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Understanding the Perception of Emotionality of GenZers as a Way of Developing Well-Being

Abstract

Emotionality plays a significant role in teaching and learning a foreign language. Emotions are always present in a foreign language classroom, and teachers and learners aim to determine how to regulate them (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). In the literature on applied linguistics and psycholinguistics, the importance of emotions has been subject to considerable discussion (Dewaele, 2010; Pavlenko, 2006; Wierzbicka, 1999). We already know that students' and teachers' emotional needs should be discussed, understood, and met to develop (Aron, 2013; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Despite the importance of emotionality, there remains a paucity of evidence on language learners' perceptions of emotions and emotionality. Researching perception seems to be an essential strategy for understanding any element influencing the affective dimension of a foreign language classroom, especially when we consider the psychological state of teachers and students due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the generally poor mental health that characterises young people from Generation Z. Thus, the primary aim of the following study was to analyse spoken definitions of emotionality, provided by Generation Z university students (N = 70). The analysis was conducted at the intersection of psycholinguistics and applied linguistics. It employed qualitative content analysis. The results show an informative picture of how GenZers talk about such personal issues as emotions, which will certainly be helpful for educators and researchers in the context of psycholinguistics and well-being research.

Keywords: student wellbeing, teacher wellbeing, understanding classroom life, personal development activities, delayed feedback

The issue of emotionality and well-being are closely linked, and naming and perceiving emotions in a language is a source of knowledge about the linguistic image of the world. The following study was conducted on a group of Generation Z students who openly admit to having problems

expressing emotions and declare a deteriorating state of mental health, equivalent to a lack of well-being, which the COVID-19 pandemic has only sharpened. Generation Z students are an interesting research group because the academic setting is the context in which young people form their identity, gather experiences, and gain complete independence. However, observations show that the period of study, commonly considered so far as a positive time in a young person's life, results in increased stress levels, anxiety, lowered mood and psychosomatic symptoms, which often reduce if not prevent functioning. In the words of the GenZers themselves, the university period is a rapid leap from a teenager's life to that of an adult, with all the responsibilities and problems, precisely their issues and those of the global world. GenZers, in informal conversations with me but confirmed with other teachers, complain about the overwhelming pressure that comes from families, teachers and, above all, social media. Being under constant and sometimes increasing pressure quickly deteriorates their mental health, which, they tell me, at best ends up in continuous use of professional support from doctors and therapists. Thus, the overall aim of this study is to better understand Genzers' perceptions and definitions of emotionality in order to subsequently support them on their path to well-being in an academic context, which, in turn, was my primary motivation for carrying out this project.

Theoretical Background

The Notion of Emotionality

Emotionality and emotions, as well as their expression in language, are the research subject of numerous scholars (e.g., Ekman, 2008; Pavlenko, 2016; David, 2018; Feldman Barett, 2018; Dewaele et al., 2021). The majority of them stress the difficulty of defining emotionality and naming emotional states in precise terms; at the same time, they emphasise the significance of emotions in human life at its various stages and their impact on the functioning of humans.

> Emotions are a process, a particular kind of automatic appraisal influenced by our evolutionary and personal past, in which we sense that something important to our welfare is occurring, and a set of psychological changes and emotional behaviors begins to deal with the situation. (Ekman & The Dalai Lama, 2008, p. 10)

Emotional agility is defined as "being flexible with your thoughts and feelings so that you can respond optimally to everyday situations […]. Emotional

agility is about loosening up, calming down and living with more intention. It's about choosing how you'll respond to your emotional warning system" (David, 2016, p. 11). Such an understanding of these terms may be the key to the skilful and precise communication of emotion in L1 and in FL/L2. The case is similar to regulating emotions, which Shanker (2022) calls self-regulation and explains as follows:

> The original psychophysiological definition of self-regulation refers to how we respond to stress—whether in a manner that promotes or restricts growth. Mindful self-regulation, which enhances learning and emotional, social and physical well-being, involves learning to recognise and respond to stress in all its many facets: positive as well as negative, hidden as well as overt, minor as well as traumatic or toxic. (Shanker, 2022, p. 23)

An attempt to strengthen the development of emotional agility from an early age can be made by using The Ekmans' Atlas of Emotions (Ekman & Ekman, 2016). This tool, available free of charge on a website in the form of an application, serves as an excellent base for delving deeper into emotions as early as for nine-year-olds. It has the potential to be used in multifarious types of research, not only of a psychological nature. The Atlas of Emotions embraces the richness and plethora of emotional states, which is possible due to the presence of numerous lexical items (in a few languages) that neatly and precisely capture certain aspects, shades, and nuances of these states. Ekman and Ekman (2016) do not divide emotions into good and bad but show how many there are, how they can be defined, recognised and named. In previous years, schools did not lay so much emphasis on teaching emotions as is the case these days, which means that those who are children right now will be better off as concerns the sphere of emotions, whereas university students may be deficient in this respect. In light of the above considerations, the directions in which any education is going and any research similar to the one in this paper are not to be underestimated and are fully justified.

Ekman and Ekman (2016), as well as the aforementioned authors, suggest in unison that emotionality may have a direct impact on well-being, which, after Ryan and Deci (2001), we perceive as a group of hedonic elements related to "pleasure/enjoyment/satisfaction, and comfort/painlessness/ease" (Huta, 2015, p. 3), and eudaimonic ones related to such variables as "meaning/value/relevance to a broader context, personal growth/self-realisation/maturity, excellence/ethics/quality, and authenticity/autonomy/integration" (Huta, 2015, p. 4).

Moreover, Petrides (2009) perceives emotionality and well-being along with self-control and sociability as four main aspects of trait emotional intelligence (TEI), defined by him as "trait self-efficacies or dispositions of how people experience and utilize affect-laden information of an inter- and intrapersonal nature"

(Petrides, 2009, quoted in Jacobs & Wolny, 2022, p. 156). This proves that emotionality and well-being not only influence each other, remaining in a constant interplay, but also constitute the basic dimensions of one of the personality traits.

Mercer and Gregersen (2020) stress the subjectivity of research on well-being. Under that reasoning, any projects on emotionality should focus on the analysis of subjective definitions of emotionality and on individual perception of other constructs under scrutiny, not losing sight of the fact that "wellbeing is socio-contextually determined, and some aspects may be universal" (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020, p. 5). The results can also be interpreted with reference to Positive Psychology (PP) (Gabryś-Barker & Gałajda, 2016; MacIntyre et al., 2016; Goleman, 2020; Compton & Hoffman, 2020) while taking into account more complex models, like PERMA (Seligman, 2011) and EMPATHICS (Oxford, 2018), as well as the construct of flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1997), and bearing in mind how the expression of emotions, but also our emotional states and well-being have changed (for worse) on account of the pandemic (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Seligman's model and Oxford's model take into account the factors defined by the authors that influence mental health and life satisfaction. Relating the results of studies such as the one described in this text to the aforementioned models can help to interpret the relationship between **P**ositive emotions, **E**ngagement, **R**elationships, **M**eaning, **A**ccomplishments (Seligman, 2011), **E**mpathy, **M**otivation, **P**erseverance, **A**gency, **T**ime, **H**ardiness, **I**ntelligences, **C**haracter strengths, **S**elf-factors (Oxford, 2018) and well-being and thus more effectively understand respondents' perceptions of mental states. The flow construct, on the other hand, describes, among other things, a state of optimal challenge and skill, thus allowing one to work towards a sense of fulfilment, balance and enhanced engagement. All of this is a counterbalance to the overload and pressure that young people currently see as major obstacles to well-being.

When looking at emotions from a psycholinguistic perspective, it is essential to mention that factors determining the communication of emotions in a given language include the level of proficiency and the psychological distance when processing a given language. The reflection of the intensity of emotions in a given language, the cultural framework and the individual preferences of bilingual and multilingual people also play a significant role (Oleszkiewicz, 2023). Code-switching is a natural phenomenon that characterises bilingual and multilingual people and concerns expressing emotions. A particular language may, for example, be perceived as more effective in conveying a specific emotional message and help create a sense of community with those with whom the language is shared. Some reasons for this may be the non-translatability of some expressions describing emotions and the fact that the terms in a given language influence the conceptualisation of specific emotional states (Wierzbicka, 1999). In addition, recognising and feeling emotions is much easier when one has the corresponding word in any known language in one's mental lexicon.

Discussing Well-Being

It seems that perceiving and defining well-being is a very individual matter, and although academic sources (Das et al., 2020; Hascher & Waber, 2021) provide a fairly unified set of associations with the word well-being (happiness, health, contentment, comfort, ease, abundance, alleviation, amenity, felicity, bliss, cheerfulness, success, good, sake, benefit, satisfaction, enjoyment, pleasure, fitness, physical euphoria, energy, peace of mind, freedom, robustness, safety, joy, luxury, gratification, delight, soundness, strength, content, ecstasy, and soundness, all the associations generated by Google), understanding the individual's perception of this construct is hugely important for facilitating in a given context.

From a psychological perspective, well-being can be considered as made up of other constructs as components. In this text, we focus on selected constructs based on our teaching experience and knowledge from the literature. Guided by intuition, the following constructs (in addition to emotionality described earlier) may influence well-being in the university environment. The research project outlined in this text draws on the roots of well-being research, namely the interest in Positive Psychology (PP) (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2020), integrative well-being models such as PERMA (Seligman, 2011) and the context-focused SLA EMPATHICS (Oxford, 2018), and current approaches to education, namely following Talbot (2022) positive education (PE), Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) and positive emotions in education. It is also only possible to refer in the interpretation of the data to the relationship between well-being and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (MacIntyre et al., 2020).

Reflections on well-being start with the concept of self-awareness, which Eurich (2018, p. 28) divides into internal and external, defining each as follows:

> internal self-awareness, represents how clearly we see our own values, passions, aspirations, fit with our environment, reactions (including thoughts, feelings, behaviours, strengths, and weaknesses), and impact on others, and external self-awareness, means understanding how other people view us, in terms of those same factors listed above.

Self-awareness should be facilitated by a process of self-observation, in which we recognise situations, thoughts and emotions and then examine reactions. Another important aspect of building well-being is to focus on working on self-acceptance, which the APA Dictionary of Psychology (2022) defines as "a relatively objective sense or recognition of one's abilities and achievements, together with acknowledgement and acceptance of one's limitations. Self-acceptance is often viewed as a major component of mental health."

Self-awareness and self-acceptance are important in building well-being, as they are the only way a person builds up knowledge about themselves, which they then learn to accept, thus fostering intrapersonality and a sense of coherence. Self-awareness and self-acceptance can also be considered key aspects of practising mindfulness. Mindfulness fosters an understanding of, for example, one's emotions and oneself in general, which in turn contributes to well-being and mental health in general. Understanding oneself and skilfully communicating one's needs and emotions fosters better communication with others, which also builds an individual's well-being, especially one of its pillars, social connection (Siegel, 2012). Mindfulness is also a holistic approach to reality and ourselves. By looking at things mindfully, one sees more and deeper and thus is more in touch with oneself and with others. This promotes effective communication and being in a relationship, but a prerequisite for this is the skilful use of language.

The next two components that build well-being may seem the most difficult to achieve, as we have very little experience and practice of them over generations. The first is self-compassion, about which Neff (2020) says the following:

> Having compassion for oneself is really no different than having compassion for others. […] First, to have compassion for others you must notice that they are suffering. […] Second, compassion involves feeling moved by others' suffering so that your heart responds to their pain (the word compassion literally means to "suffer with"). […] Having compassion also means that you offer understanding and kindness to others when they fail or make mistakes, rather than judging them harshly. Finally, when you feel compassion for another (rather than mere pity), it means that you realize that suffering, failure, and imperfection is part of the shared human experience. […] (Neff, 2020, What is Self-Compassion, para. 1)

Neff also adds that self-compassion is about treating yourself with kindness in the face of difficult experiences, failures or personal inadequacies. Rather than ignoring the pain or criticising oneself, one should pay attention to one's difficulties and look for ways to self-compassion. This attitude implies forbearance and acceptance of one's own weaknesses (Neff, 2020).

The second is vulnerability, which can already be problematic at a linguistic level because there is no proper equivalent in many languages, for example, Polish. Often translated as a weak point, or susceptibility to impression, it is associated with weakness, which is absolutely incompatible with understanding it in the context of psychology and well-being, as evidenced by the following quote from Brown (2017, pp. 154–155):

> The definition of vulnerability is uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. But vulnerability is not weakness; it's our most accurate measure of courage. When the barrier is our belief about vulnerability, the question becomes: "Are we willing to show up and be seen when we can't control the outcome?" When the barrier to vulnerability is about safety, the question becomes: "Are we willing to create courageous spaces so we can be fully seen?"

In many countries, even in Europe, self-compassion (e.g., Gilbert, 2019; Matos et al., 2021) and vulnerability are considered part of soft skills that increase well-being and positively influence interpersonal communication and empathy, which is essential for creating overall social well-being. The inclusion of self-compassion and vulnerability in defining well-being also correlates with what Stahl (2022) writes about feeling and thinking personality types, emphasising that each of us manifests traits of one and the other type, which is not mutually exclusive and should be consistent if we look at ourselves and others with compassion, respecting them and our own vulnerability.

Last but not least, Proyer et al. (2015) point out that the traits that characterise us, enthusiasm, hope and a sense of humour, are predispositions to well-being. This is particularly important in the context presented in this article because of the characteristics of Generation Z discussed earlier. Representatives of Generation Z see humour as a way of coping with difficulties in life, which, on the one hand, is obvious, but their humour is very specific, black and mostly related to communication and the language of social media. The enthusiasm of Generation Z is, according to them, extinguished, and hope "died a long time ago" (informal student quote) despite being so young. The social and linguistic doomerism (Ray, 2020) observed only confirms this. While (at least partly) representatives of Generation Z have a sense of understanding and resourcefulness, following the Antonovsky (1996) coherence model, the third pillar, that is, making sense of their actions and the reality around them, is very scarce, making it impossible to achieve full well-being Proyer et al. (2015) emphasise that it is worth considering who or what takes away our enthusiasm, hope and undermines our sense of well-being in life, as it is easier to take care of this in the context of nurturing well-being than to recover from lack of well-being later on.

The Characteristics of Generation Z and Their Communication

Generation Z are those born between 1997 and 2012, currently studying in the range from upper primary school grades and up to fresh out of university. They are the generation of young people who, in the context of this text, are the main recipients of the didactic process and who dictate trends in social

media while showing and commenting on reality, using slang and digital body language to communicate what they are unwilling or unable to express in words.

McKnight (2021) enumerates the following characteristics of Generation Z:

- "wired in" (2021, p. 38)
- claim no religious affiliation
- engage for their psychological and emotional well-being
- confront potential issues with their identity
- varied in terms of race and ethnicity
- "growing up 'too slow' and 'too fast'" (2021, p. 42)
- their parents "are both overengaged and underengaged" (2021, p. 43)
- start their own business very early
- seek and see the value of education (2021, p. 44)

Generation Z representatives value convenience, constant accessibility and the absence of unnecessary interaction with strangers. The lack of face-to-face interaction gives a sense of security, for example, when starting a conversation. During lockdown, the convenience of remote communication turned into a necessity. Forced by this circumstance of the COVID-19 pandemic, they assimilated to online communication without much difficulty and quickly became addicted to it, being online most of the time. Digital body language enables them to avoid awkward situations and communicate using visual tools. Many of them struggle with social anxieties that hinder their communication in the real world and use DBL as entertainment as well. The superiority of messaging can be understood as being able to respond later or interrupt the conversation at any time. Asynchronous communication facilitates multitasking. But at the same time, it is a way to entertain. Voice messaging is also the golden mean between a phone call and a text message.

Generation Z is also characterised by several phenomena common to most people representing this social group. Among many, one can mention black humour, irony, and sarcasm, which serve as an emotional buffer. Also related is doomscrolling, that is, devoting excessive attention and time to reading negative and anxiety-inducing social media news, and indirectly cautious optimism, that is, approaching reality cautiously while hoping things will turn out well. The GenZers combat the phenomenon of toxic positivity, which David (2016) says is telling others, "my comfort is more important than your reality," and cultivate what can be called "self-talk," a daily, often all-day internal monologue that can be vented in posts and comments on social media.

Discussing Generation Z from the linguistic perspective, it can be said that they use slang taken from social media, often creating idiolects; their language is very diverse, mainly due to new technologies, the internet and globalisation. Generation Z's language perfectly portrays this generation's characteristics, and the cultural dimension is highlighted by using English as a lingua franca. When talking about Generation Z's communication, it is impossible not to briefly

discuss the digital body language (DBL) mentioned earlier, which Dhawan (2021, p. 19) says are "technique and understanding of interpersonal communication, using digital devices and symbols such as memes, emoji, emoticons, punctuation marks or capital letters." Seemingly small actions, such as putting an exclamation mark at the end of a sentence or writing in capital letters, can greatly impact how we are perceived by the recipient of a message and influence their perception of us, our attitude and the message being conveyed. Ekman (2008) claims that non-verbal communication has five functions: repeating, substituting, complementing, accenting, and contradicting, and the same can be said of digital body language, using the following as an example:

- Meme: an image or graphic that links to text of a humorous nature;
- Emoji: a set of small icons used to express emotions;
- GIF: a format for an animated picture file;
- Voice message: short audio messages sent via mobile devices;
- Reaction pic: an image used in digital communication to highlight a reaction.

According to Gerova and Preslavsky (2022), DBL is a valuable form of communication that is used to convey our emotions in the digital world. It fills the cross-cultural gap, represents not only emotions but also concepts and creates a new environment for conversation. Also, it can engage more shy or introverted people in discussion.

Despite the many pluses and the fact that DBL gained prominence after the pandemic outbreak, researchers point out the negative aspects of DBL, such as the emphasis on informal communication in all contexts, the avoidance of direct contact with each other, the simplification of language, the tolerance of linguistic errors.

Digital body language can be subjected to multidimensional linguistic analysis, including discourse analysis, contrastive studies, and emotional messages, relationships, and psychophysical states, such as well-being (or lack thereof) and their expression in language. Sometimes, DBL is called the "new normal," significantly influencing understanding contemporary communication skills and shaping communicative competence. The author of this text believes there is a need for research that holistically analyses DBL as part of the profile of an effective communicator. This will make it much easier to understand the communication of younger generations like Gen Z or the upcoming Generation Alpha behind them. Also, incorporating DBL into language instruction may help to support students' multiliteracy as part of their everyday communication.

By establishing representatives of a particular generation as respondents to the research, the question arises about the validity and relevance of categorizing people in relation to the time in which they were born and lived. According to Gao (2023), this makes sense because "categorizing people with the framework of generation highlight the impact of certain time and events

on people's viewpoints, behavior patterns and lifestyles, much like the impact of culture on people. Therefore, we may view intergenerational communication as intercultural communication" (Gao, 2023, p. 426). Following such reasoning, Gao refers to Speech Codes Theory (Philipsen, 1997), which emphasizes the differences in communication between people belonging to the same society and living in the same times. These differences are due to the fact that communication in different social groups is influenced by factors such as gender, culture, society and occupation, resulting in a speech code. These codes can also refer to the modes of communication presented by different generations since they are characterized, like the cultural groups Philipsen studied, by "substance (vocabulary, meaning, syntax)" (Gao, 2023, p. 427) and they are "the force [...] in social life for that [...] group" (Gao, 2023, p. 427). Since a generation can use different codes to communicate, this will also apply to expressing emotions. This is why it is so interesting to explore how Generation Z, with all its characteristics, perceives and defines emotionality.

Methodology

Participants

The participants in the study were second-year students of English philology at the University of Silesia in Katowice (Poland) (N = 70). As for linguistic proficiency, in the case of the respondents to this survey, these were L1 = Polish, L2 = English, and L3 = German (N = 20)/Korean (N = 30)/Arabic (N = 20), depending on the type of translation programme. All participants were of Polish nationality and belonged to Generation Z at the time of the study. This project defined them as people born between 1997 and 2012, with an average age of 20 in the case of the present study. The research group represented the majority of all students of the mentioned major and specialisation in the number of N = 100 who attended conversation classes in the third semester according to the curriculum scheme. It included those who voluntarily and anonymously agreed to participate in the study.

Research Instruments and Procedure

The study's main aim was to find answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: How do university students belonging to Generation Z define emotionality, and what are their perceptions of emotionality?
RQ2: What does Generation Z's definition and perception of emotionality tell us about their well-being, and how this information can help them develop their well-being?

The procedure for the survey was as follows. Students were asked to produce two recordings in English of a minimum of one minute: (1) an informal definition of emotionality and (2) a formal definition of emotionality, where both definitions were to be in their own words. The students were not given any other guidelines, and they could rely on their own experience and academic content that they found themselves or that had been discussed in class beforehand. The recordings were part of the conversation course credit and were assessed, feedback was given, and sent back to the students. Along with the recordings, students were asked to submit a transcription of both recordings, which they could provide with comments if they wished. The recordings, transcriptions and comments were in English, although this would have been noted in the analysis if respondents had used another language. The quotations from the received corpus included in this text have not been altered or corrected in any way by the author of this text, for example, in terms of linguistic accuracy.

My choice of English was made for several reasons. The participants in the study were students of English philology in their second year, which, according to the guidelines of the curriculum scheme, indicates their high level of competence (C1 according to CEFR). In addition, the study took place in conversation classes, which are held in English, and the students are used to communicating in this language in this context. Finally, and very importantly in the context of this study, students repeatedly declared that English is their second language, in which they communicate very willingly and spontaneously, even naturally, which correlates with the characteristics of Generation Z described above and the function of English as a global language.

Following this, the texts containing the transcription of formal (FD) and informal (ID) definitions along with the participants were coded (e.g., 1FD, 8SD, where the number denotes the number assigned to a particular student) in order to preserve the anonymity of the study participants. The ways of anonymising data include permanent removal of personal data prior to analysis and publication. The resulting corpus was subjected to qualitative content analysis (Table 1) adapted from Mayring's QCA (2000), in which I focused on both deductive and inductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning meant assigning categories to confirm theories about the constructs under study as described in the literature (e.g., Dewaele et al., 2021; Eurich, 2018; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Coding rules were predetermined, "determining exactly under what circumstances a text passage can be coded with a category" (Mayring, 2001, p. 5). In the process of creating inductive categories, I re-read the collected

results to gain a deeper understanding of the raw data and familiarise myself with it. Sections of text marked with similar labels have been grouped together to form categories that did not appear among the deductive categories. These inductive categories and their labels came directly from the data and were not predetermined. For both deductive and inductive categories, I identified fragments that contained relevant information relating to the research questions. Data segments were assigned to specific categories.

Table 1

Coding Agenda (adapted from Mayring, 2000).

Inductive Categories	
Category	**Definition**
Past, present and future experiences	Description of what has happened, is happening or will happen to respondents and what affects them consequently and over time.
Respondents' personal comments	Something the respondent said, expressing their personal opinion.
Descriptions and metaphors addressing emotionality and emotions	A statement in which the respondent directly describes what something related to emotionality/emotions is or refers to something that is considered to have similar characteristics.
Particular examples referring to emotional states	Specific cases relating to emotional states.
Deductive Categories	
Category	**Definition**
Self-reg and emotionality	Experiencing and expressing emotions and the ability to regulate and understand them.
Self-acceptance and self-awareness	Understanding and accepting one's own abilities and limitations, being conscious of one's own character and the ways others perceive it.
Self-compassion and vulnerability	Feeling sympathy, understanding, empathy and kindness for oneself, having courage to face "uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure." (Brown, 2017, pp. 154–155)

Results According to Deductive Categories—Formal (FD) and Informal Definitions (ID)

Self-Reg and Emotionality

Respondents emphasise that they cannot cope with expressing emotions because they do not have the relevant knowledge and experience. This may be why it is so easy for them to hide their emotions or hide them (and themselves) under sarcasm, a social media avatar, or any other elements of communication specific to DBL.

> *I don't know how to talk about emotions at all, no one taught me that, neither parents nor teachers.* (10ID)
>
> *We do not regulate emotions, we hide them, deep, by the way, no one cares about them, we can express ourselves in social media.* (23ID)
>
> *I express myself with gifs, I send emoji to my parents, my friends also understand TikToks because they feel and perceive it the same way.* (17FD)

Self-Acceptance and Self-Awareness

GenZers emphasise that they speak negatively and critically about themselves, highlighting weaknesses. They attribute such a tendency to the experience they have had at home or which is characteristic of the education they know. Again, there is a theme of hiding actual emotional states, a tendency to cover them up with humour (often black humour) even in conversations with close peers. Social media, and the internet in general, is a "safe" place to hide and communicate practically one hundred per cent on one's own terms. It is in the digital world that GenZers feel more listened to than in the real world, which makes them very sad and adds to the frustration of being seen as someone completely different with characteristics that cannot be attributed to them. The respondents, although also very confused by the messages they receive from their parents, are very aware of their problems, obstacles, and often the reasons for their condition.

> *When someone asks me, I list weaknesses right away, with strengths it is more difficult.* (9ID)
>
> *I would constantly correct something in myself, but it's because of my parents and teachers, they keep saying that I still don't know something, that I should know more, and everything in general.* (21ID)

My friends and I feel like losers, we turn it into jokes on social media or by writing to each other directly, but in reality we are sorry, it's sad. (18ID)

I know what I like, what is important to me, but I don't say it out loud, because no one listens and won't do anything about it anyway. (29 ID)

I'm glad we have social media, because I don't have to speak out loud in public, and I can still share my opinion and find those who think the same way. (58ID)

I'm annoyed by how others perceive me: I hear that I'm feisty, calm, always ready to speak up, and in fact, I'm the one who later fights it off, stress eats on me inside. (11ID)

I'm confused because my parents tell me once that I'm definitely going to make it, but right after that I'm supposed to study because I won't pass. (43ID)

Self-Compassion and Vulnerability

As the following responses confirm, finding parts of the corpus that could be classified in this category surprised me. Respondents are not used to showing vulnerability or self-compassion. They feel they have been brought up not to complain but to take responsibility and blame every time. In addition, they feel that they should be strong and confident rather than vulnerable, which is commonly assumed, especially compared to the Polish equivalent, to be associated with weakness and vulnerability. The division between vulnerable and brave is reminiscent of the division between good and evil, and such associations are confirmed by respondents. Furthermore, the more introverted GenZers see bravery as a problem because it costs them too much sacrifice and energy. GenZers emphasise that they are aware of their inability to take care of themselves, and the way they try to do this is more akin to addiction and further burying their emotions.

Our parents think that we have the internet, that we have opportunities, that we have everything and that we should embrace our issues and not feel sorry for them or ourselves. (23FD)

When I'm sad I immediately think that it's my fault, that I could have done something better. I can't feel sorry for myself, just figure out how to fix it. (3ID)

When I'm having a hard time and want to take care of myself, I feel like I'm acting self-destructively: binge watching, eating junk food, scrolling social media for hours. (19ID)

I don't understand this connection between courage and vulnerability. I read a lot of self-help books to feel important, courageous, confident. I don't want to feel fragile. (29FD)

For me, people have always been divided into the courageous and the vulnerable. I try to be brave, and vulnerable I am when I am alone with myself or with friends, when we laugh at memes, gifs, TikToks, they show it well, so sarcastically. (12FD)

Whenever I am "brave," it always ends badly for me. Then I suffer in solitude, stressed out, thinking how silly I was to say something and why, if no one listened. (36ID)

Results According to Inductive Categories—Formal (FD) and Informal Definitions (ID)

Past, Present and Future Experiences

Although the GenZers emphasise belonging to a group, they are aware that each of us has valid experiences and thus can process emotional states differently. Respondents can even give examples of past experiences that have influenced their perception of emotionality. They also know how experiences of specific emotional states can affect their life and health in the future.

Each of us has different experiences encountered in the past and therefore in the same situation each would react in different way. (47FD)

According to the research conducted by the first speaker, it's guesses constructed by the brain on the basis of our past experiences. (33FD)

From experience, I know that a highly sensitive person is sensitized to any kind of violence. (42ID)

Unfortunately, I had the occasion where I was laughed at because of being "too sensitive" or simply "paranoid." (29ID)

I am sensible of the fact that it is not all the knowledge I could acquire but I reckon that life depends on the constant growth, right? (53ID)

However, emotions have the greatest influence on the mental sphere. Over time, an excess of emotions can lead to many disorders that may require consulting a doctor, or in some cases even psychiatric treatment. (28FD)

Respondents' Personal Comments

There are numerous definitions in which respondents presented their opinions. GenZers use language skilfully, introducing personal opinions repeatedly, showing that they believe or are convinced about something. However, I need clarification on how much of the use of specific phrases is a natural desire to present one's opinion and how much is a learned form of communication for a particular task. The prevailing trend among personal opinions is that emotionality is difficult to define mainly because the experience of emotionality is very subjective. The authors of the quotes emphasise the importance of self-awareness and education regarding emotions.

I believe it is also hard to find most accurate words for this but I have to give it a go. (21ID)

I believe there is no such thing as "the best definition" because we are all aware of the fact that emotional states are hard to define and even think of. (37ID)

Personally, I define emotionality as the process of feeling that each and every one of us experiences during a certain event. (18FD)

In my opinion, the 'sensory processing sensitivity' and the 'highly sensitive person' are based on the same background – sensitivity. (10FD)

That is why, I strongly support the idea of publicising and popularising psychological subjects since the early stages of education or upbringing. (50FD)

All in all, as I said in the beginning, emotionality, emotions and accompanying emotional states are indeed hard to describe. (64ID)

Certainly, the notion is not sufficiently developed but personally, I use it due to its simplicity and clarity. (25FD)

I know this is a bad habit and whenever it happens I immediately regret it and feel stupid. (38ID)

This is beautiful that other people can sometimes see my emotions, which I am unaware of. (42ID)

Descriptions and Metaphors Addressing Emotionality and Emotions

This is one of the most data-rich categories. The respondents, both in describing emotionality and in providing a definition in the form of a metaphor, showed great sensitivity and linguistic richness. The metaphors appeal to the imagination, and the descriptions are concrete and specific. This makes it easier

to understand both cases and analyse the GenZers' perception of emotionality and emotion. Particularly in the metaphors, the attitude towards the subject is evident. Respondents speak positively and negatively about emotionality, often emphasising that it is a complex subject about which they have no experience and feel lost. Their knowledge of the subject of emotionality is very passive, and although the descriptions of emotionality are apt, respondents themselves emphasise that it is difficult to refine them so that they show their actual views.

[...] our upbringing (and many other generations as well) is full of holes when it comes to talking about emotions [...]. (43FD)

It is also defined as a 'dam' which prevents from mental illnesses [...]. (20FD)

Emotions influence every aspect of our lives and add colours and spice to them. (61FD)

It is an internal compass for me that shows me what choice would be the least harmful to others. (38ID)

Enveloped by changing the world, we try to predict and create our experience of world. (19ID)

Because it is like catharsis and clears our mind and brings us light in the tunnel. (33FD)

Feelings are just data, but no directions, which means that we own them, not they us. (49ID)

Particular Examples Referring to Emotional States

In this category, respondents are keen to share examples describing emotional states or highlighting the meaning of their words. Some examples are extended, others short. Some are descriptions, and others are listed examples. The most important thing about them is that they reinforce the message and that GenZers consciously use specific treatments. There are several such definitions of emotionality, and the examples underlining them are very well chosen and illustrated.

For instance, there comes the end of the semester. Everyone works all the hours God sends to finish every assignment, homework or studying for the test. Despite the effort, your mark isn't the one that you worked for. Additionally, you found out that you friend got a higher note even though you did pretty much the same things. (14ID)

For instance, churring stomach which can be interpreted as being stressed of being hungry. (29FD)

For example, when I am scary my heart beating faster, when I am crying my eyes are red, when I am shy my cheeks flushed. (37ID)

[...] like for instance when I am angry I often shout and argue with people who are important to me in order to express my emotions. (40ID)

[...] such as changing moods from happiness to sadness. (38FD)

An example may be hysteria, which was a disease that was attributed to women. 41FD)

[...] with fear of for instance falling in love. 12FD

Discussion

In response to the first research question (RQ1), it can be said that the characteristics of this group strongly influence Generation Z's perception of emotionality. GenZers are aware of their mental health and write about it openly, emphasising that the learning and teaching process further deteriorate their mental state. From the data received, it appears that Gen Z is no stranger to toxic positivity (David, 2016), defined by David as "forced, false positivity" (David & Brown (Host), 2021), nor to an "inner critic" who gets activated while resilience weakens. Gen Z is not able to appreciate their vulnerability (Brown, 2015), and what ensues is that they find it more and more difficult to develop the so-called emotional agility (David, 2016), something that we consider to be indispensable when it comes to acquiring new skills and knowledge, which in turn underlie the process of studying. The pandemic only highlighted all the above-mentioned issues, and the reality within which we have been functioning since 2020 has become challenging as it concerns effective emotional management.

Almost all GenZers surveyed wonder where emotions come from and how they can control them because they believe that self-reg is expected of them as adults, at least according to the metric. They realise that emotions are part of their mental equipment and a way of processing the world and reality in which they live and function. They do not know how but subconsciously feel that developing emotional intelligence is the key to well-being.

They try to cover their emotions with sarcasm, but they do so consciously. This is because they know that emotional states are what all people have in common, regardless of who they are, where they come from or how they were brought up. The same is true of social media communication, which

is also often fake and a buffer for emotional states, but the GenZers are also aware of this.

GenZers respond very well to tools for exploring their emotionality, such as the Ekmans' Atlas, which was regularly used as a supplement in conversation classes attended by the respondents, among others, and taught by the author of this text. Through this, they develop their awareness by learning how they are triggered, what they feel like and how they respond to various emotional stimuli. GenZers know that awareness is a strategy in itself because understanding our emotions helps deal with them; we do not want to get rid of them but rather respond to them in ways that will be constructive and helpful. Awareness also helps them understand how we experience emotions due to the activation of different mechanisms and analyse the interpretations of these experiences depending on the cognitive scenarios associated with the language. GenZers know emotions are not divided into positive or negative. How we manage them translates into moods and behaviours, which many categorise into good and bad, and hence, thinking in this way about the nature of emotions.

Language, especially language skills and being bilingual or multilingual, is significant for GenZers. They would generally like to use language to express emotions but find it difficult. As observed over the course of the conversation classes attended by the respondents, among others, they often express their emotionality through DBL, which they share with narrow circles of friends or people with similar interests and knowledge. Due to being the lingua franca of the internet, English is seen by Gen Z as an effective way to take care of their well-being and as a medium for communication in general.

In terms of the constructs discussed in this article, that is, concepts related to the self, which may be components of well-being, Gen Z knows that they have difficulty defining them and need guidance and a lot of patience and empathy to get to know and learn them. Due to an overabundance of information, they acquire knowledge about themselves late and sometimes not at all. They claim that previous generations know less about the online world but are generally better at relationships and the real world.

Answering the second research question (RQ2), the gathering of more data could result in the formulation of implications and an attempt to create a universal program to support the well-being of GenZers while learning and to train teachers from previous generations to understand GenZers' communicative behaviours: a universal repository of recommendations, one that will enable us to understand students and their emotional states better, and that will increase the effectiveness of cooperating with them in the context of broadly understood 'academic community'. For teachers, it would be something that should contribute to their personal development and increase their work comfort. What is more, the development of communicative competence in the mother tongue and in a foreign/second language employing students being involved

in discussions touching upon issues that are currently vital for them, upon communicating emotions, without focusing on general topics not directly related to their lives can enhance learners' well-being to a great extent.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this research may serve as specific recommendations within the domain of applied linguistics or inspirations for further research within psycholinguistics, bilingualism, multilingualism, or text linguistics in relation to Generation Z. The main findings of this study indicate that GenZers know that it is impossible to build sustainable well-being without self-regulation and an understanding of (one's own) emotionality. However, they talk openly about the fact that, despite their age, they still need help working with their emotions, if only by naming them. The same is true of the components relating to the self: GenZers are aware of their existence but emphasise the need to support them in the process of cognition. Only through guidance can they fulfil their potential and develop the autonomy to look after their well-being. Understanding the emotionality and well-being of Generation Z should start by supporting GenZers in exploring these areas. By accompanying them in this process as teachers, for example, by facilitating the development of communicative competence, it is possible to get to know and understand better why and how emotionality is such an essential factor in building sustainable well-being among Generation Z young people.

Juxtaposing emotionality with well-being analysed from the linguistic angle may be an interesting undertaking for psychology-oriented researchers. In other words, such projects' interdisciplinary potential and universality are easily noticeable. Such complex research has already been conducted in many parts of the world (Bogolyubova et al., 2020; Vella-Brodrick et al., 2022). It should be pursued further in other countries to research not only single constructs, usually in social sciences, psychology in particular. The reference to linguistics in this study and its various fields (Wierzbicka, 1999; Sykulska, 2003; Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2013) as well as connecting this research with a broader psychological perspective leads to a new approach to the subject particularly given the specific nature of Genzers. The linguistic picture of the world that will emerge from the data gathered could be juxtaposed with the results from other countries, and simultaneously, the selected research area can be expanded by the cultural context, which, although strongly influenced by globalisation in the case of Generation Z, can vary depending on language, for example.

There are certain limitations to the study that was conducted, which, for example, could have been carried out on a larger group (broken down by age and gender identity), in two/some languages, in a different cultural context and subjected to a more thorough analysis (e.g., LIWC-22: to examine people's cognitive processes, emotional condition and intentions and/or Text Inspector: to enrich the linguistic analysis). Furthermore, it would have been worth investigating whether perceptions of emotionality change due to the speaker's gender identity. The research itself could be supplemented with, for example, formal/informal written definitions and other instruments, for example, association chains or association tests containing sample emotion. An interesting idea would be to conduct in-depth interviews in which interviewees could be asked about constructs related to well-being (e.g., self-compassion, self-reg, vulnerability, etc.) and their relation to perceptions of emotionality. Interviews could also clarify whether specific phrases concerning, for example, personal comments are used due to an inner desire or are learned as a response to a particular communication task. It would also be interesting and valuable to explore perceptions of emotionality and its relationship to well-being in contexts beyond the learning process, but still from the perspective of GenZers' modes of communication, including DBL.

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