

Exploring the Impact of Performance-based Assessment on Malian EFL Learners' Motivation

Kadidja Koné*

Ecole Normale d'Enseignement Technique et Professionnel (ENETP) Kabala Building 4, Bamako, Mali

Corresponding Author: Kadidja Koné, E-mail: kadidja_kone@yahoo.fr

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates university English learners' motivational and emotional responses to a performance-based assessment project before and after the project. Data were collected from 25 students learning English as a foreign language using two motivation questionnaires while they were working individually on a project called "Identity Poem". A quantitative analysis of the data using descriptive and inferential statistics revealed that participants were highly motivated before and after the project. This increase in the level of motivation at both stages could be explained by the supportive behavior of the teacher and by the topic of the project that aroused curiosity and interest. Their emotional state was also positive at both stages due to their perception of the feasibility of the project and a high level of confidence resulting from outstanding performance. Regarding the qualitative data, an analysis based on the number of references to a pattern was utilized. The findings corroborated the high level of motivation observed with the quantitative results before and after the project. They additionally supported the quantitative findings indicating that the participants' emotional state was relatively positive. However, a few learners were anxious, but their anxiety did not prevent them from completing the project. Regarding the pedagogical implications, project work can be used as an alternative in assessment so that learners can stay motivated during the assessment process. To achieve this aim, language teachers need to ensure that a project is within the learners' reach and provide them with quality feedback at every stage.

INTRODUCTION

Language assessment is one of the core elements in the process of teaching and learning a language. Its final outcome is frequently used to determine language learners' future undertakings such as being admitted into the university or being selected for a job interview. Therefore, an assessment should involve both teachers and learners so that its results can be beneficial to each of these stakeholders. However, in Mali most of the teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) orient their assessment toward the curriculum purposes only instead of taking into account their learners' specific learning goals. Another practice that is common in this teaching context is the use of old standardized tests by the teachers without adapting them to their learners' particularities. Most of the assessment instruments used in the Malian EFL context are decontextualized traditional tests such as multiple-choice questions, true or false questions, or matching. These forms of traditional assessment may not help a language learner use the language for communicative purposes. Moreover, they neither inform learners about their true abilities nor tell them how effectively they can practice what they have already learned in real-life situations

(J. D. Brown & Hudson, 1998). Furthermore, the assessors may have difficulty providing the learners with constructive feedback that contributes to successful language learning and teaching. Mahlberg (2013) further argued that the teachers offer "little or no formative feedback guiding future performance" (p. 12) with the traditional assessment. When an assessment does not meet the requirements set by a language learner, it can cause anxiety and demotivation instead of improving the teaching and learning processes. Therefore, orienting an assessment toward real-life situations contextualizes it and then stimulates a higher motivation and a greater interest in the task (Scouller, 1998; Stefanou & Parkes, 2003).

To make an assessment interactive and beneficial to both language teachers and learners, researchers and language teachers developed the notion of performance-based assessment (PBA). PBA provides the assessors with an opportunity to measure the targeted competence or performance while the test takers are performing it. According to Yu (2014), a PBA activity should reflect real-life situations. Additionally, it requires a test taker to develop their responses. In a similar way, Darling-Hammond (1994) and J. D. Brown and Hudson (1998) noted that PBA orients the test toward the produc-

tive skills of speaking and writing instead of highlighting the selected response tests such as multiple-choice questions. Examples of PBA activities include oral and written skills, oral interactive activities, experiments, field work, and projects done individually or in small groups (H. D. Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). These activities increase the authenticity of the assessment and therefore motivate the language learner to use the language in real-life situations. In summary, it can be inferred that PBA activities may have the potential to increase learners' level of motivation and interest in a task.

Despite these positive influences described earlier, PBA is not a preferred assessment method in the Malian EFL context. Moreover, the Malian context remains unexplored by researchers with regard to the use of PBA instruments and their impact on learners' motivation. The present study therefore attempts to understand how Malian EFL learners respond motivationally and emotionally to a PBA project before and after the project.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Classroom Motivation

Most of the specialists in the field of second language (L2) learning motivation consider motivation as one of the key predictors of successful language learning (Alrabai, 2014; Dörnyei, 1994). Based on the research by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) and Brookhart, Walsh, and Zientarski (2006), a learner is said to be motivated when they undertake an action and persist in achieving it. Additionally, L2 learners' motivation is complex, dynamic, and changing over time (Dörnyei, Henry, & Muir, 2016; Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998; Poupore, 2013, 2016).

As it is impossible to ignore motivation while teaching or learning an L2, Keller (1983) designed four sub-variables to explain classroom motivation. They were further developed by Dörnyei (1994) to measure L2 learners' motivation. These sub-variables include interest, relevance, expectancy, and satisfaction. Interest is about a learner's desire or curiosity to discover more about their L2. Relevance illustrates the extent to which a learner considers an L2 to be useful for their learning goals, desires, and values. Expectancy is related to the success, effort, and attention that an L2 learner gives to the L2 or classroom activities. It additionally takes into account the difficulties and challenges related to the completion of classroom tasks. Regarding satisfaction, it refers to the good grades, praise, or positive appreciation that an L2 learner receives after completing a task. The present study will adapt these variables and use them.

Benefits of Performance-based Assessment

In regard to H. D. Brown and Abeywickrama's (2010) principles of assessment, the contextualized activities assessed through PBA have a high washback, authenticity, and validity.

Washback

Washback is the positive or negative impact that testing has on the process of teaching and learning (H. D. Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). Positive feedback can enhance learning and generate a positive atmosphere in the classroom. Additionally, it increases the cooperation between teachers and learners and gives the students a voice. In other words, they discuss their performance or grades with the teacher so that they can improve their ongoing work (H. D. Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010).

Authenticity

An assessment is thought to be authentic when it reflects real-life situations (H. D. Brown, 2007). Authenticity is also defined by Bachman and Palmer (1996) as "the degree of correspondence of the characteristics of a given language test task to the features of a TLU [TLU means target language use] task" (p. 23). Authentic assessment highlights the productive skills of speaking and writing. It provides the teacher with an opportunity to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching (H. D. Brown, 2007). Furthermore, it promotes autonomy since learners perform real-world tasks during the assessment process.

Validity

A test is said to be valid when it measures what it is intended to evaluate (H. D. Brown, 2007; Messick, 1996). In other words, a valid test can be used for communicative purposes. For example, the best way to measure a learner's speaking performance consists in designing activities that require them to speak while the assessors are assessing their skills.

Positive Impact of Performance-based Assessment on Language Learning and Motivation

Research studies related to PBA showed that it has a positive impact on the process of learning and teaching a language. For example, a study conducted by Fook and Sidhu (2010) with two lecturers and 20 graduate students majoring in education demonstrated that authentic assessment, also known as PBA, had a positive effect on these students' English learning. This type of assessment allowed them to reflect on the teaching and learning processes to set new goals for their learning. Setting a goal or vision for language learning and striving to achieve it at all costs can generate an intense motivational feeling that can support an L2 learning for a long period (Dörnyei et al., 2016).

Other studies such as Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2010) indicated that role play, an example of PBA activity, had a positive effect on EFL learners' speaking abilities. The analysis of the data collected from 60 students revealed that role play allowed these participants to negotiate and interact. Achieving fluency in speaking shows learners that they are accomplishing a real-world task that is typically fulfilled by the target language community. It gives them something tangible that can be evaluated at the end of a teaching unit.

Besides, it increases their level of motivation, which in turn stimulates a successful language learning.

Additionally, studies by Birjandi and Tamjid (2010), Charvade, Jahandar, and Khodabandehlou (2012), Chen (2008), Ebersviller (2013), Min (2006), and Sajedi (2014) found that self-assessment, peer-review, portfolio assessment, and journals considered as inclusive elements of PBA based on Koné (2015) had a positive impact on L2 learners' writing skills. They also improved learners' overall learning. These alternatives in assessment transform the writing process into an interactive communication between teachers and learners and between the learners themselves before the writer reaches the final step of submission. Furthermore, they increase the autonomy of the learner who can revise or edit a writing piece using a rubric or checklist designed for this purpose.

In a similar vein, Zohoorian (2015) collected data from 60 Iranian EFL learners to investigate their level of motivation while authentic assessment tasks were used to evaluate them. The results indicated that the motivation level of these learners increased and they also enjoyed learning. These findings support Nier, Silvio, and Malone's (2014) study indicating that language learners would prefer their teachers to orient assessment toward real-world situations instead of using old standardized tests that did not reflect their learning goals.

In line with previous research, a study by Koné (2015) suggested that PBA, specifically an oral presentation project had a positive impact on English as a second language learners' motivation to complete their project. The participants' high motivation was sustained by a positive emotional state in the form of enjoyment, confidence, and satisfaction with their performance. This finding implying that positive emotional feelings could maintain motivation during a project work parallels Ibrahim's (2020) study, which also found that an intense motivational feeling was not only fueled by a vision, but was also energized by the satisfaction and enjoyment resulting from an exceptional achievement.

Purpose of the Study

Although there is a growing body of studies related to the positive impact of PBA on language learning and motivation, the Malian EFL context remains unexplored. As a result, this study attempts to fill this empirical gap by examining Malian EFL learners' motivational and emotional responses to a PBA project called Identity Poem. To reach these goals, the following research questions are addressed:

- 1: What are university EFL learners' motivational and emotional responses to a PBA project completed individually?
- 2: Are there any motivational and emotional variations across time, that is, before and after the project?

METHODS

Research Design

I used a quantitative research method, namely two motivation questionnaires adapted from Koné (2015) and Poupore

(2013) to design the present study. However, it is necessary to mention that the questionnaires were comprised of five-response option Likert scale and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions contained in the Likert scale aimed to extract quantitative data, which evaluated the variables of motivation and emotional state. The responses to the open-ended questions, on the other hand, allowed to collect qualitative data to better understand participants' emotional feelings. According to Dörnyei and Tagushi (2010), the open-ended questions allow participants to explain some of their responses or choices. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) additionally argued that a mixed-methods technique aims to emphasize the strengths of each method and therefore mitigates its weaknesses. However, in the case of the present study the questionnaire allowed me to have mixed data (i.e., quantitative and qualitative).

Participants

The sample involved 25 sophomores learning English as a foreign language and I was teaching the class. They were majoring in finance and accounting. Convenience sampling technique was used to select them. There were 17 male and 8 female students and their ages range from 17 to 25. Their mean age was 20. They all speak French as their official language. The course aimed at developing mainly the learners' communicative skills, but it is worth mentioning that the four skills were integrated (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Each semester they have 30-hour English course that counts toward their bachelor's degree completion. The participants of this study will be referred to as learners, students, or participants.

Identity Poem Project

The participants were working on a project called "Identity Poem" when data were collected. The idea of Identity Poem as a way for students to introduce themselves orally was developed from a course that I took as a graduate student at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The course that the participants of this study were taking lasted for 8 weeks, but the project itself spanned two weeks. It aimed at writing a poem with one's first name and family name and presented it orally to the class. However, each learner was expected to highlight their identity in such a way that the audience could distinguish them. In addition to the teacher-researcher, another English teacher whose role was to assess the learners' performance to increase the reliability of the assessment tool was invited on the day of the final presentation. Learners were also allowed to invite their friends and relatives. The assessment criteria ranged from creativity, speaking only English, inclusion of full names in the poem, to presentation skills such as eye contact with the audience. These criteria were discussed with the learners before they began working on their project.

Data Collection Instruments and Administration

The present study adapted the sub-variables suggested by Dörnyei (1994), Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), Koné (2015),

and Poupore (2013) to measure pre- and post-project motivational and emotional states. These authors proposed the sub-variables of task attraction, effort expectation, and success expectation to measure the construct of motivation at the pre-project level. Concerning post-project motivation, the sub-variables of interest, reported effort, and result assessment were utilized to measure the construct of motivation at this stage.

Regarding the sub-variable of emotion, it was added based on Dörnyei (2014) who argued that it is an integral element of the construct of motivation, especially if the activity requires learners to speak their L2. The emotional state in relation to before and after the project was composed of being at ease, a sense of worry, nervousness, and confidence. Project difficulty and a sense of balance between one's skills and the level of challenge caused by the project were also added as affective variables. The variables of difficulty and challenge-skill balance were added based on Poupore (2013) who argued that a project-related difficulty can enhance or block its feasibility. A project-related difficulty should therefore be adapted to learners' skills so that they can successfully accomplish it. However, it is necessary to note that the questions contained in the original questionnaires were adapted to respond to the specific needs of the present study.

Pre-project motivation questionnaire

The pre-project motivation questionnaire composed of five parts was used to measure the construct of motivation before the participants started working on their project. The first part included seven closed-ended questions, which were on a five-response option Likert scale ranging from "Not at all" to "Very" (see appendix A for more details). At this stage, two items targeted project attraction, two items also measured effort expectation, and two items were related to success expectation. These sub-variables evaluated total pre-project motivation. The sub-variable of project attraction refers to the enjoyment and enthusiasm that an L2 learner will devote to a project. Regarding the sub-variable of effort expectation, it is related to the attention and effort that an L2 learner will give to an activity. The sub-variable of success expectation emphasizes the performance and appreciation that an L2 learner expects to achieve or obtain after completing a task in their L2. The last question was about the project related difficulty and it was on a five-response option Likert scale ranging from "Not all difficult" to "Very difficult". The questions were displayed randomly as recommended by Dörnyei and Tagushi (2010) so that the participants could not simply repeat the same answers. As a whole, three sub-variables measured the construct of motivation with two items evaluating each sub-variable at the pre-project level as seen in table 1.

The second part was related to the variable of challenge-skill balance and it was also on a five-response option Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree" (see Appendix A). One item was used to evaluate it.

The third part was concerned with the variable of emotion and it was on a five-response option Likert scale ranging

Table 1. Pre-project motivation variables

Sub-Variables	Items	
Project Attraction	How enthusiastic are you to start this Identity Poem project?	How enjoyable do you expect to find this Identity Poem project?
Effort Expectation	How much effort do you expect to put into this Identity Poem project?	How much focused attention do you expect to put in this Identity Poem project?
Success Expectation	How well do you expect to do on this Identity Poem project?	If this Identity Poem project were graded, what sort of grade would you expect to get in comparison to your classmates?

from "Not at all" to "Very". Four items were measuring the variable of emotion at this level. They measured learners' level of anxiety and how comfortable they were with the Identity Poem project before completing it.

The fourth part was about four open-ended questions (refer to Appendix A). The last part was concerned with the participants' biographic information, but their names were omitted to keep them anonymous.

Post-project motivation questionnaire

The post-project motivation questionnaire was comprised of five parts. It measured the same variables as the pre-project motivation questionnaire, but included seven open-ended questions. The first part contained seven closed-ended questions, which were on a five-response option Likert scale ranging from "Not at all" to "Very" (see appendix B for more details). Two items measured project enjoyment, two items targeted reported effort, and two items evaluated result assessment. These three sub-variables measured total post-project motivation. The sub-variable of project enjoyment deals with the enjoyment and interest that an L2 learner experienced after completing a task in their L2. The sub-variable of reported effort focuses on the attention and effort that an L2 learner gave to an activity. The sub-variable of result assessment refers to the evaluation of the performance achieved by an L2 learner during a project work. Three sub-variables were evaluating the construct of motivation at the post-project level like in the pre-project motivation questionnaire as shown in table 2.

The second part was about the project challenge-skill balance and it was also on a five-response option Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree". One item measured the project challenge-skill balance at this level.

The third part was concerned with the variable of emotion and it was on a five-response option Likert scale. Four items measured the participants' emotional feeling after completing the project. The fourth part was concerned with seven open-ended questions (see appendix B). The last part was about the participants' biographic information, but their names were excluded to keep them anonymous.

Table 2. Post-project motivation variables

Sub-Variables	Items	
Project Interest	How interesting did you find this Identity Poem project?	How enjoyable did you find this Identity Poem project?
Reported Effort	How much effort did you put into this Identity Poem project?	How much focused attention did you give while doing this Identity Poem project?
Result Assessment	How well did you do on this Identity Poem project?	If you could grade yourself for this Identity Poem project, what sort of grade would you give to yourself in comparison to the rest of your classmates?

Pre- and post-project motivation questionnaires administration

First, I discussed the two questionnaires with two colleagues and they selected six students to pilot them. These learners were not attending the English course that I was teaching to the targeted participants. After the piloting phase, these colleagues suggested that I explain the different parts of the questionnaires to the targeted participants as a group before they started completing them. They also recommended that I give the targeted participants 30 minutes to complete the questionnaires instead of 20 minutes that I had previously set for the completion of the questionnaires. Those suggestions were taken into account before administering the two questionnaires. Concerning the students selected for the piloting phase, they did not report any misunderstanding or issues regarding the items contained in the questionnaires or their completion. The teachers were also satisfied with the questionnaires and they did not make any further recommendations.

Additionally, I conducted an item reliability analysis using SPSS 23 software in order to determine the item internal consistency expressed by Cronbach alpha coefficient before administering the final version of the questionnaires to the participants. This analysis aimed to determine whether the items selected for the two questionnaires were measuring the variables for which they were intended. An optimal reliability coefficient should exceed 0.70 even with short scales containing three or four items (Dörnyei & Tagushi, 2010). However, Dörnyei and Tagushi (2010) explained that lower Cronbach alpha coefficient such as .60 can be accepted in the second language acquisition due to the various areas targeted in the questionnaires. Based on this argument, it can be concluded that the items contained in the questionnaires of this study were measuring the construct of motivation and affective variables before and after the project as shown in table 3.

Moreover, the original version of the questionnaires were successfully used by Koné (2015) with students learning English as an L2 in the USA and Poupore (2013) with Korean EFL students. This also increased their reliability although they were adapted to meet the specific requirements

Table 3. Item reliability analysis for pre- and post- project motivation and emotion variables

Variables	Cronbach alpha Coefficient		
	Number of Items	Pre-project	Post-project
Motivation	6	0.77	0.69
Emotion	4	0.76	0.80

of the present study. Therefore, it can be concluded that both questionnaires were ready to be administered to the targeted participants to examine their motivational and emotional responses to the Identity Poem project before and after the project.

After this successful piloting phase, I used the class time to administer the pre-project motivation questionnaire to the targeted participants as a group just before they began working on their project, but they had received instructions for it. Dörnyei and Tagushi (2010) argued that group administration ensures that all participants complete the questionnaire. Regarding the post-project motivation questionnaire, it was also administered to the participants as a group. They completed the questionnaire the same day after all of them (25 participants) had finished presenting their Identity Poem.

Data Analysis

Regarding the quantitative data, I used SPSS 23 software to analyze them. Descriptive statistics in the form of means and standard deviation was used to calculate the mean scores of the motivational and emotional variables. Concerning the variation across time, that is, pre-project versus post-project, inferential statistics in the form of paired samples t-tests were used to measure the differences. An effect size statistics, specifically eta squared was also calculated to determine the magnitude of the differences in the means. While interpreting the value of eta squared, .01 was considered as a small effect size, .06 referred to a moderate effect size, and .14 meant a large effect size based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines.

Concerning the quantitative analysis, I gave a numerical code to each scale; 1 was given to "Not at all..." and 5 referred to "Very...". The sub-variables of project attraction, effort expectation, and success expectation were added to obtain pre-project total motivation for each participant. The emotional sub-variable of feeling at ease, nervousness, worry, and confidence are combined to obtain pre-project total emotional state. It is important to mention that reverse scoring was utilized for the worry and nervousness items because they infer a negative meaning (i.e., 1 was used for 5 and 2 was used for 4) based on (Dörnyei and Tagushi, 2010). Regarding the sub-variable of challenge-skill balance, 5 was used for "Strongly Agree" and 1 was applied to "Strongly Disagree". The same calculation was done with the post-project motivational and emotional variables.

With regard to the qualitative data (responses to the open-ended questions), they were analyzed qualitatively. I first read the data several times to comprehend them. After this

iterative process, I identified and interpreted the patterns that emerged most to explain the participants' choices. Patterns were identified based on their number of references. This qualitative data analysis technique was inspired by Creswell (2013), Dörnyei and Tagushi (2010), Harding and Whitehead (2013), Hsieh and Shannon (2005), and Nimehchisalem (2018). According to Dörnyei and Tagushi (2010), an interpretation based on the number of references to a theme or pattern can allow a researcher to reliably report and interpret what participants said directly or indirectly like in these sample comments:

"I like *when the professor gives some help and tell my force and weaknesses* because it helps me to do a good presentation."

"I really *appreciate the teacher's comments* and it permits me to work hard to make a good performance."

As a result, quality feedback as a liking aspect of the project was counted as two. Although all the responses were taken into account to determine the patterns identified in the data and their number of references, only two or three sample comments were chosen as illustration for each pattern. This decision has been motivated by the clarity and relevance of the comments.

RESULTS

The report was organized around the two research questions:

- What are EFL learners' motivational and emotional responses to a PBA project completed individually?
- Are there any motivational and emotional variations across time, that is, before and after completing the project?

Motivational Variables

After analyzing the data based on the five-response option Likert scale with 1 as the lowest point and 5 as the highest point, the findings revealed that a considerable number of learners were highly motivated to carry out the Identity Poem project at both stages as can be seen in the mean scores displayed in table 4.

Pre- and post-project motivation variation

A paired sample t-test was conducted to measure the variation from the pre-project to the post-project stages. The findings indicated that there was a statistically significant increase in the participants' project attraction at the pre-project stage

and their enjoyment at the post-project level as illustrated in table 4. However, there were no significant differences for effort expectation/reported effort, success expectation/result assessment, and total motivation at the pre-project and post-project levels.

Emotional Variables

The quantitative results suggested that the participants were relatively in a positive emotional state. In other words, they were at their ease and they were also confident at both stages. Additionally, they were less nervous and less worried as shown in table 5.

Pre- and post-project emotional variation

The variable of emotional state did not show any statistically significant variation from the pre-project to the post-project stages as can be seen in table 5.

Challenge-skill Balance and Project Difficulty

As shown in table 6, the participants thought that the project was slightly difficult and they believed that their skills allowed them to deal with the challenges related to the completion of the project. Variations from the pre-project to the post-project stages were statistically significant for both variables.

Open-ended Question Responses

I interpreted the qualitative data based on the patterns that emerged most from the participants' responses. Some sample comments that were relevant to understanding their responses are displayed as can be seen in tables 7 and 8.

Pre-project open-ended question responses

The participants were asked four questions, but some of the questions required them to select as shown in table 7. The number of references to the various patterns is indicated in parentheses. The questions were targeting the participants' emotional state.

Post-project open-ended question responses

The participants had the choice between questions 1 and 2, and between questions 3 and 4 as shown in table 8. However,

Table 4. Learners' motivational responses to identity poem project

Variables	Pre-Project		Post-Project		Pre/post Difference	Sig. at $p < .05$		
	M	SD	M	SD		t(24)	p	eta ²
Attraction/ Enjoyment	4.42	0.49	4.68	0.37	-0.26	-2.13	0.04	0.21
Effort Expectation/ Reported Effort	4.56	0.52	4.42	0.51	0.14	NS		
Success Expectation/ Result Assessment	4.52	0.44	4.38	0.54	0.14	NS		
Total Motivation	4.50	0.39	4.49	0.37	0.01	NS		

N= 25; based on a five-response option Likert scale; NS = non-significant results

Table 5. Learners' emotional responses to identity poem project

Variables	Pre-Project		Post-Project		Pre/post Difference	Sig. at $p < .05$		
	M	SD	M	SD		$t(24)$	p	η^2
Emotional State	3.19	0.46	3.33	0.66	-0.14	NS		

N = 25; results based on a five-option Likert scale; NS = non-significant results

Table 6. Project difficulty and challenge

Variables	Pre-Project		Post-Project		Pre/post Difference	Sig. at $p < .05$		
	M	SD	M	SD		$t(24)$	p	η^2
Difficulty	2.60	0.86	2.08	0.70	0.52	2.82	0.01	0.24
Challenge-skill balance	4.28	0.61	4.72	0.45	-0.44	-2.52	0.01	0.17

N = 25; results based on a five-option Likert scale; NS = non-significant results

Table 7. Patterns at the pre-project stage

Questions	Number of Participants who Answered each Question	Patterns and Number of References	Sample Comments
1. What are some of the reasons why you feel nervous before starting working on your Identity Poem project?	5	- Non-familiarity with speaking activities (2) - Pronunciation (1) - Test Taking Anxiety (2)	"I am afraid to present and this is the first time I present orally in my English class." "I'm naturally very very anxious when I have a test and I think that I will not be capable to speak." "I am very nervous because my English pronunciation is very bad and the class will not comprehend me"
2. What are some of the reasons why you do not feel nervous before starting working on your Identity Poem project?	20	- Attachment to the topic (7) - Not a timed test (6) - Teacher's support (7)	"I love the topic Identity Poem and I am sure I will do my best in it so I feel cool!" "I needn't to worry about time and a supervisor is not after me. I will prepare my poem without pressure and I really feel relaxed if all the tests were like this" "I feel fine because I can show my poem to the teacher and I will ameliorate it before the presentation"
3. Why do you think you will do well on your Identity Poem project?	23	- Preparation (15) - Familiarity with speaking activities (5) - Less pressure (3)	"I will do a lot of research because I can use a dictionary and ask people for help. I am sure I will present an excellent poem." "I like oral presentations and I used to present in my youth association" "A test like this doesn't have a lot of tension and I will do a great poem"
4. Why do you think you will not do well on your Identity Poem project?	2	- Pronunciation (1) - Workload (1)	"Again I will not do well because my pronunciation is very bad" "I will not finish in two weeks because I must learn other lessons"

all the participants were expected to answer questions 5, 6, and 7. The number of references to the different patterns is indicated in parentheses. Regarding question 6, all the participants were expected to respond to it, but only three of them revealed that they did not like certain aspects of the project. Although all the participants were supposed to answer question 7, only six learners reacted to it by mentioning some difficulties as shown in table 8. The questions were targeting

the participants' emotional state, project difficulty, and project enjoyment.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of the findings is organized around the participants' motivational and emotional responses to Identity Poem project, their variations from the pre-project to

Table 8. Patterns at the post-project stage

Questions	Number of Participants who Answered each Question	Patterns and Number of References	Sample Comments
1. What are some of the reasons why you feel nervous after completing your Identity Poem project?	3	- Low Performance (2) - Pronunciation (1)	“My presentation was not good and my poem was not charming [charming means attractive]. Some students did a very nice poem” “I am sure the class and the teacher have not understood my English pronunciation”
2. What are some of the reasons why you do not feel nervous after completing your Identity Poem project?	22	- Satisfaction with performance (14) - Confidence (5) - Audience Positive Attitudes (3)	“I did all the things the teacher asked and I presented well my poem.” “I rely on my presentation talents and I did an excellent poem presentation” “I feel great because the class applauded my presentation and they liked my poem”
3. Why do you think you did well on your Identity Poem project?	23	- High Performance (17) - Clear goals (6)	“I did an excellent poem and I presented very well. I am sure I will obtain an excellent note” “Everything was explained in the project and I knew what I should do. The different points in the grade were explained and the teacher also helped all the time”
4. Why do you think you did not do well on your Identity Poem project?	2	Speaking Anxiety (2)	“I was too nervous and I did not present well because I was too timid to speak in front of everybody” “My voice trembled and I think the class did not understand me because it was serious”
5. What aspects of this project did you like and why?	25	- Topic (13) - Authenticity (6) - Teacher’s Support (4) - Novelty (2)	“I like topics about my life and I was happy to talk about my identity in creative ways.” “I like that the teacher helps and she corrected my poem before the presentation. Because of that I was really determined to do a good presentation.” “I like tests like this. You don’t need to do everything in the class and you can use a lot resources to ameliorate your poem. The teacher gives you advice too.”
6. What aspects of this project didn’t you like and why?	3	- Speaking fluently (2) - Presenting in front of an audience (1)	“I don’t like to speak because my English is not good” “I am afraid and I don’t like to speak in front of a lot of persons because I forget about parts of my preparation”
7. What aspects of this project were difficult to achieve and why?	6	- Speaking in front of an audience (3) - Producing coherent poem (2) - Workload and time (1)	“I am a timid person so to recite my poem in front of everybody was really complicated for me.” “It was not easy to connect my names in order to have a poem which is well organized” “It was a lot of work for two weeks. Madam could give three weeks.”

post-project stages, and the pedagogical implications resulting from this discussion.

Motivational Responses

In line with previous studies where Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2010), Koné (2015), and Zohoorian (2015) found that PBA activities increased learners’ level of motivation is corroborated by the findings of the present study. In other words, the results revealed that the participants responded positively to the Identity Poem project. These positive

motivational responses are explained by the project’s topic that was captivating and interesting. It gives these students a voice to introduce themselves to a real audience and therefore increases their feeling of enjoyment. Besides, a project that reflects learners’ identity and uniqueness has the potential to increase their motivational engagement (Dörnyei et al., 2016).

Other reasons for these positive motivational and emotional responses are related to the supportive behavior of the teacher, the process-oriented aspect of a PBA project, and the goals of the project that were congruent with learners’

language learning vision. Therefore, L2 learning motivation specialists consider vision as a significant element in an L2 learner's long-term goal achievement such as speaking a foreign language (Muir & Dörnyei, 2013). It can induce and maintain their motivation until that goal is reached. Certain participants also considered the teacher's support as the cause of their success or a liking aspect of the project because they are not used to being supported by their professors during the assessment process in this teaching and learning context. Thus, having a positive relationship with the teacher and receiving quality feedback that they could use to improve their poem explained why they responded positively to the project. A test that did not require them to be confined in a classroom under a teacher's supervision may have also justified why they were highly motivated. Additionally, informing learners about the goals of a project and the assessment criteria increases their chance of performing higher as highlighted by this participant while talking about the liking aspects of the project: "I appreciate that everything was precise and I know the things I need to do to have a good note and speak English". What is interesting is that these positive comments were corroborated by the quantitative results as can be seen in the mean scores of the participants' total motivation before the project ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.39$) and after the project ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.37$).

Emotional Responses

Learners' positive motivational responses can be justified by a positive emotional state. The satisfaction with their performance enhanced their confidence hence a decrease in the level of their test taking anxiety. This positive emotional state triggered their motivation and maintained it until they presented their project. This finding is supported by Ibrahim's (2020) study, which explained that a positive emotional feeling had the power to sustain language learners' motivation before they reached their learning goals. Having the impression that they are on track to reach their goals based on the teacher's quality feedback also reinforced their determination to succeed at all costs. These explanations were endorsed by the quantitative findings, which indicated that the learners were only slightly nervous, worried, anxious, and more confident as described in the mean scores of their emotional state before the project ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.46$) and after the project ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.66$). They lend support to a study by Koné (2015) revealing that positive emotional feelings could induce and maintain EFL learners' motivation in addition to a topic that stimulated passion. The relationship between positive emotional feelings and higher levels of motivation additionally reflects Dörnyei et al.'s (2016) notion of positive progress checks that drive learners to fully engage in a task or project work.

However, these positive results should not overshadow the difficulties that were mentioned by a few participants. For example, three students considered speaking fluently as a difficult aspect of the project or a factor that could prevent them from performing well. As a result, they were slightly anxious and less confident. What is interesting is that they did not explain that completing the project as a whole was out of their

reach. This difficulty may be related to these learners' non-familiarity with project work or learner-centered approaches. It is important to mention that grammar translation is mainly used to teach English in the Malian EFL teaching context. Therefore, switching from one method to another during the process of assessment can be challenging for some students due to their individual differences or learning habits.

Motivational Variations from the Pre-Project Stage to the Post-Project Stage

In support with the previous research that suggested that "motivation is not a static state but rather a dynamically evolving and changing entity" (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998, p. 44), the findings of this study revealed that there was a statistically significant increase in the participants' project attraction at the pre-project phase and their enjoyment at the post-project stage. Some reasons for this statistically significant difference can be related to the fact that these learners are not used to exhibiting their creativity because the traditional tests only require them to recall what was done during the course. Therefore, working on an activity that gives them some opportunities to show their talent and gain confidence might boost their enthusiasm and interest in the project.

Consistent with Poupore's (2013) assumption stating that task motivation operates as a complex system, the results of the present study indicate that these participants' level of motivation varies depending on the assessment methods and materials, the level of difficulty and challenge, and the teacher's personality. The variables of difficulty and challenge-skill balance showed some statistically significant variations with a decrease at the post-project level. As the project-related difficulty and challenge were adapted to the learners' current level, this could explain why they considered the project to be within their reach. In addition, this major finding supports Dörnyei's (2014) motivational teaching practices that require the teacher to adapt teaching and learning materials to the specific needs of the learners so they can engage in their learning.

Emotional State Before and After the Project

Regarding the variable of emotion, it did not show any statistically significant variation. However, the qualitative results revealed that fewer learners felt nervous after carrying out their project work. For example, five learners felt nervous before starting their project work, but only three students felt nervous after accomplishing it. Being slightly worried and nervous before starting working on a project can be interpreted as a sign of concentration and interest if it does not become a "lasting trait" (Oxford, 1999, p. 60). Additionally, zero level of anxiety can be interpreted as a lack of interest in the targeted activity since a transient anxiety is not harmful if it does not impede the process of learning.

Pedagogical Implications for Language Teachers

Based on the results of this study, it is worth using a PBA project at least once or twice a semester so that language

learners can enjoy completing an assessment task and consider it as another type of learning. However, a language teacher should ensure the following conditions before using a PBA project as an assessment tool.

First, a language teacher must design a project that is susceptible to increase learners' curiosity and attachment and therefore generate a successful language learning. A teacher can achieve this aim by taking into account learners' multiple identities, lived experiences, and specific learning goals as theorized by Dörnyei, Henry, and Muir (2016) who noted that designing a project that meets the requirements cited earlier will induce a higher motivation that can help a language learner reach some of the goals that they had set for their learning (pp. 187-188).

Second, a teacher must be available and offer their support to their learners in the form of quality feedback during a project work. Positive feedback maintains learners' high motivation and pushes them to surpass themselves in order to attain the goals set for a project work. It also consolidates the teacher-student relationship so that a successful language learning can take place in a positive classroom atmosphere.

Third, a teacher should help learners control their speaking anxiety so that it does not become a trait. For example, they can use some of the solutions suggested by Dörnyei (2014) and Oxford (1999). According to these authors, a teacher can talk with an anxious learner to raise their awareness of anxiety and then develop solutions such as taking deep breaths before speaking, reducing competition in the classroom, or being lenient in allowing learners to make mistakes while speaking if these mistakes do not interfere with overall understanding.

CONCLUSIONS

The primary objective of this study was to examine Malian EFL learners' motivational and emotional responses to a PBA project before and after the project. The findings demonstrated that Malian EFL learners' level of motivation increased with PBA project. Variations in the level of motivation from the pre-project to the post-project stages were statistically significant for the sub-variable project attraction and enjoyment and the affective variables of difficulty and challenge-skill balance. In addition, they revealed that EFL learners' level of motivation varied according to the project topic, their performance, the assessment materials, the teacher's personality, and the feasibility of the project. It is important to note that challenges (such as fluency and accuracy) did not prevent participants from completing the project as a whole. However, it is worth mentioning that this study has some limitations related to questionnaires as data collection instruments. Participants' responses can be biased because they may present themselves in a way that meets the researcher's needs. Finally, further studies should explore the benefits of PBA to understand how they would facilitate EFL development in francophone Africa.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Pre-Project Motivation Questionnaire

I would appreciate it if you could please complete this questionnaire before you start your Identity Poem project. The purpose is to better understand your motivational responses before you start this project. This questionnaire is composed of five parts. Please read each instruction carefully. This is not a test, so there are no “right” or “wrong” answers and you do not even have to write your name. I will use the results of this survey only for my research purpose to improve the processes of teaching and learning English, so please give your answers openly and truthfully. Thank you very much for your help!

Part 1

In this part of the questionnaire, I would like you to read the following questions and select the answer that you feel is the best.

1. **How enthusiastic are you to start this Identity Poem project?**
 - Not at all enthusiastic
 - Not enthusiastic
 - Not very enthusiastic
 - Enthusiastic
 - Very enthusiastic
2. **How well do you expect to do on this Identity Poem project?**
 - Not at all well
 - Not well
 - Not very well
 - Well
 -Very well
3. **How much effort do you expect to put into this Identity Poem project?**
 - I don't have to give much effort
 - I have to make a bit of an effort
 - I have to make some effort
 - I have to try hard
 - I have to try very hard
4. **If this Identity Poem project were graded, what sort of grade would you expect to get for this oral presentation in comparison to your classmates?**
 - Far below average
 - Just below average
 - Neither below nor above average
 - Just above average
 - Far above average
5. **How enjoyable do you expect to find this Identity Poem project?**
 - Not at all enjoyable
 - Not enjoyable
 - Not very enjoyable
 - Enjoyable
 -Very enjoyable
6. **How much focused attention do you expect to put in this Identity Poem project?**
 - Not much attention
 - A bit of attention

- Some attention
- Much attention
- Very much attention

7. **How difficult is this Identity Poem project going to be for you?**

- Not at all difficult
- Not difficult
- Not very difficult
- Difficult
- Very difficult

Part 2

In this part of the questionnaire, I would like you to select the circle that best indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement.

8. **Please select a circle.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither disagree nor agree

 Agree Strongly agree

When performing this project it may be challenging, but I believe my skills will allow me to meet the challenge.

Part 3

In this part of the questionnaire, I would like you to simply select the circle that best describes your emotional feeling before starting this Identity Poem project.

9. **How is your general emotional feeling just before starting this project?**

- a. Not at ease At ease
 b. Not nervous Nervous
 c. Not worried Worried
 d. Not confident Confident

Part 4

In this part of the questionnaire, I would like you to read the questions carefully and write your responses in the space provided below the questions.

If you feel nervous or a little nervous before starting this Identity Poem project, answer question 10.

If you do not feel nervous before starting this Identity Poem project, answer question 11.

10. **What are some of the reasons why you feel nervous before starting this project?**

11. **What are some of the reasons why you do not feel nervous before starting this project?**

If you think you will do well on this Identity Poem project, answer question 12 and if you think you will not do well on this oral presentation project, answer question 13.

12. Why do you think you will do well on this Identity Poem project?

13. Why do you think you will not do well on this Identity Poem project?

Part 5

In this part of the questionnaire, I would like you to fill in this form, please.

Age:.....

Gender:.....

Good luck with your Identity Poem project!
Thank you for your contribution!

Appendix B: Post-Project Motivation Questionnaire

Now that you have finished with your Identity Poem project, I would appreciate it if you could please complete this questionnaire. The purpose is to better understand your motivational responses after completing this Identity Poem project. This questionnaire is composed of five parts. Please read each instruction carefully. This is not a test, so there are no "right" or "wrong" answers and you do not even have to write your name. I will use the results of this survey to improve the processes of teaching and learning English, so please give your answers openly and truthfully. Thank you very much for your help!

Part 1

In this part of the questionnaire, I would like you to read the following questions and select the answer that you feel is the best.

1. How interesting did you find this Identity Poem project?
 - Not at all interesting
 - Not interesting
 - Not very interesting
 - Interesting
 - Very interesting
2. How well did you do on this Identity Poem project?
 - Not at all well
 - Not well
 - Not very well
 - Well
 -Very well
3. How much effort did you put into this Identity Poem project?
 - I didn't have to give much effort
 - I had to make a bit of an effort
 - I had to make some effort
 - I had to try hard
 - I had to try very hard

4. If you could grade yourself for this Identity Poem project, what sort of grade would you give to yourself in comparison to the rest of your classmates?

- Far below average
- Just below average
- Neither below nor above average
- Just above average
- Far above average

5. How enjoyable did you find this Identity Poem project?

- Not at all enjoyable
- Not enjoyable
- Not very enjoyable
- Enjoyable
-Very enjoyable

6. How much focused attention did you give while doing this Identity Poem project?

- Not much attention
- A bit of attention
- Some attention
- Much attention
- Very much attention

7. How difficult did you find this Identity Poem project?

- Not at all difficult
- Not difficult
- Not very difficult
- Difficult
- Very difficult

Part 2

In this part of the questionnaire, I would like you to select the circle that best indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement.

8. Please select a circle.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree

Agree Strongly agree

When performing this project it was challenging, but I believe my skills allowed me to meet the challenge.

Part 3

In this part of the questionnaire, I would like you to simply select the circle that best describes your emotional feeling just after finishing doing this Identity Poem project.

9. How is your general emotional feeling just after finishing doing this Identity Poem project?

- a. Not at ease At ease
- b. Not nervous Nervous
- c. Not worried Worried
- d. Not confident Confident

Part 4

In this part of the questionnaire, I would like you to read the questions carefully and write your responses in the space provided below the questions.

If you feel nervous or a little nervous after doing this Identity Poem project, answer question 10.

If you do not feel nervous after doing this Identity Poem project, answer question 11.

10. What are some of the reasons why you feel nervous after doing this Identity Poem project?

11. What are some of the reasons why you do not feel nervous after doing this Identity Poem project?

If you think you did well on this Identity Poem project, answer question 12 and if you think you did not do well on this oral presentation project, answer question 13.

12. Why do you think you did well on this Identity Poem project?

13. Why do you think you did not do well on this Identity Poem project?

14. What aspects of this project did you like and why?

15. What aspects of this project didn't you like and why?

16. What aspects of this project were difficult to achieve and why?

Part 5

In this part of the questionnaire, I would like you to fill in this form, please.

Age:.....

Gender:.....

Thank you for your contribution!