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**Vitalina TARASOVA**

Affective factors influencing students' second language acquisition during the war

VITALINA TARASOVA. **Affective factors influencing students' second language acquisition during the war.** *The article focuses on the impact of affective factors on second language acquisition during the Russia-Ukraine war and the impact it has on the Ukrainian education system. The study aims to investigate how emotions such as anxiety, stress, and depression impact language learning and to identify tools for educators to measure the affective filters of students. The study is based on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and adopts a qualitative phenomenological design. The data was collected from 32 Bachelor students at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv through an online multidimensional Anxiety-Stress-Depression Test and open-ended questions. The results indicate that the students' emotional state, such as increased levels of anxiety, has a significant impact on their language learning performance and reduces their cognitive resources for focus and learning. The study highlights the importance of considering students' affective factors in language teaching and the role of teachers in creating a supportive and collaborative learning environment to reduce anxiety and promote self-efficacy. The conclusion emphasizes the complexity and uniqueness of each student's experience and*

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the need for appropriate supports to mitigate the effects of adversity and promote positive potential.

Key words: affective factors, second language acquisition, war, education system, emotion, cognition, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis.

1. Introduction

Emotion and cognition are often tagged as factors in learning a language. With Ukraine's education system upended by the Russia-Ukraine war, teachers are helping provide stability for their students. Remote teaching during Covid-19 has provided Ukrainian academic teachers with useful knowledge and skills, but even teaching in a global pandemic doesn't seem much of a challenge, compared to now during the wartime. As some teachers cannot have classes, and the internet is not always stable, they have to think carefully about how they can communicate with their students and create a supportive learning community, without putting any unreasonable additional stress on their learners.

Psychologically, both teachers and students are all under tremendous stress, and it is difficult to concentrate on anything when you are constantly on the alert, listening out for signs of immediate danger which leads to anxiety.

The current situation places enormous stress on the Ukrainian students, so it is important to reduce any further cognitive load and elaborate new teaching methods which can help students to cope with their anxiety.

Language educators need to know about how English Language Learners (ELLs) feel in language classes. Are they comfortable in the classroom? Are they confident or are they anxious? These emotions, feelings, and attitudes are affective factors that comprise an affective filter, which also impacts a learner's ability to acquire a new language (Gardner, 1985; Krashen, 1985).

The affective filter is obviously a significant barrier to language acquisition. If language teachers can measure students' affective filter and analyze its components, they will better understand how to meet the needs of language learners.

The **objective** of the research – to study how affective factors impact language learning during the war and what tools are available to educators to measure the degree of students' affective filters.

2. Research hypothesis

It is hypothesized that affective factors interact to impede second language acquisition during the wartime.

Krashen (1985) posited that ELLs will acquire language if they are given appropriate input and nothing is hindering their uptake of language. Additionally, Krashen asserted that, for many students, language acquisition is hindered by an affective filter. According to Zhu and Zhou (2012), the affective filter is made up of many affective factors or “aspects of emotion, feeling, mood or attitude which condition behaviors in second language learning acquisition” (p. 1). Specifically, several authors (Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 1985; Heras & Lasagabaster, 2015; Krashen, 1985; Zhu & Zhou, 2012) describe how language learner anxiety, learner motivation, and learner self-esteem are key components of the affective filter.

Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis inspired many researchers (Aida, 1994; Dogan & Tuncer, 2016; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Young, 1999; Lim, 2020) to investigate whether learners who experience high anxiety, low language learning motivation, or low self-esteem acquire language as quickly as their peers who do not have these barriers. These studies have led to the creation of various measures (Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 1995; Heras & Lasagabaster, 2015; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991) to gauge the extent to which students experience these affective factors and the impact they have on student language acquisition and academic achievement.

Many researchers elaborated different methods to assess language learning anxiety. The early work of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) who designed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) is the most cited in recent studies on language learner anxiety and has been widely supported and validated. Gardner (1985) assessed language learner anxiety as part of his Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB).

Language learner anxiety has been shown to negatively correlate with second language acquisition (Bernaus, 2007; Gardner, 1985; Horwitz et al., 1986; Knell & Chi, 2012; Trang, 2012). The more language learning anxiety a learner experiences the slower they are to acquire second language proficiency. Since it can have such profound impacts on ELLs, educators can benefit from knowing how much anxiety the ELLs they work with are experiencing in their classes.

Horwitz et al. (1986) defined language learning anxiety as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to

classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). Young (1999) described it as “the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or utilizing a second language” (p. 27). Although researchers define the term in slightly different ways, all agree that language learning anxiety negatively correlates with students’ ability to learn a new language. Language learner anxiety blocks crucial input and decreases the rate of language acquisition (Bernaus et al., 2007; Knell & Chi, 2012).

Gardner (1985) identified two aspects of language learning anxiety: anxiety related to the language classroom and anxiety related to using the target language. In our research we understand language learning anxiety in a broader sense by adding a third aspect “negative psychological phenomena caused by the war in Ukraine” as one of the main affective filters influencing learners’ cognitive abilities and motivation to study during the wartime.

Learner anxiety has been shown to decrease as language proficiency increases (Elkhafaifi, 2005; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). These findings suggest that learner anxiety can be measured and teachers can make adjustments to the learning environment to positively influence students’ levels of anxiety.

3. Methods and Procedure

The study is a qualitative phenomenological design. In our research we used online multidimensional Anxiety-Stress-Depression Test (ASD, 30 questions) and a list of open-ended questions (20 questions). 32 students were requested. These participants were enrolled in the Bachelor program at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. They were subjected for a Focus Group Discussion. The participants were asked a series of open-ended questions. Later, significant statements were grouped together to form themes which were then categorized accordingly.

The Anxiety-Stress-Depression Test (IDR Labs International) is an instrument for measuring the negative psychological phenomena of anxiety, stress, and depression.

Students were given the following instructions: “This test measures your current levels of anxiety, stress, and depression according to standardized research-based items. Though we all experience anxiety, stress, and depressive states from time to time, excessively high levels on these parameters may interfere with a person’s ability to lead a normal life and trigger the onset of a variety of clinical conditions. However, these

negative states need not be lasting, and recognizing the problem is often the first step in getting help.” Students were told to indicate their level of agreement for each of 30 items (agree/disagree). Some examples of the statements are the following:

In the past week, I have found myself...

Being intolerant and hot-headed.

Being unable to wind down or relax.

Being unable to get started on the things I needed to do.

Feeling that I had lost interest in the things that normally interest me.

Having trouble concentrating on even mundane things such as reading a book etc.

Language learner anxiety negatively correlates with second language acquisition success; a more anxious student is less likely to acquire a second language as quickly as their less anxious peers (Lim, 2020).

We conducted a survey of the 4-year students (Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv) to know the main challenges our learners are facing during the wartime and to understand what educational practices can be developed to mitigate the psychosocial impact of war and to promote students’ self-efficacy and reduce their anxiety.

Open-ended questions are broad and can be answered in detail (e.g., “What do you think about your study?”). Some examples of the open-ended questions for students are the following:

1. Are you satisfied with your study?
2. How can stress affect thinking and learning?
3. How has this war changed your life / study?

Student responses may help educators in this context better understand the affective challenges students face in working towards second language acquisition during the wartime.

4. Results and discussion

This section attempts to discuss in full the themes emerged from Focus Group Discussion. The themes were discussed under three dimensions or categories: struggles of students with high affective filter (anxiety, brain fog, a sense of uncertainty), coping ability of students with high affective filter to perform well in the class, and students’ expectations from teachers to help them.

Some of the most interesting accounts of war’s impact on schooling come from the students themselves. During the classes they often convey their personal experiences, expressing their feelings at the loss of a family

member or friend. Some students display an ability to infuse humor into discussions of the impact of war on their day-to-day lives (e.g., making jokes about emergency power cuts after Russian strikes on energy facilities across the country and “romantic” studying by candlelight or about “scientific discoveries” while hunkering down in bomb shelters). The seriousness of the impact of war, however, dominated students’ conversations. Many students talked about “giving up long-cherished plans”, “grip of a hysterical anxiety”, “the persistent sense of uncertainty”, “nagging feeling of guilt” (those who fled Ukraine), etc.

Most of the interviewed students reported difficulty concentrating (i.e., an inability to concentrate, remember and focus on what they are studying). Some of the students wrote that they could read the material several times and still not understand what it was about.

Student A shared that “the head is mostly jelly instead of brain, which does not allow you to tune in to study and focus.” Student B also shared the same sentiment: “reading and watching news 24/7 puts you into the state of excessive anxiety and despair.”

Student C confessed that “absence of electricity, water, and the shortage of food and medicines puts survival at the forefront of our minds.”

Student D shared the common complaint for all the interviewed students “the state of shock, panic attacks and the feeling of hopelessness, periods of intense activities and exhaustion, was followed by a stage of uncertainty.”

Some students said that they “spend their day taking care of their relatives and neighbors, while others are volunteering, distributing humanitarian aid.”

90 % of the students reported on experiencing “brain fog.” It’s a term used for a combination of symptoms that affect our ability to think. People may feel confused and disorganized or find it hard to focus or put thoughts into words. It’s a term that describes the cognitive impact of depression, anxiety, stress, and other psychological struggles.

According to an article in a medical journal from the Harvard Medical School, brain fog is a “term used to describe slow or sluggish thinking, can occur under many different circumstances.” The technical term for the level of thinking a student has is cognition: to read, write, think, remember, pay attention, and even advanced problem-solving. Brain fog inhibits the brain’s efficiency of cognition.

Anxious and stressed students often find it challenging to start a discussion or exchange thoughts in the classroom. It does not mean that

they are mentally disabled, they are just victims of an uncontrollable flow of emotions.

Lack of concentration and inability to focus is a symptom often experienced during depression and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

Students who moved from the occupied territories shared that “leaving the occupied territories does not return me to normal life. Housing conditions are getting worse, there is often no space for study, notes, study materials, gadgets, atmosphere and things that set me up for work.”

Different kinds of crises affect people in different ways, and there are a wide range of emotional responses that people can have. Most often people respond with resilience, and in ways that are designed to protect themselves. Some people may also want to manage difficult things on their own or find help from others who they already know or trust. Some people may show distress while others may show anger or withdrawal. Each individual response will be unique.

Teachers should acknowledge that distress during the wartime is a normal reaction – in students, distress might come across as anger, panic, sadness, crying and withdrawal.

Some students may wish to talk with their teachers about what they have been through. Providing a listening ear at these times can be helpful but teachers should avoid pressing for details.

Some students may want to talk and others may withdraw. Although talking about what happened can be helpful, no one should be forced to talk about their experiences. For some, it is important to have quiet time to think things through but for others the opportunity to organize what has happened into a story reduces feelings of helplessness.

In my classroom, I have noticed that some students have a closed mindset and are unwilling or unable to listen to or read the target language, thus missing out on comprehensible input necessary for acquisition. Such apprehensive and waning interest makes it even more difficult to motivate students. Students are no longer able to devote sustained attention for the duration of their lesson because their minds are elsewhere. Some are dreaming, others are thinking about nothing, incapable of following the lesson for a long time. When inattention is chronic, it can have long-lasting repercussions. With that in mind, Ukrainian teachers should find ways to help their students learn to focus and stay on task.

It is not unexpected that communicational skills in the target language, especially interpersonal skills, have seen stilted growth during

the past year of learning (since February 24, 2022 when Russia launched a full-scale war against Ukraine). This anxiety greatly stems from the aforementioned affective filter.

One of the ways that teachers can start lowering students' affective filters is by getting to know them and using personalization to motivate them. Students shared that "creative tasks are very interesting and distract from bad thoughts."

The Ukrainian teachers have to modify the learning process further to take into consideration the changing conditions.

People are self-regulating agents whose development takes place in transactions within a network of socio-structural and psychosocial influences, where individuals are both producers and products of social systems. The self-efficacy (or the belief that individuals have in their capacity to do and regulate circumstances affecting their lives) is one of the mechanisms that facilitate the function of social wellbeing. The belief one holds that he or she can do something and produce an effect is the core that guides and motivates people to do an extra effort to reach their goals.

Self-efficacy beliefs directly contribute to decisions, actions, and experiences, as people reflect upon their capacities when deciding whether to undertake challenging activities or to persist in pursuing difficult tasks. The more confident people are, the more resilient they are in the face of reversal and hardship.

The students in Ukraine during the war have their own unique emotional needs. War trauma that can cause distress, or more complex reactions, refers to a wide range of traumatic events or series of events that are experienced as being emotionally or physically harmful or life-threatening. Whether an event is traumatic depends not only on individual experience of the event, but also how it negatively impacts emotional, social, spiritual and physical wellbeing. However, if someone is distressed, the first line approach is to use Psychological First Aid and also to use a Trauma Informed Framework. Ukrainian teachers should know how to improve their knowledge of psychological first aid principles and confidence in applying these in practice.

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is a way of helping people feel calm and cope in difficult situations. PFA involves using active listening and giving practical advice. PFA is a way of helping people cope with distress, and it is something anyone can do. One of the principles of Psychological First Aid is to educate people about normal emotional reactions and responses.

It should be expected that many students will continue to experience psychological difficulties including nightmares, feelings of anxiety, panic and low mood. The events in Ukraine are ongoing, therefore, the trauma and distress will be ongoing for people who are in Ukraine.

Using a “Trauma Informed” approach to care can be very helpful. This means being able to recognize when students may be affected by trauma, and adjusting how we take this into account. This way of responding supports recovery, does no harm, and recognizes and supports students’ natural resilience.

Experts agree that education can play a positive role for students affected by war and “alleviate the psychological impact of armed conflict by offering routine and stability,” according to the intergovernmental Safe Schools Declaration.

Bede Sheppard, deputy director of the Children’s Rights Division at the non-profit Human Rights Watch, based in Washington, D.C. said “These days, conflict is not something that passes through quickly. We could be talking about an entire generation losing their education.”

It is necessary to elaborate content that can be used to develop appropriate learning and teaching experiences around the war. It can be used in providing support to young people who suffered from the Russia-Ukraine war.

One of the ways that we can start lowering students’ affective filters is by getting to know them and using personalization to motivate them. The lessons should utilize the approaches of individual reflection, think-pair-share, small group discussion, true or false statements, documentary storyboarding and teacher-led discussions. The degree to which teachers address war directly will depend on the needs of their students.

When designing task-based activities to lower an affective filter, it’s important to consider factors that will influence students’ responses to it such as student interest in this task, and applicability to their lives. During the wartime all tasks should be designed not only to develop definite language competences but to specifically support the emotional and mental wellbeing of students. The Russo-Ukrainian war has presented many challenges including multiple levels of change, and a need for young people to transition in many areas of life. The language exercises during the time of change and transition should offer thinking space and a place to explore the different stages of change with ideas for how to navigate each stage. They also should aim to support students:

- to understand the possible impact of adversity and trauma on their wellbeing;
- to provide them with strategies and personal coping skills to help them deal with challenges.

5. Conclusion

War trauma that can cause distress, or more complex reactions, refers to a wide range of traumatic events or series of events that are experienced as being emotionally or physically harmful or life threatening. Both teachers and students in Ukraine are affected by traumatic events in different ways.

Students may experience a range of emotions as a result of the current situation in Ukraine. They could be worried and/or afraid as well as distressed by the news and what they may hear from others. Some students may be particularly vulnerable for a variety of reasons, including those who may have family or other ties to those involved in the current situation. Supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing, therefore, is an important aspect for teachers to be aware of and sensitive to those needs.

Due to the differing nature of experiences of each Ukrainian student, it is helpful to consider the complexity and uniqueness of their experiences, so that appropriate supports help reduce the effects of adversity on the student, and also reinforce his or her own positive potential to address their own needs.

Ukrainian students during the wartime are subjected to elevated risks of higher anxiety. Increased levels of anxiety contribute to decreased performance. The cognitive abilities of stressed and anxious students are taxed. This results in a reduction in their cognitive resources which should have been used for focus and learning.

The neglect of the role of healthy emotional development of students in their learning has an adverse impact on the method of teaching and learning. Effective learning can be guaranteed only for those teachers who devote significant attention to the role of students' affect in an L2 teaching environment. Teachers may boost students' desire to learn by satisfying their fundamental needs, generating attention or promoting self-efficacy and reducing their anxiety through collaboration. Due to the differing nature of experiences of each Ukrainian student, it is helpful to consider the complexity and uniqueness of their experiences, so that appropriate supports help reduce the effects of adversity on the student, and also

reinforce his or her own positive potential to address their own needs.

From the viewpoint of pedagogical development, during the wartime the ground is fertile for the emergence of new pedagogical methods and, in some ways, the victory of education over destruction.

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Abstracts

ВІТАЛІНА ТАРАСОВА. Вплив афективних факторів на вивчення студентами іноземної мови в умовах війни. У статті розглядається вплив афективних факторів на засвоєння другої мови під час російсько-української війни та їх вплив на українську систему освіти. Досліджено, як дисгармонійні емоційні стани, такі як тривога, стрес і депресія, впливають на вивчення мови, а також визначено інструменти для вимірювання афективних фільтрів студентів. Дослідження базується на гіпотезі афективного фільтра Крашена. За допомогою багатовимірного онлайн-тесту вимірювання рівня тривоги-стресу-депресії та методу відкритих запитань діагностично підтверджено, що емоційний стан студентів, наприклад підвищений рівень тривожності, має значний вплив на їх успішність у вивченні мови та зменшує їхні когнітивні ресурси для зосередженості та навчання. Дослідження підкреслює важливість урахування афективних факторів під час викладання мови та роль викладачів у створенні сприятливого навчального середовища для зменшення дисгармонійних емоційних станів та сприяння самоефективності студентів. У висновку підкреслюється складність та унікальність досвіду кожного студента та необхідність відповідної підтримки для пом'якшення наслідків психосоціального стресу під час війни і сприяння розвитку позитивного потенціалу студентів.

Ключові слова: афективні фактори, засвоєння другої мови, війна, система освіти, емоції, пізнання, гіпотеза афективного фільтра Крашена.

VITALINA TARASOVA. Czynniki afektywne wpływające na przyswajanie drugiego języka przez uczniów w czasie wojny. Artykuł koncentruje się na wpływie czynników afektywnych na przyswajanie drugiego języka podczas wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej oraz na ich wpływie na ukraiński system edukacji. Niniejszy artykuł dotyczy tego, w jaki sposób dysharmonijne stany emocjonalne, takie jak lęk, stres i depresja, wpływają na naukę języków obcych oraz wskazuje narzędzia do pomiaru filtrów afektywnych uczniów. Badanie opiera się na hipotezie filtru afektywnego Krashena. Wykorzystując wielowymiarowy test online mierzący lęk-stres-depresję oraz kwestionariusz otwarty, zdiagnozowano, że stan emocjonalny studentów, jakim jest podwyższony lęk, ma istotny wpływ na ich wyniki w nauce języków obcych oraz zmniejsza zasoby

poznawcze służące koncentracji i uczeniu się. Badanie podkreśla znaczenie uwzględnienia czynników afektywnych uczniów w nauczaniu języków oraz roli nauczycieli w tworzeniu wspierającego i opartego na współpracy środowiska uczenia się w celu zmniejszenia lęku i promowania poczucia własnej skuteczności. W konkluzji podkreślono złożoność i wyjątkowość doświadczeń każdego ucznia oraz potrzebę odpowiedniego wsparcia w celu złagodzenia skutków przeciwności losu i promowania pozytywnego potencjału.

Słowa kluczowe: czynniki afektywne, akwizycja drugiego języka, wojna, system edukacji, emocje, poznanie, hipoteza filtru afektywnego Krashena.