

AN EXPLORATION OF EFL STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL GEOGRAPHIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH SYNTAX

Anggi Agum Gumelar

English Education Department, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia
anggiagumgumelar@gmail.com

Mumu Abdurrahman

English Education Department, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia
mumu.abdurrahman@uinsgd.ac.id

Dian Ekawati

English Education Department, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia
dian_ekawati@uinsgd.ac.id

Abstract

The students' emotional dimension is rarely acknowledged as an educational policy strategy for improving teaching and learning standards. However, emotions are an integral and foundational part of learning (Hargreaves, 2001). The emotional geography of students addresses the distance and/or closeness motives of their interactions and relationships, which configure the feelings and emotions they experience about themselves, each other, and the world. This present study thus aims to scrutinize undergraduate students' emotions spatially and experientially, based on Hargreaves' framework (2001), which focuses on five key components: socio-cultural geography, physical geography, moral geography, professional geography, and political geography, with respect to learning English syntax. In the meantime, a descriptive case study is employed in this research. The participants are English Education Department students at the State Islamic University of Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. The data is gathered through interviews, then qualitatively analysed by using thematic analysis. The results show that the students encountered all five emotional geographies. It then emerged as both positive and negative emotions in the learning process. It was also disclosed that the students experienced more negative emotions than positive ones while learning English syntax. The learners' negative emotions significantly hindered their learning and achievement, as they experienced disengagement in learning and did not achieve the highest classroom grade level based on their English syntax scores. This study ultimately has implications for both students and educators to be aware of the importance of emotional experiences in learning, with the aim of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.

Keywords: *emotional geography, learning English syntax, descriptive case study*

INTRODUCTION

This present research scrutinizes the emotional geography of EFL students in learning English syntax. Studying English syntax at English Education Department in State Islamic University of Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung is conducted in the fifth semester. It is designed to equip students with the knowledge of syntactic theory and analysis, enabling them to comprehend the concept of syntax as sentence patterns. Through this class, students experience emotional geography, which is generated by the learning process, as the classroom is an emotional space (Pekrun, 2014). Furthermore, Hargreaves (2001) emphasized that learning encompasses not only knowledge, cognition, and skills, but also emotional practices.

Emotions can generally be positive or negative (Pekrun, 2014). Negative emotions can be triggered by various problems, including confusion, frustration, hopelessness, and boredom (Pekrun, 2014). The emotional aspects of learning English syntax have been explored in prior studies. For instance, at the university level, students perceive the subject as complicated, boring, and tedious due to the monotonous activities it frequently entails (Wafi, 2019). These climates experienced by the students are obviously related to the emotion. Emotions evolve from experience, which closely relates to geography (Osho, 2008; Milla & Ghufro, 2020). In learning certainly raises emotional geography (Susanto, Suparmi, & Rahayu, 2020). In the

context of this study, the students' emotional geography is disclosed based on Hargreaves' framework, which first formulated the emotional geography of teaching and learning, comprising five key concepts: socio-cultural geography, physical geography, moral geography, professional geography, and political geography (Hargreaves, 2001). In particular, two questions are addressed in the paper:

1. What are the emotional geographies that students encounter when learning English syntax?
2. How do the students' emotional geographies influence their learning English syntax?

This current study builds upon several previous research studies related to Emotional Geography (EG). The first study, observed by Susanto, Suparmi, & Rahayu (2020), investigated the emotional geography of 25 international students learning Indonesian virtually during the Covid-19 pandemic. Another study on the emotional geography was conducted by Marvell and Simm (2018). They examined the emotional geography of students participating in fieldwork practice. Additionally, the next study by Milla and Ghufroon (2020) examined the emotional geographies of high school students as they prepared to take the national English language examination. The data were gathered from five secondary students who live a considerable distance from school.

This study focuses on different aspects compared to the previous research. This present study aims to disclose the emotional geography of EFL undergraduate students in learning English syntax at the English Education Department of the State Islamic University of Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung.

Emotional Geography in English syntax learning

As represented by Hargreaves (2001), emotional geography is defined as the spatial and experiential motifs of closeness and/or distance in human interactions and relationships that contribute to creating, shaping, and configuring the emotions we experience about ourselves, our world, and each other. As such, emotional geography is a universal lens for understanding human emotions spatially and experientially, not only focusing on psychological aspects but also on socio-cultural interactions and their relationship to the environment. The emotional geography, moreover, is the notion that facilitates our identification of threats to basic emotional attachments and the understanding of intimacy or distance in human encounters or relationships. In the learning process, emotions play a pivotal role in engaging stakeholders overall (Denzin, 1984). Moreover, learning English syntax, which involves studying the rules of language structure, requires progressive involvement throughout the study.

Therefore, the emotional geography in learning English syntax is an issue of understanding or misunderstanding the emotions students encounter towards their learning performance, development, and identity, which are shaped by various types of emotional proximity and distance during learning activities (Hargreaves, 2001; Schultz & Zembylas, 2011). Ultimately, since it was first introduced, this concept aims to enhance the quality of learning. Along with this construct, Hargreaves discloses five key dimensions of emotional geography: (a) physical (personal) geography, (b) moral geography, (c) socio-cultural geography, (d) professional geography, and (e) political geography (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 1062-1075).

Sociocultural geography refers to the closeness and/or distance between individuals affected by differences in gender, race, ethnicity, language, and culture (Liu, 2016). In teaching and learning activities, students often come from diverse backgrounds, making each one unique. The uniqueness stems from numerous origins, languages, and cultural beliefs (Niu *et al.* 2018). Thus, the variational background of students influences different emotions, both emotional understanding and misunderstanding, even in identical situations, such as students' self-confidence and interest (Pekrun, 2014).

Physical geography deals with the proximity and/or distance created by differences of time and space (Liu, 2016). It hence refers to students' close and distant relationships that can lead to emotional understanding or misunderstanding in learning activities built upon specific periods, spaces, or opportunities.

Moral geography pertains to the closeness and distance created by distinct purposes and senses of accomplishment in professional practice (Liu, 2016). In a learning context, it involves the student's learning goals and fulfillment of their responsibilities (Halimah, 2019).

Professional geography deals with the closeness and/or distance of a person's relationship created by professional differences (Astutik, N.T, & Hapsari, A, 2022). In teacher education literature, it is defined that the professional demonstrates behaviors that reflect knowledge and skills of the profession (Creasy, 2015). Therefore, it is related to the learners' self-regulation in the classroom, where students need the ability to sustain their cognition, positive motivation, and behavior in pursuit of both academic and professional goals (Balapumi, R. et al., 2016).

Political geography is concerned with the proximity and/or distance of people's relationships, influenced by the power and social status factors associated with each person (Liu, 2016; Mulyana, 2022). In terms of learning activity, it refers to students' sense of power (feeling powerful and capable of influencing others) and social status (perceived popularity and social preference) differentials in the learning environment (Garandau, 2011; Pasha, 2013).

METHOD

The qualitative approach is employed in this study, and the descriptive case study method is well-suited to meet the needs of this inquiry. This study was conducted at the English Education Department in State Islamic University of Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. The research participants consist of two students picked by purposive sampling. The sample can thus be selected purposively, meaning the subjects can be chosen according to the researcher's needs (Creswell, 2009). The students previously fit with these considerations: (1) The participants come from the academic year 2019; (2) The participants consist of male and female; (3) They come from different races and places, such as urban and rural areas; (4) They experienced the course completely. In the meantime, in order to accumulate empirical data, this study employs semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Furthermore, the data from the interview is recorded, transcribed, translated, and analyzed. To analyze these data, thematic analysis is employed, as it is effective in linking the connection between theoretical concepts and subject matters (Nowell *et al.*, 2017).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results and discussion of the students' emotional geography are presented, encompassing five components: socio-cultural geography, physical geography, moral geography, professional geography, and political geography.

1. **Socio-cultural:** *“Even though my friends and I come from different cultural background, it did not hinder my communications and learning process entirely” (R1 & R2). Then, “I was confident in this course since though English syntax is difficult, but I felt challenged and curious to study it proven by me asking a lot of questions in the classroom” (R1). However, R2 expressed her fearful towards English syntax course due to the complicated materials for herself.*

They come from different cultural backgrounds. R1 is from Lampung, Sumatra Island, and R2 comes from Sundanese, West Java. The differences could evoke mixed feelings about learning English syntax. In terms of their interaction and communication, it

did not hinder most in their learning process. However, as Pekrun, (2014) stated that different cultural backgrounds and generally learning culture can have effects on students' self-confidence and interest in learning. The findings above are similar to those indicating that R1 and R2 had different feelings. R1 felt confident during the learning, but not to R2 did not, which caused her to not enjoy the classroom.

2. **Physical:** *"The destitute duration of learning and the completion of assignments made me less than optimal in understanding and presenting the material and of course interaction with my group mates. Besides, I felt tough to follow both the materials and the instructions since I attended the online learning, and I actually expected this course held in person classroom" (R1 & R2). Additionally, "Because in the previous semester I did not study about Grammar, it really influenced my comprehending sub-optimally in English syntax" (R2).*

After analyzing the students in terms of their emotional understanding and misunderstanding of physical geography, they encountered negative perceptions of physical geography. For example, they experienced less than optimal understanding of the materials and discussing with their teammates due to the distance learning. Since then, to learn English syntax, which requires more attention, they hoped for this in-person classroom course. Furthermore, this physical geography is related to differences of time and space in learning (Liu, 2016). Interestingly, from the findings, one of the respondents disclosed that when in the course of English syntax, she had no longer learning experience related to English grammar since English syntax is closely related to English structure materials. It then really influenced their optimal involvement in learning. This phenomenon was examined by Balapumi, R. et.al., (2016) mentioned that students' prior academic experience affects how they perceive their current learning.

3. **Moral:** *"Overall, understanding all the materials of English syntax and gaining positive achievement are my main goal. Besides, I felt upset to one of my teammates who did not contribute in a group task. On the one hand, I had to accomplish the assignment and I decided to remove his name on the task result since I followed the classroom agreement about such the case. Yet, I often remaindered him to do his job in this group assignment" (R1 & R2).*

Moral geography refers to student learning goals and fulfillment of student responsibilities (Halimah, 2019). In this respect, the students shared the same feeling in the same circumstance. Their purpose in English syntax learning was to comprehend the lesson and gain positive learning outcomes. In the meantime, they expressed their disappointment when their friends in the group task, who did not share the same goal, made no contribution to it. Somehow, she had to maximize each member to assist with every divided duty. Finally, she decided to remove the name of the individual who had made no contribution to the group because she was committed to following the teaching instructions, specifically learning the rule agreement in the particular case.

4. **Professional:** *"My friend and I in my group felt nervous and anxious to follow the teaching instructions such presentation preparing for each group" (R1 & R2). In addition, "I was really excited to attend every class since the lecturer was dedicated as well as discipline and taught the understandable materials" (R1).*

The view of professional geography in term of student identity focuses on students' self-regulation in learning since in the education literature, it is defined that the professional demonstrates behaviors that reflect knowledge and skills of the profession (Creasy, 2015; Balapumi, R. et.al., 2016). In English syntax learning, both R1 and R2 were nervous and anxious about dealing with the teaching instructions, such as the group presentation, where they had to prepare a presentation every week, because the rule was that the one who got to perform was randomly selected. Additionally, this professional

geography also encompasses professional practices (Liu, 2016). R1 revealed her admiration for the lecturer and felt satisfied with the learning, as the lecturer was dedicated and disciplined, and also explained the materials in an easy-to-understand way. The expression of emotional geography shows that the English syntax learning course and the lecturer understood professional norms and applied them in professional practice, teaching English syntax. This indicates that the lecturer and students interact professionally. As reported by Liu (2016), the professional interactions of lecturers and students lead to the growth of positive feelings between them.

5. **Political:** *“I felt satisfied if I can re-teach or explain the materials to other students because I had understood the lesson” (R1). Furthermore, “I got such as ‘labelling’ from friends about my status as one of the members of the student government (SAEED) in campus that being in that position must be smart. It was a burden for me” (R2).*

Student power can be observed in terms of learning ability, and student social status also emerges within the learning environment. That is why political geography in learning covers students’ power (feeling powerful and capable of influencing others) and social status (perceived popularity and social preference) differentials in the learning process (Garandeau, 2011; Pasha, 2013). R1 had the power to influence other students, helping them understand the materials. R1 had already understood the theories earlier, so she was satisfied and happy to re-teach others. On the other hand, R2 experienced the labelling issue relating to the social status. Because R2 was involved in the student government, especially in the intellectual division, where this field is well known for those who are smart and capable in English knowledge and skills, she became a social reference as someone who might master English syntax. Personally, she felt that it was a burden for her. Therefore, both R1 and R2 became popular, and their social status increased. Hargreaves (2001) clarified that a feeling of happiness, as in the case of pride in one's self-abilities and sense of responsibility, is due to increased power and status.

Furthermore, the emotional geographies of the students emerge as both positive and negative emotions in the learning process. Emotions in learning can be both positive and negative (Pekrun, 2014). Feelings as pleasant in learning experiences are termed positive emotions. For instance, the students had feelings of enjoyment, excitement, confidence, and satisfaction. These emotions have positive effects on students’ learning and achievement. By contrast, negative emotions refer to the unpleasant feelings that arise during learning. Based on the findings, the students experienced feelings such as anxiety, fearfulness, difficulty, sub-optimal, disappointment, nervousness, and burden.

CONCLUSION

In English syntax learning, the students experienced a variety of emotional struggles on the socio-cultural, physical, moral, professional, and political levels. These emotional geographies of students emerge with both positive and negative emotions. The students’ positive emotions were disclosed by words such as “confident,” “excited,” and “satisfied.” On the other hand, the students’ negative emotions were portrayed by words such as “fearful,” “tough,” “suboptimal,” “upset,” “nervous,” “anxious,” and “burdened.” Based on the frequency of emotional geographies encountered by the students, they experienced more negative emotions than positive ones while learning English syntax. The learners’ negative emotions truly obstruct their learning and achievement, as they experienced a lack of enjoyment in learning and did not achieve the highest classroom grade level based on their English syntax grade.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Astutik, N.T., & Hapsari, A. (2022). Emotional Geography of a Pre-Service English Teacher in Online Teaching Practicum During Covid-19 Pandemic. *Academic Journal Perspective: Language, Education and Literature Vol 10*
- Balapumi R., Von Kinsky, B.R., Aitken, A., Mc-Meehin, D.A. (2016). Factors Influencing University Students' Self-Regulation of Learning: an Exploratory Study. *Proceedings of the Australian Computer Science Week Multi-Conference 2016*.
- Creasy, K. L. (2015). Defining professionalism in teacher education programs. *Journal of Education & Social Policy, 2(2), 23-25*
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (3rd ed.). In J. W. Creswell, Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: *Sage Publications*
- Denzin, N. (1984). *On Understanding Emotion*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco
- Garandeanu, C. F., Ahn, H.-J., & Rodkin, P. C. (2011). The social status of aggressive students across contexts: The role of classroom status hierarchy, academic achievement, and grade. *Developmental Psychology, 47, 1699–1710*. doi:10.1037/a0025271.
- Halimah, E.F. (2019). Students' Emotional Experiences During Collaborative Projects of Digital Storytelling: An Emotional Geography Perspective. *A paper. Siliwangi University. Tasikmalaya*
- Hargreaves, A. (2001). Emotional geographies of teaching. *Teachers College Record, 103(6), 1056-1080*. DOI: 10.1111/0161-4681.00142
- Liu, Y. (2016). The emotional geographies of language teaching. *Teacher Development, 20(4), 482-497*. DOI: 10.1080/13664530.2016.1161660
- Marvell, A., & Simm, D. (2018). Emotional geographies experienced during international fieldwork: An evaluation of teaching and learning strategies for reflective assessment. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*. DOI: 10.1080/03098265.2018.1460806
- Milla, M.Z., & Ghufron, M.A. (2020). Students' Emotional Geographies in Facing English National Examination: A Case in SMKN Trucuk. *Prosiding Nasional Pendidikan: LPPM IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro*.
- Mulyana, I.R. (2022). *Emotional Geographies of English Education Students in Distance Learning During the Pandemic of Covid-19*. A paper. English Department Tarbiyah and Teacher Training Faculty Antasari State Islamic University Banjarmasin
- Niu, R., Lu, K., & You, X. (2018). Oral language learning in a foreign language context: Constrained or constructed? A sociocultural perspective. *System, 74, 38–49* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.02.006>
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16(1), 1609406917733847*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Osho. (2008). *Emotional learning*. Alih Bahasa: Ahmadi Kahfi. Yogyakarta: *Pustaka Pelajar*.
- Pasha, H. S., & Munaf, S. (2013). Relationship of self-esteem and adjustment in traditional university students. *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences, 84(9), 999-1004*
- Pekrun, R. (2014). Emotions and learning. *International Academy of Education/International Bureau of Education. Belley, France: Gonnet Imprimeur*
- Schultz, P. A., & Zembylas, M. (2011). Advances in teacher emotion research: The impact on teachers' lives. *Springer Publishing*. www.springer.com
- Susanto, G., Suparmi, & Rahayu, E.Y. (2020). The Emotional Geography of International Students in Online Bahasa Indonesia Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of International Students*. <https://ojed.org/jis>
- Wafi, A. (2019). Using Games to Improve Students' Active Involvement in the Learning of English Syntax at IAIN Madura: An Autonomous Learning. *OKARA: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra, 13(1), 107*. <https://doi.org/10.19105/ojbs.v13i1.2256>