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FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND THE USE OF AFFECTIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AMONG GREEK UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN AN ESP/EAP CONTEXT

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Abstract

This thesis' main objective is to examine two important factors of ESP/EAP: foreign language anxiety (FLA) and affective language learning strategies (LLS) and their correlation in a Greek university context. In order to examine the relationship between these two factors, quantitative research methods were used (the FLCAS and SILL questionnaires) in connection to individual differences variables involving 365 first and second year students from three Greek university departments of economics and business administration. Qualitative methods were also employed to ensure more reliable and valid results. More specifically, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a number of ESP/EAP students and teachers. This triangulation approach to the research attempted to extract the levels of language learning anxiety these students experience and the frequency of affective language learning strategies the same students employ by cross tabulating the findings. Finally, statistical correlations were generated among the various factors investigated through cross tabulation.

The data gathered from the respondents who participated in the study revealed that they exhibited low (75,3%) to moderate (22,4%) levels of anxiety, a fact that does not correspond with other international studies mentioned in this thesis. Likewise, the respondents' frequency of affective language learning strategy use was reported as being low for 69,7% of the respondents and moderate for 28,2% of the respondents.

In terms of the relationship of reported FLA, affective LLS use and the individual differences variables, some statistically significant differences and correlates were found. More specifically, the study revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between male and female students in the levels of anxiety reported but not in the frequency of affective LLS used. Similarly, there were differences connected to academic performance -the grade students received in a previous ESP/EAP course appears to have an impact on the level of FLA reported but not on the frequency of affective LLS use. In connection to language learning experience, the results indicated that students who had studied more than one foreign language had lower levels of FLA compared to those who had not studied a second foreign language, but did not use more affective LLS compared to those who had only studied English as a foreign language. Statistically significant correlations were found with regards to the language level the participant had attained and their reported level of FLA, but no statistically important links with affective LLS were evident. Moreover, there were no significant differences among students who came from different academic departments. Likewise, in connection to affective LLS frequency of use, the mean scores for the aforementioned categories were similar. Finally, the year a student was in (first or second) did not reveal any statistically important differences regarding FLA nor did it prove to be a determining factor for affective LLS use.

The quantitative findings showed that the statistical correlation of the two elements (language anxiety and affective language learning strategies) was also not significant. Hence, this lack of statistically significant correlation does not lend any credence to the assumption that there may be a substantial connection between the presence of FLA and the use of affective LLS or that low language anxiety is attributed to the systematic and effective use of affective LLS.

With regards to the qualitative methods, the responses to the interviews supported the quantitative findings and also highlighted issues and concerns directly connected to ESP/EAP in Greece.

In essence, it is hoped that this thesis has shed some light on the pervasiveness of foreign language anxiety among students in Greek university ESP/EAP classes -an area that has not been explored. Moreover, it is hoped that the research undertaken herein has contributed new perspectives to the existing body of research which pertains to affective language learning strategies within the abovementioned context. Finally, it is endeavored that this study has explored the terrain of ESP/EAP in Greek tertiary education, while at the same time it has provided several practical and pedagogical implications and has put forward various applicable suggestions as to how the existing situation can be ameliorated.