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ANXIETY AMONG EFL ADULT LEARNERS: REASONS, CONSEQUENCES, AND WAYS OF OVERCOMING

The article seeks to understand the nature of foreign language anxiety (FLA) and how it may be manifested in adults' learning behavior. It has been established that anxiety, as a powerful emotional state, may be triggered by a threat to an individual's ego or self-esteem, and seriously impede his or her cogitative performance. With this in mind, this research proves that adults' inclination to experience this emotional state may be explained by a set of definite reasons, which stem from the changes, which older students undergo with aging. The obtained results indicate that adults' rich life experience and educational background will be inevitably reflected in their attitude to a learning process and trigger the transition from the teacher-centered pedagogical model of delivering the learning input to the student-centered andragogical one. Such a shifting is believed to become the first step to overcoming FLA, which may be intensified by the significant changes in the general methodological paradigm. The paper reveals that in order to desuggest the self-imposed barriers, which prevent adult learners (AL) from successful FL acquisition, it might be relevant to employ intensive learning techniques. In addition, it seems plausible to apply the Communicative and Cognitive approach, as its core idea is to prepare adults to independent speech production. Furthermore, this paper draws on advanced approaches to AL' assessment. Specifically, it proposes project-based learning and assessment as an alternative to traditional assessment strategies.

Keywords: *adult learners; foreign language anxiety; andragogy; affective filter; project-based learning and assessment.*

Introduction

Over the last decade, research conducted in the field of bilingual education has increasingly demonstrated that effective FL acquisition among adults may be seriously impeded by high anxiety, common to the representatives of this age group. This turns out to be extremely problematic for both counterparts of a learning process – educators and students – as it has a tremendous influence on the overall progress of the last ones. That given, it will be expedient to thoroughly explore this complex problem and suggest the corresponding practical guidance for its solution.

Purpose

This paper examines foreign language anxiety (FLA) of adult learners (AL) in several dimensions, delving into the origin of this psychophysiological phenomenon and describing its basic features. Moreover, this study sets out to analyze how FLA effects AL's speech and cogitative performance in a foreign language (FL) classroom, and how self-imposed psychological barriers may hinder progress in acquiring FL communicative competence in general. In addition, this article provides a set of activities and tools, aimed at reducing an anxiety level among older students.

Methods

The fulfillment of the research has required the employment of the following methods: critical analysis of the topic literature for comparing diverse approaches to the subject matter and providing definitions of the basic notions; generalizing the most progressive teaching practices to determine the methods of teaching English communication to AL; modeling the training process to design the comprehensive methodology.

Results and Discussion

This section of the article expounds FLA from a psychological angle and exposes the interrelation of AL's anxiety in the course of it with their age-predetermined specific properties. Furthermore, considerable attention will be paid to finding a solution to this challenging issue.

According to American Psychological Association, anxiety may be defined as "an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure". Individuals who suffer anxiety tend to possess recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns and, as a result, try to avoid stress-provoking situations [1].

S. Freud defines "anxiety" as "the symptomatic expression of the inner emotional conflict caused when a person suppresses (from conscious awareness) experiences, feelings, or impulses that are too threatening or disturbing to live with". The scholar asserts that such great concern about particular events and situations is triggered by a threat to an individual's ego or self-esteem [2].

G. Perrotta contends that anxiety may be a natural body's response to impending danger, but its defending function turns out to

be excessive in some contexts. The psycho-pathological constituents of this emotional state are the following [3, p. 2].

1. Inadequate fear of harm and negative consequences towards non-anxious situations. Such an emotional state could be defined as fear of danger.

2. Fear of making mistakes and concentration on negative rather than positive aspects while performing a given task.

3. Lack of tolerance towards unpredictable events.

4. Negative self-assessment caused by negative evaluation of one's own skills and capacities.

5. Striving to control reality as one of the possible ways of eliminating negative outcomes of uncertain future.

It is assumed that when an individual is exposed to stressful outer influences, a distress signal moves from the eyes or ears to an emotional processing area of the brain (amygdala), which decodes the perceived images and sounds. If they are being interpreted as dangerous ones, a distress signal is supposed to be sent to hypothalamus, which performs the functions of the brain's command center. This reaction is believed to happen at high speed and may be accompanied by adrenaline pumping, which causes great psychological changes, mentioned above. In addition, an individual's brain, exposed to danger, could release cortisol to help the body stay alert and control mood, fear and motivation [4]. Besides, the prolonged exposure to this neurotransmitter promotes cell death and decreased neurogenesis, negatively influences memory and retention [5, p. 63; 6, p. 83].

According to relevant theoretical premises, anxiety as an emotional state may be represented by various subtypes such as generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and social phobia [7]. Due to the research conducted by E. Horwirtz, M. Horwitz and J. Cope, this list could be completed with a specific anxiety reaction that covers an emotional state, which individuals undergo while acquiring a FL. It is assumed that learners may feel a considerable concern towards their ability to perceive, process and reproduce the learning input, presented via a target language. Specifically, students may be reluctant to participate in role-play situations, tend to avoid creating complicated messages and feel "freezed" when exposed to a FL. Having analyzed typical behavioural patterns of those individuals who feel anxious in a FL classroom, the scholars elaborated the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which comprises three do-mains: 1) communication apprehension; 2) test anxiety, and 3) fear of negative evaluation [8, p. 97].

The enormous impact of FLA on a FL acquisition process among adults may be confirmed by S. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. The scholar claims that successful FL acquisition can depend on a variety of affective variables, namely: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. The learners, whose variables are not optimal for acquiring a FL, will have a high affective filter. This mental construct can perform a role of a screen that prevents language acquisition. Basically, it means that even after understanding the message, the input could fail to reach the zone of the brain, which is considered to be the language acquisition device. The adults with an emotional state, which is more conducive to language acquisition, will obtain more input and their affective filter will be lower. That given, it is possible to assume that affective parameters could restrain or promote the delivery of input to the corresponding part of the brain [10, p. 32].

Furthermore, to bridge the gap in our knowledge about FLA among AL, we place this issue in another perspective. In the present study, we advance the hypothesis that AL may be inclined to experience a strong psychological tension in a FL classroom for a number of reasons, namely [9, p. 144]:

1) decreasing physical and cognitive capacities, which are crucial for acquiring new knowledge and skills, for instance: declining eyesight, hearing loss, poor muscular performance, impaired working memory and deficiency in information processing;

2) the negative previous learning experience, which triggers despair and doubts towards one's own ability to learn;

3) a low self-esteem and negative self-image that could impede effective perception of a new learning input.

The abovementioned age-predetermined specific features of AL may cause serious changes in their educational performance. That granted, it is sufficient to describe methods and tools that can be efficacious against FLA among adults.

First of all, it is important to understand that adults' inclination to FLA may trigger significant changes in the overall methodological paradigm. In particular, we may observe complete transformation of a traditional pedagogical model, applied to teaching children, to the andragogical one, which provides the so-called "educational background" for different strategies of teaching a FL [10, p. 65].

The andragogical model, suggested by M. Knowles, is mainly grounded on the idea of

supportive personal relationships between an instructor and an adult student, where both counterparts of a learning process possess equal rights to develop and modify a curriculum. Under such conditions, adults' deep psychological need to be perceived by others as being capable of self-direction can be fully satisfied. Thus, adult educators are supposed to help learners make the transition from dependent to self-directed learning. Another key feature of this model is that AL's diversity, namely dissimilar motivation, interests, needs and learning styles may cause individualization of teaching and learning strategies [10, p. 66].

With the andragogical framework in mind, it seems plausible to focus on those approaches to teaching a FL to adults, which could reduce communication apprehension anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. The first main idea proposed in this field is introducing intensive learning techniques in a FL classroom, which are aimed at assimilating more study material in less time and with less effort.

Intensive or accelerated learning, devised by Bulgarian psychotherapist G. Lozanov, could be defined as a multisensory method of teaching, which implies creating a conducive educational atmosphere where adult students are able to absorb and commit to memory concepts by overcoming traditional barriers of learning, namely [11, p. 33]:

– the critical-logical barrier, which rejects everything that disregards logical expla-?ation;

– the intuitive-affective barrier that rejects everything that does not create trust and a sense of security;

– the ethical barrier that contests everything that is incompatible with ethical principles of a learner.

To eliminate these barriers, Suggestopedia offers desuggestive-suggestive communicative psychotherapy, applied in combination with conventional modes of listening, reading, speaking, and writing to teach a FL.

G. Lozanov states that intensive learning could dramatically increase the effectiveness of FL acquisition, as it engages the conscious and subconscious mind and the left and right brain hemispheres through a structured, sequenced set of experiences and planned repetition. More importantly, this method is aimed at activating the whole brain by utilizing, for instance, music, physical and mental relaxation, color, and games [12, p. 13].

In addition, it is believed that Suggestopedia may activate many-sided reserved capacities of a learner; particularly, it can dramatically increase adult student's memory. Being exposed to suggestopaedic instruction, learners could experience hypermnesia (super memory), which significantly outweighs the power of ordinary memory [12, p. 13].

Complementary to abovementioned assumptions, intensive learning is grounded on the idea that learners could learn subliminally, absorbing visual or sound information from the surrounding environment. To provide implicit digestion of a learning material, it is highly recommended to employ such activities and tools as: positive suggestion and negative "de-suggestion" exercised by the teacher; soothing background music; new identities for learners; role-plays, games songs and elaborately furnished bright classrooms [13, p. 62].

The aforementioned theoretical premises may be effectively interwoven into Communicative and Cognitive Approach, developed by O.I. Vovk. This approach is targeted not only at fostering students' FL communication, but also at facilitating their cogitative performance. This methodological framework could be extremely efficacious against communication apprehension anxiety as it performs the arduous task of training AL for independent speech production. The model, enhanced within this approach, encompasses such stages as perception, initial reproduction, apperception, incubation, creative speech production, and independent speech production. The smooth transition of these stages could promote imbibing and assimilating the learning input and, as a result, boost AL's confidence in their aptitude for speech performance [18, p. 83].

To elaborate, it is worth discussing the usage of humour and games in a FL classroom as a tool against excessive anxiety. Jokes, for instance, when utilized appropriately and sensitively, may become an efficacious tool in the teacher's methodological arsenal, as it can create an optimal environment for learning and reduce stress. Supporting the idea of benefits of fun in the FL classroom, scholars single out a list of functions of humor. In particular, according to this list, jokes can [14, p. 2]: relieve stress and anxiety; promote psychological weal; boost self-esteem; enhance interpersonal relationships; form group identity; increase memory performance; lighten the mood; maximize energy and vigour; eliminate anxiety; promote creative thinking and problem-solving; strengthen respiratory muscles [14, p. 3].

Assuming that, the teacher may involve a wide variety of jokes, comics, anecdotes, and amusing videos while teaching a FL to AL.

Further, to reinforce AL's speech production in a target language and maintain the alternation of tense and more relaxed mind

states, we may employ "gamification". The term "game" in its broad sense can be defined as an activity, which includes such elements as: 1) a goal that is supposed to be reached; 2) the guidelines of how to accomplish this goal; 3) a feedback system, which presents details about progress towards the goal. What is more, games are voluntary. That given, we may assert that games in a FL classroom could perform three functions: lower an affective filter; stimulate the practice of the digested speech patterns and vocabulary in a more engaging and stress-free manner; increase self-esteem. Games may be associated with the "situations of success", in which achieved goals, reinforcements and teacher's encouragements contribute to students' self-assurance [15, p. 29].

Additionally, it is worth analyzing how to overcome fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety among AL, which are considered to be the most frequently occurred manifestations of FLA. Taking into consideration the fact that adults tend to avoid the situations in which their self-concept is threatened, FL instructors are supposed to suggest another approach to assessing AL's progress. A number of works in this area, among which is *Arlington Education and Employment Program*, have shown that this problem can be overcome by using project-based learning and assessment. Project learning may be defined as a collaborative approach to teaching and learning, which implies immersing learners into situations where they are to utilize a target language to achieve particular goals. This final project, aimed at estimating AL's level of language proficiency has to be grounded on the digested learning input, incorporate speaking, listening, reading and writing, stimulate learners' to authentically use a FL in variant communicative settings, include self-evaluation, peer evaluation and teacher assessment. Being multitask, this tool enables FL instructors to observe learning in three aspects [14, p. 6]:

1. The linguistic aspect: identifying language skills, which AL have acquired, namely their advancing in reading, writing, speaking and listening comprehension.

2. The cognitive aspect: analyzing progress in student goals, literacy practices and learning strategies, particularly planning, using appropriate resources and evaluating work and skills.

3. The affective aspect: determining modifications in adults' perceptions and attitudes towards a learning process and their roles as learners. Specifically, this domain focuses on students' motivation and confidence, which are manifested in their engagement in a FL classroom and ability to work independently, using a FL in new contexts.

However, in order to prepare students for group work and further assist them in evaluation, it is vitally important to involve AL into pre-project activities, which include communicative and collaborative tasks. For instance, information gap activities, learner to learner interviews and other semi-controlled exercises promote establishing trusting and friendly relationships between members of a group. Role-plays, simulations, problem solving discussion groups and field trips may stimulate the most spontaneous use of a target language. Besides, AL may share responsibilities with their instructor and participate in different forms of classroom activities such as arranging chairs or setting up necessary technical equipment. The involvement into these routine procedures could create a sense of belonging to the time and place where the classes occur, and provide prerequisites for informal communication via a FL. At this stage, students may choose a topic for their group work, engaging in various communication tasks, such as agreeing or disagreeing [14, p. 20].

After establishing a conducive learning environment, it is possible to proceed to the next stage – enhancing unified peer evaluation forms, which expose AL's level of language proficiency and are relevant to the suggested activity. This task may resemble "brainstorming" and result in elaborating a list of criteria for analyzing other students' speech performance. In this article, we propose evaluation and assessment samples for the project *Travelling* (the Intermediate level). Table 1 presents the evaluation form for the role play *At the Travel Agency* [ibid, p. 21].

Table 1

Name			
	Asked about a hotel	Yes	No
	Provided personal information	Yes	No
	Asked about flight	Yes	No
	Paid for a trip	Yes	No
	I understood my groupmate	All	
		Some	
	Asked about dates	Yes	No
	Asked for personal information	Yes	No
	Booked a hotel room	Yes	No
	Booked a return ticket	Yes	No
	I understood my groupmate	All	Some

Similarly, AL may estimate their own progress, answering the same questionnaire (Table 2).

Table 2

Name			
	Asked about a hotel	Yes	No
	Provided personal information	Yes	No
	Asked about flight	Yes	No
	Paid for a trip	Yes	No
	I understood my groupmate	All	
		Some	
	Asked about dates	Yes	No
	Asked for personal information	Yes	No
	Booked a hotel room	Yes	No
	Booked a return ticket	Yes	No
	I understood my groupmate	All	Some

Subsequently, a FL teacher may assess AL's oral or written performance, comparing it with a definite list of objectives and criteria, which were compiled to satisfy the project goals. To be accurate in outcome assessment, we may refer to *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment,* and create a form, which correlates both with general learners' abilities and aptitudes at the Intermediate level of FLA, and the language and non-language skills they have gained while assimilating the topic *Travelling* [16].

The visual representation of such a list is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Project assessment				
Student names:				
Project: *Travelling*				
Language Criteria				
Make travel arrangements, applying English				
Employ a wide spectrum of digested linguistic units to solve various problems in the sphere of tourism				
Orient themselves in the new locality via reading maps, signs and decoding announcements				
Make polite requests and respond to them.				
Make a complaint in a written or oral form concerning travel services				
Non-language criteria				
Take some initiatives in group work				
Offer and accept corrections				

That given, assessment as a procedure may be deprived from "subjectivity" and "personal judgments", which could threat AL's self-concept, and be perceived by adults as an adequate response to their progress.

In the same way, it seems plausible to discuss test anxiety, which triggers a number of worries among AL. It is important to state that tests and quizzes may inevitably accompany a learning process; thus preparing students for this form of assessment may seriously change their attitude to such an activity. Assuming the fact, that fear of failure and criticism are main reasons for AL's poor test performance, it is crucial to provide them with a set of positive affirmations and mental setups, which visualize favourable test completion. Moreover, past positive experiences are to be constantly provided as examples of previous successes that could be duplicated even under new conditions. Test practices could also be helpful not only for improving AL's test-taking, but also for acquiring skills of self-control and time management [17].

This investigation has **originality** since it suggests an eclectic framework of guidelines for overcoming FLA among AL, which pro-vides a deep insight into the nature of this emotional state and suggests possible methodological solutions to this issue.

Conclusions

To summarize, we may arrive at the conclusion that FLA among AL could be considered as an issue, which is mostly determined by their age-specific properties, and hence requires a complex approach to its solution. The present findings confirm that adult education, namely, teaching English as a FL to this age group, requires a complete shift to the andragogical paradigm, which develops equal, partnership relationships between an adult student and a FL instructor. Moreover, the results provide evidence for the effectiveness of the eclectic model of teaching a FL to AL. Specifically, the rational combination of Suggestopedia and the Communicative and Cognitive approach, accompanied with relaxation techniques, such as using games and humor, can be extremely productive in the struggle against FL anxiety. Furthermore, this research provides useful recommendations concerning assessment technologies, which are compatible with the suggested teaching methods and the general andragogical framework.

Further implications

In future, investigating FLA among AL, a great deal of emphasis may be placed on elaborating strategies of overcoming test anxiety and developing sets of tasks that may substitute traditional test forms.

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БРОВАРСЬКА Ілона Анатоліївна
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ПРИЧИНИ, НАСЛІДКИ ТА ШЛЯХИ ПОДОЛАННЯ ТРИВОЖНОСТІ У ДОРОСЛИХ ОПАНОВУВАЧІВ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ

Summary. *Стаття має на меті з'ясувати сутність тривожності у дорослих суб'єктів пізнання, окреслюючи основні зміни в їхній навчальній поведінці під час оволодіння англійською мовою. Встановлено, що тривожність, як потужний емоційний стан, може бути спровокована загрозою самооцінці дорослого та серйозно перешкоджати його розумовій діяльності. З огляду на це, представлене дослідження доводить, що схильність дорослих до такого емоційного стану пояснюється низкою певних причин, які випливають із вікових змін, що зазнають дорослі опановувачі англійської мови. Отримані результати свідчать про те, що багатий життєвий досвід і різний рівень освітньої підготовки дорослих неминуче відбиваються на їхньому ставленні до процесу навчання та зумовлюють перехід від педагогічної моделі викладання навчального матеріалу до андрагогічної, орієнтованої на студента. Вважається, що таке зміщення стане першим кроком до подолання тривожності, який може бути посилений шляхом запровадження значних змін у загальній методологічній парадигмі. У статті виявлено, що для подолання психологічних бар'єрів, які заважають дорослим учням успішно опанувати іноземну мову, можна залучити технології інтенсивного навчання. Крім того, доречним може бути застосування комунікативно-когнітивного підходу, оскільки його основна мета полягає в тому, щоб підготувати дорослих до самостійного продукування іншомовного мовлення. До того ж, у статті проаналізовано інноваційні підходи до оцінювання прогресу у набутті комунікативної компетенції дорослими. Зокрема, пропонується проєктний підхід до навчання та оцінювання як альтернатива традиційним стратегіям визначення досягнень дорослого учня.*

Ключові слова: *дорослі учні; мовна тривожність; андрагогіка; афективний фільтр; проєктне навчання та оцінювання*