


Chapter 11


PERMA–Model and Facilitation of Learning Dutch as a Second Language

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ABSTRACT

While second language acquisition (SLA) has been previously researched from the lens of cognitive sciences, limited attention has been given to its interconnections with positive psychology. This qualitative study explores how the PERMA model components: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment can facilitate the language learning experience of students acquiring Dutch as a second language. To conduct this study semi-structured interviews were carried out with both students and teachers at a Dutch language learning school in Maastricht, the Netherlands. The interviews were later analysed using thematic analysis. The key themes include the presence of both positive and negative emotions, the importance of teaching in a non-classical manner, creating an accepting environment, finding meaning through social integration and deriving motivation through a sense of accomplishment. The findings support the importance of positive experiences in SLA and demonstrate the relevance of the PERMA model in language learning contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of a second language is often shaped by a variety of psychological, social, and environmental factors. Positive psychology offers a framework that enhances the learning experience by fostering well-being and engagement among learners. Seligman's (2011) PERMA model, which consists of Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment, provides a comprehensive lens through which the facilitation of Dutch as a second language can be examined. This chapter explores how the PERMA model can be applied to optimize second language acquisition, particularly for Dutch learners, through a qualitative study.

Language acquisition is not merely a cognitive process but also an emotional and social experience. Research suggests that learners who experience positive emotions, strong interpersonal relationships, and a sense of accomplishment are more likely to succeed in acquiring a second language (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Traditional language learning methods have often focused on grammar drills and vocabulary memorization, neglecting the psychological aspects that can significantly impact motivation and retention. Positive psychology provides an alternative approach by emphasizing well-being and the creation of a supportive learning environment (MacIntyre et al., 2019).

The PERMA model has been widely applied in educational contexts to enhance student well-being and academic performance (Kern et al., 2015). In the context of second language learning, each component of PERMA plays a vital role. Positive emotions reduce language anxiety and enhance motivation (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). Engagement through immersive learning strategies promotes deeper language retention (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Teacher learner relationships create a supportive learning environment and increase learner engagement and positive attitudes (Gkonou, 2021). Finding meaning in language learning, such as linking it to personal goals and cultural identity, enhances intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Finally, recognizing and celebrating accomplishments builds confidence and perseverance (Bandura, 1997). This is especially significant for a less studied language like Dutch.

Learning Dutch as a second language presents unique challenges and opportunities for the learners. Unlike widely spoken global languages such as English or Spanish, Dutch is often learned for specific academic, professional, or migratory purposes. Motivation plays a critical role in sustaining language learning efforts, particularly for learners who are integrating into Dutch-speaking societies (Van den Branden, 2006). Given the diverse backgrounds of learners, from expatriates and refugees to international students, understanding the psychological and emotional dimensions of their learning experiences is crucial. Furthermore, Dutch linguistic structures and phonetics may be perceived as challenging by learners from different

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