Personal empathy and social-psychological climate as factors of learning satisfaction in linguistic university students

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Abstract. The article contemplates on the results of empirical research on personal empathy and social-psychological climate as factors of learning satisfaction in linguistic university students. Data acquired allowed to broaden the concept of social-psychological climate shaping in a study group. They also contributed to raising awareness of empathy skill level in students and the specific features of learning satisfaction in students of different specialties.

1. Introduction

Studentship is a preparatory period for further labour and professional activity. Academic activity of students at high schools is extremely complex. It is one of the most tense types of activity in emotional as well as in intellectual aspect. Academic activity tension is determined by a wide range of factors and is elicited by the intense learning process in the first line [1]. Significant academic loads are likely to have a negative impact on the quality of academic activity and result in a decrease of learning satisfaction.

A favorable social-psychological climate in a group also contributes to the increase in academic activity efficiency, affects the motivation levels in students and learning satisfaction [2]. Social-psychological climate is determined by the emotional and psychological state of academic activity subjects. It is vital to note that the emotional state of each study group member changes in the course of intragroup interactions. The development of positive interpersonal relations plays a crucial role in shaping of a favorable social-psychological climate. Their successful development is determined by empathy skill [3].

Regulatory documents of education programs at linguistic universities comprise the competencies which are to be developed in students by the end of their studies. Empathy refers to one of these competencies. Empathy belongs to the most essential components of intercultural communication. Intercultural communication involves the intention to understand what another individual thinks, to gain awareness of what triggers their behavior and line of reasoning.

Intercultural communication implies the skill of interpreting the behavior of a person representing a different culture with regard to their mindset. Empathy as a skill acts as an element of intercultural competency. Linguistic, psychological and psycho-pedagogical specialties involve an intercultural component [4]. Therefore, we forecast the following:

H1: *The level of learning satisfaction is related to the level of personal empathy skill*.

H2: *The level of learning satisfaction is related to the degree of social-psychological climate favorability in student groups*.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Participants

The research was conducted with the implementation of modern psycho-diagnostic means and statistical data processing methods. 139 students participated in the study. Among them 91 student specializes in "Theory and Methods of Teaching Languages and Cultures", 30 students – in "Psycho-pedagogical basics of intercultural communication" and 18 students – in "Psycho-pedagogical supervision of continuous education" [5]. The age of respondents varies from 17 to 23 (average = 19.91).

2.2. Measures

We devised a questionnaire for preliminary research to gather additional information about the respondents (age, gender, university they study at, specialty, academic challenges, etc.).

To assess the social-psychological climate in study groups we applied a tool for measuring group cohesion "Atmosphere in a group" (F. Fiedler's scale, adapted by Y. Khanin, 1980). The tool is based on the semantic differential scale and contains ten antonymous word pairs. The answers are given on an eight-point scale. The closer the mark is to one of the adjectives in each pair, the more intensely this feature manifests itself in a group.

Empathy and its structural components were measured using the tool "Emotional, cognitive and behavioral empathy" (ECBE) (E. A. Troitskaya). The tool includes 36 statements and 4 scales: positive emotional empathy, negative emotional empathy, cognitive empathy and behavioral empathy. There are 9 statements for each scale.

Learning satisfaction among students was measured with the tool originally devised to diagnose job satisfaction (V. A. Rozanova), and was adapted by the author for the current research. The questionnaire includes 14 statements. Answers are given on a five-point scale, ranging from (1) "quite satisfied" to (5) "extremely dissatisfied".

3. Results

The analysis and generalization of a large data body have provided substantial results that allow for accepting H1.The results acquired during the research also indicate that we can accept H2.

In the course of processing data gathered by learning satisfaction measurement tool the entire sample was divided into two groups. The first group comprises 73 students with a high (< 25) score of learning satisfaction (HS), the second group involves 66 students with a low (> 25) score of learning satisfaction (LS). As far as various specialties are concerned, 58 linguists, 10 psychologists and 5 educational psychologists fell into the HS group (33, 20 and 13 for the LS group accordingly) (see figure 1). Judging by the distribution of students into groups we can assume that linguists are more satisfied with their studies (~64% in HS group) than psychologists and educational psychologists (~33% and ~28% accordingly in HS group).

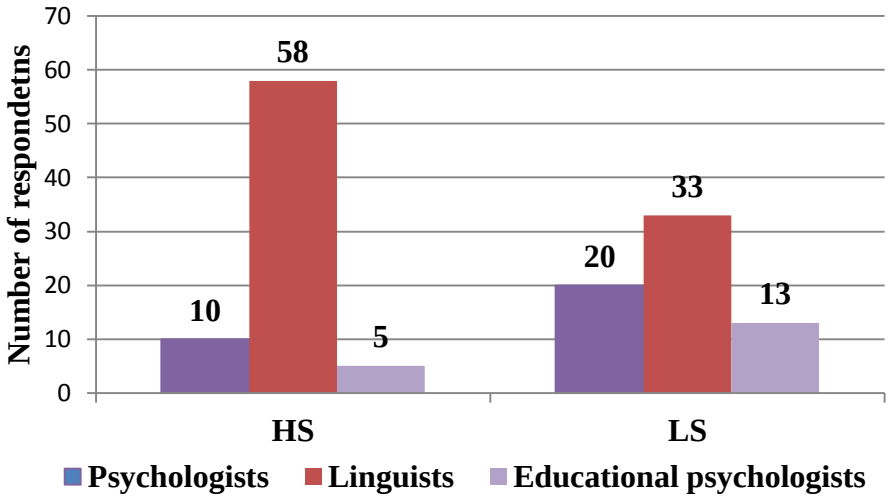

Figure 1. Distribution of the respondents with different specialties in compliance with their learning satisfaction levels

Comparative analysis reveals significant differences between HS and LS groups. In HS group students positively assess the learning process in many aspects, which is reflected in the total score of satisfaction (see figure 2). They are quite satisfied with the university they enrolled, professional training, school day duration, the chosen specialty. Total score of satisfaction in LS group falls into the range indicating borderline dissatisfaction (32 points correspond to the lower edge of learning satisfaction level). Students in LS group are dissatisfied with an array of aspects, such as coherence, leadership style and physical learning conditions.

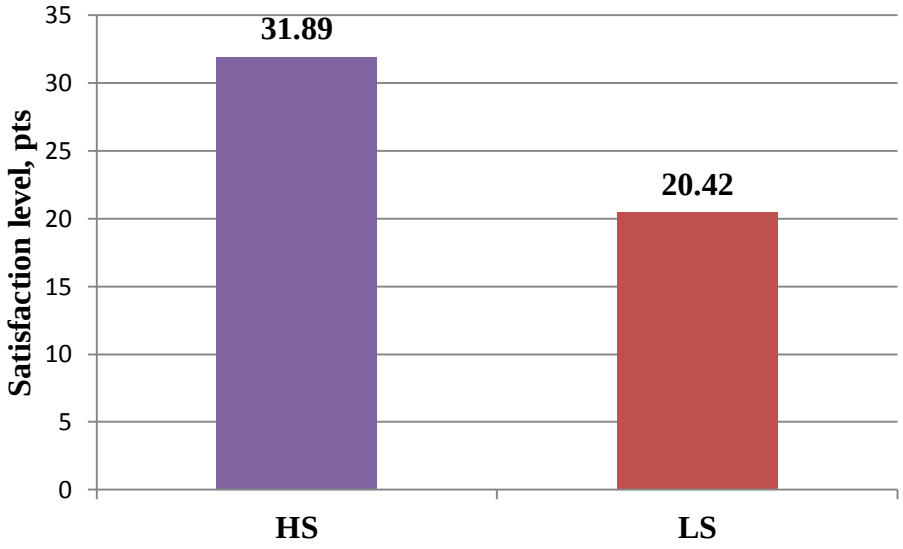

Figure 2. Total score of learning satisfaction in HS and LS groups

Comparative analysis of indicators gathered by implementing a tool for group cohesion measurement "Atmosphere in a group" shows significant differences ($p < 0.01$) connected with climate favorability in a group. In both groups the indicators are at the "relatively favorable" level, except the total favorability score. In HS group the total score is considerably lower, which points to a more favorable social-psychological climate on the whole.

Table 1. Comparison of results gained from the tool for group cohesion measurement "Atmosphere in a group" in students with different learning satisfaction levels.

Indicator	HS group (n=73)	LS group (n=66)	P
Emotional comfort	12.25 relatively favorable	17.21 relatively favorable	0.01
Cooperation efficiency	13.30 relatively favorable	17.21 relatively favorable	0.01
Total score of favorability	25.55 favorable	34.42 relatively favorable	0.01

Comparative analysis of the data acquired by using a tool "Emotional, cognitive and behavioral empathy" (ECBE) indicates significant differences ($p < 0.01$) in empathy levels between HS and LS groups. Students in LS group dispose of a more developed empathy skill. The major part of psychologists and educational psychologists as mentioned above fell into the group with low learning satisfaction. It might be attributed to the fact that empathy is one of the key competencies for the given specialties. The representatives of "human-human" job group work in the field explicitly related to the emotional and personal domains. Consequently, their training implies focused development of empathy.

Table 2. Comparison of results gained from the tool "Emotional, cognitive and behavioral empathy" (ECBE) in students with different learning satisfaction levels.

Indicator	HS group (n=73)	LS group (n=66)	P
Positive emotional empathy	14.01	16.82	0.01
Negative emotional empathy	16.77	19.38	0.01
Cognitive emotional empathy	16.42	17.03	–
Behavioral emotional empathy	15.18	17.24	0.01
Total empathy score	62.38	70.47	0.01

To reveal connections among all the indicators of diagnostic tools implemented we applied the correlation analysis procedure.

In HS group all diagnostic indicators stand in correlations (see figure 3). Consequently, the following indicators – empathy skill, state of a social-psychological climate in a group and learning satisfaction correlate positively.

In the course of analysis connections between the indicator of satisfaction with coherence and all the indicators of group cohesion measurement tool (emotional comfort, cooperation efficiency, total favorability score) were discovered ($p < 0.01$). High level of satisfaction with coherence has a positive impact on social-psychological climate and increases cooperation efficiency in a study group. Stated correlations between the total empathy score and all the indicators of group cohesion measurement tool point to the essential role of empathy in shaping a favorable social-psychological climate.

There are also positive correlations between all indicators of group cohesion measurement tool and total score of satisfaction ascertained. Apart from these connections, noted indicators positively correlate with the following factors: satisfaction with the leadership style at a university and learning satisfaction level affecting the decision to enroll the same university again ($p < 0.05$). Thus we can

assume that in HS group learning satisfaction is primarily related to the positive attitude towards the chosen educational institution. Satisfaction level in students belonging to the group under discussion cannot be entirely reduced to social-psychological climate.

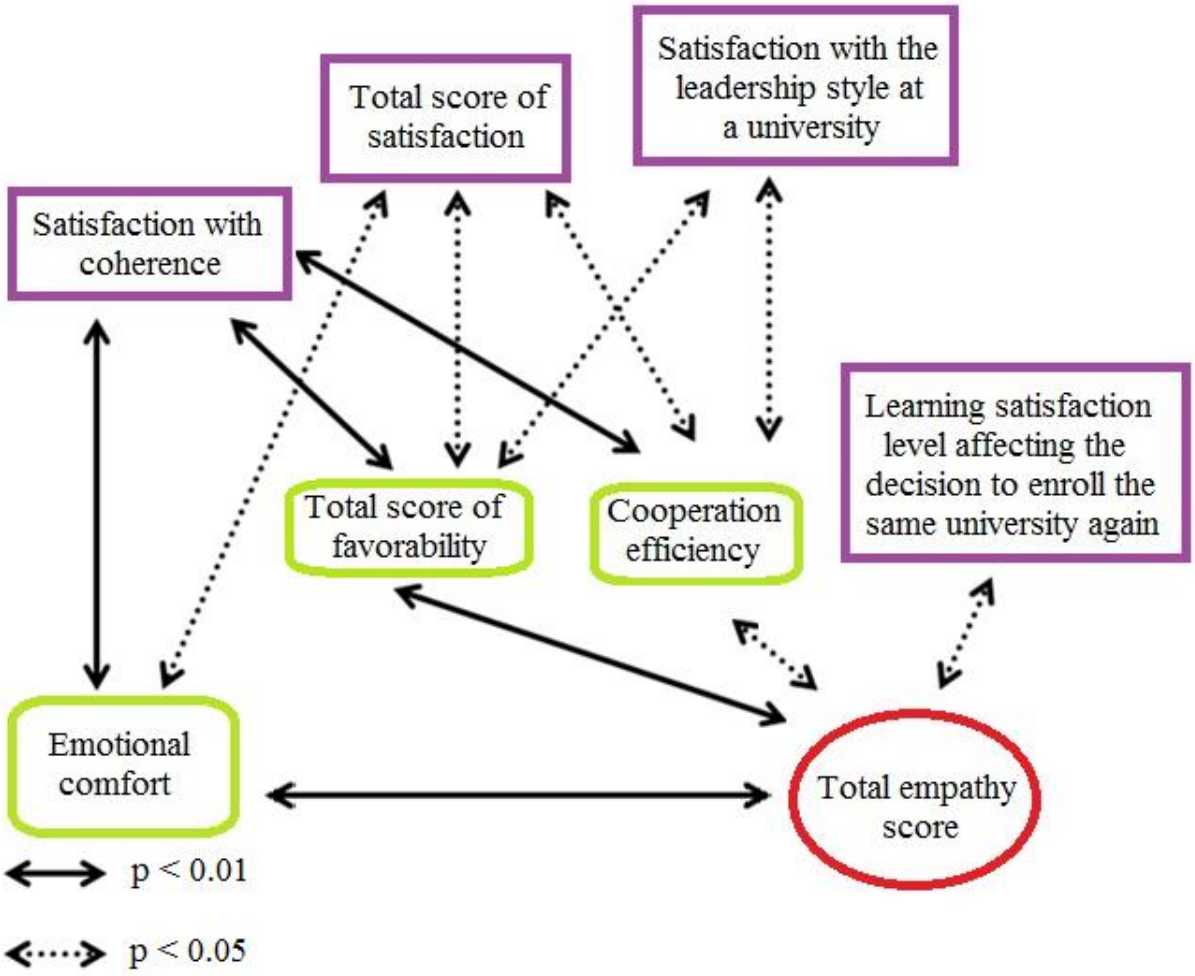

Figure 3. Correlations between the indicators of diagnostic tools (HS group)

In LS group were revealed similar positive correlations between empathy total score, satisfaction indicator and favorability level of social-psychological climate (see figure 4). It is vital to note the discovery of statistically significant connections between the total score of satisfaction and the indicators of group cohesion measurement tool ($p < 0.01$).

Revealed connections are indicative of satisfaction and empathy skill being determined by the favorability of social-psychological climate in a study group. In LS group the indicators of group cohesion measurement tool form the nexus of the correlation structure. Thus we can surmise that satisfaction is determined by the level of social-psychological climate favorability to a considerable extent.

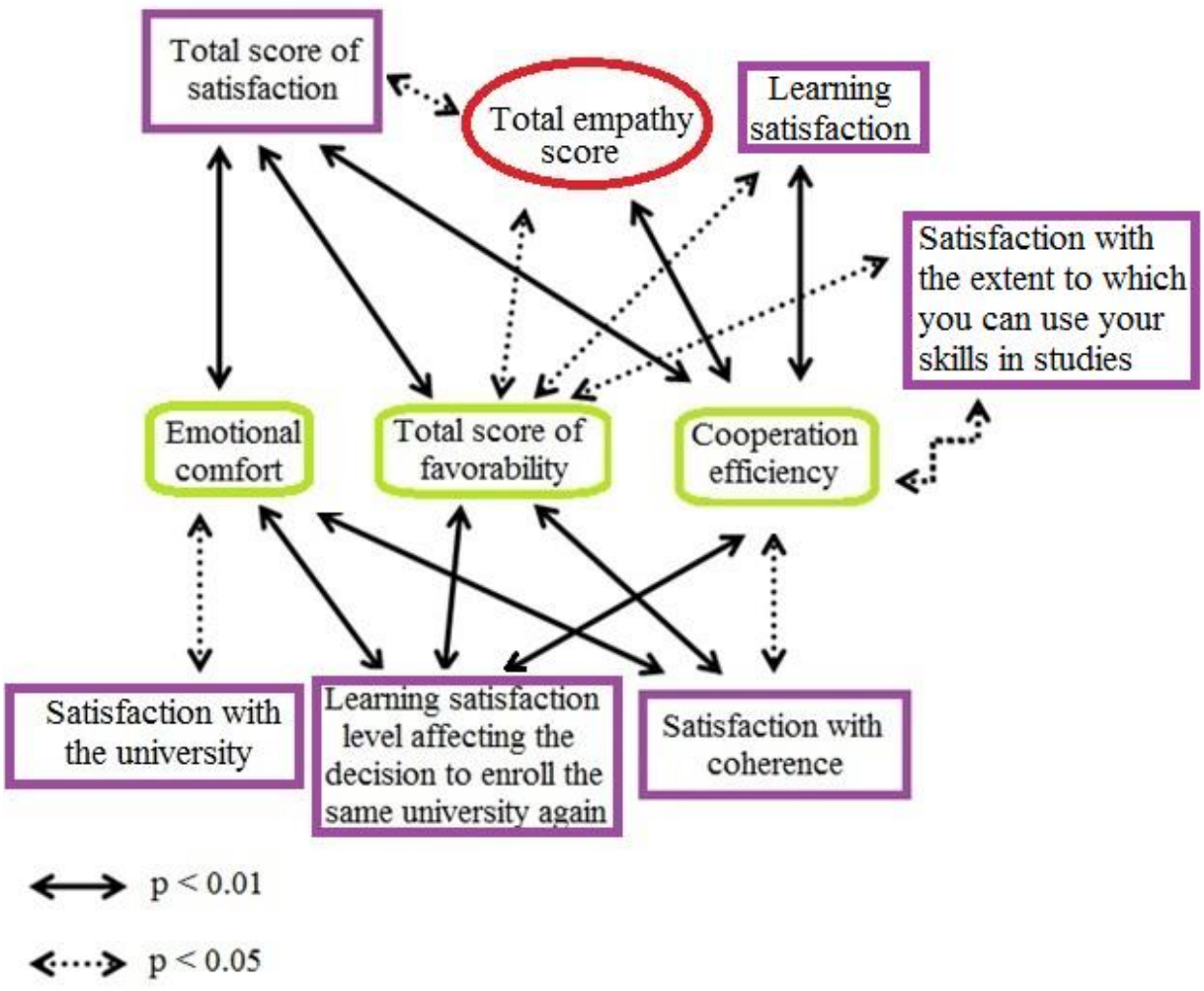

Figure 4. Correlations between the indicators of diagnostic tools (LS group)

Collected data confirm the existence of stable positive connections between empathy, learning satisfaction and climate favorability indicators.

4. Conclusions

Drawn conclusions serve as basis for determining further experimental work strategies. The research conducted can be applied to establish the framework for a deeper inquiry, aimed at gathering data on the connection between empathy skill and both emotive and communicative competencies. Impartial factors (such as the amount of subjects, school day duration, quality of teaching, etc.) and their impact on learning satisfaction retain their relevance. The issue of developing empathy as a competence, as well as opportunities for the focused development of empathy skill via special training courses refers to other significant areas of scientific inquiry.

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