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INSIGHTS INTO LANGUAGE LEARNING PSYCHOLOGY: BRINGING IN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

OUR TEAM

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OUTLINE OF THE SESSION

- × Theoretical background
- × Rationale of the study
- × Research design
- × Quantitative findings
- × Writing the interview protocol
- × Preliminary insights from the interviews
- × Intervention strategies
- × Future steps

DEFINING LANGUAGE LEARNING PSYCHOLOGY (LLP)

- × “[...] concerned with the mental experiences, processes, thoughts, feelings, motives, and behaviours of individuals involved in language learning” (Mercer et al., 2012, p. 2).
- × Success in LL depends “ [...]less on material, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between people in the classroom” (Stevick, 1980, p. 4).
- × Motivation has dominated LLP research.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

- ✘ Research has largely focused on understanding the thoughts and emotions of the learners (learner individual differences).
- ✘ But what about teachers' perspectives on this field?
- ✘ Need for understandings of the topic situated in actual classrooms.

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

- ✘ Our aim was to create data collection tools with ‘**participant benefits**’ (Smith and Anmpalagan, 2013).
 1. Bring in teacher voices to the discussion of work in the field of LLP, but also
 2. Conduct research respectful of teachers’ commitments and giving them something back.

OVERALL AIMS OF THE STUDY

- ✘ To gain a deeper understanding of teachers' perspectives on LLP:
 - By exploring their experiences, beliefs, priorities and practices in regards to LLP in their classroom contexts.
- ✘ To suggest possible intervention strategies that could inform classroom pedagogy.

RESEARCH DESIGN: PHASE ONE

- ✘ Establish which aspects of LLP teachers feel are priorities in their settings.
- ✘ Research questions:
 - Which aspects of LLP do teachers feel are especially important and relevant for their setting?
 - Are there any differences in teacher priorities according to school level (i.e., primary, secondary, and tertiary)?

QUESTIONNAIRE: PHASE ONE

- ✘ Online questionnaire was constructed using survey monkey:
 - a. Basic biodata section.
 - b. 14 items about key constructs from LLP (Dörnyei, 2005; Mercer et al., 2012).
 - c. Brief definition offered alongside each term.
 - d. 7-point Likert scale: rate how important each of these constructs is in participants' settings.
 - e. Open-ended section: List which two of these constructs were most important and explain why.
 - f. Teachers at all educational levels in Greece, Portugal, and Austria.

PARTICIPANT BENEFIT: PHASE ONE

- ✘ Annotated bibliography about useful books for teaching practice on some of these constructs.

TASK 1

- ✘ Complete the questionnaire.
- ✘ With a partner, discuss the two constructs which are most important for you and explain why.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS (I)

Construct	Extremely important	Important	Aggregate scores
Self-concept	118	96	214 (5)
Personality	108	98	206
Motivation	194	55	249 (1)
Mindsets	80	107	187
Attributions	64	80	144
Foreign language anxiety	81	75	156
Willingness to communicate	140	87	227 (2)
Learning strategies	125	81	206
Learning styles	95	97	192
Metacognition	58	83	141
Goals	102	98	200
Learner autonomy	109	90	199
Group dynamics	116	103	219 (4)
Emotions	140	82	222 (3)

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS (II)

✘ Differences according to school type:

School type	Most important constructs
Primary school	Motivation & Emotions Self-concept Group dynamics Learner autonomy
Secondary school	Motivation Willingness to communicate Strategies Emotions Group dynamics
Post-secondary education	Motivation Emotions Self-concept & Willingness to communicate Learner autonomy & Group dynamics

OPEN-ENDED QUESTION

- × Motivation
- × Emotions
- × Group dynamics
- × Learner autonomy
- × Learning strategies
- × Willingness to communicate
- × Self-concept

OTHER ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTION

- × Context-specificity.
- × Teacher role.
- × Good rapport (T-Ss and Ss-Ss) ⇒ positive classroom atmosphere.
- × Learning is within students' responsibility.
- × Student age.
- × Learning outside class.

RESEARCH DESIGN: PHASE TWO

- ✘ Build on insights gained in Phase 1.
- ✘ Teachers at the secondary school level (majority group of language educators across the globe).
- ✘ Research questions:
 - What do teachers believe about the constructs? (seven priorities from phase 1)
 - What experiences have they had in respect to them?
 - What are their teaching practices in respect to them?

INTERVIEWS

- × Semi-structured interviews.
- × Volunteer secondary school teachers.
- × Interview protocol:
 - a. Background and understanding the context.
 - b. LLP and the seven constructs: motivation, emotions, willingness to communicate, learning strategies, self-concept, group dynamics, learner autonomy.

PARTICIPANT BENEFIT: PHASE TWO

- ✘ Met participants at an alternative time to share insights and materials with them.
- ✘ Copy of LLP constructs and their definitions, and of the annotated bibliography.

PRELIMINARY INSIGHTS

- ✘ Sensitivity to learner psychology.
- ✘ Aspects of learner psychology are connected.
- ✘ Teachers have a lot of knowledge, but this may not correspond to terms and discourse used by researchers.
- ✘ Reliance on intuition (emotional intelligence).
- ✘ Teacher psychology is absolutely central to what is going on in the classroom.
- ✘ Learner psychology is heavily dependent on teacher psychology.
- ✘ Importance of personality.

TASK 2

- ✘ With a partner, discuss what would you do in class with relation to (some of) the following psychological constructs?
 - Motivation
 - Emotions
 - Willingness to communicate
 - Learning strategies
 - Self-concept
 - Group dynamics
 - Learner autonomy

DEALING WITH LLP

- × Giving learners voice.
- × Praising students.
- × Teaching strategies (explicitly).
- × Building a good rapport with students.
- × Encouraging students to make mistakes.
- × Diversifying lessons.

RESEARCH DESIGN: PHASE THREE

- ✘ Combine insights from the two earlier stages.
- ✘ Establish with a wider population specific teacher beliefs and practices in respect to the seven constructs focused on in Phase 2.
- ✘ Teacher reactions to a series of proposed intervention strategies in these areas (from the literature and teachers in the interviews).

RESEARCH DESIGN: PHASE THREE

× Research questions:

- What do teachers believe about the constructs?
- What are their experiences in respect to them?
- How useful do they find a series of proposed strategies for classroom intervention in respect to them?

QUESTIONNAIRE: PHASE THREE

- × Online.
- × Items which present a series of practical interventions:
 - Whether they already use them.
 - Whether they would use them in the future.
 - Other ideas for classroom interventions in these areas.
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PARTICIPANT BENEFIT: PHASE THREE

- ✘ List of all the proposed activities and strategies for teachers to keep.

PROPOSED INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

- × Exploring learners' beliefs.
- × Realistic self-concept.
- × Sense of security.
- × Sense of progress.
- × Building communities ⇒ pair work and/or group work.
- × Topics that are of interest to learners.
- × Strategy instruction integrated into language instruction.
- × Raising students' awareness (of their motivation, learning styles, preferred learning strategies).

TO CONCLUDE

- ✘ Finding out about our students.
- ✘ Aspects of LLP are interconnected.
- ✘ Viewing LLP from a more global perspective, and not as a set of separate domains.

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THANK YOU
FOR YOUR ATTENTION AND PARTICIPATION

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