



The “Happy Learning” Approach to Learning German as Foreign Language: An Educational Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates language learner’s perceptions of vocabulary acquisition in German as a foreign language, with particular emphasis on the role of affective factors and instructional approaches. Using a quantitative methodology, data were collected through a standardized survey administered to undergraduate and postgraduate students. The findings reveal that most of the learner’s experience anxiety related to vocabulary learning, highlighting it as a significant barrier in the language acquisition process. At the same time, respondents overwhelmingly acknowledged the effectiveness of supportive strategies, including the use of visual aids, emotional engagement with lexical items, and a positive, stress – free classroom environment. The results additionally reveal a clear inclination among learners toward a “happy learning” approach, with the majority indicating that such an environment mitigates the fear of making errors, reduces anxiety, and fosters greater motivation and active participation. These outcomes highlight the pedagogical significance of adopting effective, learner-centered instructional practices in foreign language education. The study therefore concludes that cultivating a positive emotional atmosphere, with the implementation of engaging and multimodal teaching strategies, can substantially enhance vocabulary retention and overall language acquisition.

Introduction



The Happy Learning approach is gaining increasing prominence in the modern educational landscape because it focuses on learners' emotional well-being and views learning as a positive, motivating process. In contrast to traditional, often performance-oriented teaching methods, this approach emphasizes the role of joy, intrinsic motivation, and a fear-free learning environment as central prerequisites for sustainable learning success. Happy Learning assumes that positive emotions promote the cognitive learning process. Findings from learning psychology show that emotions such as joy, interest, and curiosity improve the ability to absorb and process information. Learners who are in a supportive and appreciative environment are more willing to actively participate in class and engage with new content. This leads not only to better learning outcomes but also to a positive attitude toward learning.

To effectively and successfully teach and learn a language today, it is important to focus on the positive resources that people possess. A central pillar of positive didactics is psychological capital (PsyCap). It refers to four key strength factors that can be further developed: hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Successfully increasing hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism enable an increase in learning outcomes, satisfaction, well-being, and motivation.

Language learning should provide an appropriate level of challenge, empower people, encourage them to focus on the positive, and teach them how to effectively manage negative emotions, periods of stagnation, setbacks, and stress.

A key feature of the Happy Learning approach is its learner – centered focus. This approach considers the individual needs, interests, and learning styles of students. Methods such as playful learning, cooperative tasks, and creative activities help to make learning processes varied and motivating. Especially in foreign language instruction, it is evident that a relaxed and joyful atmosphere reduces inhibitions and increases the willingness to communicate.

The “happy learning” approach represents an innovative perspective in the field of foreign language teaching by focusing on emotional factors and the well-being of learners. This approach is particularly relevant in the context of German as a foreign language (DaF), as language learning processes are strongly influenced by affective variables such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence. The approach assumes that positive emotions not only increase the willingness to learn but also sustainably promote cognitive processes such as attention and memory performance.

Theoretically, the Happy Learning approach can be situated within positive psychology, as significantly shaped by Martin Seligman. Seligman emphasizes that positive emotions such as joy, engagement, and a



sense of meaning are central factors for successful learning. In addition, foreign language pedagogy, as exemplified by Stephen Krashen, highlights the importance of “affective filter.” A low affective filter - that is, low anxiety and high motivation- therefore significantly facilitates language acquisition.

Methodology

This study is based on an empirical research approach aimed at examining the “Happy Learning” approach in German as a Foreign Language (DaF) instruction at Amity University Rajasthan, Jaipur. Data was collected using a quantitative method in the form of a standardized survey.

The study’s target group comprised German as foreign language learners from second semester who are currently enrolled in their first year of undergraduate and postgraduate programs. A total of 130 students were invited to participate, of whom 112 completed the questionnaire in full, representing a high response rate. Participants were selected using convenience sampling, as the students were directly accessible within the institutional context. This sampling strategy enabled the efficient conduct of the survey within the university setting.

A standardized questionnaire was used to collect quantifiable data on various aspects of the learning process, particularly regarding learning motivation, learning vocabulary, the emotional perception of instruction, and attitudes toward the Happy Learning approach. The data collected were then statistically analyzed to identify key trends and correlations within the sample.

Results

The survey responses were systematically analyzed to examine students’ perspectives on learning German as a foreign language, with particular emphasis on vocabulary acquisition. Vocabulary deficiency is often perceived as a major source of difficulty and anxiety among learners. Accordingly, the first question sought to determine whether students experience anxiety when they are unable to acquire or retain vocabulary.

I feel anxious when I am unable to remember new vocabulary.
112 responses

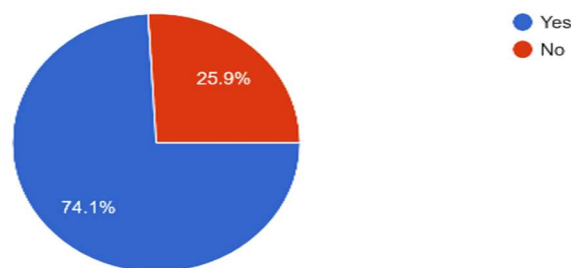


Fig 1.1: Learner Anxiety in Vocabulary acquisition

The findings reveal that 74% of respondents experience anxiety in situations where they are unable to effectively acquire or recall vocabulary, underscoring the central role of lexical competence in foreign language learning. This high proportion suggests that vocabulary-related challenges constitute a significant affective barrier, potentially influencing learners' confidence, motivation, and overall language performance. In contrast, a smaller segment of participants, 26%, reported not experiencing such anxiety, which may indicate greater familiarity with learning strategies, higher proficiency levels, or a more resilient approach to language acquisition. Overall, the distribution highlights the need for pedagogical interventions that specifically address vocabulary development and aim to reduce learner anxiety.

Another item in the survey examined learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of visual aids in supporting vocabulary retention. The results demonstrate a strong positive inclination, with approximately 86% of respondents agreeing that visual aids facilitate the retention of new lexical items. A smaller proportion of 8 % of participants adopted a neutral stance, suggesting either limited exposure to such techniques or uncertainty regarding their effectiveness. Only 6% of respondents expressed disagreement with the statement. These findings underscore the pedagogical value of incorporating visual elements such as - images, flashcards, and multimedia resources- into vocabulary instruction, as they appear to significantly enhance learners' ability to internalize and recall new words.

Visual aids (pictures, videos, and flashcards) help me understand and remember new words.

112 responses

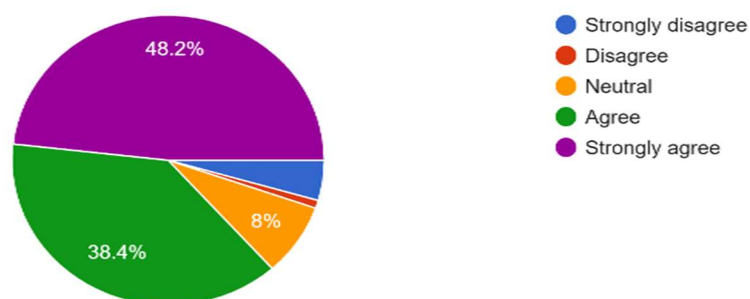


Fig 1.2: Effectiveness of Visual aids in Vocabulary Learning.

The third question explored whether establishing an emotional connection with lexical items contributes to their long-term retention. The inclusion of this variable reflects an interest in the affective dimension

of vocabulary learning, recognizing that emotionally salient associations may enhance memory processes. By examining learners' perceptions in this regard, the study seeks to understand the extent to which affective engagement supports deeper processing and facilitates more durable vocabulary acquisition.

Emotional connection with words helps me remember them longer.
112 responses

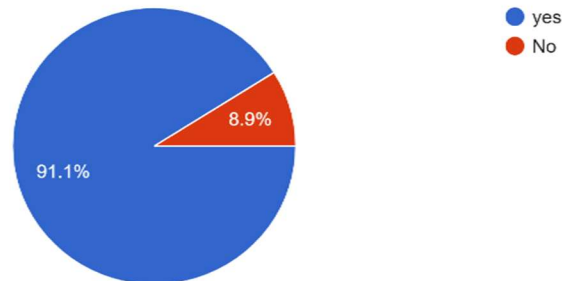


Fig 1.3: Impact of emotional connection on Long -term Vocabulary retention

The graphical representation of responses indicates a highly pronounced trend, with 91.9% of participants affirming that an emotional connection with words facilitates longer retention, while only 8.9% reported otherwise. This overwhelming majority highlights the significant role of affective engagement in vocabulary acquisition, suggesting that learners are more likely to retain lexical items when they are meaningfully or emotionally associated. Such findings reinforce the importance of incorporating pedagogical strategies that foster personal relevance and emotional involvement in the learning process, as these appear to contribute to more sustained and effective vocabulary retention.

Another survey item investigated whether learners perceive a joyful and stress-free learning environment as conducive to more effective language acquisition. This question addresses the broader affective conditions of the classroom, recognizing that emotional climate can significantly influence engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. By eliciting learners' views on this aspect, the study aims to assess the extent to which positive and low-anxiety environments are considered beneficial for facilitating the process of language learning.

I learn new vocabulary better when the learning environment is joyful and stress-free.
112 responses

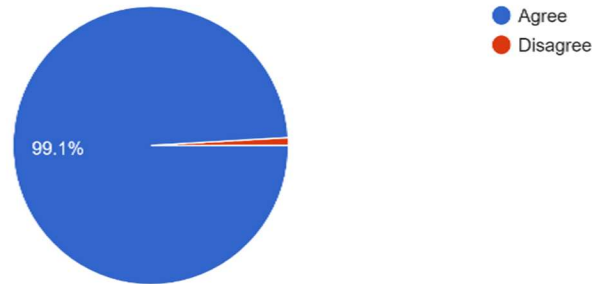


Fig 1.4 : Influence of a joyful and stress-free environment on language learning

The responses to this item demonstrate an almost unanimous consensus among participants, with 99% affirming that a joyful and stress-free learning environment significantly enhances their language learning experience. This overwhelming agreement underscores the critical role of a positive affective climate in facilitating effective language acquisition. It suggests that environments characterized by reduced anxiety, encouragement, and enjoyment not only support learners’ emotional well-being but also promote greater engagement, confidence, and willingness to participate. Such findings strongly advocate for pedagogical approaches that prioritize a supportive and motivating classroom atmosphere as an integral component of successful language instruction.

A further key aspect was examined through a question addressing whether a “happy learning” approach contributes to reducing learners’ fear of making mistakes, particularly in the context of acquiring new vocabulary. This item targets the affective barriers associated with language learning, as fear of error is often linked to reduced participation and inhibited practice. By exploring learners’ perceptions of a positive and supportive learning atmosphere, the study seeks to determine whether such conditions can mitigate anxiety and foster a more open, risk-taking orientation toward vocabulary learning.

Happy learning reduces my fear of making mistakes while learning new words.
112 responses

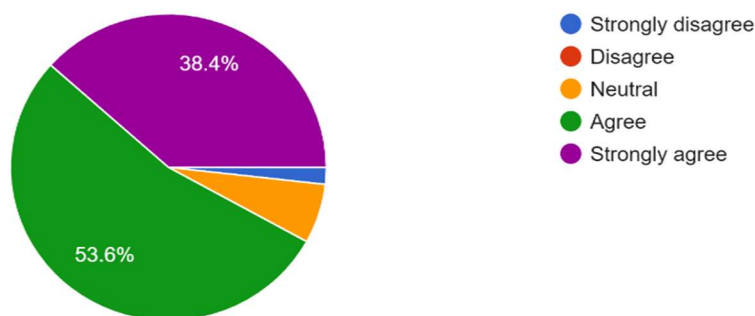


Fig 1.5: Happy Learning reduces fear of mistakes



The findings reveal a strong consensus among participants, with 92% of respondents expressing strong agreement that a happy and supportive learning environment reduces fear and anxiety among learners. This substantial majority highlights the critical role of positive affective conditions in alleviating apprehension associated with making mistakes, particularly in vocabulary acquisition. The results suggest that when learners feel comfortable and encouraged, they are more likely to engage actively, take risks, and participate without the fear of negative evaluation. Consequently, fostering a “happy learning” environment emerges as a key pedagogical strategy for reducing anxiety and enhancing overall language learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The findings of the present survey collectively indicate a pronounced and consistent learner preference for the integration of a “happy learning” approach within the foreign language classroom. The data reveals that affective variables- particularly anxiety, emotional engagement, and classroom atmosphere – play a decisive role in shaping learners’ experiences and outcomes in the acquisition of German as a foreign language. The high levels of anxiety associated with vocabulary learning, as reported by majority of respondents, highlight the extent to which lexical acquisition is not merely a cognitive process but is also significantly mediated by emotional factors.

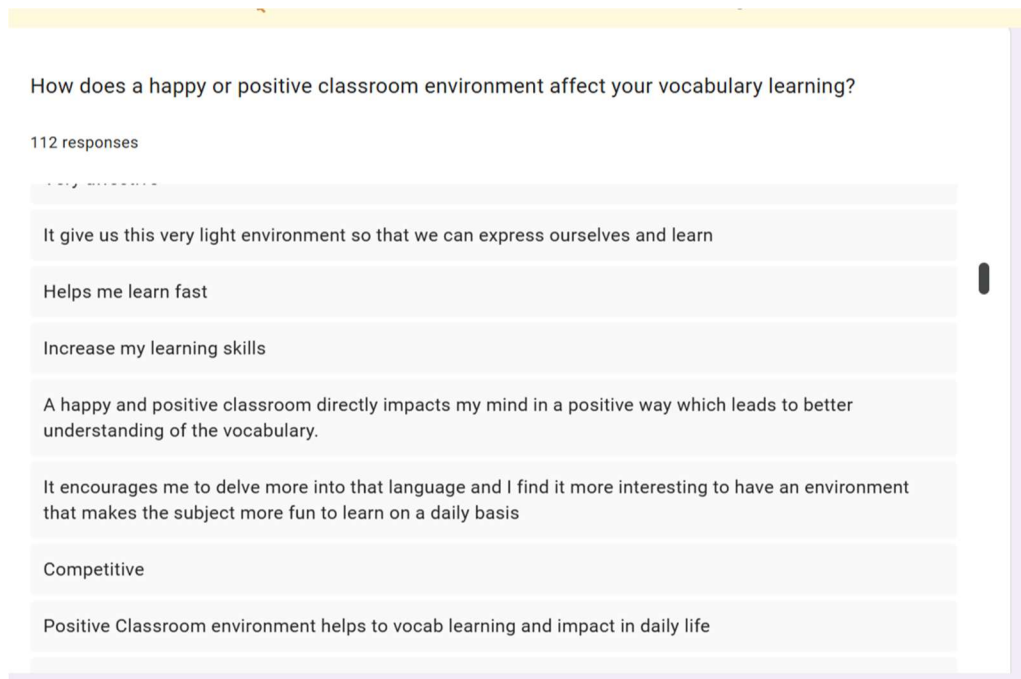


Fig 1.6: Learners Perception of a positive classroom environment



Furthermore, the strong endorsement of pedagogical elements such as visual support, emotional connection with lexical items, and a joyful, low -stress learning environment underscores the importance of adopting a holistic, learner – centered approach to language instruction. The near – unanimous agreement regarding the positive impact of a stress- free environment, along with the substantial proportion of respondents acknowledging the anxiety- reducing effects of “happy learning”, suggests that affective facilitation is integral to enhancing learner engagement, confidence, and willingness to participate.

In the context of these findings, it may be concluded that traditional, form-focused and potentially anxiety- including instructional practices require reconsideration in favor of more supportive, interactive, and emotionally responsive methodologies. The implementation of a “happy learning” framework – characterized by positive reinforcement, meaningful interaction, and multimodal instructional strategies – emerges as a pedagogically sound approach that can significantly contribute to improved vocabulary retention, reduced learner inhibition, and overall effectiveness in foreign language acquisition.

Furthermore, the role of teachers is crucial. Teachers no longer act primarily as knowledge transmitters but as learning facilitators who create a positive learning environment and offer emotional support. Feedback is designed to be constructive and encouraging in order to strengthen learners’ self-confidence. However, a balance between the joy of learning and the achievement of clearly defined learning objectives is necessary to ensure both motivation and the development of competencies.

The findings of this study suggests that the “Happy Learning” approach constitutes a significant contribution to the advancement of contemporary pedagogical frameworks. By systematically integrating affective dimensions into the learning process, it facilitates not only effective knowledge acquisition but also supports the holistic development of learners, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and motivational domains.

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