Author(s): Tewelde, Mussie; Moate, Josephine; Posti-Ahokas, Hanna

Title: Investigating the Emotional Experiences of Sophomore Students in English Language Education in Eritrea from an Ecological Perspective

Year: 2023

Version: Published version

Please cite the original version:

Tewelde, M., Moate, J., & Posti-Ahokas, H. (2023). Investigating the Emotional Experiences of Sophomore Students in English Language Education in Eritrea from an Ecological Perspective. Education Sciences, 13(12), Article 1181. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13121181

Article

Investigating the Emotional Experiences of Sophomore Students in English Language Education in Eritrea from an Ecological Perspective

Mussie Tewelde [1,*], Josephine Moate [1] and Hanna Posti-Ahokas [2]

1   Department of Teacher Education, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Jyväskylä, 40014 Jyväskylä, Finland; josephine.m.moate@jyu.fi
2   Department of Education, Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Helsinki, 00014 Helsinki, Finland; hanna.posti-ahokas@helsinki.fi
*   Correspondence: mussielatewelde@gmail.com

Abstract: Although the mother tongue policy in Eritrea aims to promote positive language learning trajectories for students, the transition to English as a medium of instruction from the start of junior education remains emotionally demanding for students until the end of tertiary education. Through in-depth qualitative interviews, this study investigates the emotional experiences of sophomore students in English language education (ELE) and seeks the sources of emotions that facilitate or debilitate English language development. Drawing on an ecological perspective, the findings highlight how students' positive, ambivalent, and negative emotions were evoked by the conditions that informed their identities and ideal selves. This study aims to understand what activates students' emotions and informs their visualisation of their ideal selves within the ecosystem of English language education. Overall, this study highlights the importance of creating a network of supportive emotional affordances, despite the constraints of the ecosystem, to enhance students' emotional mindfulness to transform negative emotions into positive emotional experiences to attain their ideal selves.

Keywords: English language education; ecological perspective; emotions; identity; self; individual–environment relationship

1. Introduction

The role of language in education is an important consideration in multilingual societies [1]. Eritrea, in the Horn of Africa, maintains a multilingual mother tongue (MT) policy for elementary education with English taught as a subject from grade one. While the initial MT policy aims to promote students' language learning trajectory [2], the shift to English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in junior education is complex, generating disconnectedness between language policies and practices, likely affecting students' English language development [3]. English is a foreign language (FL) for most Eritrean students and little used outside classrooms. Despite being the medium of formal education even at tertiary level, government reports note that students' English proficiency remains minimal [4].

Recent research suggests that studying English or studying through English can be emotionally demanding with daunting negative experiences [5], resulting in FL anxiety and affecting students' motivation to learn a language [6]. Moreover, negative emotional experiences can disempower students' generating a sense of inadequacy and fear of failure rather than success and achievement [7]. Though emotional experiences can drain motivation for language learning and undermine language identity development [8], emotions can, however, act as important motivators helping students envisage future success in language learning [9,10]. Emotions, therefore, seem to be the 'living glue' between individual experience and the environment. This interview-based study uses an ecological perspective to explore the emotions informing sophomore students' experiences of English

language learning. The particular focus is on the interrelations between emotions and the environment influencing the learning of English and students' future sense of self.

1.1. Emotions and Language Learning

Though emotions are 'the most influential force in language acquisition' [11] (p. 10), they are 'the elephants in the room poorly studied, poorly understood, seen as inferior to rational thought' [12] (p. 205). In essence, the affective turn in SLA-research acknowledges that emotions and L2 learning are reciprocally interrelated, affecting each other [13] (Pavlenko, 2013). This study regards emotions as 'socially constructed dimensions of human experience' [14] (p. 36) used to make sense of language learning experiences within different environments and serving as a litmus test for long-term motivational trajectories [15].

Learners' experiences of language learning involve positive, negative, and ambivalent emotions [16]. Positive emotions broaden individuals' perspective on language input, placate negative arousal, build necessary skills and resources, and encourage individuals to go beyond usual limits and accept new challenges [17,18]. Studies on negative emotions often focus on anxiety because of the complex ways negative emotions affect individual selves [19]. Negative emotions can bring 'fight or flight' reactions [20] with debilitating and facilitating learners. Debilitating emotions narrow the focus on the range of language input, affecting language achievement [19], deeply disturbing students' self-esteem and confidence [21], reducing effort, and leading to avoidance-oriented behaviour [22].

It is well established that negative emotions inform negative experiences. Negative experiences are worsened if students are blamed for being weak in the FL [23] and the conditions and experiences affecting language learning remain unacknowledged [24]. Emotions exacerbating negative experiences include fear of negative evaluation and misunderstanding [25], comparison with peers [26], fear of mistakes and being embarrassed in class [27], perfectionism [28], and boredom with the teaching style [5]. Negative emotions can, however, facilitate focus, resilience, and adaptation and might be the strongest predictors of FL success [29].

Ambivalent emotion is experienced when the positive-broadening and negative-narrowing power of emotions together coordinate the approach and avoidance tendencies in FL learning [17]. For example, students can experience high enjoyment and high anxiety simultaneously, leading to conflicting emotions [19]. Arguably, however, negative and positive emotions are 'the left and right feet' of language learning [30] (p. 193). Hence, they are distinct domains that coexist with each other in language learning. If students can avoid focusing on negative emotions and relish positive experiences [31], motivation and resilience increase and coping strategies can be optimised [32]. For language researchers, exploring how individuals' emotions inform language experiences draws attention to the interrelationship between individuals and the environment with language being the semiotic mediator [33].

1.2. An Ecological Perspective on the Emotional Experience of Language Education

An ecological approach acknowledges affordances and individual emotions as environmental conditions [34]. Environmental conditions can create or limit opportunities for language learners, and affordances depend on individuals' perception and readiness to make use of what the environment provides [35]. For example, bouldering might seem climbable to a mountaineer but emotionally taxing to others depending on an individual's characteristics and the environmental conditions. An individual's response to the affordances of the environment informs the individual's emotion–environment relationship.

An ecological perspective provides a lens to explore the synergy of emotion–environment interactions arising from the proximal and distal conditions of the environment [36]. Each ecosystem is a unique collation of varied elements that become the affordances of an ecology, determine what exists within the environment, and ascribe social meaning [37]. When students respond to environmental conditions, they draw on established 'trait' emotions that have

evolved through previous language learning even beyond the classroom, as well as 'state' emotions within the moment [38]. Moreover, though an environment may target language learning, a lack of opportunities to practice can evoke a range of emotions in students. In other words, emotional affordances are context-dependent and unique to individuals [39].

1.3. Language Emotion and the Self

In FL learning ecosystems, emotions are discursively constructed, focusing on the power relations of individuals within the environment informing identities [40]. Ecological perspectives recognise the complexities of emotions in ecosystems potentially forming multiple identities emerging in the interplay between local interactions and an envisioned global identity of English language proficiency [41]. Drawing on past experiences, individuals can form transportable identities of who they are and wish to become, anticipating success in their language development [42].

An ecological approach acknowledges the existence of significant relationships between learners' current selves' emotional experiences of language learning and their envisioned ideal future FL selves. The tension of these relationships is described as having 'a definite guiding function in setting to-be-reached standards and, in a negative way, the feared self also regulates behaviour guiding the individual away from something' [43] (p. 13). Whereas the ideal self can be a strong motivator for striving learners to revitalise L2 emotional experiences [44], deactivating emotional experiences can also bring uncertain ideal selves in the pursuit of language learning development [45].

Another influence in understanding emotion in FL classrooms is the motivation and activation behind ideal selves that emerge from anticipatory emotions created in the present by actively working with ideal selves, and anticipated emotions, which is the imagination of experiencing certain emotions in the future [17], consequently affecting the motivational investment of effort [46]. The interplay occurs between the activation of students' emotions and beliefs of expending effort to learn English, as well as experiencing success and/or failure, in turn informing their envisioned future self [47]. Existing research highlights how an ecological perspective is useful in examining learners' emotional experiences intertwined with emerging identities and their imagined selves [48]. This study explores the emotional experiences of sophomore students within the Eritrean ELE ecosystem.

1.4. Research Questions

The research task underpinning this study seeks to explore how emotions present in individual language learning experiences inform the identity development of FL learners. A crucial starting point is to recognise the different kinds of emotions and their sources present in the participants' accounts and then examine the interconnectedness between the emotions and the environment to understand how this relationship affects motivation to learn and future selves. The research questions are:

1. What kind of emotions are present in the sophomore English language students' learning experiences?
2. Where do these emotions arise from as reported by the participants?
3. What is the relationship between students' emotions and their future selves?

2. Methodology

2.1. The Context for this Study

The sixteen participants in this qualitative interview study were sophomore students, aged 20–27, concluding their formal English language studies in Natural Sciences and Social Sciences streams. They were selected and invited to participate based on their freshman English results with eight high-performing (HP) students (four males and four females) and eight low-performing (LP) students (four males and four females) from each stream. Moreover, the participants' geographic background (region, school location (rural and urban), school type (private and public), religion, ethnolinguistic identity, and sociolinguistic categories [49] students' enrolment bio-data 2018) were also taken into account to represent

the sociolinguistic and ethnic reality of Eritrea. As sophomore students, the participants provide different perspectives on ELE in Eritrea, having extensive experience at school and college levels.

The participants were provided detailed information on this study's nature and the data's utility for research purposes during pre-interview discussions. Each participant provided signed consent and indicated their understanding of the confidentiality and anonymity that refers to their participation, voluntarism, and information regarding this study [50]. Each participant was assigned an identifier as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Linguistic information of participants.

Identifier	Tigrigna	English	Arabic	Tigre	Amharic	Bilin	Geez	Afar	Other
HP1	X	X	X						
HP2	X	X	X						
HP3	X	X	X						
HP4	X	X	X						
HP5	X	X	X	X					
HP6	X	X	X		X	X	X		XX
HP7	X	X			X				
HP8	X	X	X		X				
LP1	X	X	X						
LP2	X	X							
LP3	X	X	X	X	X				
LP4	X	X						X	
LP5	X	X	X						
LP6	X	X	X						
LP7	X	X							
LP8	X	X							

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Interview data were collected to provide a deeper understanding of the students' emotional experiences in ELE. As little research has been conducted on the emotional experiences of ELE in Eritrea previously, 'efforts are made to get inside the person and to understand from within' [50] (p. 17) and allow freedom, which enhanced the richness of the data [51]. Although it is not possible or desirable to 'get inside' another person, nevertheless, interviews provide subjective insights into participants' perspectives or experiences, which is a powerful way of probing inner feelings and views in greater depth [52]. Capturing their emotional experiences can enable them to freely reflect their own voice and thoughts despite the individualised opinion that can be fleeting at times due to impending conditions [53]. The interviews were intended to provide space for participants to share the range of their emotions and their sources to investigate the interrelationship between their emotions and their ideal selves. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The language of the interviews was primarily English unless the participants preferred to use Tigrigna.

For this study, the interview was divided into several sections that invited participants to share different aspects of their language learning experiences. The questions were designed to elicit information on how the participants' emotional experiences inform their identity and influence their selves that potentially contribute to their language learning trajectories within the ELE ecosystem [16]. While the selection of participants was based on their final freshman grade, as a member of teaching staff, the interviewer (Author 1) was already familiar with the participants prior to this study. Moreover, these interviews

complemented the culture of the college at the time as initiatives had been taken to include students in the development of materials hopefully creating a safer environment for the participants to share their experiences. Interviews began with an invitation for participants to share experiences from their early years of language learning and to continue reflecting on experiences from later years. The interview also included questions that explicitly focused on what kind of emotions the participants had experienced or associated with English language learning, as well as reflections on different language skills, language tests, and their overall educational achievement. An important question addressed how the participants overcame challenges that they had faced.

The recorded data were transcribed and translated resulting in 352 pages, font size of 12, and 1.5 line spacing. The data were analysed using a data-driven approach [54] to guide the initial coding by focusing on the presence of different types of emotions in the interviews mentioned often explicitly and sometimes implicitly. The type and degrees of emotions experienced differed between students. The second analytical cycle drew on an ecological perspective that highlights the importance of environmental conditions. This cycle involved organising the overarching themes of emotions to recognise the sources of emotions present in the participants' interviews. The third analytical cycle focused on the future self as expressed by different participants. Through these iterative steps, it was possible to trace the presence of learner emotions and the interconnectedness of emotions and the sense of self within the ELE environment [55], as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Illustrating the presence of emotions in student experiences, implicit mentions are underlined and explicit mentions are in bold.

Examples of Verbatim Text	Codes of Emotions	Emotional Experience	Source of Emotion	Developing Ideal Self
I get **anxious** and ask myself, 'Where have I been?' that I didn't learn anything at all (LP3). Drilling of words and trying to master grammar rules were so **stressful** as a child (LP4).	Anxiety	Negative	Teacher and classroom conditions	Narrowing future potential
Emotionally I was going with the herd. I **felt bored** when the teachers go back to the basics and talk the whole period and I just listen. I was not showing my capabilities (HP1).	Boredom			
I get confused and stuck even if I know the answer (LP5).	Bewilderment	Ambivalent	Student and teacher Conditions	Mixture of broadening and narrowing future potential
I am always **curious** why we don't have qualified English teachers in remote areas. We don't learn much in class. (LP 1)	Curiosity			
My experience of English at home made me **confident** in class. I always had the impulse of learning. (HP6)	Positive	Confidence	Learner conditions	Broadening future potential
I **hope** I will be able to develop my English in the future (LP4).		Hope		

3. Findings

The findings are organised into three sections. The first and second sections present positive, ambivalent, and negative emotions and their sources that affect individual learners, respectively. The third part provides an overview of the interrelationship between students' emotions and their future selves.

3.1. Types of Emotions

The participants shared a wide range of emotions through their stories and descriptions of key moments in their language learning journeys. The positive emotions include confidence, joy, excitement, gratefulness, hope, interest, passion, and pride. The negative emotions experienced include anger, anxiety, boredom, disappointment, embarrassment, fear, frustration, hopelessness, shame, and intimidation. The ambivalent emotions contain conflicted emotions of bewilderment, curiosity, silence, and indecision.

The positive emotions described by students allowed them to be excited and joyful about their achievement, build confidence, and show passion in their language development as described by HP students:

'Because of my performance, my studies go smoothly', (HP2)

'It's almost a mother tongue for me. I am passionate and just have it inside me' (HP6)

'Back when I was in high school I had an English book translated'. (HP1)

Confirming positive emotions of interest and pride enables them to boost their enthusiasm, which they described as having a lasting effect on their language development, as explained in more detail in Section 3.2.

The negative emotions experienced by the students comprise fear of making mistakes in large class sizes, being mocked and embarrassed by peers and teachers, and negative evaluations. Another powerful negative emotion was shame as LP5 says, 'Comparing myself with high-performing students, I feel ashamed of my weak English, and the place I came from'. Shame-filled past experiences might lead to anger, uneasiness, and disappointment while performing in English classes. Moreover, the numbing, negative emotion of boredom was vividly described (see Table 2).

Many students referred to negative emotions as having debilitating effects on their selves to learn English, 'They are killers in language learning and put you again in more negative emotions' (LP1). Some HP students, however, recognised the facilitative role of negative emotions in their language development, 'it can drive you to work hard to achieve your goals' (HP2). Through determination, the power of turning negative experiences into positive emotions can narrow down the debilitating negative emotions on students' language development. In extreme scenarios, however, negative emotions were hard to bear:

'When I was in grade five, our English teacher used to punish us by putting a pen between our fingers squeezing them forcefully for committing errors while reading. That was very painful and stressful. But, it was a push factor to practice reading' (HP3)

The existence of physical pain can turn into emotional turmoil followed by anxiety and fear of learning the language. In such conditions, students had no choice but to endure negative experiences as part of their language learning experiences in Eritrea.

The ambivalent emotions students experienced created conflicted emotions of self-asserting confidence and inadequacy, 'though I am proficient in the language, I feel inadequate when I don't perform as expected. '(HP4). They are also caught up with self-censoring events, 'even when I know the answer, I prefer to stay silent to avoid shame and embarrassment in class' (LP7). Many LP students expressed their indignation when their past experience is incongruent with their current self, 'I thought I was good in English in secondary school and I don't understand why English is tough as a language because I speak four languages (LP3)'. These emotionally indicted experiences position them to be uncertain and question their actual self and the pride that forms their identity, as explained in more detail in Section 3.2. The extensive presence of emotions in these accounts highlights the importance of acknowledging the affective nature of language learning and how deeply it touches students' sense of who they are and who they can be.

3.1. Sources of Students' Emotions

This section draws attention to the sources of students' emotions present in the participants' interviews. The sources of students' emotional experiences arise from individual students, teachers, linguistic, and systemic conditions.

3.1.1. The Individual Conditions of Different Learners

The findings indicate that several issues prompted students' emotions that affected their language development. Learners' previous language experiences and significant others' support impacted their emotions tremendously. As HP1 recalled, 'When I was young, I was so close to my father. He used to tell me bedtime stories and I fell in love with the stories and loved English and grew up to be like one of them'. Her early childhood experience enabled her to draw on her past experiences and anticipate future experiences that inform her future self. This might generate a sense of global English identity contributing to her current English language development. The most powerful sources of students' emotions are exposure and opportunities to practice the language in and outside the classrooms. Many HP students shared that family support at home and attending private schools positively informed their language experience. Despite the limited exposure to practice the language, HP1 and HP6 students explained that they had opportunities, for example, to attend church programs in English, helping them socialise in English.

For many LP students, however, the English language is beyond reach. LP2 expressed her bewilderment saying, 'I was in grade six when I first watched people speaking in English on TV, it was a source of astonishment for me'. Unfortunately, LP1, LP3, LP4, and LP7 noted that they had not been exposed to the English language outside the classroom in the places they came from. There is considerable overlap between students' emotional experiences and their selves when they questioned their ELE trajectories. As LP5 stated, 'You don't need to waste ten to twenty years simply not mastering the language'. By questioning the educational language system, students portrayed their perception of language learning, suggesting that emotional experiences of the past have affected their present experiences, even in beginning to form ideal selves.

Students' negative and ambivalent emotions also evolved from the fear of losing face and making mistakes in front of peers. As LP 6 remarked, 'During class presentations, I save my face to avoid humiliation to preserve my pride'. These experiences can put them in a conflicted emotion of silence by hiding their emotions to avoid embarrassment. When comparing themselves to other students, many LPs experienced feelings of inadequacy, 'When I encounter excellent students in English, I feel inadequate and weak' (LP3). The sense of inadequacy can result in uneasiness about their lack of English language competence and fears regarding others' evaluations. Moreover, as HP7 said, 'I am not satisfied with my English, I won't tolerate the mistakes I make. I want to be like the natives...'. Counting one's mistakes and striving for flawlessness reflect learners' self-evaluations and critical perfectionist attitudes towards attaining excellence in their language development. Emotions such as these are also the outcome of classroom interactions in which teachers' conditions affect students' emotions. These findings highlight how differently and how personally students can experience emotions as part of their language learning journeys. Even if two students were in the same environment, the emotions of a high-performing student could be significantly different from a low-performing student.

3.1.2. Environmental Conditions Derived from Teachers

The findings indicate that teachers' low proficiency and teaching methods are the main sources of students' emotions. Students explained that they become bored with drills and the rote memorisation of rules. LP2 bitterly expressed, 'I curse the teachers who made me a parrot who only repeat grammar rules not making meaning by myself'. Such practices from early childhood can drive them to develop a strange attitude towards ELE, 'I felt English wasn't a language meant for communication but something strange only

used to name objects' (LS4). Students' views on teachers' teaching style, with disparaging teaching attitudes like giving negative criticism and intimidating remarks in classes, can have a demotivating lasting impact on their identity development: 'The worst experience I had was when a teacher laughed at me when I answer in class (LP1)' and 'belittle me that I am not good (HP5)'. These experiences highlight the discursive emotional power differentials between teachers and students. Some students vividly sense that their lifelong language learning experiences were overshadowed by teachers' classroom interactions and actions during early childhood experiences, 'When I was a child teachers humiliated and terrorized me...I developed hatred towards English language learning and it follows me everywhere' (LP1). Due to the absence of good feedback and the lack of appropriate academic relationships between teachers and students, students experience debilitating negative emotions. These findings highlight how environmental conditions are formed through teacher attitudes, words, and action as well as how deeply and emotionally students respond to these conditions.

3.1.3. Linguistic and Systemic Conditions

The findings indicated that linguistic and systemic conditions that influence students' emotions include educational language policy and practices (MTE and EMI), grammar-based instruction and assessment systems, and the existence of emotional despotism. Although there is an uncharted multilingual repertoire for language learners in Eritrea, the findings indicate that MTs were experienced as interferences when students join junior school instead of supporting their English language learning. As HP2 said, 'English language is taught through Tigrigna.... this brings confusion'. Within this environment, the transition from MTE to EMI, as LP5 and LP7 explained, was a source of negative emotions as they had not acquired basic language skills in their MTs that would affect their future English language development. This signals that the potential of MTE as an affordance to provide foundations and opportunities for further language learning in EMI has been detrimental due to the language learning policy and the feebleness to implement it.

The participants shared a wide sense of negative emotions with the grammar-focused instruction and exam systems that affected their overall language development:

'I feel inadequate.... never knew if one language has four language skills till I reach secondary school.' (LP1)

'It was frustrating... lessons and exams focus on mastering of grammar rules.' (HP7)

'It is like forcing you to eat food that is allergic to your body.' (LP7)

LP7 ruefully feels that language learning is like a nutrient that is harmful to the body, which arouses a pressured emotion with no alternative but to be caught between a rock and a hard place to make sense of oneself.

Under these conditions, students become lost and even develop a desire to start over from the basics to overcome their language learning difficulties. LP3 bluntly shared, 'After fourteen years of education, I have difficulties in English...After graduation, I will study English in a private school'. Predictably, private English language schools offer basic language learning skills. This points out that many of the LP students remain advanced beginners in the English language when they even reach sophomore level.

Different students in Eritrea's ELE ecosystem explained that they experienced known and unknown emotions of fear even beyond the classroom settings, signalling emotional despotism. As LP6 stated, 'I feel nervous, insecure, and ashamed learning English in and outside class'. Due to the absence of proper emotional affordances in the ELE environment, students can develop fearful attitudes and reach an emotional edge, experiencing extreme negative emotions. HP6 indignantly expressed, 'We are deprived of freedom and get oppressed in English language classrooms'. The continuous deprivation of emotional freedom coupled with the emotion of fear might turn into dispositions that can develop into

trait emotions over time, putting learners between the hammer and the anvil. Furthermore, the participants spoke of their emotional experiences in great depth and related them to their future selves, exposing the link between emotion and future selfhood. Although not all of these conditions are as directly in the teacher's control as teacher attitudes, words, and actions, teachers are nevertheless the ones that mediate the linguistic and systemic conditions. The student responses indicate how deeply enmeshed they are within these conditions.

3.2. Connections between Students' Emotional Experiences and Future L2 Selves

Most HP students are proud of their language achievement, utilise multilingual affordances, and go beyond their limited environment to belong to an ideal English-speaking global identity. They even set boundaries to signify themselves as 'we-proficient in the language' and 'them—the non-proficient ones' (HP1, HP3, and HP5). Some of them even boast that they have reached the desired outcome, 'The teacher challenged me the way I needed to be challenged' (HP1). This self-assured pride enables them to own a transportable identity that goes beyond their local distinctiveness, creating a high actual self with significant symbolic capital.

Many LP students, however, experience shame and failed to benefit from multilingual affordances; nevertheless, they desire to belong to a global English community, 'I wish to go to English-speaking countries and miraculously improve my English' (LP1). This is an ambivalent identity formation, reducing one's local distinctiveness but still generating future-oriented anticipated emotion. Moreover, the participants shared a deep sense of hope that reflect anticipatory emotions behind their motivational ideal selves. As LP2 said, 'I hope I will practice and read books to develop my English'. Many LPs seem ready to invest hoping for something to significantly change in the future. Conversely, when confronted with negative emotions, the HP students become resilient to continue hoping for the best, though to date, everything has been difficult and painful, 'when I feel a bit inadequate, I never give up' (HP8). By enthusiastically relishing their positive emotions, learners' motivation can be broadened to attain their ideal selves. Quite the opposite, LP6 highlighted, 'I don't take the initiative to do things. I just put aside the subject'. Such students appear to experience utter hopelessness that brings a murky motivational self in their quest for language learning. Despite experiencing negative emotions, the experience of the anticipatory emotion of hope boosts students' language learning efforts by empowering them to develop clear ideal selves. These findings indicate the interconnectedness between the emotions and future selves; in other words, student emotions indicate a response to the environment and provide insight into what kind of relationship the student has with this immediate environment. Moreover, the findings indicate that emotions have some kind of anticipatory quality with implications for the future self. The relationship between emotions and the future self is further addressed in the ensuing discussion.

4. Discussion

This study investigates the emotional experiences of students in the ELE ecosystem and the sources of emotions that facilitate or debilitate English language development in the formation of ideal selves. In response to the first research question, the findings suggest that learners' emotions are key parts of their language learning experiences. As [55] notes, positive emotions can embolden students' motivation to passionately develop their English language in their quest for ideal selves; however, the range of emotions experienced by the participants are mostly negative.

As in other studies, the emotion of fear, stated by most students, emanated from the fear of making mistakes and being mocked and embarrassed by peers and teachers [28]. Unsurprisingly, when the LPs compare themselves with HPs and recall early childhood experience, they become anxious with negative emotions, further disrupting their self-confidence as learners [21]. In line with recent research [5], this study attests that the disengaging emotion of boredom is repeatedly manifested when teachers' practices un-

dermine students' interest and motivation to learn the language. Although, ideally, the environment should provide opportunities to use the language, this study indicates that students' experiences of debilitating negative emotions narrow their language learning input and achievements [19]. Moreover, this study highlights that students' negative emotional experiences were predictors of success with a facilitative role that helped them to see themselves as striving language learners. The synergy between the students' emotions and the environment is highlighted when students find ways to combat negative emotions with a resilience to sustain their balance and build positive broadening emotions, confirming earlier findings [31].

The findings also illustrate how ambivalent emotions put students in conflicted states. Students were caught between feeling inadequate and confident; remaining silent to avoid shame and embarrassment; embracing their past pride in language proficiency and their current selves. Consistent with previous studies [19], the findings indicate that an individual can experience both positive and negative emotions simultaneously. Ambivalent emotions generate uncertainty as students attempt to coordinate their approach and avoidance, affecting their language learning trajectory [17].

The second research question focuses on the sources of emotions and the findings highlight three sources: student, teacher, and linguistic and system conditions. The students' conditions refer to individual and socio-emotional aspects of language learning. The HP participants reiterated how previous linguistic experience, family support, exposure, and opportunities to practice English language positively impacted their language development. In contrast, the LP students' lack of early language experience at home or opportunities for practice impacted their emotions negatively. Moreover, the findings indicate that while HPs' perfectionist attitude towards attaining excellence in English language informs a vision of a native-like English-speaking identity, LPs' competition with excellent students creates a state of anxiety, disturbing their confidence while advancing through their language learning trajectories [28].

The teacher conditions that influence students' emotions include affective, pedagogical skills, and personality features [56]. Although a language teacher is responsible for the emotional tenor of the classroom [57], participants in this study recognise teachers as the main source of negative emotions, unswervingly related to teachers' low proficiency and teaching methods, disparaging teaching attitude, lack of feedback, and individual attention. Consistent with [40], this study highlights the discursive emotional power differentials of the academic relationships between teachers and students affecting student attention and motivation.

Regardless of the rich linguistic repertoire of language education in Eritrea, the findings suggest MTE was an interference and source of immense negative emotions in the transition to EMI. The nonexistence of proper emotional support during this shift coupled with the focus on grammar-ridden lessons and exams, and the lack of skills to practice the language can bring subsequent effects on their language learning development and overall educational outcomes, which confirm earlier findings [3]. To cope with language practices and the direct shift to EMI, the language teaching ideology should consider MTs as an affordance rather than an obstruction to provide opportunities for the use of students' linguistic repertoire and support English language learning. Still, the participants experienced known and unknown emotions of uncertainty, oppression, and fear of English as an FL, revealing the existence of emotional despotism in the ELE ecosystem. Due to a lack of emotional affordances, students experienced helplessness and struggled to attain the desired outcomes, which could turn their situational state emotions into stable trait emotions over time [38]. Figure 1 illustrates the sources of students' emotions in ELE.

Figure 1 places individual emotional experience at the heart of two concentric circles to represent the continual interplay within the ecosystem. The circles represent the proximal and distal sources of emotion.
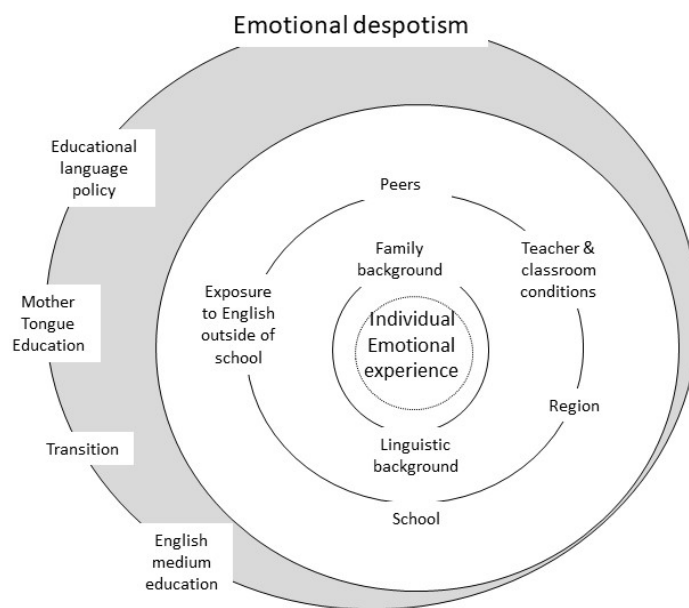
Figure 1. Ecosystemic proximity between individual experience and sources of language learning emotions.

The concentric circles illustrate the proximity between proximal and distal influences on students' emotional experiences informing language development in the ELE ecosystem [36]. Within the proximal ecosystem, illustrated with a white background, the prime sources of emotions arise from students' early English language experiences. The synergy between and among the proximal ecosystems such as teacher and classroom conditions can directly influence students' emotional experiences. Students' exposure to English beyond the classroom and their place of origin may not directly relate to their emotions, but can be vital for their language development. As part of the distal ecosystem, illustrated with a grey background, the MTE policy aims to enhance students' language trajectory [2], yet behind the classroom curtains, students experience negative emotions in the transition from MTE to EMI. In the all-embracing distal ecosystem, the absence of emotional affordances due to the existence of emotional despotism in ELE denies opportunities for students' language development and agency, imposing artificial limits on their identity and selves. The findings, however, suggest that proximal influences and individuals themselves have an important role in mediating distal influences. The negative emotions provoked by the distal language policy, for example, can be softened or reinforced through the actions of the proximal teacher or family. The findings also indicate how students actively participate in the formation of their future self.

The relationship between students' emotional experiences and their future selves is at the heart of the third research question. The findings highlight how a wide range of students' emotions inform their identity, influencing their selves in ELE. Exploiting the multilingual affordances and going beyond their limited environment, the HP students' positive emotions of pride enabled them to become de facto members of the global English community [58]. According to [41], the interplay between students' local interaction and a vision of global identity in English language proficiency empowered them to possess transportable identities [42]. Drawing on negative emotional experiences of belonging to a global English community, most LP students developed ambivalent identities, neither native nor non-native, declining locally distinct affordances [59].

The students' emotions as illustrated in Figure 2 inform connections with the motivational ideal selves.

Figure 2 uses arrows to illustrate the activation of emotions and connections between individual emotions on the left and the ideal self on the right.
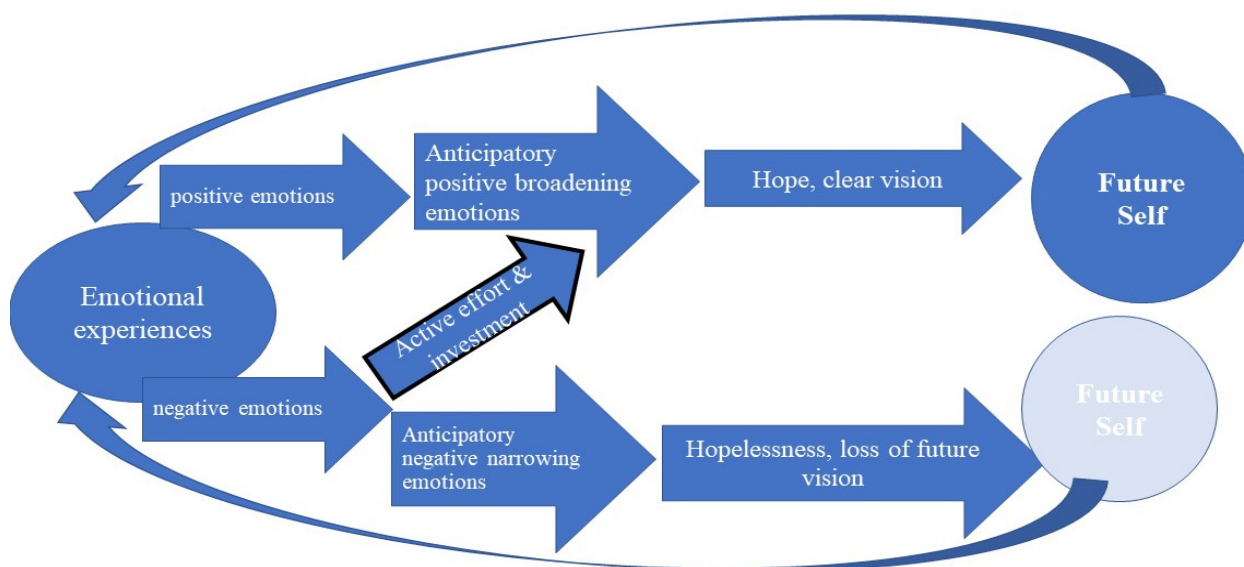
Figure 2. Interconnection between emotion and ideal self.

Alongside emotions, effort and the need to invest in language learning significantly affect students' future selves. As [17] stated, activating anticipated and anticipatory emotions is an important part in the formation of future selves. In trying to achieve ideal selves, the students spoke of the investment and efforts needed to attain success and prevent failure in the future. Despite experiencing negative emotions, the anticipatory emotion of hope boosts students' language learning efforts, empowering them to develop a clear image of their selves. For LP students, however, ambivalent anticipated emotions of hope delay the exertion of effort and investment until academic studies are over, transforming resilience into an avoidance strategy—avoiding the required investment in the present and the pain of failure. Hope can be a powerful force to help learners know where they are, what they can do, and where to reach. Conversely, the deactivating negative emotion of hopelessness reduces students' motivation to learn as the notion of an ideal self is uncertain [45], less defined as indicated in Figure 2. Moreover, the clarity or uncertainty of the future self seems to feedback into emotional experiences within the present time.

5. Conclusions

This study provides insights into the emotional experiences of sophomore students in English language education in Eritrea. Despite the limited number of participants, as a qualitative study 'the point is to generate substantive insight into the phenomenon' [60] (p. 558). Drawing on the ecological approach, this study provides an in-depth understanding of the range of positive, ambivalent, and negative emotions experienced by sophomore students of English in Eritrea. The participants highlight that recounting their emotions enabled them to question their actual selves to make sense of their ideal selves with a desire for an English-speaking global identity [61], potentially contributing to their language learning trajectories within the ELE ecosystem. This study further reiterates how some students make good use of affordances despite the constraints of the ELE environment through individual effort and investments, activating emotions and developing lucid ideal selves over time.

As noted in the opening section of this article, the transition from a mother-tongue-based educational policy to the use of English as the language of education is significant with implications for learning other subjects [62]. The findings from this study indicate that negative emotions informing language learning pathways could have negative implications for students' educational achievement.

The far-reaching implication of the present study highlights the need to create a network of supportive emotional affordances to motivate the whole person [48], to assist learners to find personal freedom, to become more agentic in dealing with emotions, and to inform teachers to re-evaluate their teaching practices to enhance successful language learning [63]. Finally, more positively framed approaches could transform the narrowing ripple effects of students' negative emotions into positive broadening emotional experiences to attain ideal selves.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, M.T., J.M. and H.P.-A.; methodology, M.T. and J.M.; formal Analysis, M.T. and J.M.; Investigation, M.T.; Data curation, M.T.; writing–original draft preparation, M.T.; writing–review and editing, M.T., J.M. and H.P.-A.; supervision, J.M. and H.P.-A.; project administration, H.P.-A.; funding acquisition, J.M. and H.P.-A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The authors adhere to the national guidelines for ethical research provided by the Finnish Academy (TENK 2019) and the guidelines of the University of Jyväskylä.

Informed Consent Statement: Each participant was provided informed consent and indicated their understanding of the confidentiality and privacy that refers their voluntary participation and information regarding the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are not publicly available due to ethical issues. They can be available on request from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Magocha, M.; Mutasa, D.E.; Rammala, J.R. Mother-tongue education in South Africa: A highly contested terrain of the 21st century. *S. Afr. J. Afr. Lang.* **2019**, *39*, 253–262. [CrossRef]
2. Benson, P.; Barkhuizen, G.; Bodycott, P.; Brown, J. *Second Language Identity in Narratives of Study Abroad*; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2013. [CrossRef]
3. Ahmadi, Q.S. Unwelcome? English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in the Arabian Gulf. *Engl. Lang. Teach.* **2017**, *10*, 11–17. [CrossRef]
4. MoE. *Monitoring of Learning Achievement Project*; Ministry of Education: Asmara, Eritrea, 2016.
5. Richards, J.C. Exploring emotions in language teaching. *RELC J.* **2022**, *53*, 225–239. [CrossRef]
6. Sadiq, J.M. Anxiety in English Language Learning: A Case Study of English Language Learners in Saudi Arabia. *Engl. Lang. Teach.* **2017**, *10*, 1–7. [CrossRef]
7. Moate, J.; Ruohotie-Lyhty, M. Identity and agency development in a CLIL-based teacher education program. *J. Psychol. Lang. Learn.* **2020**, *2*, 92–106. [CrossRef]
8. Gregersen, T.; MacIntyre, P.D. Capitalizing on language learners' individuality. In *Capitalizing on Language Learners' Individuality*; Multilingual Matters: Bristol, UK, 2014. [CrossRef]
9. MacIntyre, P.D.; MacKinnon, S.P.; Clément, R. The baby, the bathwater, and the future of language learning motivation research. In *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self*; Multilingual Matters: Bristol, UK, 2009; pp. 43–65.
10. Dörnyei, Z.; Chan, L. Motivation and vision: An analysis of future L2 self images, sensory styles, and imagery capacity across two target languages. *Lang. Learn.* **2013**, *63*, 437–462. [CrossRef]
11. Scovel, T. *Learning New Languages: A Guide to Second Language Acquisition*; Heinle & Heinle: Boston, MA, USA, 2001.
12. Swain, M. The inseparability of cognition and emotion in second language learning. *Lang. Teach.* **2013**, *46*, 195–207. [CrossRef]
13. Pavlenko, A. The affective turn in SLA: From 'affective factors' to 'language desire' and 'commodification of affect'. In *The Affective Dimension in Second Language Acquisition*; Multilingual Matters: Bristol, UK, 2013; Volume 3, pp. 3–28.
14. Benesch, S. *Considering Emotions in Critical English Language Teaching*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2012.
15. Ushioda, E. Foreign language motivation research in Japan: An 'insider' perspective from outside Japan. In *Language Learning Motivation in Japan*; Apple, M.T., Silva, D.D., Fellner, T., Eds.; Multilingual Matters: Bristol, UK, 2013; pp. 1–14.
16. MacIntyre, P.D.; Vincze, L. Positive and negative emotions underlie motivation for L2 learning. *Stud. Second Lang. Learn. Teach.* **2017**, *7*, 61–88. [CrossRef]
17. MacIntyre, P.; Gregersen, T. Emotions that facilitate language learning: The positive-broadening power of the imagination. *Stud. Second Lang. Learn. Teach.* **2012**, *2*, 193–213. [CrossRef]

18. Dewaele, J.M.; MacIntyre, P.D. The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Stud. Second Lang. Learn. Teach.* **2014**, *4*, 237–274. [CrossRef]
19. Dewaele, J.M.; Witney, J.; Saito, K.; Dewaele, L. Foreign language enjoyment and anxiety: The effect of teacher and learner variables. *Lang. Teach. Res.* **2018**, *22*, 676–697. [CrossRef]
20. Seligman, M. *Flourish. A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Wellbeing*; Free Press: New York, NY, USA, 2011.
21. Zheng, Y. Anxiety and second/foreign language learning revisited. *Can. J. Educ.* **2008**, *1*, 1–12.
22. Gregersen, T.; MacIntyre, P.D.; Meza, M. Positive psychology exercises build social capital for language learners: Preliminary evidence. In *Positive Psychology in SLA*; Multilingual Matters: Bristol, UK, 2016; pp. 147–167.
23. Read, S. *Staging Group Activities in the Classrooms*; University of Singapore (Memo): Singapore, 1982.
24. Gregersen, T.; MacIntyre, P.D. *Capitalizing on Language Learners' Individuality: From Premise to Practice*; Multilingual Matters: Bristol, UK, 2013; Volume 72.
25. Timina, S. Causes of English-Speaking Anxiety among Taiwanese University Students. In Proceedings of the INTCESS 15—2nd International Conference on Education and Social Science, Istanbul, Turkey, 2–4 February 2015; pp. 1305–1309.
26. Yan, J.X.; Horwitz, E.K. Learners' perceptions of how anxiety interacts with personal and instructional factors to influence their achievement in English: A qualitative analysis of EFL learners in China. *Lang. Learn.* **2008**, *58*, 151–183. [CrossRef]
27. Aksak, K.; Cubukcu, F. An Exploration of Factors Contributing to Students' Unwillingness to Communicate. *J. Foreign Lang.* **2020**, *12*, 155–170. [CrossRef]
28. Gregersen, T.; Horwitz, E.K. Language learning and perfectionism: Anxious and non-anxilanguage learners' reactions to their own oral performance. *Mod. Lang. J.* **2002**, *86*, 562–570. [CrossRef]
29. Oxford, R.L. Anxious language learners can change their minds: Ideas and strategies from traditional psychology and positive psychology. In *New Insights into Language Anxiety: Theory, Research and Educational Implications*; Oxford Academic: Oxford, UK, 2017; pp. 177–197.
30. Dewaele, J.M.; MacIntyre, P.D. Foreign language enjoyment and foreign language classroom anxiety: The right and left feet of the language learner. In *Positive Psychology in SLA*; Multilingual Matters: Bristol, UK, 2016; pp. 215–236. [CrossRef]
31. MacIntyre, P.D.; Gregersen, T.; Mercer, S. *Positive Psychology in SLA*; Multilingual Matters: Bristol, UK, 2016.
32. Fresacher, C. 15 Why and How to Use Positive Psychology Activities in the Second Language Classroom. In *Positive Psychology in SLA*; Multilingual Matters: Bristol, UK, 2016; Volume 97, p. 344.
33. Van Lier, L. The ecology of language learning: Practice to theory, theory to practice. *Procedia Soc. Behav. Sci.* **2010**, *3*, 2–6. [CrossRef]
34. Douglas Fir Group. A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world. *Mod. Lang. J.* **2016**, *100*, 19–47. [CrossRef]
35. Thoms, J.J. An ecological view of whole-class discussions in a second language literature classroom: Teacher reformulations as affordances for learning. *Mod. Lang. J.* **2014**, *98*, 724–741. [CrossRef]
36. McLinden, M. Examining proximal and distal influences on the part-time student experience through an ecological systems theory. *Teach. High. Educ.* **2017**, *22*, 373–388. [CrossRef]
37. Siemens, G. Connectivism: Creating a learning ecology in distributed environments. In *Didactics of Microlearning. Concepts, Discourses and Examples*; Waxmann: Montreal, QC, Canada, 2007; pp. 53–68.
38. Oxford, R.L. Definitional Concerns. In *The Routledge Handbook of the Psychology of Language Learning and Teaching*; Routledge: London, UK, 2021. [CrossRef]
39. Kaviani, A.; Tamim, R.; Ghaemi, H. Teaching and Learning during a Global Pandemic: An Ecological Approach. *Mod. J. Lang. Teach. Methods (MJLTM)* **2020**, *10*, 1–8. Available online: http://mjltm.org/article-1-585-en.html (accessed on 10 October 2022).
40. Benesch, S. Emotions as agency: Feeling rules, emotion labor, and English language teachers' decision-making. *System* **2018**, *79*, 60–69. [CrossRef]
41. Barcelos, A.M.F. Unveiling the relationship between language learning beliefs, emotions and identities. *Stud. Second Lang. Learn. Teach.* **2015**, *5*, 301–325. [CrossRef]
42. Steffensen, S.V.; Kramsch, C. *The Ecology of Second Language Acquisition and Socialization*; Springer International Publishing: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2017. [CrossRef]
43. Dörnyei, Z. The L2 motivational self system. In *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self*; Multilingual Matters: Bristol, UK, 2009; Volume 36, pp. 9–11.
44. Csizér, K.; Lukács, G. The comparative analysis of motivation, attitudes and selves: The case of English and German in Hungary. *System* **2010**, *38*, 1–13. [CrossRef]
45. Pekrun, R. *Emotions and Learning*; Educational Practices Series; International Academy of Education (IAE): Geneva, Switzerland, 2014; Volume 24, pp. 1–31.
46. Darvin, R.; Norton, B. Language, identity, and investment in the twenty-first century. In *Language Policy and Political Issues in Education*; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2017; pp. 1–15. [CrossRef]
47. Teimouri, Y. L2 selves, emotions, and motivated behaviors. *Stud. Second Lang. Acquis.* **2017**, *39*, 681–709. [CrossRef]
48. Ushioda, E. Language learning motivation, self and identity: Current theoretical perspectives. *Comput. Assist. Lang. Learn.* **2011**, *24*, 199–210. [CrossRef]
49. EIT. *Students' Enrollment Bio-Data*; Eritrea Institute of Technology: Mai-Nefhi, Eritrea, 2018.
50. Cohen, L.; Manion, L.; Morrison, K. *Research Methods in Education*, 7th ed.; Routledge: Abingdon, UK, 2011.

51. Heigham, J.; Croker, R.A. (Eds.) *Qualitative Research in Applied Linguistics–A Practical Introduction*; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2009; pp. 182–199. [CrossRef]
52. Li, C. A Positive Psychology Perspective on Chinese Students' Emotional Intelligence, Classroom Emotions, and EFL Learning Achievement. Ph.D. Thesis, Xiamen University, Xiamen, China, 2018.
53. Alshenqeeti, H. Interviewing as a data collection method: A critical review. *Engl. Linguist. Res.* **2014**, *3*, 39–45. [CrossRef]
54. Maass, W.; Parsons, J.; Purao, S.; Storey, V.C.; Woo, C. Data-driven meets theory-driven research in the era of big data: Opportunities and challenges for information systems research. *J. Assoc.* **2018**, *19*, 1253–1273. [CrossRef]
55. Dörnyei, Z. Towards a better understanding of the L2 Learning Experience, the Cinderella of the L2 Motivational Self System. *Stud. Second Lang. Learn. Teach.* **2019**, *9*, 19–30. [CrossRef]
56. Dincer, A.; Göksu, A.; Takkaç, A.; Yazici, M. Common characteristics of an effective English language teacher. *Int. J. Educ. Res.* **2013**, *4*, 1–8.
57. Dewaele, J.M.; Gkonou, C.; Mercer, S. Do ESL/EFL teachers' emotional intelligence, teaching experience, proficiency and gender affect their classroom practice? In *Emotions in Second Language Teaching: Theory, Research and Teacher Education*; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2018; pp. 125–141. [CrossRef]
58. Ushioda, E. Language motivation in a reconfigured Europe: Access, identity, autonomy. *J. Multiling. Multicult. Dev.* **2006**, *27*, 148–161. [CrossRef]
59. Claire, K. *The Multilingual Subject*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2009.
60. Patton, M.Q. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 4th ed.; Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2015.
61. Lamb, M. Integrative motivation in a globalizing world. *System* **2004**, *32*, 3–19. [CrossRef]
62. Tadesse, A.; Lehesvuori, S.; Posti-Ahokas, H.; Moate, J. The learner-centred interactive pedagogy classroom: Its implications for dialogic interaction in Eritrean secondary schools. *Think. Ski. Creat.* **2023**, *50*, 101379. [CrossRef]
63. Oxford, R.L. Expanded perspectives on autonomous learners. *Innov. Lang. Learn. Teach.* **2015**, *9*, 58–71. [CrossRef]