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## Возникновение эмоционального барьера при изучении иностранного языка в школе: причины и решение проблемы

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**Аннотация.** Цель исследования – проанализировать причины и следствия возникновения ситуаций, в которых способность обучающегося в возрасте 14–18 лет усвоить язык ограничена, так как он/она могут испытывать негативные эмоции, согласно гипотезе возникновения эмоционального барьера по Крашену (Krashen’s Affective Filter). Научная новизна данной работы заключается в разработке решений возможных сложных ситуаций в образовательной среде школы, возникновение которых, как правило, сигнализирует о проявлении эмоционального барьера у обучающихся и препятствует успешному овладению иностранным языком в рамках школьной программы. В статье показано, что необходимо принимать во внимание, учитывать и анализировать все ситуации, которые становятся причиной проявления эмоционального барьера. Для этого нужно устранить все элементы неблагоприятной учебной атмосферы в классе, т. к. положительная эмоциональная оценка учителя всегда вызывает положительный отклик у учеников. В результате сделан вывод о том, что для создания благоприятной образовательной среды учитель должен принимать все возможные в рамках учебного процесса предварительные меры для предотвращения ситуаций, связанных с проявлением эмоционального барьера среди учеников.

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## High school students’ affective filter in second language acquisition: Causes and solutions

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**Abstract.** The research aims to examine the causes and consequences of the activation of Krashen’s Affective Filter in a high school environment, with students aged 14–18 on average. The scientific novelty of the study lies in developing possible solutions for situations in which high school students’ affective filter tends to activate often. It is shown that, when all situations that could cause the affective filter to appear are accounted for, and all elements of disturbance in the classroom are removed, students react positively to the encouragement coming from their teachers. As a result, we discover that, while it is always a good idea to take precautions against the affective filter, a teacher should always be ready to adjust his/her strategies whenever needed.

### Introduction

The research relevance of the article lies in its premise to elevate the Affective Filter to the role of a paradigm capable of evaluating teaching techniques and processes. Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis has been a focal point in the development of pedagogy and education theory for decades after its conception. It has been employed and analysed in great detail, with support and improvements to the theory also coming from Krashen (1989) himself. The Affective Filter has sparked controversy among scholars such as Higgs (1985) and Horwitz (1986), and it is one of the five parts of Krashen’s Theory of Second Language Acquisition (Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, Monitor Hypothesis, Input Hypothesis, Affective Filter Hypothesis, Natural Order Hypothesis) (Kurniawati, 2021). At its core, the affective filter represents the affective variables that can decelerate the progress of a student when learning the rules, basics and conventions of a second language. A confident, motivated, daring student usually has better results overall in the acquisition of a new language, and in this case, the affective filter is down. There are some situations, however, that raise the affective filter, impeding the harmonious assimilation of new concepts:

– *Low motivation.* Some students may take part in the learning process following the request of a guardian or a tutor. Studying without pleasure or results quickly turns into resentment (Baaqeel, 2020), which sparks animosity towards the subject matter.

– *Anxiety*. Whenever a student believes that the task ahead is too great or difficult, they may experience a feeling of hopelessness, and this is usually enough to provoke stress and activate the affective filter (Rahman, Hamid, Gul, 2020). Fortunately, as we will see later on, a friendly teacher can definitely assist students suffering from this condition.

– *Low self-esteem / introversion*. Students that do not naturally reach out for help may feel alone against the difficulties posed by a new linguistic challenge, and students that suffer from low self-esteem are usually prone to abandoning the task because they do not believe their skills are good enough to face it (Mandokhail, Khan, Malghani, 2018).

Following these main reasons, the affective filter is raised, and this impedes second language acquisition, be it partially or totally. It is similar to a block of the mind, a shield that prevents new concepts from strengthening the linguistic wealth of a student, a wealth that needs to be nurtured and fostered (Krahnke, Christison, 1983). It is true that school, meant as an institution but also as an environment for the development of the individual, has changed tremendously in these past decades, especially with the advent of the internet and new technologies, and teachers are tasked with maintaining high standards of intelligibility and teaching strategies, something that can prove to be very difficult. Many theories regarding input processing and second language acquisition have been considered and proposed by the pedagogical community (Nagle, Sanders, 1986). We established our research as aimed towards high school students, since that age range is subject to many shifts and it is usually considered a time of change, when students are capable of delving deeper (and more consciously) into foreign languages for the first time. It will be important to consider the main scenarios that may raise students' affective filter and to evaluate possible solutions to lower its influence.

The main research tasks of the article are as follows:

- to outline the main scenarios in which high school students' affective filter in second language acquisition may be raised;
- to propose and evaluate possible solutions for lowering the influence of high school students' affective filter in second language acquisition.

*Literary Review*. Our initial aim is to describe the most common situation that may activate the affective filter. In order to do this, we will report the results and findings of scholars in the field that have previously observed similar cases, and whose research will be mentioned shortly. This is the best way to answer the first of our research questions, since it is paramount to understand the root of the issues we wish to solve. We will observe general patterns in various situations that may strengthen the affective filter, applying them to a high school environment while trying to understand their nature. To this end, we will adapt Atmowardoyo's (2018) approach to TEFL analysis, which underlines the importance of case study to explain the phenomena found in a specific context of interest.

A further goal of the research is to suggest possible solutions to mitigate the affective filter's influence. This will be done through observations made by teachers and scholars who faced the issue first-hand. The answer, in this case, can be found in a friendly school environment, based on mutual respect and understanding of the individuals' needs. The best way to approach the issue is represented by the method suggested by Milošević and Maksimović (2020), who base their findings in comparative research to underline the need to consider a wide range of techniques to tackle issues pertaining to the pedagogical world. Following their *modus operandi*, we will consider the point of view of various researchers, but this time, it will be important to draw conclusions based upon them, instead of simply commenting a proposed scenario.

The practical value of the present work will be given by our observation-based findings, the solutions proposed to lessen the weight of the affective filter on the student's school life. The obtained results and considerations can be used in the pedagogical sphere as a valid aid for teachers and researchers to better understand their students. The proposals that follow can be subsequently applied to real study environments and schools, with the teacher being tasked to be more open, emotionally supportive and understanding.

As a theoretical background for the article, we will include various influential works. We will evaluate the impact of stress and anxiety on students following Lee and Kim (2019), who specify that, once students overcome their affective inhibitions, they are able to perform better in a learning environment. We will also base our article on the research by Nurmi et al. (Nurmi, Viljaranta, Tolvanen et al., 2012), which shows a deep correlation between student understanding and teacher behaviour. The research by Pan et al. (Pan, Xi, Shen et al., 2018) will provide a reading key for all the techniques that can be used in a classroom environment to maximise the learning process. We will then consider Herrada, Baños, Alcayde's (2020) research on teaching and learning software implementation to better understand the impact of learning technologies in today's classrooms.

## Results and Discussion

In recent times, also due to the pandemic, the world has become more technology-oriented, with online communication spearheading and shaping our new perception of reality (Shrestha, Shad, Haque, 2020). Many institutions had to come to terms with the need to stay relevant, with an emphasis on cutting-edge technology and on the overhaul of the school system as a whole. In this age of technological change, it is unfortunately easy to lose sight of individual students, who may already be experiencing personal issues and difficult conditions (Román, Gallen, Roca, 2021). Our role as teachers is to identify problematic situations and to lower the impact of the affective filter, in an attempt to ease the learning process in spite of difficulties.

*a. Task overload*. Especially in a classroom with stress-inclined students, a teacher should never tackle too many topics at once, or assign too much homework within a strict deadline (Willis, Grainger, Menzies et al., 2021).

The acceptable quantity of tasks naturally depends on the classroom itself, and overburdening students results in the affective filter's activation due to stress, with homework partially done or not done at all.

A balanced environment is fruitful for both the students and the institutions, and there have been valid researches about strategies aimed at reducing stress in schools (Waechter, Stahl, Rabie et al., 2021).

*b. Unfriendly environment.* If a student does not feel welcome in a classroom, be it due to conflicts with other students or due to an inattentive teacher, a possible reaction could be one of rebellion against the environment, which may result in the student distancing him/herself from the topics discussed (Li, Huang, Li, 2021). Teachers are responsible for guiding communication among the class group, and they need to pay extra mind when a student requires attention. A good affective-filter lowering tactic is achieved by encouraging the student in question, for example through the "feedback sandwich" (Prochazka, Ovcari, Durinik, 2020), that is, delivering feedback in a three-stage formula (praising the effort, correcting the mistake, encouraging the student). The most important thing to remember here is, of course, the importance of appropriate error correction, something that must be useful for the students, and not just an assessment of their lack of skill.

*c. Boredom.* If a student feels like their time is being wasted in the classroom, for example during long and difficult grammar exercises without practical application, they might lose sight of the ultimate goal of language acquisition, in which case they will stop paying attention and feel frustrated whenever they focus again on the present tasks (Kruk, Zawodniak, 2020). It is the teacher's responsibility to create interesting and engaging activities, oriented towards a goal, but also deeply rooted in the topics that must be dealt with. A possible solution, as we will see later on, is represented by gamification (Koivisto, Hamari, 2019), that is, the employment of gaming components and frames, in order to create a relaxed environment to adequately develop linguistic competence through gaming experiences.

*d. Inaccessible technology.* Not all students have access to technology, and not every school has the means to provide working devices (Waxman, Boriack, MacNeil, 2020). When discussing Krashen's Affective Filter, this issue is seldom considered, but it is becoming more and more central to the issue of teaching methods at large. This is also due to the fact that many teachers, while recognizing the benefits of technology in the classroom and enjoying a wealth of relevant studies and theories (Obara, Nie, Simmons, 2018), are still diffident towards new techniques and sometimes openly oppose them. As we will see, there are some countermeasures that may be taken in such cases, but it is paramount that the effort to improve the situation at large must come from teachers.

We have outlined a few, but not all, problematic scenarios regarding the presence of the affective filter in the educational process in high school second language teaching, with a few tips on how to deal with them. Now we will focus our attention on possible suggestions and solutions to lower the affective filter in said situations.

*a. Task regulation.* An obvious choice to solve task overload would be reducing the amount of work that a student should do on a daily or weekly basis, but this solution is not always easily achievable, especially when task commitment plays a role (Anggraini, Neviyarni, 2020). As we have mentioned regarding Nurmi et al. (Nurmi, Viljaranta, Tolvanen et al., 2012), teachers should adapt to their student according to their academic performance, by being flexible about deadlines and homework. Instead of just decreasing said quantity, good alternatives are represented by diversified tasks that test different spheres of a language (listening, writing, grammar checks) and by group projects that redistribute the workload among a group of peers; not only do these measures lower the affective filter's influence, but they favour communication inside a classroom environment (Van de Pol, Volman, Oort et al., 2015). There may be study-intensive moments throughout the year, but the affective filter's presence becomes clear if the effort is prolonged for an extensive amount of time. Self-regulation in studying as a measurement of daily effort has become a prominent point of discussion during the pandemic (Blume, Schimdt, Kramer et al., 2021).

*b. Friendly environment.* Regarding interpersonal relations, students' affective filter can be lowered in a number of ways (Buber, Unal, 2017), apart from the aforementioned feedback sandwich. Teachers can, for example, foster critical thinking and ask for the opinion of students on a topic, making them feel valued as people. They can also be open to criticism and feedback to reduce anxiety and establish a positive human-to-human relationship with the students. A very important step towards a warm, welcoming environment is represented by inclusiveness (Alinsunurin, 2020), something that schools today should strive to achieve. As observed by Lee and Kim (2019), students are more willing to speak new, foreign languages in a classroom environment when they do not feel pressured to achieve perfection. Every student should feel at home in their classroom environment, and they should have the possibility to learn at their own pace, with the school itself acting as a support to facilitate the knowledge exchange. In case of bullying, schools should hire professional help to assist students in need (Huk, 2021).

*c. Interest.* By "interest" we mean all that is correlated to an active and attentive participation in classroom activities. A teacher can rework an exercise of a book to include interactive and brainstorming components, a new topic could be introduced through interesting examples instead of just listing the related grammar rules. Pan et al. (Pan, Xi, Shen et al., 2018) note that the whole process can be proposed through the lenses of gamification, that is, the usage of game elements (scores, achievement points, avatars) to encourage task participation (Bal, 2019). Some alternatives are: simulations, that is, activities that closely imitate a real-life scenario; videogames that can be accessed through the Internet and that can also be structured as friendly competitions among students; podcasts that can be used to practice language in conversation while discussing interesting topics. This is not to say that the entertainment component should become the focal point of the lesson. It should rather become an additional infrastructure, capable of capturing the attention of students and of giving them a clear direction, a clear goal towards which to focus their efforts. Gamification has already shown promising results with different age groups (Alshammari, 2020).

The only limiting factor in this tactic is represented by a teacher's creativity, while students are usually happy to study in a relaxed, joyful environment (Saucedo-Araujo, Chillón, Pérez-López et al., 2020).

*d. Accessible technology.* In the spirit of inclusiveness, every student should have the right to use technology applied to their learning process. In case the school is unable to grant interactive instruments to all students, the BYOD ("bring your own device") approach can be adopted, in order to allow students to work on their own devices. The usage of new technologies has become more and more prominent, a viewpoint that is also supported by Herrada, Baños, Alcayde (2020), who note that 94% of the world's population was affected by closures of learning spaces during the Covid emergency. This has already been successfully applied in different contexts (Yeop, Othman, Abdullah et al., 2018). In case students cannot use their own devices, schools should be adequately equipped to grant everyone the same opportunities. This can prove to be a challenge in countries and areas that do not have enough infrastructure to favour the switch towards technology (Amiel, Kubota, Wives, 2016). If teaching and learning technologies are not readily available, the affective filter can be lowered by limiting their usage for all students as to not cause attrition, although it would still be preferable to focus towards general modernization. At any rate, the world is becoming more and more technology-oriented, and more resources seem likely to be generally available in the future (Blut, Wang, 2020).

## Conclusion

There is an abundant wealth of information about student behaviours and responses in this new, technological age, and we can understand Krashen's Affective Filter better than ever before. We have seen some common causes for its activation, and we have discovered that the majority of them are rooted in real situations, with specific issues sometimes tied with personal life. While it is still not easy to pinpoint an exact solution for every single problem, we have deduced that the role of the teacher is fundamental in this effort; as an ideal figure of reference for all students, the teacher can adapt to different needs and adopt various solutions. The goal is a noble one: to empower all students and give them a solid chance at avoiding the affective filter and subsequently delving deep into language learning with minimal stress and worry. The challenges along the way can be overcome with collaboration and effort, while also keeping in mind that, just as situations shift and change, so too the solutions adopted by teachers to oppose the affective filter must be updated and reworked whenever the need arises, not only regarding languages, but in all areas of knowledge and study.

As we have declared regarding our research tasks, we have outlined the main scenarios in which the affective filter poses a problem in a high school environment, and we have seen that the focal points of these problems are constituted by the relationship among peers in the student group and between students and teachers, by the lesson material employed, and by the techniques used by teachers.

We have also proposed possible solutions to avoid the activation of the affective filter, which mainly revolve around the idea of a new teacher, capable of employing new technologies and reworking exercises that may be perceived as unsatisfactory by the students. The teacher is, then, responsible for fostering a whole new perspective, oriented towards complete understanding of the challenges of a foreign language.

A limitation of this study is represented by its current scope. The examples we have discussed here constitute the main issues posed by the affective filter, but do not encompass the whole range of possible problems that can emerge in different contexts. Additionally, the personality of individual students cannot be generalized, and as such, in the same conditions, an approach could work or fail depending on the classroom; for example, if the majority of students do not enjoy games, the gamification process presents very marginal results.

New grounds for further research are represented by the application of the solutions found in the present article. Employing these methods in a real situation, such as a classroom environment, could generate further findings and advancements in the field, with precise analyses of different study groups. Day by day, new solutions are researched and studied, and as we have seen, the affective filter is tackled with different approaches with varying success. This would ultimately lead to a complete analysis of most cases and situations that involve the affective filter, and as a consequence, the learning process can be better understood as a whole and streamlined to account for the needs of the students.

All in all, this research represents a solid starting ground for anyone who wishes to achieve deeper understanding about Krashen's theories and how to create more successful lessons. The future of education is in our hands, and we teachers have a mission: to educate future generations, to transform students into citizens of the world, capable of communicating in a multicultural environment with confidence.

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