to questions. Evaluative barriers are associated with the learner's perception of biased assessment by the teacher or of negative subjective attitudes, which subsequently affect grading and feedback. Intercultural and semantic barriers arise when the learner lacks knowledge of appropriate approaches to language learning, does not

know or does not wish to follow the rules of communication and discussion, fails to express opinions about the traditions of the target language's culture, or misinterprets the speech of an interlocutor as a representative of another culture. (Шепеленко, 2017:3)

Research Objective

Taking into account the above-mentioned psychological factors in the learning process, a study was conducted with Georgian groups learning Turkish and German. The aim was to create a healthy psychological environment, develop strategies to address existing difficulties, simplify the learning process, and transform it into an engaging and enjoyable experience. This study provides an opportunity to observe the impact of an individual's psychological state (psychological barriers, motivations, and fears) on the process of language acquisition. The findings allow us to:

1. Identify from the outset the learner's psychological disposition toward language learning, including psychological barriers, fears, and level of motivation.
2. Analyze questionnaire responses to determine the role of the learner's psychological attitude, motivation, and barriers arising from past failures in shaping the language-learning process.
3. Use the discussion of existing psychological barriers as a basis for considering the teacher's necessary psychological approaches to language instruction, the creation of a healthy learning environment, and, when required, the development of strategies and activities to enhance learner motivation.

Method

A written, questionnaire-based survey was conducted, consisting of the following items:

1. General Information

- Your age

2. Gender

- Female
- Male

3. What level of study are you in?

- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Doctorate

4. Do you speak any language other than Georgian at home?

- Yes
- No

5. Which foreign language are you studying?

- Turkish
- German

- English
- Russian
- French
- Other (please specify)

6. What is your main purpose for learning this particular language?

- For work
- For personal development
- For academic purposes
- Other (please specify)

7. In your opinion, how important is this language in your life?

- Very important
- Less important
- I don't know yet

8. How difficult do you find learning a new language?

- Very difficult
- Moderately difficult
- Not difficult for me

9. What is your emotional state before starting to learn a new language?

- Excited, because a new horizon is opening for me

- Slightly anxious
- Very nervous
- Neutral/less emotional
- Other (please specify)

10. When you first started learning a new language:

- I thought I would learn it easily
- I had fears and anxieties that it would be difficult for me
- I had no particular feelings about learning a new language
- Other (please specify)

11. When you face difficulties in learning a language, how do you react?

- I try to stay motivated and continue studying
- I feel sadness and anxiety
- I become discouraged and lose motivation
- Difficulties strengthen me and give me energy

12. What worries you the most when learning a foreign language?

- Fear that I won't be able to memorize
- Fear of failing the exam
- Embarrassment about making mistakes in front of the group
- Other (please specify)

13. How would you describe your inner motivation?

- Very high
- Quite high
- Average
- Low

14. What contributes most to your success?

- Teacher's approach and support
- My personal motivation and interest
- External factors, such as support from family and friends
- Teaching methods and resources

15. How do you feel when you first start speaking using the words you have learned?

- Tension
- Anxiety because I don't want to make mistakes
- Happiness
- No reaction, I just continue learning
- Other (please specify)

16. Do you think language learning becomes more difficult if you are not psychologically prepared?

- Yes
- No

17. Which psychological state, in your opinion, most hinders the language learning process?

- Low self-esteem
- Emotional background
- Fear of making mistakes
- Other (please specify)

Concluding Open-Ended Questions

- Please briefly describe the psychological barriers you may have encountered during the learning process;
- In your opinion, what teacher approaches are most important during times of difficulty, and which approach motivates you the most?

Results

Responses to questions 1–5 provide the following general observations:

1. The questionnaire was completed by 30 students (19 studying Turkish and 11 studying German).
2. It would have been interesting to analyse gender-related differences; however, as only 3 male students participated, meaningful discussion of gender differences is not possible.
3. Absolute majority of participants are Georgian, and communication at home takes place exclusively in Georgian. This naturally has a significant impact on the language-learning process. As is well known, children who grow up in multilingual households generally develop

stronger abilities to perceive language systems, notice differences and similarities between languages, prepare for communication, and understand different cultures.

4. The age range of participants is between 19 and 21 years, meaning no significant age-related differences were observed in the analysis.

5. In addition to Turkish and German, participants either know or are in the process of learning other languages (Russian or English). Thus, working with linguistic structures and perceiving differences is not an entirely new experience for them.

Responses to questions 6–17 present the following picture:

- The majority of respondents want to learn a language for a **combination of personal development + academic goals + work**, while learning solely for work (16.7%) is less relevant;
- Most respondents consider language learning to be very **important**, though **30%** remain uncertain about the potential areas of application for the language.
- A majority (**60.0%**) perceive language learning as **moderately difficult**; low percentage (**26.7%**) consider it **easy**, while only small portion (**13.3%**) view it as very **difficult**.
- Regarding initial attitudes, most participants **reported feeling excited and highly motivated (56.7%)**. Some experienced **slight anxiety (20%)** or **less emotional (23.3%)**, while **0% reported excessive nervousness**.
- When beginning the learning process, **63.3%** believed it would be **easy**, while **36.7% experienced fears or anxieties**. **0%** reported **having no feelings** at all.
- Reactions to difficulties were noteworthy: **66.7% reported maintaining motivation and continuing their studies**, **13.3%** experienced

sadness and anxiety, another 13.3% became discouraged and lost motivation, while 6.7% stated that difficulties strengthened and energized them.

The most important factor, which has the greatest role in the learning process, was observed in the answers to the following question:

- **fear of not being able to memorize material (53.3%) and embarrassment about making mistakes in front of peers (40%).** Both are connected to the fear of failure and public shame. Only 6.7% expressed concern about **failing exams.**
- Despite anxieties, **intrinsic motivation was generally high: 40% rated theirs as high, 33.3% as very high, 26.7% as average, and 0% as low.**
- It is also noteworthy that for the respondents, **success is primarily determined by the teacher's approach - 43.3%, teaching methods and resources: 30%, personal motivation: 26.7%, while external factors, such as support from family and friends, are not a factor for the respondents at all - 0%.**
- **Emotional responses to taking the first steps in communication using the target language were varied: 46.7% reported feeling happy, 33.3% anxious, 16.7% tense, and 3.3% reported no emotional response.**
- **Notably, 60% of participants believed psychological readiness is essential for successful language learning, while 40% did not consider it necessary.**

Regarding **psychological barriers hindering the learning process**, 63.3% pointed to **anxiety about making mistakes**, 20% to **emotional background and nervousness**, and 16.7% to **low self-esteem**.

Discussion

Motivation and Goals

Survey results indicate that the overwhelming majority of respondents approach language learning with considerable enthusiasm and motivation, having already established specific objectives regarding its use. A significant portion of participants pursue language acquisition both as a means of career advancement and as a tool for personal development. This suggests that their engagement with the target language is characterized by long-term planning, and that the language is expected to play an important role in their lives.

The majority of participants describe the process of language learning as moderately challenging. However, such challenges do not diminish their interest or enthusiasm; only a small proportion report experiencing fear or anxiety toward novelty. Encouragingly, even in the face of difficulties, most participants attempt to sustain their learning with motivation. Equally noteworthy is the sense of joy reported during the initial stages of communication in the target language, accompanied by emotions that stem from a serious attitude toward study and a strong sense of responsibility.

The importance of psychological disposition in the learning process is further substantiated by the participants' responses: 60% believe that appropriate psychological preparedness is essential for assimilating new material and maintaining readiness for action. Conversely, 40% consider the commencement of language learning to be a purely mechanical process, one that does not necessitate any prior psychological preparation.

With regard to success factors, the overwhelming majority of participants identify the teacher's approach as the primary determinant of student achievement. Teaching methods and resources were ranked second in importance, while, perhaps surprisingly, personal motivation was cited only afterwards. This finding underscores that even for highly motivated students, motivation alone is insufficient. The teacher, as the principal facilitator of the learning process, must possess mastery not only of pedagogical techniques but also of the art of fostering balanced interpersonal relationships. Responses to open-ended questions confirm that while a successful teacher contributes significantly to strengthening student motivation, monotonous, rigid, or non-interactive teaching methods - as well as undesirable personal characteristics in the teacher—are frequently identified as factors leading to student demotivation.

In open-response reflections, students emphasized not so much the lecturer's professionalism and qualifications as their personal qualities. Above all, emotional support from the teacher was deemed crucial. Respondents underscored the qualities a teacher should avoid: authoritarianism, harshness, and lack of empathy. Such traits, they argue, hinder questioning, generate tension, and obstruct productivity. As one representative statement from the majority indicates: *"With a lecturer, I should not be afraid to ask the same question repeatedly or to make mistakes; otherwise, my self-esteem and motivation decrease, and the learning process becomes unproductive."*

Sources of Anxiety and Psychological Barriers

When asked, *"In your opinion, what kind of psychological disposition hinders the process of language learning?"* the majority of respondents (63.3%)—who at the outset of the survey had expressed

enthusiasm and readiness to tackle linguistic challenges with motivation—identified fear of **making mistakes** as the principal obstacle. A smaller proportion pointed to **emotional background and low self-esteem**. However, it is worth noting that fear of mistakes is closely linked to emotional disposition and, in many cases, may itself serve as a precursor to diminished self-esteem.

The sense of embarrassment caused by making mistakes in front of peers, combined with anxiety over possible failures of memory, also emerged prominently in discussions of sources of anxiety. Only a very small proportion of respondents (6.7%) reported experiencing anxiety primarily related to the possibility of failing examinations.

Data analysis led to the following key tasks:

1. What measures should be implemented to ensure that motivated students—those who demonstrate readiness to learn the language and to confront anticipated challenges—do not become demotivated?

2. What measures should be undertaken to eliminate anticipated fears and anxieties?

3. How can students whose perception of the role of the target language remains unclear, and whose primary concern is exam performance, be effectively engaged and motivated?

4. What kind of learning environment should be established so that it is equally comfortable for students with diverse goals and psychological dispositions?

Conclusion and Recommendations

As the study demonstrates, one of the most significant components in foreign language instruction is the teacher's personality and professional style. The majority of students directly attribute their own success or failure to the teacher's attitude. This suggests that the teacher's role extends far beyond the mere transmission of knowledge: it encompasses responsibility for shaping the emotional climate of the learning environment, reinforcing students' intrinsic motivation, and enhancing their self-esteem. Therefore:

- First and foremost, the teacher should create an atmosphere in which mistakes are perceived **as a natural part of the learning process rather than as failures**. It is advisable that teachers occasionally share stories of successful individuals (including their own experiences) who made mistakes along their learning or professional paths. This helps reinforce the idea that mistakes and setbacks do not signify incompetence; rather, they represent steps on the path toward education and professionalism. If a student becomes the target of punishment or ridicule for making mistakes, anxiety inevitably emerges, leading to decreased self-esteem. According to the survey data, the greatest source of anxiety is precisely the embarrassment caused by errors. For this reason, it is crucial that the teacher transform mistakes into tools for success by tirelessly explaining the correct form while simultaneously encouraging the student.

- Open-ended responses revealed how important **the teacher's energy and emotional approach** are as well. Entering the classroom with a positive attitude, engaging in friendly communication with a smile, and showing readiness to listen to and answer any questions makes students feel comfortable. In such an environment, they are

not afraid to ask questions and are more actively involved in the learning process.

- The teacher's role also includes employing **diverse teaching methods**. Uniform and standardized approaches often diminish motivation, whereas the language teacher should consistently seek to spark students' interest in new activities. Interactive practices—such as discussions, role-playing, and project work—create an engaging environment and facilitate memory retention.

- Beyond academic functions, the teacher is also a **mentor and emotional supporter**. The teacher's approach is crucial: with a single phrase, they can transform fear into motivation—or, conversely, cause the complete loss of interest. For this reason, a professional teacher must stand out not only for professional competence but also for emotional intelligence.

- A particularly serious challenge arises with students whose only concern is their exam score and who therefore see the role of the language in their lives as vague. Because the survey showed that participants already have experience with learning other languages, some students approach language learning sceptically or indifferently due to past failures, perceiving the process as impossible and struggling with diminished self-confidence. For such students, a **differentiated approach** is especially important, since they are at risk of losing interest altogether and falling significantly behind in the material. The teacher should periodically set aside time for individual work, giving these students the opportunity to ask direct questions and receive explanations. This reduces embarrassment in front of peers and strengthens trust in the teacher. Instead of reproach, the teacher's responsibility is to involve them more actively in group discussions, set small and achievable goals, and adapt language learning to their interests and plans. For instance, if a student is interested in

music or sports, the teacher might provide materials related to those topics in the target language. Even the smallest successes must be acknowledged in order to gradually rebuild students' trust in their own abilities and raise their self-esteem. Teacher attention, support, and a constructive approach to mistakes can prove transformative for such learners.

- The results of the study clearly demonstrate that the effectiveness of teaching is not determined solely by professional or technical components such as academic competence, the introduction of innovative approaches, or the degree of engagement in discussions. While these aspects are undoubtedly important for the learning process, they are preceded and grounded by the teacher's personal qualities. Positive energy, emotional openness, a benevolent attitude, and even simple yet symbolically meaningful gestures such as a smile help create an emotionally safe environment, reduce anxiety, strengthen trust and the bond between student and teacher, and, consequently, enhance motivation and effectiveness in learning.

- Only when the emotional and social foundation of the learning process is secured can the lecturer's academic knowledge, professional skills, and competencies fully unfold and produce real outcomes. As a result, teaching is transformed from a mere process of knowledge transmission into intellectual and emotional collaboration, which provides students with the opportunity to strengthen their self-efficacy, motivation, and creative potential.

These findings carry significant implications for both educational practice and education policy. The success of an education system depends not only on the innovativeness of its programs but also on the full recognition of the teacher's role—not only as a transmitter of knowledge and intellectual guide but also as a creator of a positive emotional environment and, in many cases, a shaper of

students' futures. Genuine teaching effectiveness arises precisely from the harmonious synthesis of the teacher's personal characteristics and professional competencies. It is within this unity that teaching becomes not only the transfer of information but also the foundation for students' personal, emotional, and intellectual development.

I hope this work serves as a modest guide for those interested in conducting the learning process productively and in creating a healthy and effective educational environment for students.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to our students, who participated in this study with enthusiasm and great interest, thereby laying the foundation for the creation of this research.

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