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Exploring Motivation, Self-concept and Engagement in an Emerging Educational Setting: A Mixed Methods Case Study of 4 EAP Classrooms in Iraqi Kurdistan

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this mixed methods case study is to explore EAP (English for Academic Purposes) classes at universities in Kurdistan, North Iraq through two conceptual frameworks: The Actional Phase of The Process model of L2 motivation; (Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998) and Complex Dynamic Systems theory (Larsen-Freeman, 1997). The study explores the relationship between teaching practices and ability grouping on students' academic motivation, academic self-concept, and classroom engagement seeking both teachers and students' opinions, beliefs and perspectives. Employing an exploratory sequential research design, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies was used to analyse data from questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations. A complexity lens highlights the interrelatedness of the three constructs in an emerging educational setting as a complex dynamic system. Moreover, it reveals that several aspects of Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) model can be enhanced by and related to the Complex Dynamic Systems framework.

Keywords: *Academic Motivation, Academic Self-Concept, Classroom Engagement, Ability Grouping, Complexity*

Introduction

Over the past few decades, the higher education system in the Kurdish region of Northern Iraq (KRI) has been witnessing a radical reform. In the 1960's and 1970's, some Iraqi universities held an impressive reputation both in the Middle East and globally for their high quality and standards (Harb, 2008). Since then, numerous wars, conflicts and political tensions in the country,

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particularly within the Kurdistan region, meant that the plans for rebuilding and improving the post-conflict education system were neglected due to the lack of budget. However, the ousting of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath party in 2003 saw the beginning of concrete plans for reformation. Despite significant improvements, further mandatory changes were identified. Consequently, in 2009, the KRG published the 'Road map to Quality' in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR). This report marked the beginning of a new education system in the KRG. As a result, the number of international schools and language colleges opening across the KRG has increased substantially in order to meet the high demand of students who recognize the need to be able to speak and understand English in order to succeed in the future job market of Kurdistan (MHESR, 2010). Thus, mainstream universities within the region adopted an English Medium Instruction policy (EMI) for many modules. However, a survey conducted by Borg (2016) highlighted the frustrations that some university lecturers in the KRI felt regarding the new policy. Approximately 45% of lecturers stated that the EMI policy has created several challenges for the students and staff and that most were still delivering their lectures in Kurdish or Arabic as the students' level of English was inadequate to access the content of undergraduate study in English. In attempt to tackle this issue, EAP (English for Academic Purposes) classes, designed to improve the standard and quality of English for pre-undergraduates, were introduced. Due to the varied English levels, many were streamed by ability. However, streaming is a highly controversial topic amongst educators and has been studied intensively over the past two decades (George & Alexander, 2003, p. 414) and is a practice usually seen at a primary or secondary school level; rarely in a university context (Bahar, 2015; Matovu, 2012; Hallam, Ireson, & Davies, 2004). This raises the question whether streamed (single ability, SA) or non-streamed (mixed ability, MA) groups are effective in an EAP university setting. The aim of this paper is to explore these themes and the students'/ teachers' perceptions further.

Literature Review

Motivation

Over the past few decades, there has been a considerable amount of research on the nature and role of motivation in the second language classroom (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2012; Dörnyei, 2010; Dörnyei, 1994). Theories on this subject have differed greatly during this time and are continuing to be revisited. 'Put simply, L2 motivation is currently in the process of being radically reconceptualised and re-theorised in the context of contemporary notions of self and identity' (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009, p.1). Several studies analysing students in SA groups found a positive link between streaming and motivation, particularly for low ability students, who often perform better in lower ability groups (Saleh et al., 2005; Harlen & Malcolm, 1999; Lou et al., 1996; Stipek, 1996). Despite this positive link, the question of ethicality has also been raised in the literature. Hastings (1992), a strong opponent of ability grouping, stated that it is 'ethically unacceptable' in a democratic society (Hastings, 1992, p.14). In addition, students in lower groups have often reported feeling stigmatised and demotivated (Joyce & McMillan, 2010; Boaler, William, & Brown, 2000; Harlen & Malcolm, 1999; Hastings, 1992). With such studies proclaiming the

negative effects of ability grouping, educators may be led to believe that MA grouping is more likely to give lower ability students an equal chance in the L2 classroom without them feeling demotivated. Proponents of MA groups advocate that grouping student heterogeneously may positively affect not only students' academic achievement, but also their self-esteem and interpersonal relationships (Villa & Thousand, 2003; Slavin, 1990). However, researchers such as Curry (1997) claim that whilst MA grouping can encourage low ability learners to persist at difficult tasks, high ability students may lose their incentive to learn. SA university students who had been regrouped into MA groups expressed negative attitudes towards MA grouping patterns with high ability students complaining that the courses were simplified by the teacher and were demotivating (Bahar, 2015). This indicates the lack of knowledge teachers may have on teaching in MA groups; hardly surprising as there has MA grouping is often referred to as 'problematic' and in addition, there has been little research on what is conducive to a good MA classroom (Francis et al. 2016).

Self-concept

This paper focuses on academic self-concept which is defined as a person's self-evaluation concerning particular academic domains (Matovu, 2012; Marsh, 1984; Byrne, 1984; Kulik and Kulik, 1982). These include how students conduct their school work and how students feel about themselves as learners (Guay, et al. 2003). Streaming by ability may have an impact on the students' self-concept according to the 'Big-Fish-Little-Pond Effect' (BFLPE) (Seaton, Marsh and Craven, 2009; Dai & Rinn, 2008). This model is based on multifaceted self-concept and social comparison theories and assumes that students use a 'frame of reference' to form their self-concepts (Marsh and Parker, 1984). It posits that students who attend high-ability classes/schools have lower academic self-concepts than their counterparts who have been educated in low and average-ability settings and vice versa. These findings correlate with other studies which suggest that the stronger the peer group (academically, as a frame of reference), the lower the students' academic self-concept (Dai & Rinn, 2008). The model assumes that students make social comparisons according to their environment – upward comparisons with stronger ability students for a focus on self-improvement and downward social comparisons with lower ability students for self-enhancement and making themselves feel better (Dai & Rinn, 2008; Foddy & Crundall, 1993). What the literature does not define is the link between the BFLPE, self-concept and ability grouping with adult learners in an EAP setting.

Classroom Engagement

A plethora of research into motivation over the past two decades has prompted further attempts to understand engagement (Reschly & Christenson, 2012; Svalberg, 2009). The interconnected constructs of motivation and engagement are sometimes argued to be so similar that they are used interchangeably throughout various research papers (Martin, 2007) and that the two constructs are not orthogonal (Skinner and Belmont, 1993). For the purpose of this paper, only classroom engagement (student's in class engagement) will be discussed. It is a student's willingness and

desire to participate and be successful in the learning process. Hu and Kuh (2001, p.3) define this type of engagement as 'the quality of effort the students themselves denote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes.' What has been recognised, is the need for a multifaceted approach, encapsulating the multi-dimensional aspects of engagement, divided into behavioural and psychological elements (Bryson and Hand, 2007; Glanville and Wildhagen, 2007). Ohers, such as Svalberg (2009), defined 3 dimensions; cognitive, affective and social engagement.

There has been little research in a university setting to investigate ability grouping and its effect on engagement. There has been, however, some studies which took place at a primary/ secondary school level. Ireson and Hallam (1999) highlighted the body of research which exposes ability grouping as having negative effects on engagement and consequently achievement, particularly between different ability levels. Similarly, a more recent study by Higgins et al. (2015) found that lower ability students' confidence and engagement is undermined when streamed into lower ability groups. Equally, Jean (2016) found that academic achievement and engagement is hindered for those students assigned to lower ability groups. They also found that the higher the ability group the student is assigned to, the higher the engagement and achievement will be.

With such conflicting views over the link between motivation, self-concept, engagement and ability grouping, it was decided that this study would employ a mixed-methods approach to explore further into these constructs within EAP classes at a university level. The literature review identified that the relationship between academic motivation, self-concept and engagement is dynamic, multidimensional and non-hierarchical. Such a relationship can only be defined using a lens which recognises the complex interrelatedness of the components with the understanding that it is not always possible to explain their behaviour or the changes in behaviour; similar to a complex system (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008b). In addition to this framework, a lens was needed which could explain the point where the students commit to action in the classroom in an attempt to further understand the motivation and engagement of Kurdish students in a university setting. Hence, the Actional Phase of Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) Process Model of L2 motivation (PML2M) was utilised.

Material and Methods

In an attempt to investigate the EAP classrooms in more detail, a triangulated, mixed methods approach was employed to explore the motivation, self-concept and engagement of EAP learners in the KRI. The research questions and sub-questions that guide this study were derived from the literature and my empirical experiences of teaching English at universities in the KRI. All of the questions were based on the context of EAP teaching and learning in Iraqi Kurdistan.

According to the teacher and student participants,

RQ1: What is the relationship between:

a. teaching practices and academic motivation?

b. ability grouping and academic motivation?

RQ2: What is the relationship between:

a. teaching practices and academic self-concept?
b. ability grouping and academic self-concept?
RQ3: What is the relationship between:
a. teaching practices and classroom engagement?
b. ability grouping and classroom engagement?
RQ4: Are there any observable differences in:
a. how the students in the SA and MA classes engage?
b. the teaching practices in the SA and MA classes?

For this study, the target population was Kurdish university students studying either pre-sessional or in-sessional EAP at an EMI university in the KRI. In order to gain participants, stratified purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Cohen et al., 2003), was used in order to target a particular group (Kurdish EAP students).

This case study consisted of two distinct phases. Phase one saw the distribution of quantitative self-reporting questionnaires to over 400 students across 4 universities in the KRI – university A, B, C and D. These closed-ended 40 item questionnaires collected data on motivation, self-concept, engagement and ability grouping. Seventeen of the items related to self-concept and were adapted from Liu, Wang, and Parkins' (2005) academic self-concept (ASCQ) scale. Although the original scale was designed for school age children, the wording of the selected questions was changed to make it suitable for the study (e.g., 'school' changed to 'university' and 'classwork' changed to 'coursework). The responses ranged from 'strongly disagree' = 1 to 'strongly agree'= 6. The scale consisted of two subscales, the 9-item academic confidence (AC) and the 9-item academic effort (AE) subscales. The remaining 23 items that were interspersed into the questionnaire were adapted and revised from the MSLQ questionnaire (Pintrich et al., 1991). These included question items on the areas of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (8 items), task value (4 items), peer learning (3 items), classroom environment (5 items) and self-efficacy (3 items).

Using SPSS software, descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data from the questionnaires. As a Likert scale was used, the data produced was ordinal, non-parametric (Cohen et al., 2003). Therefore, the statistical analysis tests used in this study were the tests for normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test), Pearson correlation test, Cronbach's alpha and the Mann-Whitney U test.

Subsequently, phase two employed both qualitative classroom observations and student/ teacher interviews. In order to get an in-depth view of EAP classrooms in the region, a series of 12 observations took place. Each observation lasted the length of the class which was approximately 90 minutes; 25 minutes using a quantitative checklist and the remaining 65 minutes with qualitative field notes. An adaptation of the Motivation Orientation of Language Teaching (MOLT) classroom observation scheme (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008) was used as a loose guide for the observation. It provided a descriptive account of the teachers' motivated practices (TMP), and the students' motivated behaviours (LMB) and actions, in the style of a checklist. It also measures attention, participation and volunteering of students. Field notes were also taken after

the observations which were coded and analysed using a hybrid approach to thematic analysis using NVIV0 11 software.

Following the observations, semi-structured interviews were then conducted with 16 student participants and 5 teachers from each of the four universities. They spoke about their experiences and feelings towards motivation, self-concept, engagement and in streaming EAP classes. Like the observations, the interview transcripts were then coded using NVIVO 11 software and analysed using a hybrid approach to thematic analysis.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study have been divided into three sections according to the main themes of the research questions. They are discussed in relation to the literature and conceptual frameworks. The study produced a plethora of findings, but due to space confinements, only the most prominent ones are included below.

Academic Motivation

During the interviews, the participating teachers discussed strategies they used to motivate their students, including using encouraging words, delivering student-centred lessons, posting on social media, creating competitions within the class, promoting autonomy and, in one extreme case, academic punishments (e.g., keeping the students behind after a class if they do not perform well on a test). The students only highlighted two of these motivational strategies; 'encouraging words' from university D and 'creating competitions and challenges' in university C. At university D, strategies not mentioned by the students during interviews, such as promoting autonomy, group work and pair work, were observed. University C and D were very different, but both streamed their EAP classes by ability, which may explain the similarity in motivational strategies used. In CDS terms, they consisted of negative feedback, which regulates the stability of a system to keep a class in a motivated attractor state.

The MOLT observation checklist showed that all of the strategies listed were observed in the classes, although some more than others. The most common strategies in observed MA groups were (mean average across MA groups) Social chat (8.17 mins), and Establishing relevance (7.33 mins). In the SA groups, the most commonly used strategies were Groupwork (8 minutes) Promoting instrumental/ integrative values (7.67 minutes) and Asking referential questions (7.56 minutes). The least observed strategies were Social chat in SA groups (5.94 minutes) and Groupwork in MA classes (2 minutes). Coincidently, social chat was observed more in MA than SA classes indicating that the dynamics of the classrooms were at opposing ends of the scale. The MOLT also showed a positive correlation between the TMP and the LMB in the classrooms. This may mean that the wider the variety of TMP utilised by the teachers, the more motivated the students will be, as was found in previous studies such as Guilloteaux and Dörnyei, (2008).

In addition to motivational teaching practices, teaching resources, mentioned by both teachers and students, emerged as something which can both motivate and demotivate EAP students. The teachers' use of technology in the classroom was a particular motivator for many. For example, in

universities A and C, students mentioned that the teachers used different types of technology in the classrooms which they found interesting and motivating such a apps and websites. The private universities were able to equip all students with new books each year and classrooms were fitted with smartboards and I-pads for use; affordances rarely seen in the public universities. In contrast, university B and D used photocopied pamphlets and textbooks were shared, if available. In CDS terms, when a class becomes motivated/ demotivated, this positive feedback could push the system of class engagement into an attractor state of motivation/ demotivation. Likewise, from a PML2M perspective, the use of technology in the classroom may be considered an executive motivational influence which either ensures motivation is sustained during the class or hinders it.

Ability grouping and academic motivation

All the teacher participants agreed that ability grouping positively impacted students' academic motivation, including the MA class teacher who spoke of his past experiences. Two of the 5 teachers expressed that MA groups can negatively affect students' academic motivation as lower level students become demoralised and demotivated by being amongst more fluent speakers. Whilst this kind of linear cause-effect view is not consistent with CDS theory, it could be a contributing factor to their perceived demotivation of students. They also mentioned that students and teachers struggled to cope in MA classes due to the difficulty of teaching a variety of levels in a large class.

The participating students had analogous perceptions of the relationship between ability grouping and academic motivation. When asked which they preferred, 13 out of 17 of the students preferred SA grouping predominantly because they felt it motivated them to succeed. This may be related to their self-concept, or familiarity; they are used to this style.

Kulik and Kulik (1982) and Bahar (2015) both found that students had positive attitudes towards learning in SA classes and preferred them to MA classes. They also found that MA classes were often simplified by the teachers, perhaps explaining why high ability students in MA classes may become demotivated among lower level students (Bahar, 2015; Curry, 1997). This current study's findings are broadly in line with these as the majority of students preferred SA for the level-specific focus that SA classes can offer. A small number of the SA students and one MA student said they felt more motivated in MA classes because they felt energised by the dynamics of multi-level classes; findings compatible with Saleh et al., (2005) who found that students felt they benefitted from helping others with their English and sharing ideas. However, when a student is frequently left with the task of helping their classmates, it is possible that the student's own learning may suffer as a result, as noted during an interview.

Interestingly, despite concerted efforts to stream students by ability, all the participating teachers and some SA students highlighted the range of levels within their classes. Several SA students felt that many of the classes were more heterogeneous than homogeneous and described their classes as if they were MA classes. Moreover, in this context, it was found that the most advanced level offered in SA universities was less advanced than the level of some of the students, which meant native speakers of English, as well as advanced level students, were often placed alongside

students with little or no English. This indicates that in the current research context, the process of streaming may not be robust enough to label classes as SA, but the range of levels in the MA classes was likely greater than the SA classes.

Self-motivating strategies were mentioned by all SA students but not the MA students in university B; perhaps because the MA students were more extrinsically motivated. While some SA students claimed it was due to their passion for learning, some felt self-motivating strategies were essential due to the inadequate English provision within their university. This finding was corroborated by student questionnaires in which the SA groups scored relatively higher on the intrinsic motivation scale (178.72) than the mixed ability groups (168.08). The MA students, on the other hand, appeared to be more extrinsically motivated as they scored higher on this scale (181.73) when compared to their SA counterparts (167.83). This may mean the SA grouped students were more intrinsically motivated and the MA grouped students were more extrinsically motivated. Higher-level students in the MA groups felt that their classes were not beneficial as they did not learn anything new. Combined with similar comments from the teacher participants, this supports the theory that MA classes are 'class taught' or 'taught to the middle' thus not very well differentiated. These findings are in line with the motivational model of Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) who also posit that a loss of motivation may occur if materials are not relevant, meaningful or significant to the student.

Whether students benefit from streaming might depend on their level. The questionnaire findings showed that students preferred being in SA classes, perhaps to avoid being 'bored' 'demotivated' and 'frustrated' in the lessons as they claimed to be in the interviews. It also emerged from both the interviews and questionnaires that many students disliked being in the same class as lower level students as the teacher usually gave more attention to the lower level students causing the higher ones to feel neglected. The lower level students, contrarily, felt more motivated and encouraged to do better by being amongst higher level students. This coincides with the work of Bahar (2015) and Saleh et al. (2004) who also posit that lower level students are more motivated in MA classes and higher ability students are more motivated in SA classes; a phenomenon perhaps explained by the BFLPE theory.

Self-concept

Self-concept was not explicitly discussed by teachers and they mostly seemed unaware of its importance for their students. They were unsure of the meaning and how to encourage a positive self-concept. Similarly, the students were unaware of the construct and did not discuss any teaching practices which had any impact on their self-concept. This may be through being unaware of the concept or they may not have realised any connection between teaching practices and self-concept.

Ability grouping and students' academic self-concept

All the teachers agreed that the process of streaming was likely to upset some students, particularly lower level ones, and could initially have a negative impact on their self-concept. They felt that

streaming may be perceived as a form of discrimination and recognised that some of their students may have felt marginalised and stigmatised by the process. This also accords with the students' perceptions of being stigmatised and that ability grouping can be stressful, unfair and offensive in some cases. The students also expressed similar opinions. These findings seem to follow closely on from Boaler, William and Brown (2000) and Hastings (1992) with the notion of streaming being stressful, unfair and upsetting and who also found that streaming may negatively impact the students' self-concept.

Despite the initial distress immediately after streaming, the attitudes expressed by teachers and students show some similarity regarding the gradual development of a positive self-concept. Regardless of the negative effects, all the teachers were adamant that they still preferred SA to MA classes as the benefits to their teaching (easier to teach, more level-specific resources etc) outweighed the drawbacks. Similarly, the students preferred SA groupings as they perceived an increase in their confidence when streamed into homogeneous ability groups. These findings reflect those of Kulik and Kulik (1982) who found that SA students eventually develop positive attitudes towards themselves and school.

There are similarities between the attitudes expressed by the students during interviews and the results of the student questionnaires which found that on 13 of the 18 self-concept items, the SA students scored higher than their mixed ability counterparts. These findings also suggest that the academic self-concept of the SA students was higher than in the MA groups. When those self-concept related questionnaire items were divided between Academic Confidence and Academic Effort, both totals were higher amongst the SA grouped students which indicates that streaming has the potential to boost academic self-concept. Through a complexity lens, the system had settled into a state of equilibrium through self-organisation (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). Due to sensitivity to initial conditions, (possibly a demotivated attractor state due to previous high-school effects) the students may have been relatively motivated as they prepared to start university. Then, when streaming occurred, this feedback or perturbator would have pushed the system into a chaotic state and into a demotivated attractor state once more. However, as the students' confidence grew, they gradually became more confident and hence motivated so the system once again self-organised into a motivated attractor state.

Although many students were unaware of the construct of self-concept, certain excerpts of the student interviews were indicators of either high or low academic self-concept. Examples of these include perceptions of how they saw themselves in comparison to others and of their academic progress. The BFLPE effect supports the findings as students talked about wanting to be placed amongst higher level students so that they could 'emulate' them and feel better about their English abilities- upward social comparison. This model may also explain why many of the students disliked being placed amongst lower level students as according to the BFLPE, it may lower academic self-concept. In addition, students are more likely to use upward comparison or compare with peers of a similar ability because downward comparison, despite being self-enhancing, is less beneficial for their performance evaluation (Foddy & Crundall, 1993).

There was also strong evidence of the BFLPE noticed by NES teachers who perceived there to be a stigma attached to lower level students in MA classes. This finding is also consistent with the data obtained from student interviews but interestingly was only mentioned by NES teachers and not by local teachers. This may have been because local teacher training courses rarely focus on learner identity or the construct of the self.

Class room engagement

The teachers appeared to have rather skewed views on what they perceived engagement to be. All of them mentioned that SA classes were easier to control, which may be an indication of the teaching practices used within the class. Rather than aiming for classroom engagement (which was scarcely mentioned during the interviews) they aimed for classroom control.

Four of the five teachers mentioned very little about their style of teaching and the teaching practices they used but one teacher did talk at length about his student-centred rather than teacher-centred approach. This local SA class teacher from a public university explained how he often changes the activity according to the dynamics of the class on a particular day and how the students respond to the task. This was confirmed by the classroom observations which where he demonstrated this approach; something which was lacking from most other class observations. During interview, he openly criticized other local teachers in the region for being too rigid and strict with their students comparing them to dictators. He preferred a more relaxed style of teaching and learning which gives the students more autonomy.

The students also had difficulty identifying the teaching practices used in their classes and could not differentiate between the teachers' influence on their engagement and the materials used in the class. The students' perceptions of the relationship between materials and resources and their classroom engagement differed according to their grouping style. They also perceived the quality of the teacher to be dependent on the quality of the resources and activities. This indicates that the resources, seen as executive motivational influences from the PML2M framework and negative feedback through a CDS framework, form a pivotal part of the students' academic motivation and are strong enough to push the system into a different attractor state.

Ability grouping and classroom engagement

Despite their awareness of the potentially negative effects, all teacher participants still preferred to stream by ability because they perceive teaching to be easier. They also believed that SA students benefit from more tailored lessons rather than being 'taught to the middle' in an MA class where students of lower and higher ability were disadvantaged while the average ability students were accessing level appropriate resources. The teachers also believed that the SA students are more engaged than the MA students because they have activities which are more suited to their level.

Some considered MA classes 'a nightmare to teach,' 'difficult,' 'not beneficial for the students' and admitted to 'teaching to the middle' despite perceiving that students at both extremes (higher and lower ability) were less engaged. They also believed that engagement in MA classes was lower

for this reason and that usually, the higher-level students would be the ones doing all of the work while the lower ability students would sit passively. This may explain why the MA students interviewed claimed they were bored in class and felt their grouping style thwarted engagement. Correspondingly, the SA students felt more engaged as their lessons were more challenging and promoted more learner autonomy; results which align not only with the executive motivational influences of the PML2M framework but also with those of the questionnaires. The aggregated results of the items relating to 'Academic Effort' saw the SA students rank higher mean than the MA students. As academic effort is a factor of classroom engagement, this means that the SA students report a higher level of classroom engagement than the MA students; a result which was also supported by the Mann Whitney U results. In terms of relation to the literature, these findings, whilst generally compatible with that of other researchers, opposes Jean's (2016) findings that high ability students showed a higher level of engagement and lower ability students showed a lower level of engagement.

Mostly, the classrooms all fostered pleasant and supportive environments. In observations, the students in the private universities (A, C), appeared more socially, cognitively and affectively engaged in their lessons. The MOLT data confirmed that engagement and volunteering were higher amongst SA students and this was further confirmed by the results of the Mann Whitney U test. This may have been due to better resources and smaller classrooms which allowed for better classroom layouts where all the students could see and hear the teacher. They also showed evidence of more cohesive learner groups than university B and D which is also another influence from the PML2M. This may have been related to the presence of NES teachers in these universities who appeared to have a better rapport and fostered more positive learning environments than the local teachers; evidence which supports the PML2M framework as 'teachers motivational influence' is also from the model.

In university B and C, mobile phones and devices were a distracting influence for several students and affected the engagement of entire groups within the class. This indicated that despite grouping differences between universities, device usage was ubiquitous and may have been due to boredom or the task being too easy for the group but appeared to be a barrier to engagement in many cases. Other barriers to engagement included large class sizes, inadequately air-conditioned classrooms and a distinct lack of resources but this was more apparent in university B and D; the public universities in lower socio-economic areas of the KRI. These barriers along with device usage would be seen through CDS as positive feedback which could influence the state of the system. Through the PML2M framework, the barriers would be seen as executive motivational influences from the actional phase of the model which could influence the extent of the motivation displayed by students in the classroom.

The qualitative findings from the classroom observations were validated by the descriptive statistics from the MOLT data which confirmed that participation (engagement) and volunteering were higher amongst SA students. The MA students, however, scored higher mean ranks for attention and the Mann Whitney U test with the exception of attention scores which were the same for both groups.

The teaching practices in SA and MA classes

All of the classes used a whole class teaching approach showing no differentiation, despite there being a range of levels in the classes. The teachers in SA classes appeared to demonstrate more TMP than the MA classes, such as scaffolding techniques to encourage coping potential and student autonomy. SA lessons appeared more structured (they began with clear aims and objectives and often ended with a recap) and there was more usage of feedback and praise. Consequently, the SA students were more engaged. The MOLT findings further confirmed this via a Pearson correlation test showing a strong positive correlation between TMP and LMB across the SA and MA groups.

As well as the SA/MA divide, there were also differences between different universities. Teachers in universities B and D, where there were more local faculty (non-native), often initiated interactions in Kurdish rather than English which appeared to be a barrier to engagement with the task in some cases. The students in university B and D whose English levels were very low may have been less engaged due to alienation by the usage of L2 and this may explain the increased usage of Kurdish in these classrooms.

Recommendations

Based on this the results of this study, educators in the KRI need to be aware of the challenges facing English language learners in Kurdish universities and the findings from this study highlight several possible areas for further research. One avenue would be research into classroom engagement through a longitudinal study with mixed ability groups, focusing particularly on lower and higher ability students in the same groups.

In terms of recommendations for future policies within the MHESR, the results also showed that in order for streaming to be beneficial, it needs to be implemented in a more formalised way using a standard external test. Research into the best way of streaming is necessary to ensure the minimum negative impact on the students' self-concept. As shown in the study, the teachers were mostly unaware of the construct therefore, it is recommended that teachers are made more aware, through training and policy, of self-concept and how it affects their students.

In addition, it is recommended that the EMI policies in the KRI are reviewed to combat the perceived gap between the English proficiency required for undergraduate study, and the students' current levels of English. This is similar to a recommendation by Borg (2016) who also advocated further research of this sort. In addition to motivational teaching strategies training, the data indicated that differentiation training (training to meet individual learner needs) is necessary for the region particularly when public university class sizes often reach up to 60 students. This would enable each student, regardless of ability, access to the curriculum.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore 3 themes within Kurdish EAP classrooms: Academic motivation, academic self-concept and classroom engagement. Within these themes, the concepts

of streaming and motivational teaching practices were brought into light through this exploratory case study. Overall, it was found that both teachers and students in the KRII preferred streaming as it had a mostly positive effect on their motivation, self-concept and engagement which was confirmed through a multi-phase data set using a complexity lens. There were, however, several limitations to this study, for example, the small sample sizes. Although the aim of this study was never to generalise results, a larger sample size may have generated more accurate mean values, identified outliers and provided a smaller margin of error. It may have also provided more significant results.

As the study took place at a time of extreme economic and political tension within the KRI, the results for motivation and self-concept and to some extent engagement may have been skewed due to the power of multiple external influences. Whilst this was a situation which was beyond my control, extra consideration should be given to this when interpreting the results of the study.

Finally, student interviews being conducted in English may have prevented the participants from fully articulating their opinions. To prevent this, participants were informed that they could speak in Kurdish at any time throughout the interview but perhaps due to observer effect, they chose not to.

About the Author

Stacey Xaelani is both a full time EAP teacher and a member of the Independent Sector National Council for the National Education Union in the UK. Having completed her BA in TESOL and Education studies, Postgraduate Diploma in teaching and learning and her MA in Education, she developed an avid interest in the areas of streaming, motivation and self-concept which led to her PhD in Education studies. She has published journal articles on topics which were relevant to her work as an EAP teacher both in the Middle East and the UK such as needs analysis curriculum development of EAP classes, notetaking techniques and mixed ability grouping. Additional research interests include educational psychology, education in post conflict settings, complexity and education and the relationship between culture and education.

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