

Affective strategies in fostering motivation and English language acquisition for students in at-risk contexts

Estrategias afectivas para fomentar la motivación y la adquisición del lenguaje inglés para estudiantes en contexto de riesgo social

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ABSTRACT

The acquisition of English as a foreign language is influenced by cognitive, emotional, and contextual factors that shape learners' participation and academic achievement. Among these factors, affective strategies have emerged as essential tools for reducing anxiety, strengthening motivation, and facilitating language learning, particularly in socially vulnerable environments. This study aimed to analyze the influence of affective strategies on students' motivation and English language acquisition in an at-risk educational context in Guayaquil, Ecuador. A concurrent mixed-methods design was adopted, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study involved a sample of 46 students selected from a population of 327 learners enrolled in a public educational institution located in a high-risk area. Data were collected through classroom observations, student surveys, and a semi-structured interview with an English teacher. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical procedures, while qualitative information was examined through thematic coding. Preliminary findings revealed that the implementation of affective strategies, including positive reinforcement, empathy, motivational support, and gamified activities, contributed to increased student participation, greater classroom engagement, and a reduction in emotional barriers associated with English learning. Survey results indicated that most students perceived English classes as more enjoyable and reported feeling encouraged to continue participating despite making mistakes. Likewise, observations showed improvements in classroom climate, motivation, and interaction. The findings support Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis by suggesting that emotionally supportive learning environments facilitate language acquisition. The study concludes that affective strategies play a significant role in fostering motivation and promoting English language acquisition among students living in contexts of social vulnerability.

**Keywords:** Affective Strategies; English Language Acquisition; Motivation; At-Risk Context.

RESUMEN

La adquisición del inglés como lengua extranjera está influenciada por factores cognitivos, emocionales y contextuales que condicionan la participación y el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes. Entre estos factores, las estrategias afectivas han adquirido especial relevancia debido a su capacidad para reducir la ansiedad, fortalecer la motivación y favorecer el aprendizaje de idiomas, particularmente en contextos caracterizados por la vulnerabilidad social. El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar la influencia de las estrategias afectivas en la motivación y en la adquisición del idioma inglés de estudiantes pertenecientes a un contexto educativo de riesgo en la ciudad de Guayaquil, Ecuador. Para ello, se empleó un diseño de métodos mixtos concurrentes que integró enfoques cuantitativos y cualitativos. La investigación contó con una muestra de 46 estudiantes seleccionados de una población de 327 alumnos de una institución educativa pública ubicada en una zona de alta vulnerabilidad social. Los datos fueron recopilados mediante observaciones de aula, encuestas estudiantiles y una entrevista semiestructurada aplicada a una docente de inglés. La información cuantitativa fue analizada mediante procedimientos estadísticos descriptivos, mientras que los datos cualitativos fueron examinados a través de un proceso de categorización temática. Los resultados preliminares evidenciaron que la implementación de estrategias afectivas, tales como el refuerzo positivo, la empatía, el apoyo motivacional y las actividades lúdicas, favoreció una mayor participación estudiantil, incrementó la motivación y redujo diversas barreras emocionales asociadas al aprendizaje del inglés. Asimismo, se observaron mejoras en el clima del aula y en la interacción entre los estudiantes. Se concluye que las estrategias afectivas constituyen un elemento fundamental para fortalecer la motivación y facilitar la adquisición del idioma inglés en contextos educativos socialmente vulnerables.

**Palabras clave:** Estrategias afectivas; Adquisición del Idioma Inglés; Motivación; Contexto de Riesgo social.

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English teachers in vulnerable schools should prioritize empathetic feedback, mistake-tolerant speaking routines, brief gamified tasks, and consistent positive reinforcement to reduce anxiety and sustain participation among students facing social adversity.

## INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of English as a foreign language has become a fundamental educational objective in contemporary societies, as proficiency in English provides access to academic, professional, and intercultural opportunities. However, language learning is a complex process influenced not only by cognitive factors but also by emotional, motivational, and contextual variables. Current research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) emphasizes that successful language development depends on the interaction between learners' emotional states, motivational dispositions, instructional practices, and social environments (Ellis, 2015; Loewen & Sato, 2018; Zhang & Zou, 2022).

Among these factors, affective strategies have gained increasing attention due to their role in helping learners regulate emotions, manage anxiety, and maintain engagement throughout the learning process. Within the framework of self-regulated learning, affective strategies are considered essential mechanisms that enable learners to cope with emotional challenges and sustain academic effort (Habók, Magyar, & Molnár, 2022). Similarly, Huang (2022) argues that positive emotions such as enjoyment, hope, and confidence promote resilience and persistence in language learning, while Ifadah, Aimah, and Santoso (2023) highlight that affective regulation remains an underdeveloped component of many educational programs despite its demonstrated benefits. Furthermore, research conducted by Peungcharoenkun and Waluyo (2024) indicates that positive affective engagement contributes significantly to learners' participation and language improvement through collaborative learning experiences.

Motivation constitutes another critical variable in language learning and has consistently been associated with students' academic achievement and persistence. According to Eccles, Wigfield, and Schiefele (1998), motivation functions as the driving force behind goal-directed behavior, while Jansen et al. (2022) identify it as one of the strongest predictors of academic engagement in educational settings. In the context of English language learning, motivational processes are closely linked to affective regulation and instructional support. Sun (2021) found that teacher praise and caring behaviors strengthen students' willingness to participate, whereas Zhang (2024) demonstrated that self-regulation strategies positively influence learners' motivation, self-efficacy, and willingness to communicate. Likewise, Lazowski and Hulleman (2015) concluded that motivational interventions produce meaningful improvements in academic performance across educational contexts.

The process of English Language Acquisition (ELA) is also shaped by multiple cognitive, social, and interactional dimensions. Ellis (2015) conceptualizes language acquisition as a dynamic process influenced by learners' exposure to meaningful input and communicative opportunities. From an interactionist perspective, Bower and Kawaguchi (2011) as well as Loewen and Sato (2018) emphasize the importance of interaction, feedback, and negotiation of meaning in promoting language development. Additionally, recent studies have highlighted the contribution of scaffolding practices, contextualized vocabulary instruction, and technology-enhanced learning environments in facilitating English acquisition and communicative competence (Pascual, Dionisio, & Ilustre, 2022; Zhang & Zou, 2022; Du, Elgort, & Siyanova-Chanturia, 2021).

These variables acquire particular relevance in educational settings characterized by social and economic vulnerability. At-risk contexts often expose students to adverse circumstances such as poverty, family instability, violence, neglect, and limited educational support, factors that may negatively affect both academic performance and emotional well-being. Novosel et al. (2012) define at-risk learners as students whose personal, familial, or community conditions place them at greater risk of academic failure. In this regard, Tiekstra and Minnaert (2017) argue that students in vulnerable environments require greater emotional and instructional support than their peers, while Santa Parrello et al. (2019) demonstrate how social inequalities can undermine students' self-esteem, aspirations, and motivation to learn. Consequently, these conditions may intensify emotional barriers that interfere with language acquisition processes.

Although previous studies have independently examined affective strategies, motivation, English language acquisition, and vulnerable educational contexts, limited research has explored the dynamic relationship among these variables within high-risk learning environments. This gap is particularly evident in Ecuadorian public schools serving socially vulnerable communities, where students frequently face challenges that extend beyond the classroom. Therefore, the present study seeks to analyze the influence of affective strategies on students' motivation and English language acquisition in an at-risk educational context in Guayaquil, Ecuador. By adopting a concurrent mixed-methods approach, this research aims to contribute empirical evidence regarding the role of affective support in reducing emotional barriers, strengthening motivation, and facilitating language learning among students exposed to conditions of social vulnerability.

### **Affective Strategies**

Affective strategies refer to the deliberate actions learners use to regulate emotions, manage anxiety, and sustain motivation during the language learning process. Within contemporary educational psychology, these strategies are situated under the broader framework of self-regulated learning (SRL), which encompasses cognitive, metacognitive, and affective regulation (Habók, Magyar, & Molnár, 2022). From this perspective, affective strategies do not function as peripheral supports but as central mechanisms that enable learners to persist, engage, and process linguistic input more effectively.

Empirical evidence confirms the centrality of affective strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Habók et al. (2022), in a large-scale quantitative study, demonstrated that affective strategies such as anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, and emotional monitoring directly predict learners' attitudes toward English and their achievement outcomes. These findings suggest that affective strategies operate as mediators between emotional states and academic performance, reinforcing learners' capacity to remain engaged despite linguistic difficulty.

Positive emotional experiences have also been shown to strengthen motivational persistence and self-regulation. Huang (2022) found that emotions such as enjoyment, hope, and confidence promote sustained engagement and resilience in language learning. When learners experience positive affect, they are more willing to tolerate ambiguity, take communicative risks, and persist through challenges. This evidence aligns with the affective filter hypothesis in classical SLA theory, which proposes that low anxiety and positive emotional states facilitate the intake of linguistic input.

Despite their importance, affective strategies remain underutilized in many instructional contexts. Ifadah, Aimah, and Santoso (2023) reported that learners tend to rely more heavily on cognitive and metacognitive strategies while neglecting emotional regulation. This imbalance was attributed to limited explicit instruction in affective strategy use within school curricula. Consequently, affective strategy development should be viewed as an instructional objective rather than an assumed learner trait. Affective strategies also function within social and interactive learning environments. Peungcharoenkun, Tipaya & Waluyo, Budi. (2024) demonstrated that positive affective engagement during peer feedback activities correlates with increased persistence and measurable language improvement. These findings indicate that affective regulation extends beyond individual learners and is co-constructed through interaction, feedback, and classroom relationships.

The effectiveness of affective strategies is further shaped by teachers' emotional competence and instructional practices. Wang, F., & Ye, Z. (2021) emphasized that teachers' ability to regulate their own emotions significantly predicts students' academic engagement. When teachers model calmness, empathy, and emotional control, they establish a classroom climate that reduces anxiety and supports motivational stability. Similarly, Marsevani (2024) observed that teachers who intentionally integrate emotionally supportive practices—such as positive reinforcement, relaxation techniques, and reassurance—facilitate learners' internalization of affective strategies as personal learning tools.

Joining these researches, we can suggest a dual dynamic in affective regulation: teachers provide the emotional scaffolding that enables learners to practice affective strategies effectively, while learners' strategy use reinforces motivation and engagement. Affective strategies thus function as a bridge between emotional stability and sustained participation in language learning. Negative emotions, including anxiety, boredom, and demotivation, continue to present significant barriers to EFL progress. Solhi (2024) reviewed evidence showing that such emotions reduce participation, impair recall, and limit communicative willingness, effectively acting as affective filters that block language input. The study emphasized the importance of integrating affective strategy training—particularly anxiety management, mindfulness, and self-encouragement—into everyday classroom routines.

Affective strategies become especially critical during challenging instructional conditions, such as online or hybrid learning environments. Djiwandono (2024) found that learners who intentionally applied coping strategies, including humor, relaxation, and social interaction, managed stress more effectively and maintained motivation during remote instruction. These findings highlight the adaptive function of affective strategies across learning contexts and their protective role during educational disruptions.

## **Motivation**

Motivation represents a foundational construct in understanding learner engagement and achievement in English language acquisition. Derived from the Latin term *movere*, meaning "to move," motivation captures the internal energy that initiates and sustains human action (Eccles et al., 1998). Contemporary scholarship defines motivation as the driving force behind individuals' goal-directed behavior, emphasizing its influence on academic engagement, achievement, educational attainment, and psychological well-being (Jansen et al., 2022) reinforcing the theory of Lazowski, Rory & Hulleman, Chris. (2015) which states that motivational interventions have a moderate positive effect on academic performance. Within language learning, motivation is increasingly understood as a dynamic and context-sensitive construct rather than a stable trait.

Research has demonstrated that motivation interacts closely with affective regulation and instructional support. Sun Y (2021) identified teacher praise as an external affective scaffold that strengthens learners' internal motivation and willingness to communicate. Such affective support enhances engagement, which in turn mediates language achievement. Similarly, Zhang, Tingting (2024) reported that self-regulation strategies, including emotional control techniques, significantly predict learners' motivation and self-efficacy. These findings suggest a reciprocal relationship in which motivation encourages the use of affective strategies, while affective regulation sustains motivation during cognitively demanding tasks.

Motivation also operates in conjunction with metacognitive processes. Abdelshiheed et al. (2023) demonstrated that learners' awareness of when and how to apply learning strategies, combined with motivational engagement, predicts their capacity for preparation for future learning. This evidence indicates that motivation alone is insufficient; rather, it functions synergistically with cognitive and metacognitive regulation to support both immediate performance and long-term adaptability.

### **English Language Acquisition.**

English Language Acquisition (ELA) refers to the process through which learners develop the ability to comprehend, produce, and use English across academic, social, and professional contexts. Within applied linguistics, ELA is examined under the broader field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), which conceptualizes language learning as a dynamic, non-linear process influenced by cognitive, social, linguistic, and contextual factors (Ellis, 2015).

From an interactionist perspective, English acquisition is mediated through meaningful communication that involves negotiation of meaning, feedback, and collaborative problem-solving (Bower, Jack & Kawaguchi, Satomi 2011). Interaction-rich environments expose learners to modified input and encourage output production, promoting awareness of gaps in interlanguage development. Empirical studies confirm that task-based and interaction-oriented instruction significantly enhances communicative competence and pragmatic development Loewen S, Sato M.(2018). Sociocultural approaches further emphasize mediation and scaffolding as central to language acquisition. Learners progress when supported within their Zone of Proximal Development through guided instruction, peer collaboration, and dialogic feedback. Post-2020 research confirms that scaffolding strategies facilitate English development by creating emotionally supportive and cognitively appropriate learning conditions, reinforcing the social nature of language learning.

Cognitive theories of ELA highlight the role of processing capacity and developmental readiness. Instructional input that exceeds learners' cognitive processing limits does not result in immediate acquisition, underscoring the importance of sequencing instruction according to learners' developmental stages. Vocabulary acquisition, as a core component of ELA, is similarly shaped by frequency of exposure, contextualized use, and depth of processing (Pascual, Lyn & Dionisio, Greogorie & Ilustre, Ramil 2022). Usage-based perspectives emphasize that lexical knowledge develops through repeated meaningful encounters rather than isolated memorization according to Javadi, Yaghoob & Kazemirad, Fakhreh. (2020).

Another key dimension of ELA is cross-linguistic influence. Learners draw on their first language as a cognitive resource when acquiring English, resulting in both facilitative and non-facilitative transfer. Experimental evidence demonstrates that cross-linguistic influence operates bidirectionally, affecting both second-language processing and, in some cases, first-language use (Du, Elgort, & Siyanova-Chanturia, 2021). Contemporary SLA research therefore views transfer as a natural component of multilingual development rather than as a deficit.

Contextual and technological factors further shape English language acquisition. Research published after 2020 highlights the growing role of digital tools and blended learning environments in increasing exposure to authentic input and opportunities for interaction (Zhang & Zou, 2022). However, the effectiveness of technology-enhanced instruction depends on pedagogical alignment with SLA principles and learners' affective readiness to engage.

### **At-risk Contexts.**

At-risk contexts learners as defined as the students who is in danger of failing to complete school with a basic level of academic proficiency due to several factors situated within the individually, family, and community by Novosel, L., Deshler, D.D., Pollitt, D.T., Mark, C., Mitchell, B.B. (2012). The present research aboard students in situationship of danger facing socioeconomic gap, abuse, neglect, parent's marital status and even some of them low or none parent's level education. In the case of at-risk students, teacher's behavior could have an enormous impact on learning outcomes. As a result, these students need more coaching than the rest of their peers Tiekstra, Marlous & Minnaert, Alexander. (2017). These interactions help students to low their Affective Filter barriers reinforcing Krashen's theory about the relation between emotions and learning.

A research shows that perhaps because the relationship with the suburbs and the educational institution represent strong elements of the identity. The most named emotion is 'anger'—the anger of the professionals confronted with the clear social injustices in the suburbs (Santa Parrello, Ilaria Iorio, Barbara De Rosa & Massimiliano Sommantico 2019) Those injustices affect the moral and the self-esteem of pupils. Some of them lose the motivation to study because think that they never going to achieve a goal and do not even try to develop their life style.

Taken together, this body of research supports an integrative view of English language acquisition in which affective strategies, motivation, and instructional context interact dynamically to influence learning outcomes. Affective strategies function as mediating mechanisms that regulate emotional responses, sustain motivation, and enable learners to engage productively with linguistic input. This framework provides a foundation for examining how such processes operate within at-risk contexts, where emotional vulnerability and motivational instability may intensify barriers to language learning.

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study adopted concurrent mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The concurrent nature of the design allows for simultaneous collection and analysis of data, facilitating the triangulation of findings and enhancing the validity of the results. This approach is particularly suitable for examining the influence of affective strategies on second language acquisition in high-risk contexts, as it enables the researcher to capture both measurable trends and in-depth perspectives.

### Participants and Sample

The population of the study consists of 327 students enrolled in a public educational institution. From this population, a sample of 46 participants was selected through random sampling techniques to ensure representativeness and reduce selection bias. The selected participants constitute the primary source of quantitative and qualitative data for the study.

### Setting / Context

The research was conducted in a public school located in Guayaquil, Ecuador, specifically in a high-risk area between Socio Vivienda 1 and Nueva Prosperina. This context is characterized by social and economic vulnerability, which may influence students' learning processes and emotional conditions. Therefore, the setting provides a relevant environment for analyzing how affective strategies impact second language acquisition under challenging circumstances.

### Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Data was collected through multiple instruments to ensure methodological rigor and depth analysis. Observation checklists were used to systematically record classroom dynamics and monitor how affective strategies influence students' second language acquisition. Additionally, a semi-structured interview was conducted with a teacher from the language area to gain professional insights into instructional practices and student behavior. Furthermore, surveys were administered to the selected sample of students in order to gather quantitative data regarding their experiences and perceptions.

### Instruments.

#### 1. Classroom Observation Sheet

Objective: Identify how affective strategies used during English classes influence student motivation and participation.

Observation Scale: 1 = Not observed | 2 = Slightly observed | 3 = Moderately observed | 4 = Frequently observed | 5 = Constantly observed

### Affective Strategies

| Indicator                                                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Observations |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--------------|
| Teacher uses activities that reduce anxiety (games, humor, relaxation) |   | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 |              |
| Teacher promotes students' self-confidence when using English.         |   | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 |              |
| Students attempt participation even when they make mistakes.           |   | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 |              |
| Teacher encourages emotional self-regulation during activities.        |   | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 |              |

### Student Motivation

| Indicator                                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Observations |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--------------|
| Students show interest in English learning activities. |   | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |              |
| Students volunteer to participate.                     |   | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 |              |
| Students persist despite linguistic difficulties       |   | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 |              |
| Students show enjoyment or enthusiasm                  |   | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |              |

### Emotional Climate and Teacher Support

| Indicator                                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Observations |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--------------|
| Teacher uses praise or positive reinforcement.                 |   |   | 3 | 2 | 3 |              |
| Teacher shows empathy toward student difficulties              |   | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 |              |
| Classroom environment allows students to make mistakes safely. |   | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 |              |
| Students appear comfortable participating.                     |   | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 |              |

### Interaction and Participation

| Indicator                                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Observations |
|---------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--------------|
| Communicative English activities are implemented. |   | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 |              |
| Students interact in pairs or groups.             | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |              |
| Students use English to express ideas.            | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 |   |              |
| Teacher promotes peer feedback.                   | 1 | 3 | 2 |   | 2 |              |

### Emotional Barriers

| Indicator                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Observations |
|-----------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--------------|
| Students show anxiety when speaking English.  |   | 4 | 1 | 3 |   |              |
| Some students avoid participation.            | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 |              |
| Signs of boredom or demotivation are visible. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 |   |              |

## 2. Semi-Structured Interview for Teachers

Objective: Explore teachers' perceptions about affective strategies and their influence on motivation and English learning.

### Affective Strategies

1. What strategies do you use to help students manage emotions such as anxiety or insecurity when learning English?

From the beginning of classes, teacher speaks to them and explains the way in which her score every work. Also, the teacher explains why bullying is not allowed in her classes and the consequences if anybody make it to their classmates.

2. How do you encourage students' confidence to participate in English activities?

Teacher uses behaviorism in classes, as a consequence, they need to speak in classes and participate to get a score and do not reprove the year.

3. Do you think emotional regulation strategies should be explicitly taught? Why?

Teacher does not consider it because she thought that values are responsibility to parents and in school is not necessary to teach it. Just need to reminder students of their values and not dedicate a whole class to that.

### Student Motivation

4. How would you describe your students' motivation toward learning English?

They do not feel or seem motivated the whole time. As a result of the environment, they do not get the enough motivation from their families to develop all their skills.

5. What strategies do you use to increase or sustain motivation in your classes?

Until now, behaviorism is the favorite one, students must speak and participate if they want to gain the credits to pass the subject.

6. Have you noticed changes in motivation when using more dynamic or interactive activities?

Yes, it is different when they are working in a listening activity or a speaking one. They feel nervous and make more mistakes, but also, their behavior get better, so then they think to gain more time to prepare themselves.

### Emotional Climate

7. What actions do you take to create a safe classroom environment for using English?

Speeches about lost credits if they bother a classmate when make a mistake or similar.

8. How do you manage students' mistakes during oral activities?

I consider to "we need to correct together" the mistake. The students and I need to work more and drill the correct word until they do it better.

9. What role do you believe teachers play in the emotional management of the classroom?

Before to be "a teacher" it is necessary to became "a mother" and even "a friend" for them. Most of those children face hard situationship in their homes and teacher's role is to be a listener, usually they do not have anyone to be listened.

### Interaction in Language Learning

10. What types of activities do you use to encourage interaction in English?

Listening activities, role plays, speeches.

11. How does peer interaction influence language learning in your classroom?

They do not use peer interaction as the way to develop their skills, but as a social event time. Some students start to speak each other in their mother language and do not complete the assignments unless teacher is supervising them.

### At-Risk Contexts

12. What challenges do students from vulnerable contexts face when learning English?

Generally, they are leading with parents' divorce, abusive families, families uncomplete because a parent is in prison, abandoned children raising by grandparents, and similar contexts.

13. How do these contexts affect motivation or participation?

They influence so much in students, they feel depressive, demotivated, weak, can not sleep well at night and do not consider scholarship necessary in their lives.

14. What strategies have been most effective in supporting these students?

Being a good listener, only that. Most of them do not want tips or advices, they only need to speak and pucker all their feeling with some reliable one.

### 3. Student Survey

Objective: Identify students' perceptions of motivation, emotions, and classroom strategies in English learning.

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly agree

### Affective Strategies

| Statement                                                                     | 1 | 2 | 3  | 4  | 5  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|----|----|----|
| My teacher uses activities that make the English class relaxed and enjoyable. |   |   | 3  | 21 | 22 |
| Class activities help me feel less afraid to speak English.                   |   |   | 2  | 20 | 24 |
| When I make mistakes, I feel encouraged to keep trying.                       |   | 5 | 23 | 18 |    |

### Motivation

| Statement                                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
|------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|----|
| I feel motivated to learn English.                   |   |   | 2 | 1 | 43 |
| Class activities encourage me to participate.        |   |   | 2 | 4 | 40 |
| I try to participate even when English is difficult. | 6 |   | 2 | 3 | 35 |

### Emotional Climate

| Statement                                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4  | 5  |
|----------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|----|----|
| I feel comfortable participating in English class. | 2 | 4 |   | 15 | 25 |
| My teacher encourages me when I participate.       |   |   |   | 6  | 40 |
| In this class I am not afraid of making mistakes.  | 2 | 8 |   | 32 | 4  |

### Interaction

| Statement                                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|----|
| We have activities to speak English with classmates.  |   |   |   |   | 46 |
| Working with classmates helps me learn English.       |   |   |   | 2 | 44 |
| Group activities make English class more interesting. |   |   | 1 | 2 | 43 |

### Emotional Barriers

| Statement                                                      | 1  | 2  | 3 | 4  | 5 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|---|----|---|
| I feel nervous when I have to speak English.                   |    | 14 |   | 32 |   |
| Sometimes I avoid participating because I might make mistakes. |    | 20 | 2 | 24 |   |
| Sometimes I feel unmotivated to learn English.                 | 40 |    | 4 |    | 2 |

### Procedure

The study was conducted in sequential phases within the framework of a concurrent mixed-methods design. Initially, the selected group was observed prior to the implementation of affective strategies in order to establish a baseline of students' behavior and second language acquisition processes. This preliminary phase last for a period of 15 days, during which constant observation will be carried out using structured observation checklists.

Following this initial stage, affective strategies were implemented over a period of eight weeks. Throughout this intervention phase, weekly observations were conducted to monitor and evaluate any potential progress in students' second language acquisition. This systematic observation process allowed continuous assessment of changes associated with the application of affective strategies.

In addition, a semi-structured interview conducted with the English teacher responsible for upper basic education levels within the institution. The purpose of this interview is to gather professional insights regarding teaching practices, classroom dynamics, and perceived changes in students' learning processes. Simultaneously, a survey administered to the selected student sample in order to collect first-hand data about their perceptions of the instructional changes and their impact on second language acquisition.

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the surveys and observation checklists were analyzed using statistical methods. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was employed to perform descriptive and inferential analyses, including correlations where appropriate, to identify patterns and relationships within the data.

Qualitative data derived from the teacher interview was analyzed through a coding process. The information was categorized according to key themes and components identified in the literature review, allowing for a structured interpretation of the findings. This combined analytical approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the research problem by integrating both numerical data and contextual insights.

### Validity.

It is necessary to remark that the paper has been studied in an at-risk context where not all the parents can read or write properly, poverty is common in alarming levels, most of the families are dysfunctional, drugs and violence are highly present in the sector, and not all the kids live in comfortable situationship. As a consequence, learning barriers are normal and children see the school as a playground and a space to have fun rather than a space to learn properly.

For our research we decided to use structured observation in class. The population of the study was 827 students; however, the sample was only 46 students from 4th grade. The observation was realized continuously over eight classes and the results that we can get from them were the next.

First, in the early observation classes the teacher was not using affective strategies to encourage students to learn the language, therefore students got bored and uninterested during the lessons. As the days came along the teacher was getting to know the kids more, getting their interests and knowing the general situation of most of the students and showing empathy for their daily lives outside of the school. (Most of them need to care for their siblings, help their grandparents at work, do home chores in the afternoon, and even educate themselves completely alone).

As long as the teacher was using the strategies such as, motivation, terms of endearment, gamification after classes, short activities and even worksheets (color by number, wordsearch) students were open their mind and lowering their affective barriers (according to Krashen's hypothesis) allowing themselves to understand more easily and in a funny way the different learnings through lessons, as the graph show.

Another change was about motivation, classroom climate and interaction. In the first lessons learners do not want to participate and even laugh when a classmate did it, the data revealed that when more effective strategies were used the kids start to pay attention and participate in activities, even if they fall, they do not desist, in contrast, they decide to keep trying.

There are some barriers that persist yet, nevertheless the research is in progress. The second part is programmed with a structured interview for the other English teacher and a survey for the students in order to get another part of the quantitative data and the qualitative data by itself.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interview shows that teacher manage the classrooms at her guard in base of behaviorism. This branch of psychology and education emerge in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a reaction relied on subjective report of states and processes. This theory proposes that environmental stimuli and consequences shape behavior and that learning occurs through a process of operant conditioning. (National University, 2023) So, students only participate and fulfill the workshop because they worried about lost credits and repeat an academic year.

On the other hand, the surveys applied to 46 students shows the difference when behaviorism is not used, but the affective strategies are. Supporting this, Krashen's by his Affective Filter Theory (1982) posits that emotional variables act as a filter that either facilitate or impede the language acquisition. As we can see, in observation sheets exist a complete correlation about how while the affective strategies rise the demotivation and stressful barriers low until the second language acquisition is more fluent.

Additionally, a study by Dewaele and McIntyre (2014) demonstrates that learner who employed affective strategies reported lower levels of foreign language classroom anxiety and higher levels of proficiency, according to the paper of Qizi, R. N. B. (2025).

**Table 1.** Correlations between variables

|                      |                        | Affective_Strategies | Motivation | Emotional_Climate | Interaction | Emotional_Barriers |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------|-------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Affective_Strategies | Correlación de Pearson | 1                    | ,977**     | ,995**            | ,927**      | -,906**            |
|                      | Sig. (bilateral)       |                      | <,001      | <,001             | <,001       | ,002               |
|                      | N                      | 8                    | 8          | 8                 | 8           | 8                  |
| Motivation           | Correlación de Pearson | ,977**               | 1          | ,977**            | ,931**      | -,932**            |
|                      | Sig. (bilateral)       | <,001                |            | <,001             | <,001       | <,001              |
|                      | N                      | 8                    | 8          | 8                 | 8           | 8                  |
| Emotional_Climate    | Correlación de Pearson | ,995**               | ,977**     | 1                 | ,902**      | -,936**            |
|                      | Sig. (bilateral)       | <,001                | <,001      |                   | ,002        | <,001              |
|                      | N                      | 8                    | 8          | 8                 | 8           | 8                  |
| Interaction          | Correlación de Pearson | ,927**               | ,931**     | ,902**            | 1           | -,841**            |
|                      | Sig. (bilateral)       | <,001                | <,001      | ,002              |             | ,009               |
|                      | N                      | 8                    | 8          | 8                 | 8           | 8                  |
| Emotional_Barriers   | Correlación de Pearson | -,906**              | -,932**    | -,936**           | -,841**     | 1                  |
|                      | Sig. (bilateral)       | ,002                 | <,001      | <,001             | ,009        |                    |
|                      | N                      | 8                    | 8          | 8                 | 8           | 8                  |

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study provide evidence that affective strategies constitute a significant pedagogical resource for fostering motivation and facilitating English language acquisition among learners situated in socially vulnerable contexts. The integration of positive reinforcement, empathy, emotional support, gamified activities, and opportunities for meaningful interaction contributed to reducing emotional barriers commonly associated with foreign language learning, particularly anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and lack of self-confidence.

The results obtained through classroom observations, student surveys, and teacher interviews revealed a consistent relationship between the implementation of affective strategies and increased levels of participation, motivation, and engagement in English learning activities. These findings support Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, suggesting that emotionally supportive learning environments promote greater receptivity to linguistic input and facilitate the acquisition process. Likewise, the study confirms contemporary perspectives that recognize motivation and affective regulation as interconnected variables that directly influence language learning outcomes.

Particularly relevant is the fact that these effects were observed within an educational setting characterized by social vulnerability, where students are frequently exposed to adverse circumstances such as poverty, family instability, neglect, and limited academic support. In such contexts, affective strategies transcend their instructional function and become mechanisms of inclusion, emotional support, and educational equity. The findings indicate that when teachers acknowledge students' emotional realities and intentionally create safe, supportive, and motivating classroom environments, learners demonstrate greater willingness to participate, persist through difficulties, and engage in meaningful language use.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature emphasizing the importance of affective dimensions in Second Language Acquisition and highlights the need for educational practices that balance cognitive development with emotional well-being. Future research may expand this investigation through longitudinal designs, larger samples, and intervention-based studies that measure the long-term impact of affective strategies on language proficiency. Ultimately, fostering positive emotional experiences in the classroom should not be viewed as a complementary aspect of language teaching but as a fundamental condition for meaningful and sustainable learning, particularly among students facing conditions of social risk.

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|                                                                 | A1                               | A2  |
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| B. data research and statistical analysis:                      | 50%                              | 50% |
| C. elaboration of figures and tables:                           | 50%                              | 50% |
| D. drafting, reviewing and writing of the text:                 | 50%                              | 50% |
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