

Mental Well-Being And Foreign Language Anxiety

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Abstract

Mental well-being can be defined as the individual's positive perception of himself and being aware of his strengths and limitations by realizing himself / herself, as well as being satisfied with himself/herself, acting autonomously and independently, and finding his life meaningful. This mental state will affect living condition such as health, education, work, social relationships, established and natural environments, security, civic participation and governance, housing and work-life balance. In this study, the mental well-being and foreign language anxiety level of 102 university ELT students were measured. It was revealed that the participants with high well-being levels were low in foreign language anxiety, whereas the research showed that participants with low levels of well-being had high levels of foreign language anxiety.

Introduction

Psychological Well-being is a construct based on psychological theory, aggregating knowledge from areas such as human development psychology, humanist-existential psychology and mental health, regarding positive or optimal psychological functioning (Ryff, 1989). Well-being can be regarded as a component that widely recognized as the main integral part of a healthy life, for which happiness is essential (Diener, Scollon & Lucas, 2003). The question of what constitutes happiness has been a central theme in many civilizations since ancient Greece, when philosophers like Aristotle tried to solve the riddle of happy existence. However, the inclusion of the study of well-being in the psychological field in the field of scientific research took place only in the 1960s, driven by major social changes and the need to develop social indicators of quality of life (Keyes, 2006). While philosophers still debate the essence of the state of happiness, researchers have endeavored, over the past three decades, to build knowledge and bring scientific evidence on well-being. In the recent period, social and behavioral psychologists realized that questions about mental illness and human suffering had been thoroughly explored, but very little was known about aspects such as mental health and happiness (Diener, 1984). The most prominent scientific conceptions of today about well-being in the psychological field can, according to Ryan and Deci (2001), be organized in two perspectives: one that addresses the subjective state of happiness (hedonic well-being), and is called subjective well-being. The other investigates human potential (eudemonic well-being) and deals with psychological well-being. In the view of these authors, these two study traditions reflect different philosophical views on happiness. While the first (hedonism) adopts a view of well-being as pleasure or happiness, the second (eudemonism) is based on the notion that well-being consists in the full functioning of a person's potential to think, use reasoning and common sense. Several studies have demonstrated that well-being is closely related to quality of life, biological health markers, adaptive developmental processes and mental health (McCrae & Costa, 1989; Jin & Moon, 2006; Keyes & Ryff, 2003; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Thus, several new terms started to be used related to Well-being, such as happiness, satisfaction, mood, morals, positive affect, subjective assessment of quality of life, among others (Diener, 1984).

Mental Well-being which can be defined as the ability to deal with negative emotions and look at life positively and people with high level of mental well-being are people who are at peace with themselves. They can nurture human relations, have high self-esteem, be open to learning and development, and these people have goals to find meaning in their own lives. Therefore, they are the people who have taken the responsibilities of their lives (Ryff, 1989). Psychological or mental well-being begins with the "self-knowledge" of a person. Then this person, according Ryff and Essex (1992), needs to "understand his potential". Then using that potential and trying to accomplish the goals desired are next steps for mental well-being. This effort is related to self-realization; that is, if a person wants to know himself/herself, he/she must begin to observe his/her own emotions, thoughts and behaviors (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). In fact, the basis of psychological (mental) well-being is the ability to live in harmony with one's true self, that is, of self-knowledge. According to Ryff (1989), an

individual who is in psychological well-being must have the following six characteristics to live a functional life. (1) self acceptance and self-peace (2) positive relations with others (3) self-thinking and behaving (4) environmental domination (5) having a purpose and meaning in life (6) evaluating life as a process of learning and development. For instance, if you have a high degree of self-acceptance, your thoughts towards yourself are positive, you also accept the good aspects of your personality (Ryff, Keyes, Hughes, 2003). Similarly, if you have high autonomy, you are an independent person who can make one's own decisions and so you can be someone who can purify himself from social pressures and regulate your own feelings and thoughts in line with the principles of yours. On the contrary, if you have low autonomy, you are someone who has a lot of thought about others' judgments and lives by making decisions based on others' judgments (Ryff, et al., 2006). In a clearer way, psychological well-being involves the individual's self-perception and recognition of himself / herself realistically, being aware of his/her strengths and limitations, as well as being satisfied with himself/herself, thus acting autonomously and independently, to make his/her life meaningful (Ryff & Singer, 2006). However, the feelings such as having a low degree of acceptance, not being satisfied and feeling weak can cause a negative emotion: anxiety, which is the second theme of this study.

Anxiety is a feeling of intense fear and panic. Most people may feel frightened and fussy before important events in their lives. This feeling can be regarded as natural emotional state and generally when the expected important event ends, feelings of fear, panic and anxiety also end. However, during an important event such as while having a speech, meeting or while speaking a foreign language, this feeling of fear and panic might impair the quality of life even after the expected event (Spielberger et al. 1983). General symptoms of anxiety are: feeling nervous, tense, feeling panic, accelerated in heartbeat, acceleration of breathing, sweating, feeling weak, difficulty in focusing and many more can be added. There are several variables that influence a person's success in learning a foreign language and one of them is related to Affective Filter, which is a mental block that prevents individuals from making full use of the understandable input they receive. For instance, this occurs when a student is unmotivated, without self-confidence, anxious or on the defensive mood, that is, when he/she sees the language class as a place where his/her weaknesses will be revealed (Krashen, 1985). One of the most prominent emotions that influence the Affective Filter is anxiety. Therefore, researchers and language teachers have been interested in the effects of anxiety in this context. Clinical experiences, empirical findings and personal records report that the influence of anxiety in individuals with regard to language classes can not be ignored (Scovel, 1978; Gardner, 1985; Horwitz, 2001). The fact that anxiety negatively affects the learning of foreign languages is not only intuitive, but also logical, since it is known that, in addition to interfering in different types of learning, it has been one of the most examined variables both in the area of psychology and education. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) regarded listening and speaking as the greatest sources of anxiety in the context of foreign language learning. According to them, unprepared free conversation is especially disconcerting. The discrimination of sound and linguistic structure presents problems in relation to other potential difficulties in understanding. Veit and Ware (1983) point out that mental health has two facets: psychological distress and psychological well-being. Anxiety is a typical state of psychological distress and because of that, individuals might tend to stay away and not to participate in activities with others such as speaking a foreign language. Nevertheless, when individuals are not in the state of distress and psychologically feel well, they will search for new relationships and have the need of engaging in projects with others. So we can say that there is a connection between anxiety and mental well-being and this study stipulates that there is a negative correlation between linguistic performance and mental well-being.

1. Method

For this study Correlation Analysis - a statistical measure which determines co-relationship or association of two variables- and Regression Analysis - describing how an independent variable is numerically related to the dependent variable- were used. In the research, regression analysis was used to determine to what extent students' scores on Foreign Language Anxiety Scale were predicted by Mental Well-being Scale. In addition, correlation analysis was used to determine whether there is a negative or positive correlation between well-being and foreign language anxiety.

2.1 Participants

102 ELT students (54 females and 48 males) aged between 21 and 28 participated in the research.

2.2 Instruments

Warwick-Dinburgh Mental Well-being with 5-point Likert Scale (Tennant et al., 2007) and Foreign Language Anxiety Scale with 5-point Likert (Horwitz, 1986) were used.

2. Results

To see whether there is correlation between foreign language anxiety and mental well-being, Correlation Analysis was used.

Table 1 The correlation between Mental Well-being and Foreign Language Anxiety

		Mental Wellbeing	Foreign Language Anxiety
Mental Wellbeing	Pearson Correlation	1	-,624**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	102	102
Foreign language anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-,624**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	102	102

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

We can see in the table that there is a negative correlation between foreign language anxiety and psychological well-being. It means that when the participants' well-being state get better, their foreign language anxiety decreases. This correlation is reported to be as statistically meaningful ($p < 0.001$).

Table 2 Regression Analysis -Model Summary of the study

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,624 ^a	,389	,383	20,81200

a. Predictors: (Constant), Mental Well-being

Table 2 shows that the predictor factor Mental Well-being helps us to predict the foreign language anxiety of the participants with 64% accuracy ($R = ,624$)

Table 3. ANOVAa Table of Regression Analysis

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	27617,629	1	27617,629	63,762	,000 ^b
	Residual	43313,950	100	433,139		
	Total	70931,578	101			

a. Dependent Variable: Foreign Language Anxiety

b. Predictors: (Constant), Mental Well-being

The ANOVA table in the regression output shows us whether our regression model is generally significant. Here we can say that our regression model is significant by looking at the F-value and the p-value ($p < 0.001$). In other words, Mental well-being variable is a significant predictor of the Foreign Language Anxiety variable.

Table 4. Coefficientsa of Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	121,264	5,754		21,074	,000
	Well-being	-1,398	,175	-,624	-7,985	,000

a. Dependent Variable: Foreign Language Anxiety

In Table 4, the regression load (-1,398) and the standardized regression load (-,624) of the Well-being variable are reported. In this model, the constant value is reported as 121,264. Moreover, as the table shows the model of the study is statistically meaningful ($p < 0.001$). In other words, each point increase in foreign language anxiety score causes a decrease of 1,398 points in psychological well-being score. In addition, if we know the score foreign language anxiety scores of a person, we can predict the sate of well-being that person has.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

As previous studies put forward anxiety leads to a negative impact on an individual's emotional state. This negative emotional impact causes the individuals to experience a wide range of negative emotions such as worry, fear, self-criticism, and negative self-assessment (Keogh and Reidy, 2000). Similarly, the fear of being assessed negatively, of looking ridiculous, clumsy, foolish and seeing your personal status diminished arouses

such high levels of discomfort and anxiety while trying to speak a foreign language that you might just give up speaking that language (Pinto, 2000). This study comes up with an important clarification which shows that if the better mental wellbeing of is good enough When it comes to mental wellbeing, it is usually seen as a combination of positive emotional states such as happiness and performance with optimal effectiveness in individual's social life. Thus, Mental wellbeing is regarded a key aspect of happiness and success (Diener & Biswas, 2008) and also has a positive effect on reducing anxiety. People with a high level of psychological well-being experience happiness, life satisfaction and ability to learn (Huppert, 2009). In the present study, the rationale of the analysis demonstrates that the relation between psychological well-being and foreign language anxiety are consistent with previous results shown by other studies related to the correlation between anxiety and mental wellbeing. (Costa & McCrae, 1980; Gilman & Huebner, 2003; Huppert, 2009; Watson & Clark, 1997). The study confirms that there is a negative correlation between mental well-being and foreign language anxiety, and it signifies that when a person's anxiety score is known, the mental well-being score of that person can also be calculated. This tells us that students with language anxiety actually have psychological well-being problems. This result is consistent with the study by Gilman & Huebner (2003), who finds that those having better psychological well-being scores also get higher points in all academic, personal and interpersonal functionality scales than those with low level of psychological well-being scores. Language learners who do not feel well psychologically will have difficulty in learning a foreign language. As stated before, mental well-being reflects the level of the individual's interaction with other individuals. High levels of anxiety has a negative impact on individuals and it causes difficulty in transforming tension into constructive action, making it difficult to learn a language and converse it with others (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986). Therefore, having a better mental well being as this study put forth will be helpful to minimize the effects of foreign language anxiety devastating language learning process and leaving many students behind the learning level required for each of their different stages of life. Individuals' capacity to achieve any goal significantly depends on their mental wellbeing (Ryff and Keyes, 1995; Savage, 2011) and foreign language learning is a goal for many people to achieve and many teachers struggle to teach it. As revealed in this study, if psychological well-being is achieved, students' foreign language anxiety will decrease and it will be easier to teach and learn a foreign language.

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