

Affect in English Language Learning: What Goes on Inside and Between

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José Manuel Foncubierta
Universidad de Huelva, Spain

Esther Cores-Bilbao
Universidad Isabel I, Spain

Abstract

Although second language learning has been widely studied as the result of a set of cognitive processes (such as perception, attention, or memory), human cognition cannot be fully understood without paying attention to the affective dimension of learning. This chapter deals with the role of within-person and between-person affective factors in second language education. From a pedagogical point of view, traditional methodologies have generally considered that the learning process occurs only from the neck up. This belief favoured an approach to learning and learning material design based on memorization and mechanical repetition, with no other stimuli than the written or spoken word. However, the results of well-established research from diverse fields such as psycholinguistics, educational psychology, and neuroscience highlight the importance of more affective teaching for more effective learning. This perspective has gained particular currency after the global health crisis and the widespread advent of technology-based learning, emphasising the emotional and relational dimensions that all meaningful learning processes require. Drawing on how affective factors influence second language acquisition and learning, this chapter proposes some methodological principles that can be applied to language teaching. Practical guidelines for conducting classroom research are also provided, such as applying these principles and exploiting multimodal stimuli to support and measure student motivation and positive emotions towards English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning.

Keywords

Affective factors, emotion, second language teaching, multimodality, adult learner.

1. Introduction

Second language learning (SLL) is a complex process involving a broad spectrum of cognitive, social, and affective factors. While cognitive factors such as memory, attention, and problem-solving skills have traditionally monopolized most of the research on SLL, the affective domain only started to gain ground at the turn of the 20th century due to the influence of humanistic psychology on the training of teachers and researchers (Arnold & Foncubierta, 2021; MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014) and to neuroscientific findings on the role of emotion in cognition (Damasio, 1994; Ledoux, 1996; Schumann, 1997).

Early recognition of the role of affect in second language (L2) acquisition initially focused on how emotions could be a barrier to learning, giving rise to Krashen's *Affective Filter Hypothesis* (1982). In this sense, anxiety has remained among the most widely documented emotional factors impacting on learning, from Horwitz et al. (1986) to its current development by Rubio-Alcalá (2017). Arnold's (1999) landmark work, influenced by humanistic psychology, argued that addressing the affective dimension was less about trying to mitigate negative emotions and more about reinforcing positive ones, thereby shifting the focus to emotional communication in language teaching and propelling positive affect into a more prominent role in the field. With the advent of positive psychology in the first decade of the 21st century, interest in positive affective factors was reinforced (Dewaele & Li, 2020; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Thus, motivation-related variables, drawn mainly from the well-established models of Gardner, Clément, and Dörnyei, have underpinned research into the correlates of basic positive and negative emotions and the development of pedagogical models for L2 acquisition (MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017). Modern neuroscience has similarly provided strong evidence for what teaching practitioners have long intuited, namely that affect is central to human learning (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007), arguing that positive emotion-related processes are necessary for new knowledge to be ingrained and transferred from the formal learning environment to the real world. To this end, an emotionally safe and stable learning atmosphere ought to be generated in order to foster feelings of self-worth and confidence that allow the L2 learning experience to be rewarding and enjoyable (Arnold & Foncubierta, 2019; Fonseca-Mora, 2023).

The affective dimension of learning is embedded in human cognition and influences our ability to retrieve the information we store in memory, intervenes in attentional processes, and positively or negatively affects problem-solving skills. According to Gross (1992), attention to affective factors can be worthwhile because "we can accelerate and enrich our learning by engaging the senses, emotions and imagination" (p. 139). Thus, the affective dimension is not merely an extra add-on but an inseparable attribute of human understanding.

This chapter aims to provide a brief overview of up-to-date research on affective factors. First, the definitions of the key concepts are presented, and their relevance to English Language Learning (ELL) is discussed. The chapter then outlines these affective factors' individual and socio-relational dimensions and their pedagogical implications for language teaching when technology-based and online language education is becoming increasingly prevalent. Finally, how-to guidance is also provided for conducting classroom research that applies affective factors to teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

2. What are Affective Factors?

Self-esteem, anxiety, teacher confirmation, and empathy are affective factors, that is, non-linguistic variables of an emotional nature which may facilitate or hinder the process of second language teaching and learning. The term affect is used here broadly to deal with phenomena concerning emotions but also moods, attitudes, beliefs, dispositions, or

preferences (Oxford, 2021). Accordingly, it is used more comprehensively than the word emotion, even though affect and emotion may appear interchangeable in some contexts (Fox, 2018) and are complementary concepts (Fonseca-Mora, 2023).

Defining emotion is notoriously difficult as many features characterize it. Some of its specificities refer to the “short-lived, feeling-arousal, purposive expressive, adaptive mechanisms” that emotion triggers (Reeve, 2005, p. 294). Considerations regarding its interplay with cognition or certain individual personality traits also complicate providing a precise definition. Nonetheless, it is widely acknowledged that positive emotion awakens creativity, broadening learners’ perspectives and receptiveness to language acquisition (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Similarly, defining affect remains remarkably challenging. Following Arnold and Foncubierta’s (2019) definition, the term *affective factor* is conceptualised in this chapter as a psychological construct encompassing the attitudes, beliefs, and emotions that explain certain learning behaviours and outcomes. It is worth noting that these factors need not necessarily manifest themselves in isolation; indeed, they usually mutually influence each other. However, in order to provide a taxonomic scheme and facilitate a better understanding of what affective factors mean in the L2 learning process, many studies have adopted a classification inspired by Earl Stevick’s well-known quote (Arnold, 1999; Arnold & Foncubierta, 2019; Fonseca-Mora, 2023):

Success [in teaching languages] depends less on materials, techniques, and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on *inside* and *between* the people in the classroom. (Stevick, 1980, p. 4)

Through this reasoning, Stevick does not intend to downplay the importance of learning resources, teaching methods, or language competence but rather to emphasize that factors pertaining to the people in the classroom play a central role in developing deeper and more lasting learning. In this chapter, we focus on *individual affective factors* such as *self-esteem*, *motivation*, or *anxiety* to describe what happens within the learner, while *relational affective factors* such as *empathy* or *teacher confirmation* account for what happens between the people who engage with each other in the teaching-learning process.

2.1 Individual Affective Factors

Generally speaking, a seasoned and accomplished language learner “can find in each new language learned a renewed confirmation of the value of what he [or she] carries within” (Stevick, 1980, p. 93). Indeed, successful past experiences may reinforce a positive self-concept, predisposing one’s mindset to pursue a given goal, such as language learning. Similarly, transformative experiences, dependent on students’ individual factors, are those through which perceptions of the world are broadened, most frequently among students who report high levels of positive emotions (Pugh et al., 2023).

Efforts to delve deeper into individual factors have prompted the formulation of multiple constructs concerning L2 learner identity, such as self-concept, self-esteem, self-

efficacy, and self-image (Mercer, 2011), the sharp distinction between which is inevitably controversial. In this regard, self-esteem has been defined as the value of the evaluation of one's self-concept (Dörnyei, 2005), which is the result of the self-scrutiny to which people are constantly subjecting themselves, be it in their physical, personal, competence, or interpersonal spheres. These dimensions collectively represent self-concept, and self-esteem is the appraisal stemming from it (Rubio, 2014). Mercer (2011) thus advocates "thinking of a learner's self-system more holistically and re-conceptualizing all these multiple layers of self-beliefs in different domains as interrelated parts of the same holistic system" (p. 343).

One notion akin to Mercer's *self-system* is the traditional understanding of self-concept as the synthesis of each individual's self-knowledge in relation to how they assess themselves (Dörnyei, 2009). Motivation scholars have drawn on a particularly compelling aspect within this complex notion. The future dimension of self-concept is not concerned with how people perceive themselves in the present but with how they envision themselves in the future (Dörnyei, 2014). Dörnyei's (2009) motivational model (L2 Motivational Self-System) brings the self-concept to the forefront of the motivation construct. According to the author, the discrepancy between one's current self-image and the ideal future self would provide the motivational thrust to stay on the learning path.

By asking learners to imagine and visualise their future selves, their curiosity is aroused, leading to "a motivational desire for acquiring new knowledge and experience through exploratory behaviour" (Mahmoodzadeh & Khajavy, 2018, p. 334). In the same vein, Ryan and Deci (2000) referred to curiosity, relating L2 learners' motivation to their "inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn" (p. 70). Hence, not only does this inquisitive mindset spur a feeling of contentment and enthusiasm, making the learning process pleasurable and motivating, but it also stimulates learners' educational performance. Mahmoodzadeh and Khajavy (2018) thus conceptualise Language Learning Curiosity as one of the levers for boosting motivation in the language classroom.

Interestingly, Mora (2017), a neuroscientist, also identifies curiosity and, from this core emotion, formulates a simple equation: $L = Em + Att + Mem$ (Learning = Emotion + Attention + Memory). In other words, curiosity can spark the emotional ignition required to unlock the gates of conscious attention. Once attention is awakened, memory can register (or record) what is being learnt.

Furthermore, in a critical way, self-concept connects the individual's affective and cognitive systems while intimately related to learning. Thus, "when stimuli, experiences or events cross the threshold of the self-concept in such a way that they attain self-relevant meaning, they become special" (Markus & Wurf, 1987, p. 328). In addition to enhancing memory retention, exposing learners to novel, unexpected, and moderately challenging input fosters intrinsic motivation (Oudeyer et al., 2016).

Historically, self-esteem was often approached from the perspective of a relationship with a negative affective factor, anxiety: the lower the self-esteem, the higher the anxiety and the more learning difficulties (Horwitz et al., 1986). However, the influence of humanistic psychology at the end of the 20th century and the emergence of positive psychology in the second decade of the 21st century led to the consolidation of

a model of research and pedagogy in which positive emotions play a central role in understanding how a second language is acquired.

Anxiety is arguably the affective factor that has received the most attention in second language learning research, along with motivation and self-esteem, and its salience lies in its potential to hinder or even inhibit language learning. Although some have referred to the existence of a facilitating type of anxiety (Horwitz, 2010; Rubio, 2017), research in this area tends to agree that the presence of anxiety in the learning process is generally negative in nature (MacIntyre, 1999); thus, rather than *facilitating anxiety*, it would perhaps be more accurate to speak of *creative tension*. As Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 125) state, “when anxiety is limited to the language learning situation, it falls into the category of specific anxiety reactions,” that is, those experienced exclusively in particular settings rather than being attributable to underlying anxiety levels. Moreover, if speaking in public in one's mother tongue is often anxiety-provoking in itself, this feeling may be somewhat more pronounced when having to do so using a linguistic code that one has not yet mastered. Thus, the act of learning a foreign language constitutes what Guiora (1983, p. 8) called a “profoundly unsettling psychological proposition” in that by communicating in an L2 in which their competence is limited, learners are not able to express themselves as capably as they might wish and therefore regard communication in L2 as intimidating.

2.2 Relational Affective Factors

Language learning is a socially constructed process, a fact that has attracted the attention of scholars interested in the extent to which external sources, such as the classroom setting, the learning environment, and transactions or interactions with peers and teachers, can influence learners' feelings and emotions (Richards, 2022). This means that individual and relational affective factors should be considered when undertaking language activities in the classroom, as they have been found to influence learning (Arnold & Foncubierto, 2019) significantly.

Järvenoja and Järvelä (2013) claim that emotional reactions that are aroused or otherwise related to the social learning situation, like the emotional atmosphere within a classroom context and the interaction between learners, may support the learning process. It follows that socio-emotionally competent students are in a better position to benefit fully from their learning experiences. McBrien et al. (2018) attribute the students' social competence to their emotional and social skills, empathy, and interpersonal sensitivity.

Empathy has inspired much research in the field of language teaching, and more specifically in the EFL context. Empathy, sometimes described as “the willingness to put oneself in another's shoes”, that is, the readiness and ability to understand others, is crucial for learning, teaching, and communication, particularly between individuals from different cultures.

The neurobiological interpretation of empathy reveals the importance of observation, imitation, and emotional understanding of actions that we internalize as appropriate social behaviours. Neuronal cells known as mirror neurons (Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia, 2006) or Gandhi neurons (so named by Ramachandran, 2008) are the

physiological basis of our empathic behaviour. These neurons reproduce the same brain activity when a person witnesses an action as when they perform it; this means that, without actually engaging in the external behaviour, its mere observation generates a mental representation that allows us, in a sense, to own up the actions, sensations, and emotions perceived in others. Studies have shown that this group of neurons is involved in understanding the world around us and is essential for social harmony, since our interactions with our environment and our own emotional behaviour are largely dependent on “our ability to perceive and understand the emotions of others” (Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia, 2006, p. 170).

Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) highlight leadership skills as a critical trait in the development of teaching competence and, based on the humanistic model developed by Rogers (1969), they identify the teacher’s empathic capacity among the main contributors to the achievement of good results in the classroom. These views are also connected to Goleman’s (1998) definition of emotional intelligence, according to which individuals who exercise their leadership effectively display the following traits:

1. Knowing one’s own emotions.
2. Knowing how to manage them.
3. Motivating oneself.
4. Recognising other people’s emotions.
5. Managing social relationships.

(adapted from Goleman, 1998, pp. 82-90)

Being an empathetic teacher does not imply constant agreement with the learners and striving to please them. The latter would be sympathy, not empathy. Instead, being a teacher with empathic sensitivity implies being equipped with an attitude of unconditional acceptance towards the student, providing constructive feedback which avoids judgements that could generate anxiety or rejection in the student, as well as being able to manage groups while keeping in mind their possible emotional response. Empathy is to teaching what oxygen is to human survival. If a teacher does not desire to see and feel things the way his or her students see them, then he or she may be able to deliver content but not truly teach.

The quality of intra-classroom relationships is also closely connected to the concept of *teacher confirmation*, which refers to an affective relational factor that allows us to modify our self-concept based on verbal and non-verbal behaviour during interpersonal interactions. People construct their sense of worth, acceptance, and competence through interaction with others. In education, Ellis (2000, p. 265) defines teacher confirmation as “the process by which teachers communicate to students that they are valuable, significant individuals”. By doing so, teachers foster a positive self-concept in learners and can awaken motivation, interest, willingness to communicate, and learners’ confidence in their own abilities.

Stevick (1998) notes the importance of making the learner feel like a person of worth within a universe of meaningful action. De Andrés (2002) explains that to establish

meaningful communication in class, the first requirement is an affective recognition of the student. Consequently, teaching also encompasses being mindful of how we communicate, as this often conditions how students perceive their teachers and their students, ultimately shaping the meaning and structure of classroom interaction. For Leon (2007), confirmatory communication is a dyadic process in which the sender and receiver provide feedback to each other, thus also involving the student's confirmation, which makes the teacher feel valued.

Thus, the teacher's emotional investment in the learning process and his or her need to feel valued as a competent professional is acknowledged. In both cases, while confirmation conveys positive feelings for one's self-concept, disconfirmation conveys messages to the receiver that are emotionally charged and negative for their self-image. The way we teachers express ourselves through the use of verbal and non-verbal language is a valuable asset for the creation of a more affective and effective learning community, which we can develop if we embrace the notion that "students are our finest teachers" (De Andrés, 2002, p. 95) in the universe of meaningful action that is the classroom.

Recently, the value of establishing and managing interpersonal relationships within the classroom has been further explored and conceptualised as *relational mediation* by Coste and Cavalli (2015). Building on this idea, the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) has been updated and extended to include in its Companion Volume (2020) benchmarks for measuring learners' performance in speaking activities which require, for instance, "establishing a positive atmosphere, creating a pluricultural space, facilitating collaborative interaction with peers, managing plenary and group interaction, or resolving sensitive situations and disputes" (North & Piccardo, 2016, p. 456). Moreover, relational mediation has been explicitly credited with facilitating cognitive mediation, that is, the ability to co-construct meaning with fellow learners in the language classroom and relay the meaning received, both orally and in writing, to others. It thus seems that language education policy documents officially embrace *what goes on between the people in the classroom*, as proposed by Stevick (1980).

3. Affective Factors and English Language Learning

Affective factors of learners and teachers of English have been the focus of numerous research efforts, usually linked to their correlation with the linguistic and interpersonal competence of the participants. Understanding this phenomenon is particularly suited to managing the classroom environment, ensuring constructive peer interactions, and fostering learners' sense of autonomy. Thus, teachers' awareness that "strategy training and helping learners improve their self-esteem may have a mutually positive effect hence boost FL learning" (Asadifard & Biria, 2013, p. 1688) is instrumental to a holistic approach to ELL.

Similarly, motivation in the EFL classroom has been addressed from the perspective of both learners' motivation and that of English language educators, ranging from those with a long career to novice and prospective teachers. In the same vein, extensive research has focused on the teaching strategies and methodologies deployed to

induce motivation in the EFL classroom (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008). In EFL teaching, in settings where English is neither the mother tongue nor used regularly in everyday life as a lingua franca, learner motivation also counteracts potential constraints such as the lack of exposure to the target language culture or opportunities for learners to engage in interaction in English outside the classroom (Howard & Al Khaimah, 2023).

Consequently, EFL teachers need to recognize their role as facilitators of motivation and help their students to draw motivation from unexpected areas, as well as harness their motivational mechanisms to tap into them (Bahous et al., 2011). Teacher motivational strategies, primarily when consciously utilised and specifically tailored, can successfully foster EFL learner motivation (Howard & Al Khaimah, 2023). To this end, Nalipay et al. (2021) demand greater attention be placed on emotion in pre- and in-service teacher training.

In particular, strategies based on positive affective factors have contributed significantly to success in target language acquisition (Asadifard & Biria, 2013), enabling learners to reach their full potential. In this sense, as Ng and Ng (2015) point out, the EFL teacher is often the primary or sole means of accessing the target language through instruction and feedback. The EFL teacher wears multiple hats, including “initiator, facilitator, motivator, the ideal model of the target language speaker, mentor, consultant and mental supporter” (Ng & Ng, 2015, p. 99).

Positive emotions expand English learners’ outlooks and foster the deployment of the cognitive resources which are needed for FLL (Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2021). Accordingly, positive emotions can enhance English language learners’ “awareness of language input” (White, 2018, p. 23). A similar idea, linking the rational and emotional spheres as mutually dependent components of an integrated self which is necessary for effective ELL, has recently been presented by Fonseca-Mora (2023).

Several factors have been shown to influence EFL learners’ motivation. Most notably, students’ attitudes, such as willingness to communicate and beliefs about language learning (Cao, 2011). Beliefs like self-efficacy can bolster learners’ confidence, perceived FLL skills, and interactional behaviours. However, approaches to teaching and the socio-educational context can be equally decisive (Sato & Storch, 2020). Along the same lines, the centrality of enjoyment to intrinsic motivation led Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016) to propose Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and to identify two intertwined sub-dimensions which emerge in the classroom. Thus, social FLE, arising from “shared legends, laughter in class and enjoyable relationships with teachers and peers” (Dewaele, 2020, p. 208), relates to a positive classroom environment conducive to empowering interactions among all the group members. Private FLE, on the other hand, embodied in “internal feelings such as pride, fun and a sense of accomplishment” (Dewaele, 2020, p. 208), connects, in turn, to a positively perceived self-concept and self-esteem.

Equally connected to motivation is the concept of flow (Egbert, 2004), which has lately been attracting mounting academic attention in SLL (Dewaele et al., 2022; Wang & Huang, 2022), especially in the course and aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Flow refers to the experience whereby one is subconsciously immersed in a task, actively engaged in the learning process with a sense of pleasure, and taking notice of nothing else but the learning situation. Interestingly, Dewaele (2020) identified that FLE was

significantly correlated with the occurrence of flow experience. Other related studies have revealed the efficacy of flow in ameliorating stressful periods of uncertainty (Rankin et al., 2019), offering a robust framework for successfully adapting to online education (Abdolrezapour & Ghanbari, 2022).

Furthermore, the possibilities afforded by technology open up the way to create ELL texts that combine words, images, sound, music, and other media, a practice known as multimodal composing. Jiang and Luk (2016) observed seven motivating features of employing multimodal text construction as a learning activity in the English classroom, namely, “challenge, curiosity, control, fantasy, competition, cooperation, and recognition” (p. 8). The multimodal approach is well suited to appeal to learners’ affective sphere and elicit positive emotional responses that connect with their FLE and ELL engagement. In addition to its link to emotional responses, research has uncovered the potential for enhancing social-emotional and interpersonal skills that music-based teaching approaches can have for the EFL classroom (Cores-Bilbao et al., 2019).

Lastly, the relationship between positive affective phenomena and resilience in ELL should also be mentioned. The value of resilience lies in the ability to cope successfully with academic challenges, stress, and learning pressures encountered in the language learning process (Zhang, 2022), whose prevalence is typically higher in the early stages of ELL. Consequently, scholarly literature suggests that educators should equip students with strategies for managing adversity in ELL to increase their resilience and motivation.

4. What does Recent Research Reveal?

Teachers of English as L2 need to keep up to date with research findings in SLL. The act of reading scientific articles can provide insights and new theoretical foundations on which to build their pedagogy. Knowing what has been tried and tested is always more reassuring in the face of unsubstantiated beliefs or opinions. The field of L2 research itself brings together a multitude of articles that establish a constant and sometimes contradictory scientific dialogue with each other. Scientific progress moves forward in this way. Teachers are also involved in research when they apply the implications of these findings to teaching. In this section, we present the conclusions of four articles from which suggestions can be drawn for incorporating procedures, strategies, or resources into L2 teaching.

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gregersen, T. (2012). Emotions that facilitate language learning: The positive-broadening power of the imagination. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* 2 (2), 193–213. <https://doi.org/10.14746/sslit.2012.2.2.4>

This paper aims to establish a theoretical foundation to fully understand how affect and imagination contribute to language learning. Teachers can create classroom and task conditions that draw upon the power of their imaginations to provoke essential reactions and optimize the cognition that modifies learners' emotional schemas.

Jiang, L., & Luk, J. (2016). Multimodal composing as a learning activity in English classrooms: Inquiring into the sources of its motivational capacity. *System*, 59, 1–11. <https://10.1016/j.system.2016.04.001>

This paper argues for teachers to incorporate positive motivational strategies in using multimodal resources, such as gamification, peer collaboration, and personalization, to improve students' engagement and persistence in language learning.

Gkonou, C., & Mercer, S. (2017). *Understanding emotional and social intelligence among English language teachers. Discussion Paper. British Council.*

This paper outlines how the interpersonal dimension of the language classroom is central to its success, and why it should be fostered in teacher education, especially in the early stages of their career. Moreover, the article stresses that students should be encouraged to set realistic and achievable goals in EFL learning and be given feedback and reinforcement to nurture their self-concept as language learners.

Cores-Bilbao, E., Fernández-Corbacho, A., Machancoses, F. H., & Fonseca-Mora, M. C. (2019). A music-mediated language learning experience: Students' awareness of their socio-emotional skills. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 2238. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02238>

This research shows that the implementation of a music-mediated experience promoted tolerance and enhanced learners' intrinsic motivations for language learning at the same time as acknowledging their diversity.

The studies above provide empirical evidence on aspects we can include in our English as L2 classes. The results of MacIntyre and Gregersen's study can be considered the starting point of positive psychology applied to SLA. They encourage teachers to design activities where learners can see themselves doing things, as that provides motivational energy. In Jiang and Luk's study, multimodal activities become essential as

they affect motivation-related aspects: engagement and perseverance. Gkonou and Mercer's research confirms the importance of helping learners to set realistic goals, as this improves their self-esteem as L2 learners. Finally, the article by Cores-Bilbao et al. underlines the importance of music-mediated L2 learning experiences and how these activities affect intrinsic motivation.

In short, reading these and other research articles can contribute to focusing on the affective dimension at the centre of the L2 teaching-learning process.

5. Affective Factors and Classroom Instruction

Multimodal activities featuring other languages alongside verbal language, with particular attention to the value of visual, kinaesthetic, and auditory content, provide essential stimuli for sensory memory. Designing such activities offers ESL teachers a set of methods to mobilize cognitive resources, combine affective content, and ensure the physical engagement of learners. These are holistic approaches, since we learn through our bodies (Asadifard & Biria, 2013; Arnold & Foncubierta, 2019). These tasks aim to facilitate the integration of multiple elements (mind, senses, imagination, creativity and emotion), in order to capture students' attention, achieve their active involvement, a greater retention in long-term memory, a strengthening of their self-esteem, and an increase in their motivation.

Traditional methodologies, however, often view the learning process as occurring only from the neck up. This highly contested reductionist view of learning privileges knowledge acquisition through memorization and mechanical repetition, with no stimuli other than the written word or auditory input. Understood this way, learning can reduce, to some extent, students' willingness to communicate in the classroom. Moreover, public speaking is an activity that challenges the social image of the learner. In this sense, few subjects in the curriculum make students feel as vulnerable as when they have to speak in a language they have not yet mastered. For this reason, Stevick (1998) affirmed that "success depends less on materials, techniques, and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on *inside* and *between* the people in the classroom" (p. 3).

Among the main socio-affective strategies to favour the development of a positive interpersonal climate and adequate intrapersonal well-being in the classroom, the teacher's own physical presence and disposition stand out, as well as their verbal and non-verbal communication. Thus, making eye contact (with all students equally); using face and hand gestures when speaking (we also communicate through our bodies); varying intonation (emotion is often conveyed through the voice); showing approachability (being oneself); circulating the classroom (showing proximity), and smiling, can go a long way.

Students need teachers for many reasons. One of them is fundamental: to make learning happen. This means managing the classroom to generate learning situations in which we build the most conducive emotional or accommodating atmosphere. These are ambitious goals for good teaching practice, but they are attainable. Stevick's (1998) quote brings us closer to the affective dimension of the teaching-learning process and posits that instruction is not essential for learning to occur. The act of teaching is subservient to the act of learning. The teacher can nurture learners' desire to acquire communicative skills

in English by making the classroom an attractive space in which their physical, cognitive, and affective dimensions are attended to. Another socio-affective strategy for developing skills such as oral and written expression is to devise learning tasks that address both the practice of communication and the strengthening of intrapersonal affective factors such as self-esteem. Reasoner (1983) defined self-esteem as the judgement of worth we make about ourselves. De Andrés and Arnold (2009) summarise it as the extent to which we trust ourselves. Being aware of the building blocks of self-esteem can help us to design tasks or implement the most appropriate teaching strategies to create an optimal learning space. Reasoner (1983) breaks down the concept of self-esteem into the following sub-components: security, identity, belonging, purpose, and competence. The task Qualities Barter is a prime example of how working on affective factors such as self-esteem does not mean giving up grammar and vocabulary (Table 1).

Table 1

Title Qualities Barter task

Level: CEFR A2 and above.

Aims: To practise vocabulary related to positive qualities and units of measurement.

Oral and written production.

Language content practised: countable and uncountable nouns; quantifiers; making suggestions (Let's trade... for...; Shall we trade... for...?)

Time: 10 minutes one day. 30 minutes the next day.

Teachers' notes:

1.- Introduce the class to the vocabulary for expressing quantities and invite students to participate by brainstorming two or three quantity words or expressions they already know.

Suggestions:

2.- At the end of the lesson ask students to bring to the following class a list of five positive qualities that they think they possess.

3.- Just before the beginning of the next class, write on the board QUALITIES BARTER. You may want to go over the vocabulary for expressing quantities or simply list it in a space on the board.

4.- Tell students that the classroom has become a marketplace for the day, where they can exchange positive qualities. Students will walk around the room and ask each other what qualities they have. They will have to explain the meaning if a classmate is unfamiliar with it. If there are qualities they really covet, they may exchange them by making use of these language tokens:

- "I'll trade you a litre of sympathy for a metre of imagination."

- "Would you like to exchange a pinch of your sincerity for a spoonful of my enthusiasm"?

5.- If their classmate agrees, they can add this new quality to their list.

6.- For homework, students will have to write a paragraph about the qualities they have acquired and how they plan to use them in their lives.

Arnold and Foncubierta (2019), *Atención a los factores afectivos*, Edinumen

Based on an introspective view, the task reinforces the development of a sense of identity in the L2. Also, by promoting the exchange of qualities with peers, it reinforces the feeling of belonging to the group and generates feelings of mutual acceptance, along with a self-appraisal of one's own strengths and an appreciation of those of one's peers. The purpose of the task is straightforward: to strengthen one's positive self-image. The task builds on the principle of trust, setting a low level of difficulty and drawing on the language provided by the learners, which activates their sense of competence. By providing language models, learners can come to feel that they are capable of completing the task. Finally, the activity concludes with an emotional photo booth session in which pupils are photographed standing beside their qualities.

Figure 1

Participant in the Qualities Barter Task



Note. Participant in the Qualities Barter task, former student of one of the authors of this chapter

Another type of task which can promote feelings such as a sense of assurance, confidence and competence and ultimately identity in an L2 are those based on picture reading or visual literacy. The advantage of visual input is that it is easily decodable; the image acts as a *lingua franca* as long as it is familiar and recognisable to the learner. Reading images always elicits correct responses and this fosters a sense of confidence and reduced anxiety: we can always think of something to say because there is no more authentic communication than that between the observer and the observed. When we look at an image, our interpretative thinking is activated based on what we have stored in our long-term memory. What is relevant about this type of task is that it fosters curiosity, which is vital for learning (Mora, 2017; Mahmoodzadeh & Khajavy, 2018).

The task "*I am an image/melody: what can you guess about me?*" is a good example of a warm-up activity focused on developing socio-affective learning strategies. This proposal is inspired by an idea by Ben Goldstein (2008) and can be carried over to other languages such as that of music ("I am a melody").

Table 2

I Am an Image Task

<p>Level: CEFR A2 and above.</p> <p>Aims: To create a relaxed atmosphere for hypothesising by using expressions of opinion (I think you are a _____ person...; I believe you are a _____ person; I think you like/enjoy/ are good at _____) and descriptive vocabulary to convey the image we have of others and of ourselves.</p> <p>Content: positive personality traits or characteristics; hobbies and likes or dislikes.</p> <p>Skills: Oral and written production.</p> <p>Time: 30 minutes.</p> <p>Teachers' notes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1.- Share a photograph of a landscape or an object with which you can identify. Alternatively, you can relate to a melody. Show examples to the class to practise expressing hypotheses about what a person is like, their hobbies and preferences, etc.2.- Then invite students to join in by saying "I am this image/melody, what can/could you guess about me?".3.- As an activity for the following day, ask students to bring an image or a melody they feel they identified with in order to carry on with the activity and thus promote mutual understanding.4.- In the next session, collect the images and distribute them on the walls of the classroom as a photo gallery. Ask students to walk around and to make notes of their hypotheses about what their owner might be like based on the image. If they share a tune, you may want to create a playlist on Spotify.
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Adapted from Golstein (2013), Working with images. Cambridge University Press

The above activity (Table 2) is a simple way to fuel students' imaginations, break the ice in the classroom and offer a fresh presentation activity that can arouse students' curiosity. The basic emotion that activates attention and improves memorisation skills. Encourage students to bring a picture to class that is closely connected to the way they see themselves. Turn the classroom into a photographic exhibition hall (if possible, metaphorise it) and have students wander around looking at their classmates' pictures, attempting to imagine what they are like from the visual cues provided.

Figure 2

Title Visual cue for I am an image task



The final next task is entitled "My future self" and it is as simple as using the *futureme* resource (<https://www.futureme.org>). This is a website which allows learners to write an email to themselves which they will receive on a set future date. It is a very interesting tool that can encourage such dialogue between the current self and the imagined future self. It can be incorporated into the classroom from B1 level upwards. The results are usually very rewarding because it stimulates curiosity, a sense of humour and allows students to check whether their initial goals have been met or whether they need to adjust their initial plan. It is highly recommended for long-term courses.

6. Suggestions for Action Research in the TESOL Classroom

Action research methodology focuses on the reflective process by which teachers analyse their own professional practice. Therefore, in action research the departure point is always a practical classroom problem from which hypotheses are formulated. It differs from other research methods in that it is action-oriented and thus aims primarily at improving teaching practice.

In this section, a real-life situation is presented involving learners who struggled to produce a sufficiently fluent and coherent narrative text at B1 level (CEFR, 2018), due to a limited amount of prior practice in this skill. This may also apply to learners who self-report as lacking the ability to imagine scenarios or find the words to convey their ideas, which denotes a poor self-esteem or low self-assessment of their own competence. Given that some of the activities presented in this chapter have featured music as a means of encouraging students' emotional involvement and thus facilitating their ability to visualise, an action research study exploring the effect of a music-based visualisation task on students' written expression is detailed below.

Table 4

Title Influence of musical stimuli on the quality of adult EFL learners' writing tasks

Influence of musical stimuli on the quality of adult EFL learners' writing tasks

Research Questions

1. Are there significant differences in texts produced by learners depending on whether they performed L2 writing tasks supported by background musical input?
2. If so, which variable of written expression responds best to the use of background musical stimuli (the number of words written, the range of adjectives used, the syntactic complexity or the number of linking devices incorporated into the text)?

Research Design

This study seeks to help teachers determine whether the use of musical melodies during the completion of an L2 task can contribute to higher quality texts produced and increased learner creativity.

The aim is to reflect on how to create a supportive classroom environment that facilitates the successful completion of writing tasks, which are difficult for learners because they require time, confidence, a sense of competence and concentration. Previous studies on the matter offer contradictory results, as some authors consider that music positively influences L2 task performance, while others argue that music interferes with the cognitive processing of those linguistic tasks (Schellenberg & Weiss, 2013). Kämpfe et al. (2011), however, indicated that music had a significant effect on adult learners' emotional responses when performing written production tasks.

Procedure

The procedure to be followed requires a comparison between two groups of learners, one of which would perform L2 tasks with the support of background musical stimuli (group A) and another in which the background musical stimuli would be suppressed (group B or control group).

Using the narrative text "The Unicorn" (see annex) as input material, in the control group, the teacher would read the text aloud and at each long pause the learners would be asked to imagine and try to describe the different characters, recount the situations presented and devise an ending for the story.

The students in the experimental group (group A) would perform the task accompanied by musical stimuli to help them visualise the situations and gain a sense of control over the activity. Classical musical compositions representing character traits or story plots would be selected and played to test whether the musical stimuli contribute to the desired atmosphere of concentration, confidence and creativity.

The tasks would be time-limited and the assessing teachers would challenge students in both groups to strive to bring as much linguistic richness and textual fluency into their writing as they are able.

Research Instruments

The research methodology proposed for this study is qualitative in nature. To flesh out the data obtained from the student-generated texts, participant observation, which is a method in which the researcher actively observes and participates in the activities and interactions of a group or community under study, is proposed. This method is encouraged because it offers the advantage of providing close familiarity with the groups under study and their practices, allowing, for example, peer observation of fellow teachers and their students. In addition, participant observation provides meaningful data that goes beyond quantitative measures such as test scores. Researchers can thus capture nuances, emotions and tacit aspects of the learning process (Yang & Moskovsky, 2021).

Teachers' records of participant observation would be documented in real time through field notes. These notes may contain detailed descriptions of what was observed, including behaviours, interactions and context. Students may also be prompted to write learning logs recording their experiences, thoughts, feelings and reflections, which would be made available to their teacher at the end of the research project.

Data Analysis

For the descriptive analysis of the complexity and richness of each group of learners' texts (e.g. monitoring the number of times a learner uses complex syntactic structures), a computational linguistic analysis tool is suggested (Dowell & Graesser, 2014), such as Coh-Metrix. Coh-Metrix supports text analysis because it provides several metrics related to frequency and type of linguistic and syntactic features of written texts, such as sentence length, subordination, word frequency, etc. which makes it suitable for assessing the overall complexity of students' writing.

As for the data from field notes and student logs, the initial step would be to categorise the data, organising and structuring it around the project key concepts (i.e. creativity, concentration, emotional responses, etc). Next, the focus would be on identifying recurring themes or patterns in the data, by establishing the frequency of certain behaviours, key words or phrases. Alternatively, data from the teacher's field notes could be compared and contrasted with the students' learning logs to reveal discrepancies or consistencies between the teacher's observations and the students' experiences.

Project Duration

The estimated timeframe this project would be one trimester, which would involve fieldwork for approximately two months, and an additional month for the analysis of the data obtained and for the drafting of the reports to be shared with the educational community.

7. Conclusion

For Mora (2017), teaching is an act of affection. Based on this premise, if teaching is an act of emotion, the global understanding of learning must naturally incorporate how students feel because the human brain only learns if there is emotion. In this chapter, we

have presented evidence gathered in the field of SLL research, which places emotions at the heart of the L2 teaching and learning process itself: emotions can strengthen or hinder learning. The activities presented, as well as the action research project, were aimed at working with teaching and learning strategies related to affective dimension of learning. Thus, stimulating imagination and imagining oneself speaking an L2 can be a good strategy for developing communicative competence in that language. In this sense, activities aimed at promoting visualisation and inner talk may be advisable ways of achieving more affective and effective results in the early stages of the learning process. In an article in *The Guardian* in 2016, the same concern was expressed: “If you can’t imagine things, how can you learn?”

The multimodal approach to activities, employing image and music, can also contribute to creating the environments of well-being, safety, and confidence that positive psychology speaks of. Both music and image are easily decodable, regardless of the learner's mother tongue, because they act as a lingua franca, which creates a more pleasant classroom atmosphere and allows learners to connect with themselves while completing a task. Likewise, images and music are languages that can be emotionally charged and stimulate the creative side of learning.

A classroom that links language content with real or imagined experiences (the mind does not discriminate between the real and the imagined; it activates the same neural networks) is a classroom that could promote language learning opportunities in a more affective and effective way.

Recommended Reading

Dewaele, J. M., & Li, C. (2020). Emotions in second language acquisition: A critical review and research agenda. *Foreign Language World*, 196(1), 34–49.
https://caod.oriprobe.com/articles/58141199/Emotions_in_second_language_acquisition_A_critical.htm

This paper critically examines the literature on emotions in second language acquisition and offers suggestions for further research and implications for L2 teaching and learning.

Gregersen, T., & Mercer, S. (Eds.). (2021). *The Routledge handbook of the psychology of language learning and teaching*. Routledge.

This book is dedicated to theories in positive psychology and their implications for language teaching and learning. Among other contents, the authors explore the characteristics of individuals, contexts, and relationships that facilitate learning: positive emotional states such as enjoyment and flow and character traits such as empathy, hardiness, and perseverance.

Vonkova, H., Jones, J., Moore, A., Altinkalp, I., & Selcuk, H. (2021). A review of recent research in EFL motivation: Research trends, emerging methodologies, and diversity of researched populations. *System*, 103, 102622. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102622>

This is a recent comprehensive systematic review of the most relevant EFL motivation breakthroughs. It brings together numerous studies investigating the positive impact of technology on EFL learners' motivation to learn. Similarly, creative teaching approaches are noted as having the potential to enrich the EFL experience by enabling greater student agency.

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