

Portraying Students' Emotions in English Conversation Clubs at a Colombian University

Caracterización de las Emociones de los Estudiantes en Clubes de Conversación de una Universidad Colombiana

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Abstract

Emotions are ubiquitous and permeate all aspects of human life, including language learning. However, little attention has been paid to emotions in the ELT curriculum, let alone in the design and implementation of conversations clubs. In this article, we share the qualitative results of a mixed-method study on students' emotions while participating in a conversation club at a public university in Colombia. Findings show an ample range of students' emotions, factors commonly associated with these emotions such as academic load and personal life, and the connections of emotions with students' language learning processes. This study identifies how emotions can facilitate or interfere with language learning, highlights the importance of emotions in the development of oral skills in the context of conversation clubs, and contributes to the understanding of the language learner from a holistic perspective in the field of Applied Linguistics.

Keywords: conversation club, emotions, feelings, language learning, university students

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Resumen

Aunque las emociones están siempre presentes y permean todos los aspectos de la vida, incluyendo aprendizaje de idiomas, ha habido poca investigación sobre ellas en el área de la enseñanza del inglés y se les ha prestado poca atención en la planeación de clases o en el diseño curricular, aún menos en la implementación de clubes de conversación. En este artículo, compartimos los resultados cualitativos de un estudio de caso con enfoque mixto sobre las emociones de los estudiantes que participaban en un club de conversación en una universidad pública colombiana. Los resultados muestran una amplia lista de emociones, factores comúnmente asociados con esas emociones como son la carga académica y la vida personal, así como conexiones de las emociones con el proceso de aprendizaje del idioma de los estudiantes. Este estudio identifica cómo las emociones pueden facilitar o interferir en el aprendizaje de idiomas, destaca la importancia de las emociones en el desarrollo de la expresión oral en el contexto de los clubes de conversación y contribuye a la comprensión del aprendizaje de idiomas desde una perspectiva holística en el campo de la lingüística aplicada.

Palabras claves: club de conversación, emociones, sentimientos, aprendizaje de lenguas, estudiantes universitarios

Introduction

Emotions are inherent to human life, yet they are not always perceived or understood at first glance; one needs to carefully observe the signals unconsciously or unwittingly sent by others to acknowledge, interpret, and respond to them in an adequate form. In educational settings, emotions are invariably present and involved in learning; they affect students' motivation, their attention and centeredness in the class activities, and the choice for participation, among others (Pekrun, 2014).

Research on emotions and the affective domain in Applied Linguistics has been outnumbered by the bulk of cognitive studies (Dewaele, 2019; Prior, 2019; Shao et al., 2019) and a concentration on language learning anxiety (Horwitz, 2010; Horwitz et al., 1986), although this might not be the most common emotion experienced by foreign language learners (Beseghi, 2018). However, following the recent affective turn, the interest in researching emotions has started to grow and there is a renewed call for a better understanding of emotions in language learning and teaching (Dewaele, 2019; Kong, 2019; Prior, 2019; Shao et al., 2019).

Studies indicate that students tend to show negative reactions towards activities focused on oral skills, particularly when these are presented through individual work, rather than in pairs (see Beseghi, 2018; Gknou, 2013; Jorquera Torres et al., 2017; Méndez López & Peña Aguilar 2013). Students feel wise, motivated, and skillful when collaborating with a partner as compared to feelings of ignorance, isolation, and clumsiness when working on their own (Beseghi, 2018; Jorquera Torres et al., 2017). Regardless of what might be the source of emotions: students' personal beliefs, their performance in grades and tests, the type of

learning activities, or teachers' decisions (Beseghi, 2018; Gkonou, 2013), and their fluctuation over time (Beseghi, 2018; Gkonou, 2013), emotions certainly impact students' motivation in both positive and negative ways (Méndez López, 2022; Méndez López & Peña Aguilar, 2013). All in all, studies agree on the need of teachers to be aware of students' emotions and to work with, instead of against them (Beseghi, 2018; Gkonou, 2013; Jorquera Torres et al., 2017; Méndez López & Peña Aguilar, 2013).

In Colombia, studies about emotions in education have primarily investigated the impact of teacher attitudes and teaching methodologies on students' self-esteem (Sarmiento Pérez & Sanabria Herrera, 2003), the use of affective strategies to reduce anxiety in oral performance (Sánchez Solarte & Sánchez Solarte, 2017), and the use of a holistic theater content methodology to reduce the affective filter in participants (Gualdrón & Castillo, 2018). As it can be seen, researchers have limited the nature of emotions to specific feelings, such as anxiety and self-esteem. Although research has been conducted on the topic of emotions, there is currently a lack of research specifically on emotions and English language teaching in both Colombian and international contexts.

Conversation Clubs (CCs) are increasingly being used to supplement instruction. They are considered a leisure activity where learners are free from the pressure of a more formal learning environment like language classes, which include evaluation and normally demand regular attendance. Words used to characterize the environment of CC include “uncanny communicative experience” and “boost your English”³, and a place “to make friends”⁴. Hence, CCs are expected to be a learning space clear of unpleasant emotions and to naturally contribute to the development of students' oral skills. In Colombia, conversation clubs as a language learning context have barely been included in research. Emotions are an under-researched area in the context of CCs that supplement ELT in higher education, unlike formal settings (e.g., Méndez López, 2022). To delve into emotions and the role they might play in ELT learning in such a context, in this paper we address the questions: What emotions do students experience in English conversation clubs in the context of higher education? And, what type of relationship, if any, is there between students' emotions and their learning experience?

Theoretical Background

Emotions in Language Learning

Emotions are one of the many features of the affective domain, which also includes beliefs, aptitudes, personalities, values, self-esteem, and motivation (Aragão, 2007; Méndez

3 <https://www.konradlorenz.edu.co/noticias/new-talk-show-conversation-club/>

4 <https://cienciasociales.uniandes.edu.co/lenguas-cultura/servicios/recursos-linguisticos/coffee-time/>

López & Peña Aguilar, 2013). As an umbrella term, the concept of “affect” refers to the “aspects of emotion, feeling, mood or attitude which can condition behavior” (Arnold & Brown, 1999, p. 1). The American Psychological Association Dictionary (American Psychological Association Dictionary [APA], 2020) defines emotion as “a complex reaction pattern, involving experiential, behavioral, and physiological elements, by which an individual attempts to deal with a personally significant matter or event” (n.p). Nummenmaa et al. (2018) assert that emotions are more than an abstract concept and that they are biologically embodied in humans; they are felt through the whole body, entrenched in our physical bodies, and expressed in movements. In the same vein, Maturana (1990) speaks of the bodily and movement characteristics of emotions which, for him, are domains of actions; this means that emotions are a biological dynamic system leading to different actions based on the situation or person. Although there is no clear agreement on an exact definition of emotion (Shao et al., 2019), common to the above definitions is its perception as innate processes experienced in and expressed through the body, making them sometimes visible to observers through various ways such as the tone of voice and sweat, to mention a few examples.

As opposed to emotions which are internal body states and experienced through unconscious neural patterns, feelings are conscious and expressed through discourse, creating self-awareness of their presence (Kalaja, 2003, as cited in Aragão, 2007). Feelings are “image-representations of the state of the body relative to itself and to external objects” (Kramsch, 2009, p. 68) and make part of the linguistic world (Aragão, 2007). For instance, excitement (an emotion) might be connected to the feelings of happiness, surprise or even insecurity, depending on the situational context. In sum, the difference between emotions and feelings is mainly theoretical and while they are closely interrelated, the latter will be present only if the former exists.

The influence of emotions in language learning evinces the connection between two domains that have historically been divided: the cognitive and the affective. Researchers have emphasized the cognitive domain and left aside affection when studying learners and their language acquisition processes. In his theory of biology of cognition, Maturana (1990) highlights the relevance of emotions in the way we communicate, behave, and make decisions in our daily life. He questions the assumed superior human characteristic of rationality, and states that people's emotions come prior to action. Similarly, Kramsch (2009) reminds us that: “many researchers and teachers still consider language learners as talking heads that have to be taught from the neck up” (p. 28).

Brown (2000) acknowledges the role of affection in language teaching and learning. His Language Ego principle, for instance, leads to students' fear of making mistakes and their feeling of fragility in front of the class. Self-esteem, a principle that entails students' concept, acceptance, and reflection of the self as an individual and in interaction with others, is connected to building self-confidence in the learning process. Risk-taking, another principle,

is a product of students' confidence which allows them to see mistakes as part of their learning process.

The distinction between emotions and feelings helps to identify them in the context of CC. Damasio states that this differentiation is useful to understand certain phenomena, such as empathy, identification, and alienation, all of which play a role when learning a language (Damasio, 1994, as cited in Kramersch, 2009). Brown's affect principles, in turn, supports the connection between the emotions and feelings and language learning.

The Affective Turn

In the field of Second Language Acquisition, research interest has moved from the mind, learner cognition, how the brain works to the social context, and its relation to students' learning (Pavlenko, 2013). Pavlenko (2013) refers to the affective turn to stress the need to place "embodied subjects in their linguistic and social context" (p. 14). For the author, there is a need to connect students' social and emotional domains to build stronger theories that unite the contributions of Linguistics, Psychology, and Social Sciences. Similarly, Kramersch (2009) positions the learner and the teacher as multilingual subjects who embody knowledge and become new people intellectually, emotionally, and physically –the embodied self. She emphasizes that learners acquire the language through their senses, questioning the tradition in Applied Linguistics that has focused on the formal aspects of the language. Kramersch (2009) highlights the importance of not separating the mind from the body and asserts that learning a language deals with emotions, body experiences, and the social context.

The concept of embodied self (Kramersch, 2009) and its various dimensions supports the connection between the biology of emotions and their sociocultural nature. The learner's self arises not only through internal stimuli, the person's memory, thoughts of anticipation, reflection, and narratives, but also through direct experience with the immediate environment and its objects. What is more, the self emerges in the interaction with others and their responses in specific situations: "the self develops a sense of intersubjectivity through its response to other selves. It understands others by understanding itself in tune with others" (p. 70). Emotions are therefore entrenched in all dimensions of the self, thus influencing the subject's learning processes.

Research Design

We used a case study research design following a mixed method approach with an exploratory sequential design. Case studies allow us to observe the wholeness of the individual and gain insights into a particular issue (Stake, 1995). Through case studies, one can get "an understanding of the inner dynamics of a unit... to understand the... social phenomena

in real-life environments” (Aaltio & Heilmann, 2010, p. 68). The case, university students' emotions, was instrumental to shed light on what feelings university students portrayed during conversation clubs and how their emotions influenced their learning. Following the exploratory sequential design, qualitative data were collected first through the journals of a small group of students to explore the range of emotions they experienced. The results were used to design the survey for data collection of quantitative nature. This use of mixed method approach helped develop a better understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). For this paper, we focus on qualitative data.

Context

We conducted the research at Universidad del Valle (Univalle), a public university in the southwest of Colombia. The University has a total of 11 campuses in the Valle del Cauca and Cauca departments, with a student population of more than 30,000. Univalle offers 21 technological programs, 63 undergraduate programs, and 59 postgraduate programs. Through the section of Foreign Languages for General and Academic Purposes (LEFGA), the University provides language courses to all undergraduate programs. To support student independent learning, the language curriculum includes different activities and resources such as tutoring, software, and conversation clubs. This last strategy was the learning context of the research.

Conversation Clubs

There is no formal definition in the academic literature for the concept of conversation clubs. Littlewood's allusion to the classroom as a social context involving social interaction activities (Littlewood, 1981, as cited in Bygate, 1987) or a as space for discussions (Gómez Rodríguez, 2017) helps to describe conversation clubs (CCs) as a gathering of language learners, aimed at practicing oral skills. CCs can combine direct and indirect teaching methods (Brown, 2000), i.e., can be planned, but at the same time, they can include spontaneous conversations triggered by a topic or an activity proposed by the teacher (Harmer, 2007). The CCs at Univalle include both planned and spontaneous activities and are planned and held by student-teachers of the *Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras* during their practicum. For two semesters, student-teachers plan and implement conversation clubs for weekly 90-minute sessions. The content of the sessions is linked to the language curriculum offered to non-English majors; in this case level I (semester 2019-1) and level II (2019-2), which corresponds to the transition from A1 to A2 English language proficiency level. Most clubs follow Task-Based Teaching and Learning, with tasks such as making a chart to compare local and foreign universities, creating a guide for a tourist in Cali, and sharing rituals before exams. Activities are varied: watching videos, reading texts, completing forms, pair discussion, among others. The number of participants in each club fluctuates from 10 to 18 students per session.

Participants

One hundred forty-three students participated in the quantitative segment of the research. Selection criteria for the survey consisted of students being registered in English for General and Academic Purposes, levels I and II and having participated in Conversation Clubs (804 students). Out of the 206 students who answered the survey, 143 students (17,8%) provided complete answers.

Eight students collaborated in the qualitative component of the research. Students who attended the sessions of the CC led by one of the authors of this article during semester 2019-2 were invited to participate in the research. We explained the study and asked volunteers to complete the informed consent in which they agreed to continue attending the sessions and to write a journal. The list of participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Academic program	Semester
Javier	M	23	Technology in Ecology and Environmental Management	3
Johan Stid	M	19	Bachelor of Basic Education with emphasis in Mathematics	5
Miguel Ángel	M	20	Bachelor of Basic Education with emphasis in Mathematics	5
Natalia	F	23	Technology in Ecology and Environmental Management	3 - 4
Nathalia	F	19	Technology in Ecology and Environmental Management	3
Nayely	F	18	Bachelor of Popular Education	2 - 3
Paredes	M	19	Technology in Ecology and Environmental Management	3
Yina	F	18	Technology in Ecology and Environmental Management	3 - 4

Data Collection Methods

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We used an online survey for the quantitative segment of the research and journals for the qualitative data reported in this paper. The survey was designed based on the results of students' journals and the literature review (feelings portrayed by students in Aragão 2007's study and the Language Ego, Self-esteem, and Risk-Taking principles by Brown, 2000). This was an online survey divided into three sections: (a) background experience in English, (b) emotional states and factors related to the conversation club, and (c) sociodemographic information.

Journals provide rich data from participants; they are like bridges that connect people with their inner world. Through journals, we aimed at understanding emotions that arose during the CC and to gain an insight of the learners' world and of factors that may interfere in the learning process (Pavlenko, 2007). We drew on both "elicited journals", which allows the learners to write explicitly for an audience in mind, in this case the researchers, and "dialogue journals" in which teachers engage in a discussion through the journals to clarify doubts and avoid misunderstandings with the data (Bailey, 1991).

For the journal entries, the participants answered three questions: ¿Cómo te sentiste durante el club de conversación?, ¿Qué actividad te provocó sentimientos negativos o positivos?, ¿Por qué te sentiste así?⁵ These questions were answered immediately after each club session (retrospective data) to reduce the possibility of forgetting the events (Bailey, 1991). Students wrote their journals in Spanish so they could feel at ease. The amount of students' diary entries ranged from three to twelve. We collected a total of 73 entries during two academic semesters (2019-2 and 2020-1) which covered a total of 24 CC sessions. The journals were kept by the researchers and distributed to participants after the CC sessions for their writing. The participants not only answered the questions above, but also addressed queries posed by the researchers to clarify or elaborate on specific ideas.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the journals was based on Saldaña's (2013) coding procedures, which included several readings, coding, recording, and grouping. We used Saldaña's "emotion coding" method, leading to an initial number of 74 feelings, which we merged later into 28 feelings, based on frequency and word class. We then grouped codes into families considering the possible main origins of feelings (*triggering factors*).

Two themes generated from the previous analysis: *Emotions leading to learning* and *Emotions interfering with learning*. Our analyses are plausible interpretations and correspond to a unique situational context and learning experience in the CC. Trustworthiness of the research study was achieved through the definition of main concepts (emotions, feelings), using different types of data to answer the research questions and support findings, peer examination for the data collection instruments, member checking with participants through their diaries, and checking consistency in the data analysis between the two researchers.

Findings from the students' journals are presented below, organized in three sections: (a) the identification of students' feelings, (b) the factors that triggered feelings, and (c) their relation between emotions and language learning.

⁵ How did you feel during the conversation club? What activity provoked negative or positive feelings in you? Why did you feel that way?

Findings

Students' Feelings

We found a great variety of feelings experienced by students in the CCs (Table 2). They ranged from feelings of bravery to insecurity, happiness to sadness, from comfort to discomfort. Because of space, we will share only a few samples of students' emotions.

Table 2. List of Students' Feelings and Their Frequencies

No	Feeling	Frequency	No	Feeling	Frequency
1	Alone	1	15	Happy	31
2	Annoyed	6	16	Insecure	7
3	Anxious	38	17	Intrigued	1
4	Ashamed	3	18	Judged	1
5	Brave	5	19	Lazy	4
6	Comfortable	30	20	Motivated	19
7	Confident	13	21	Overshadowed	2
8	Confused	18	22	Overwhelmed	5
9	Dispirited	2	23	Preoccupied	1
10	Empty	1	24	Proud	5
11	Free	2	25	Sad	14
12	Frustrated	6	26	Surprised	3
13	Good	33	27	Tired	8
14	Guilty	3	28	Uncomfortable	14
				Total	276

As it can be seen, the most frequent feeling found was “anxious”, which resulted from merging other codes such as distressed, “*asurado*”, desperate, stressed, worried, scared, afraid, nervous, and frightened. In her journal, Nayely wrote: “Well, regarding the activity of the Chinese telephone, I felt anxious or stressed... it’s like carrying a responsibility, regardless of the fact that they [classmates] won’t judge you” (Nayely, 12/20/19). Javier also expressed:

"You may wonder why I did not eat breakfast and it is because I live alone, this leads me to experience anxiety, loneliness and I have realized that it has affected my academic, personal, interpersonal performance" (Javier, 08/29/19). Despite different sources, both students experienced feelings of worry and uneasiness.

Students often expressed feeling "Good", such as in Nathalia's case: "I felt good, it was fun, most of the activities caught my attention" (Nathalia, 09/05/19). Similarly, feeling comfortable was also frequent: "I felt comfortable in small groups of people, sharing information or questions in English" (Yina, 08/22/19). A less frequently reported feeling, one that would ideally be increased in future CCs was "proud". In this matter, Miguel Angel (08/15/19) expressed: "I felt proud when during the first activity I had to answer a question posed by another classmate because I did it correctly and without saying it slowly". He rejoiced at being able to communicate effectively. In fact, in his next entry, Miguel Angel (08/22/19) explained that he felt "much more comfortable because I interact with more classmates due to the confidence I have developed through the club".

Factors Triggering Feelings

Students' feelings during the CC were linked to ten different factors, which we have named accordingly. Below, we present these triggering factors and exemplify them with extracts.

Academic Load. This factor refers to academic tasks and duties. "I would have liked to participate more by asking [questions] my classmates, but it was difficult for me to create them, perhaps because I felt somewhat exhausted by the academic load and the intensity of this semester" (Miguel Ángel, 09/05/19). Comments like this were common in students' diaries; they show how academic duties not related to the CCs are the source of tiredness which sometimes restrain students from engaging more in the sessions.

Baggage. We called outside issues brought to the sessions "Baggage". "The day before [yesterday], I received a call from someone very important to me, and as she said she was going through many difficulties. Hearing her cry made me very worried and so I am preoccupied with her... making me be unfocused" (Javier, 09/05/19). Javier brought this emotion from his daily life context to the CC, affecting his performance in the session. Just like him, other participants also mentioned distractors from outside the sessions. In the case of Javier, we highlight that he comes from Bogotá and the experience of living by himself adds more pressure to his life.

Homeostasis. We used Nummenmaa et al.'s concept of homeostasis (2018), which includes biological states such as hunger or thirst, to refer to students' physical conditions. In one of her entries (09/05/19), Nathalia wrote:

At the beginning of the club, I felt dispirited and didn't want to work, but ... it was more because I felt somewhat sick... I am on my period, as I had menstrual cramps, I felt more annoyed but as they passed... my attitude changed.

A similar situation was experienced by Nayely (08/22/19):

I've been sick for four days and today was no exception. I felt that my body was warm during the whole conversation club... my head hurt, I just wanted to lie down. However, the class was fun [and] I felt angry and discouraged when trying to speak and not being heard or understood because of how affected my voice was due to the flu.

Club-Insiders. Other participants in the CC can also trigger different emotions in students. In the case of Javier, Nayeli and Natalia, there is evidence of how a classmate's attitude or level can impact students' feelings and willingness to participate as they might feel annoyed, overshadowed, or comfortable.

...in general, throughout the conversation I was annoyed by a boy who did not stop talking ... and distracted me since I get easily distracted. With this boy, it was difficult to pay attention and [I was] also hungry, so I began to feel frustrated (Javier, 08/22/19).

In this group of classmates there was a new girl... apparently, she was good at English, it was obvious that she knew... She took the lead and started writing... when it came to sharing, she did everything, as if she didn't realize that she was not allowing others to speak... And unfortunately, I had to work with her again when we did the activity of the festivals and she is the one who took the floor again (Nayely, 08/29/19).

The third activity, I liked it more because I had to work with a partner who spoke English more fluently and could hold a conversation with her, the words I did not understand, she explained them to me ... (Natalia, 11/15/19).

Club-Outsiders. As opposed to Club-insiders, the presence of outsiders of the CC is what triggers emotions, like in Javier's case: "Another thing that happened today... is that a friend came to work at Dexway [near the space of the club] and because of some things that had happened between us before, I felt a little uncomfortable" (09/05/2019). In this extract, it was a person not participating in the session that caused feelings of uneasiness and discomfort, preventing an appropriate learning environment.

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Group Dynamics. Students' interactions within the club influence their emotions. This is clear in Nathalia's journal entry (08/29/19): "[I felt] an extra interest; in addition to working with people with whom you feel some empathy or simply do not bother ... me, they generate a feeling of satisfaction and make the class more enjoyable". Another example of Group dynamics triggering emotions was Miguel Angel's extract (09/05/19):

Regarding the activities, I felt good in the first activity because there was good chemistry with the group and we always tried to answer the questions in English and speak in English. In the second

activity I felt a bit nervous because there were classmates who were very fluent when doing the activity.

Both students felt comfortable in the type of interaction that had generated. In the case of Miguel Ángel, however, contradicting feelings appeared simultaneously because of his classmates' perceived higher level.

Knowledge. Students' knowledge of the topic addressed, and linguistic competence seem to be a strong factor in triggering students' emotions. In several cases, students mentioned that the limited knowledge of English prevented them from more participation. Here's an example: "In today's conversation club I felt somewhat frustrated and annoyed by the fact that I could not understand the activities well when I wanted to be able to understand what the teacher was asking us" (Paredes, 09/05/19). In the case of Yina (02/07/20), it was not knowing about politics that frustrated her: "Today I felt uncomfortable in the club, I have no knowledge about politics, I did not know what to answer regarding the questions asked".

Personality: Students' individual differences in their patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving relate with the emotions they experience in the CCs. Extraversion or shyness, for example, mark different degrees of participation and of the feelings expressed. The following excerpts are examples of how shyness is embedded in feelings of insecurity: "Since one generates questions, I wonder if it will be easy or difficult [to make them]? Can I answer it? How will the people around me react? The insecurity" (Yina, 08/15/19).

But the activity that worried me the most was the last one because it was time to speak in public and I really didn't want to because I wouldn't be able to do the exercise with the bases [of the language] that I currently have and that, without considering how embarrassed I can feel. (Paredes, 09/05/19)

Nature of Speaking Activities. Diaries entries often referred to the content of oral activities and how they affected their emotions, like in this case: "Regarding the activities, I really liked the story, I laughed a lot, the feeling was joy because the direction the story took was funny" (Johan Stid, 08/22/19). In her journal, Natalia (08/22/19) explained that "the closer my turn to speak got, the more anxious I felt because I didn't know how to connect the sentences one with the other". These two extracts refer to the same activity: a story that students needed to complete with their own ideas- and yet they produced different reactions and emotional experiences.

CC Facilitator. Feelings triggered by the student-teacher included his attitudes and pedagogical decisions during the CCs. Here are a few examples of this group: "From the CC facilitator's club, I always learned something new, but the most important thing is the confidence that he builds, which ... helps me lose fear of [using] English" (Natalia, 02/14/20).

I also feel more comfortable in the conversation clubs than in the English class I am enrolled in. In the club, the CC facilitator instills... confidence when carrying out the activities and understands [our] feelings and why the students act like the way they do. (Yina, 08/15/19)

In these extracts, the student teacher's attitude and decisions about class activities contributed to the confidence of the CC participants in their learning process.

Emotions and the Learning Experience

To answer the second research question about whether there was a relationship between students' emotions and their learning experience and if so, which type, we clustered findings in two themes: *Emotions leading to language learning* and *Emotions interfering with language learning*.

Emotions Leading to Language Learning. These are emotions that contribute to students' effective reception of the topic, the CC environment and input from the teacher. Examples of cases of these emotions were frequent in the data with the entries of Nathalia (09/05/19; 08/29/19), Yina (08/22/19; 08/12/19), Miguel Ángel (08/15/19; 08/22/19; 09/05/19), Natalia (11/15/19) and Johan Stid (08/22/19), for example, who mentioned that they felt good, proud, free, comfortable, satisfied, empathetic, secure, or happy. While they experienced these emotions, they participated in the CC activities and paved the way for language learning. Natalia (11/15/19) explained: "In the conversation club I felt very good... I liked the labyrinth activity a lot because it is a strategy to learn to trust our classmates and above all a method to speak English in a way more fluid and in a didactic way". Her remarks show the link between her feelings triggered by a type of activity, and her learning of English. In addition, Nayely (08/22/19) stated that "When we did the next two [activities], I was able to feel proud that I made minimal errors and they made me remember and reflect that I must always keep the simple present in mind even if we are looking at the past." Again, Nayely's comments reveal how activities trigger the feeling of being proud of oneself allowing the learner to reinforce topics.

Emotions Interfering with Language Learning. As the name announces, these refer to emotions that limit or prevent students from profiting from the CC input and activities and from appropriating knowledge for they seem to be stronger and more relevant to the individual and absorb the time, attention, and energy they need to engage in learning. The extracts presented above: Nayely (12/20/19; 08/22/19; 08/29/19); Javier (08/29/19; 09/05/19; 08/22/19; 09/05/19); Yina (02/07/20; 08/15/19); Miguel Ángel (09/05/19), Natalia (08/22/19), and Paredes (09/05/19) show moments where emotions restricted their learning process. Students wrote that they felt tired, anxious, lonely, worried, ill, dispirited, angry, annoyed, hungry, insecure, frustrated, uncomfortable,

stressed, and nervous, all of which became obstacles to learn. In one of her entries, Nayely (08/29/19) expressed:

The third and fourth [activities] I almost didn't like; my classmates don't tend to talk. I've already been with them, so I felt tied to the same thing, I didn't feel free. For me, I would try to say everything in English, but seeing that my classmates' attitude is not like that, it makes it almost impossible for me, it makes me enclosed in a little bubble of shyness. Additionally, there are so many words that I don't know how to say or I don't know how to express myself, I get blocked and that's so frustrating, I don't even ask.

It is clear how classmates' attitude can interfere with students' feelings and participation, which in turn limits their opportunities to learn.

As emotions fluctuated during one single session, the opportunities to learn were also transformed. See Miguel Ángel's case (08/29/19):

Finally, I could say that the closest feeling to something negative in the club was when they asked us to socialize about our festivals, because there was a classmate with penetrating glaze and made me feel uncomfortable, also because she is not bad at English, so somehow, I felt a bit judged, but my other classmates somehow made me avoid that feeling because I felt good.

At the beginning, Miguel Ángel experienced an emotion which interfered with his learning as he decided not to participate because he was feeling judged. Nevertheless, the pleasant class environment and the fellowship built with other members of the CC, led to a switch in his emotions and a gain in learning.

Another example worth mentioning is Nayely's experience: "At the time of socializing or speaking in front of everyone, I feel motivated, but at the same time I feel also afraid of being wrong yet hearing that several [students] make mistakes reduces my fear of speaking" (08/15/19). She also said that: "Normally I hardly speak because of the fear of being wrong or saying something silly, but in these spaces, I am creating the confidence to do so, because it is English and because we are in the same condition to learn" (12/20/19). Here, the student reflects on what she saw as an opportunity to learn; although she was afraid of making mistakes, at the same time she felt excited and was ready to overcome her fear and gain confidence.

Finally, expressing feelings seems to be helpful for students in areas other than the academic, as Javier extract shows (05/09/19): "I think that the writing of what I feel and the reasons why I feel that way, make me feel some peace of mind by not keeping everything to myself". Just as Javier, other students were grateful for the opportunity they had to identify, acknowledge, and speak of their emotions.

Discussion

A Wide Range of Emotions but Limited Vocabulary to Express Them as Feelings

Students seem to experience a vast group of emotions in CC sessions and, given that emotions are “an essential building block of consciousness” (Nummenmaa et al., 2018 p. 9198), paying attention to them when teaching and learning the language becomes important. Nevertheless, learners do not seem to have enough vocabulary to articulate their emotions in words. For instance, when they were asked to write how they felt during the CC sessions, the second most frequent feeling mentioned was “Good”, each student having used this word at least once. “Good” is a rather generic adjective to describe an emotional experience, it is not specific and can be interpreted as a shield to avoid opening to others or as an indicator that students might not know or have enough vocabulary to express their emotions more accurately. After noticing the use of generic terms which would hinder the understanding of students’ emotions, we decided to provide the participating students with a list of feelings (Nummenmaa et al., 2018) that they could use to talk about their emotions in the CCs. Jorquera Torres et al. (2017) and Pekrun et al. (2005, as cited in Méndez López, 2022) also used instruments with names of feelings to research emotions. The lack of sufficient vocabulary to express emotions can be an indicator of the need to study emotions more in depth in the area of Second Language Acquisition and Applied Linguistics (Dewaele, 2019; Pavlenko, 2013; Prior, 2019) and to educate learners in their emotions.

Even though anxiety (and its related terms, e.g., distress, worry, desperation, and stress) was the most frequent feeling in students’ journals, and it has been proven to affect students’ learning process (Gkonou, 2013; Krashen, 1982), we cannot downplay other emotions that are felt by students. Besides anxiety, similar feelings of insecurity appeared, which also interferes with learning (Gkonou, 2013; Sanchez Solarte & Sanchez Solarte, 2017; Sarmiento Pérez & Sanabria Herrera, 2003). Nevertheless, it is interesting to see differing feelings such as “comfortable”, “motivated” or “happy”, appearing simultaneously during and after the CC sessions. As Gkonou (2013) and Beseghi (2018), we found that anxiety and emotions can fluctuate, and our findings confirm the variability of feelings.

Nevertheless, this is not always the rule. As it was apparent in students’ diaries, some feelings persist and might have an impact on learning, such as students’ fear of making mistakes or appearing foolish in front of others when speaking. Hence, one main objective in CCs is the improvement of oral skills, there is a need to work towards a change of this belief (Gkonou, 2013). Seeing speaking as something enjoyable (e.g., Johan Stid) that generates happiness has a better chance to lead to language learning.

Emotions and Learning: A Complex Relationship

In contrast to Beseghi (2018), Méndez López and Peña Aguilar (2013), and Pekrun (2014) who refer to positive and negative effects of emotions, we prefer to speak of *Emotions leading to* and *Emotions interfering with language learning* to avoid making judgements or oversimplifying their complexity (Kong, 2009), and to acknowledge that the so-called “negative feelings” can bring positive outcomes in students’ learning while “positive feelings” might lead to unwanted outcomes (Méndez López & Peña Aguilar, 2013), contrary to what is expected.

Our data showed that different emotions lead to language learning through students’ participation, reflection, and socialization in CC sessions. At the same time, these same aspects can interfere with students’ learning process, proving the complexity of the relationship between emotions and learning. Therefore, it is not only anxiety, lack of motivation, or low self-confidence that can block learning (Krashen, 1982), but a great variety of emotions that deserve deeper analysis.

Emotions are associated with different sources. As expected, we found that the academic load interferes with students’ learning; however, this does not seem to be the main issue. For some students, their daily life and their family’s or friends’ problems might be more important, and they show little or no control over the associated feelings (Nummenmaa et al., 2018). Hence, it is important to convert the CC into a space sufficiently engaging so that students can forget about other issues at least temporarily and be emotionally present.

This research confirmed that physical conditions like being sick or hungry affect students’ bodies and minds and therefore their learning, as emotions are embodied (Nummenmaa et al., 2018). Although teachers cannot control these factors that are internal, their acknowledgement can help understand why students perform in certain ways. As Kramsch (2009) states, learning a “foreign language is first and foremost experienced physically...emotionally” (p. 60), which can be seen with a physical reaction (e.g. Nayely’s case). Besides, peers’ attitudes, personality, and language level (Club-insider’s feelings) affect students’ emotions and learning. As Méndez López and Peña Aguilar (2013) show, when students compare their language proficiency level with others’ (such in the case of Miguel Ángel and Nayely), their confidence decreases, and this interferes with their learning. Students’ inhibition to speak is caused by their belief of “superior strangers”, i.e., people they are not acquainted with might have a higher language proficiency level than theirs (Aragão, 2011). Nevertheless, some students might not feel threatened when interacting with classmates who have a higher language proficiency level and they can even profit from this situation (e.g., Natalia). Students’ emotions resulting from their peers’ language proficiency level might be linked to personality traits (personality feelings),

ego (see Brown, 2000), or their lack of knowledge (Knowledge feelings). In general, the students' emotional reaction to their partners' language proficiency level and the link this might have with their learning is complex and needs more research.

As it is expected, limited knowledge of the language (Méndez López & Peña Aguilar, 2012) and particularly the lack of vocabulary as the study reported here shows (e.g., Paredes, Yina, Nayely) restrict students' participation. In fact, the unfamiliarity with the topic and unknown lexis might trigger anxiety (Gkonou, 2013) as opposed to students' fluid participation and collaboration when having knowledge of the language, as in the case of Miguel Ángel in our study. What is more, personality traits such as insecurity (Yina) or shyness (Paredes) trigger emotions interfering with students' learning. Aragão's study (2011) demonstrated that students restrain from participation due to shyness. It is difficult to address personality traits in CC, but at least a good environment can be provided so that students feel comfortable. On the other hand, the fellowship students have with each other (Group Dynamics feelings) allows them to participate and learn in the CC. Pavlenko (2013) helps understand the importance of social aspects; therefore, in our opinion, conversation clubs can be seen as a place not only to learn the language, but also to accept each other and to build empathy (Kramersch, 2009; Maturana, 1990).

In general, language learners worry about speaking in public and making mistakes. Gkonou (2013) speaks of "the fear of appearing foolish in front of their teachers and their peers" (p. 61) while Méndez López and Peña Aguilar (2013) refer to the "fear of mockery" (p. 117), which trigger feelings of anxiety or nervousness, because students usually want to express things right (Bygate, 1987). This was confirmed in our study, we found that it was probably linked to students' personality traits or lack of linguistic knowledge. The data in this study also showed that the student-teacher that led the CC sessions plays an important role in students' learning and self-esteem (e.g., Natalia), which supports findings by Aragão (2007) and Gkonou (2013). This shows how relevant it is to have teachers in charge of CC that care about participants and try to transcend the academic domain in order to contribute to students' self-confidence and risk-taking (Brown, 2000).

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The analysis of the data in this research contributes to understanding the diversity and dynamism of feelings, and their relation with the learning process. While Maturana (1990) places emotions as a key factor in rationality and Kramersch (2009) asserts that "rational condition, judgment, agency, and moral value, that are associated with the brain, could not exist without emotions... it is emotions that guide us in our decision... to ensure the physical and social survival of our organism" (p. 67), we also find an inseparable connection between emotional life and learning deserves greater attention.

Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications

This study shows a range of university students' emotions in the context of conversation clubs. It sheds light on different factors that affect students' emotions and their overall well-being which might impact learning in different ways and degrees. Students face different types of barriers for participation and therefore learning in CCs. Findings indicate the need to conduct more studies that delve into the nuances of the complex relationship between emotions and learning.

The impact that teachers can have on students is significant; students are not only provided opportunities to learn but also to build language learning confidence that can affect their future knowledge. Although it is difficult to care for each individual student in CC sessions, this should not be an impediment to restrict from attempting to approach students holistically and to create classes that seek to impact their lives beyond the academic domain. Future teachers need tools to understand not only how cognition works, but the role emotions play in learning. With these tools, they could help transform feelings interfering with learning.

One limitation of this study was the lack of expertise in the field of psychology, which would have benefited the analysis. For future studies in the area, the collaborative interdisciplinary work between language educators and psychologists could offer a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between emotions and the language learning processes.

Emotions play a permanent and important part of students' lives. Hence, we recommend paying attention to this area in the development of the curriculum and the creation of lesson plans for the purpose of educating students holistically. We claim that there is a need to embrace the affective turn in foreign language teacher education so that future teachers cultivate not only the mind but also the soul.

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