

## Affective Variables and Language Acquisition: A Functional Analysis



### Language

**KEYWORDS:** Affective Variables, language acquisition, teaching strategies

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### ABSTRACT

Preliminary language acquisition relies on neurological maturity while affective characteristics are responsible for second language acquisition. Therefore, affective variable is one of the most imperative factors in the multifaceted process of English Language learning. In order to foster learning, instructors create and apply various teaching strategies for triggering learners' interest in the language learning process. The goal of this research is to scrutinize the effectiveness of our classroom teaching strategies and the relative importance of students' perception of these strategies. The outcome of this research study implied that the instructors and students agreed on the relative frequency of some of the strategies, but not on the frequency of other strategies. Nevertheless, this research study holds a gamut of potentially important implications to gain insight of which strategy was most effective from the students' perspective.

### Introduction

The implication of the relevance of Affective Variables is a significant factor that precedes success in the learning process. Wlodkowski (1986) uses a metaphor to stress the importance, "Facilitating motivation in students is like taking a car trip from New York to California; you can have all the money necessary, buy a new car, make plans well in advance, organize the needs supplies, make the proper reservations and have everyone including yourself ready to go, but if you lose the ignition key (or get a flat tyre or take a wrong turn or run out of gas or lose your money, etc.) you can't go anywhere." (p.11). In conclusion, academic learning does not take place without the affect factor.

Active involvement of highly motivated students in the learning activity and the learning process is greater than less motivated students. They take advantage of a given opportunity and show effort in the implementation of the learning process. They also reveal positive emotions such as excitement, enthusiasm and interest during learning. On the other hand, the less motivated are found to be less interested in participating in the learning process. Most of them are bodily present in the class room, but are mentally inattentive. They are often unsuccessful to actively involve themselves in the learning tasks. They are more likely to stop learning and drop out. Less motivated students should be guided and wheedled to acquire a constructive attitude towards the learning process.

An instructor has a significant role in guiding less motivated students because our role leans more towards facilitator or guide. Our role is to increase student motivation and develop the skills or strategies that make a student more competent by structuring the learning environment in a manner that makes students take responsibility of their own learning. The focus here is on the strategies that instructors use to develop and maintain motivation in students. It is important for instructors to identify the purposes and the needs of students and develop proper instructional strategies to restructure less motivated students.

### Research Question

The researcher seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What does students' feedback have to say about their perceptions of the importance of the teaching strategies?
2. Do students and instructors perceive the importance of the teaching strategies similarly or differently?

### Participants & Context

The participants were 93 students and 7 instructors from Scientific College of Design, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. All the students are Omani and study English at the foundation level. The first language of all the students is Arabic and their ages range from 19 - 21.

All the instructors are teaching English language at Scientific College and have experience teaching English language at the elementary and advanced level. They are in the age group of 40 – 60 and have over 10 years of teaching experience.

### Results & Data Analysis

**Table 1:** Result on the comparison between students' and teachers' perspectives on the importance of the classroom teaching strategies.

	Instructor's actions:	Student	Teacher
1	Establish good relationship with students	84.41	82.14
2	Bring in and encourage humor	82.80	67.86
3	Create supportive classroom so students will take risks	83.87	67.86
4	Use an interesting opening activity to start each class	79.03	78.57
5	Hold high but realistic expectations for students	72.04	71.43
6	Avoid creating intense competition among students	69.09	57.14
7	Use different teaching methods	67.74	85.71
8	Use movies, games and internet activities in class	77.15	75.00
<b>Creating a Pleasant Classroom:</b>		<b>79</b>	<b>73</b>
9	Increase the amount of English you use in the class	92.74	85.71
10	Clarify to students communicating meaning effectively is more important than being grammatically correct	79.30	75.00
11	Encourage students to use English outside the classroom	84.14	85.71
<b>Familiarize learners with L2-related values:</b>		<b>85</b>	<b>82</b>
12	Help students set achievable goals on learning English	83.60	78.57
13	Work from students' strengths and build into a course	86.83	71.43
<b>Increase learners' goal-orientedness</b>		<b>91</b>	<b>75</b>
14	Encourage students find out mistakes by themselves	84.41	71.43
15	Encourage students to share personal experiences	77.42	75.00
16	Make tasks challenging and interesting	70.97	82.14
<b>Promote learner autonomy</b>		<b>78</b>	<b>76</b>

17	Encourage learning from classmates in small groups	79.03	85.71
18	Introduce students to the good work of their peers	75.00	82.14
<b>Promote group norms:</b>		<b>84</b>	<b>84</b>
19	Don't overload students with quizzes	79.57	71.43
20	Provide students with positive feedback	86.02	82.14
21	Make sure grades reflect students' efforts and hard work	69.09	85.71
22	Design tests that encourage the kind of learning you want students to achieve	73.66	78.57
<b>Recognize students' efforts:</b>		<b>77</b>	<b>80</b>

**Table 2:** The comparison (ranking) of each category from students' and teachers' perspectives of the importance of the classroom teaching strategies

	Sections:	Student	Teacher
1	Creating a Pleasant Classroom	79 (4)	73 (6)
2	Familiarize learners with L2-related values	85 (2)	82 (2)
3	Increase learners' goal-orientedness	91 (1)	75 (5)
4	Promote learner autonomy	78 (5)	76 (4)
5	Promote group norms	84 (3)	84 (1)
6	Recognize students' effort	77 (6)	80 (3)

### Discussion and Recommendation

As can be seen in Table 1, the six categories ranked in order of importance as perceived by students were 3. "Increase learners' goal-orientedness" 2. "Familiarize learners with L2-related values" 5. "Promote group norms" 1. "Creating a pleasant classroom" 4 "Promote learner autonomy" 6. "Recognize students' efforts". However, from the teachers' viewpoint, the six categories were 5. "Promote group norms" 2. "Familiarize learners with L2-related values" 6. "Recognize students efforts" 4. "Promote learner autonomy" 3. "Increase learners' goal-orientedness 1. "Creating a pleasant classroom".

From the students' perspective, 3, "Increase learners' goal-orientedness," was ranked first, but it was ranked five on the teachers' ranking. Obviously, students and teachers perceived this category differently. This result probably reflected two points that should be regarded further. One point was that the students might be mostly motivated by goal-oriented strategies. In the 1990s, goal-oriented motivation was grouped into two types: instrumental and integrative orientations. These orientations powerfully affect students' motivation. (Gardner, 1985) Hence, the motivational strategies of 3 should be considered more important and thus more frequently used in class. The other point was that the perceived purpose that students have for learning English should be considered when teachers make their curricula. To be aware of what students' needs and learning goals are provides a better understanding for teachers and is one of the more effective ways to motivate students who learn a foreign language.

Students and teachers perceived the importance of 2, "Familiarize learners with L2-related values," similarly, which was ranked second by both. From the teachers' position, there was one point that needed to be discussed. It was that the three items in 2 corresponded with one of the main goals about teaching language, which was encouraging students to use the target language as often as possible. Assuredly, getting more chances to use the target language could increase their language abilities. Further, this point coincided with the students' perspective, and this result might be caused by the same reason. The result of this study suggested that teachers should

encourage students to become more active participants in a lesson to assist them to improve their communication skills in the target language.

Students ranked 5. "Promote group norms" third. Fragmented groups, lack cooperativeness and can easily become ineffective. Thus putting an end to the students' commitment to learn. Groups expand a student's range of methods for learning, especially when it comes to difficulty in comprehending specific subject matters. Study groups are often based on effective learning techniques such as free discussion and these practices cannot be carried out by just one individual. Moreover, learning as a group often opens up new perspectives as each member has a different point of view that can help to better understand lessons. Study groups indeed make learning easier for students, but it also makes it fun, as it is an activity that requires social interaction. Studying can be tedious and boring when done alone, thus, these groups provide the motivation and encouragement a student needs to overcome difficulties in his or her academic life.

4. "Creating a pleasant classroom" was rated fourth by students, whereas it was last for the teachers'. Even though there was a diversity of opinions between students and teachers, making the classroom climate more enjoyable has been found to play an important role in influencing student achievement. A tense classroom climate can undermine learning and de-motivate learners. On the other hand, learner motivation will be maximum in a safe classroom climate in which students can express their opinions and feel that they do not run the risk of being ridiculed. Good & Brophy (1994) "To be motivated to learn, students need both ample opportunities to learn and steady encouragement and support of their learning efforts. Because such motivation is unlikely to develop in a chaotic classroom, it is important that the teacher organizes and manages the classroom as an effective learning environment. Furthermore, because anxious or alienated students are unlikely to develop motivation to learn." (p. 215).

### Conclusion

The findings presented here conclude that understanding which instructional strategy is most effective from the learners' perspective is associated with helping teachers to select and implement effective strategies for teaching a foreign language. Instructors should drop the belief that by bonding to the language books and trying to discipline their students, they will manage to create a classroom environment that will be conducive to learning. Unless they accept their students' perspectives on the instructional strategies and work on these minute details, they will fail to motivate them. Instructors should play a vital role in turning most "curriculum goals" (goals set by outsiders) into "group goals" (goals accepted by students). A disparity prevails between learning a foreign language and learning other subjects. Therefore, language teaching should take account of all factors that are likely to promote their desire to learn the language.

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