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The Affective Dimension in Teaching and Learning French as a Foreign Language

البُعد العاطفي في تعليم وتعلُّم اللغة الفرنسية كلغة أجنبية

La dimension affective dans l'enseignement et l'apprentissage du français langue étrangère

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Introduction

In the didactics of teaching French as a Foreign Language (FLE), the focus is not solely on imparting knowledge and skills but also on fostering a sense of being by creating an optimal, positive environment that enables learners to fully appropriate and master the foreign language.

When we talk about “a sense of being”, we also refer to the active presence of the learner in their surroundings (the classroom, fellow students, the teacher, the language itself, and practical language use situations). This shifts the focus in language didactics toward educational psychology that considers the child’s subjective dimension, viewing them not just as students but as human beings in their overall dynamic.

The question of the teacher’s affective impact on the student has always been significant in primary education. Every teacher, consciously or unconsciously, harbors the desire to “make a mark” on their students, hoping to have a lasting impact and leave a profound and fruitful impression.

It is undeniable that affectivity is an indispensable part of learning, playing a crucial role in the acquisition of foreign languages, particularly in learning FLE. We all remember our primary school teachers who left a lasting impression on us, whether positive or negative.

However, some teachers neglect the relational aspect and ignore the affective dimension, believing their role is not to be liked but to impart knowledge. This approach can create discomfort among learners and even lead to academic failure.

This observation motivated us to explore the value and impact of the teacher-student relationship and the affective dimension that develops between them in creating a conducive context for learning FLE. How does the affective teacher-student relationship influence the learning of FLE?

1. Affectivity in the learning process

1.1. The pedagogical relationship

For a long time, teachers have reported facing significant challenges in meeting the objectives assigned to schools. The obstacles to the smooth practice of their profession in primary schools and other educational institutions today primarily focus on the implementation of the pedagogical relationship. The educational aspect of their professional action has gradually overshadowed the disciplinary teachings, to the extent that mastering the ability to assert authority over a group and motivate students has become indispensable for any teacher who wants to practice their profession calmly and effectively. Therefore, the pedagogical relationship is a central component of successful learning.

The productivity of a pedagogical relationship lies in the quality of communication that the teacher seeks to establish and stimulate in their interactions. It involves a dynamic that is both affective (satisfying needs, personal logic of action, availability) and pedagogical (achieving objectives, chosen approach, and set priorities). It also depends on numerous sociological and psychosocial factors, primarily the teacher's perceptions of their role, the school's missions, the students' levels and personalities, as well as the psychosocial habits shaped by family education and peer relationships.

1.2. The affective dimension in learning

A frequently overlooked aspect of learning is the affective parameter, which is fundamental to all motivation. It is a fact that we learn better when our efforts are understood and our achievements are shared. Regardless of the learning contexts, we are more motivated when we know for whom or why we are learning. Often, the intellectual parameters of learning are the only ones considered, as if learning were purely a cerebral exercise.

However, we only learn well if we feel secure in relational and physical aspects. Our brain is available to construct knowledge only if our body and heart are safe. Therefore, the affective relationship in the classroom is a partnership that requires the cooperation of both teachers and learners. It is the foundation of a successful educational relationship.

Teachers have long maintained close relationships with their students. Their educational background gives them a deep understanding of the obstacles and difficulties students encounter. Sometimes, resistance arises from the fear that some teachers will lose the freedom to act, experiment,

and feel secure in mastering a subject. On the other hand, some teachers are there to find ways to overcome the anxieties of the situation with their students, to experience the joy of living together, and to share the journey of discovery and creation.

We hypothesize that the teacher-student relationship is crucial in motivating learners, allowing the teacher to create a favorable environment and improve the teaching/learning process.

We surveyed a primary school located in the Batna province, where we observed four French teachers in third-grade classrooms. We deemed it useful to work with third-grade classes because, at this stage, students are more open to learning a foreign language. They are more interested in discovering a new language. At this age (between 8 and 9 years old), children are particularly sensitive to the affective environment they are in.

1.3. The importance of affectivity in learning

Learning is often viewed as a cognitive process involving the memorization and understanding of new information. However, the affective dimension plays a crucial role in learning and can significantly influence its success or failure.

“Affectivity is a crucial element in learning. Without emotion, it is difficult to concentrate, memorize, or use information creatively.” (Immordino-Yang, 2011, p. 137)

When emotions are involved in learning, they can act as catalysts to facilitate the memorization and retention of information. For example, a positive emotional experience associated with a lesson can make it easier to remember. Conversely, negative emotions such as frustration or anxiety can hinder the ability to learn and retain information.

According to Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia:

“Affectivity is a fundamental element of learning because it affects motivation, attention, engagement, and information retention.” (2012, p. 3)

Affectivity in the classroom can thus influence learners’ motivation and engagement in the learning process. When learners are motivated and interested in the subject they are studying, they tend to be more involved in the learning process and retain information more easily. Conversely, when learners are bored or stressed, they may find it more difficult to learn, leading to negative consequences on their performance.

It is scientifically proven that emotions can affect memory and information recall. Positive emotions can enhance memory consolidation, while negative emotions can disrupt information recall. It is also important to note that emotions are not just obstacles to learning but can also serve as indicators of the learner's mindset. Teachers must be aware of students' emotions and able to recognize emotional signals to adapt their teaching accordingly.

Furthermore, social interactions can also play a role in the affective dimension of learning. Positive relationships between teachers and students can foster a healthy and stimulating learning environment. Similarly, cooperation and support among peers can help reduce the stress and anxiety associated with learning.

Schoolwork, especially in primary school, relies on a relational dynamic where the educational climate and the teacher's role are crucial. The psychological climate in the classroom is closely linked to the activities that take place there. A favorable affective environment allows learners to feel accepted and comfortable, positively impacting their motivation at school. Such a climate promotes intellectual work in the classroom by reducing the obstacles inherent in the relational dynamic between teachers and learners.

In summary, the affective dimension is an important aspect of learning and must be considered to maximize the effectiveness of teaching. Emotions can influence the ability to learn and retain information, and social interactions can also play a crucial role in creating a positive and stimulating learning environment.

2. Learning Theories and the Affective Dimension

Learning theories have long regarded the acquisition of knowledge as a primarily cognitive process. However, in recent years, it has been recognized that emotional and affective factors also play a significant role in learning. This section presents various learning theories that explore the relationship between learning and the affective dimension, highlighting the importance of considering these factors to create a positive and stimulating learning environment for students.

Maria Montessori (1907) had a holistic view of the child and believed that affectivity was a key element in learning. She considered the child's emotional well-being as a necessary condition for successful learning. Montessori emphasized the importance of the teacher-student relationship, which should be based on trust, respect, and empathy. She believed that the teacher's role was to provide a safe and positive environment for the child,

allowing them to express themselves freely and their emotions, and helping them develop self-confidence. Montessori believed that when a child feels safe and loved, they are more inclined to explore and learn independently.

Stephen Krashen (1998) posited that second language acquisition should occur naturally, in the same way as one learns their first language. He also developed the “Affective Filter Hypothesis”, which shows that emotions and motivation are important factors in acquiring a second language. According to Krashen, learning is more effective when individuals feel relaxed and comfortable, which also applies to language learning. When learners are anxious, it can interfere with their comprehension and make learning more difficult. Conversely, learning is easier in a secure environment, during one-on-one conversations with someone who takes the time to help. Students who lack an emotional connection to the curriculum or do not appreciate its impact on their lives tend to struggle academically.

Mesa (2016), discussing Pizarro’s analysis of psychological factors influencing second language acquisition, highlights the crucial importance of the student-teacher relationship. In a mixed qualitative comparative study, Pizarro concluded that teachers must be well-prepared to handle emotional challenges in the classroom. If conditions are favorable for the learner to feel motivated, anxiety and low self-esteem will likely be mitigated.

According to Duarte (2014), Turner and Waugh explain that self-assessment expectations and perceptions of success or failure significantly influence learners’ thoughts, emotions, and behaviors when preparing for an academic activity or receiving feedback. They emphasize that the learner’s self-perception impacts their motivation and emotions to engage academically. Depending on their perception of their abilities, learners will be motivated to learn something new and feel more confident in achieving their goals. Negative emotions and feelings such as fear of embarrassment or ridicule, a sense of helplessness, or despair may stem from a poor self-perception of their learning abilities.

All these theories demonstrate that affectivity is a crucial factor in children’s learning and that their emotional well-being must be considered to promote their intellectual and social development.

3. Affective factors in learning

Research has shown that emotions can influence learners’ motivation and engagement in the learning process. Thus, learning is a complex process that extends beyond the acquisition of knowledge and technical skills, being

influenced by affective factors such as motivation, classroom interactions, and self-esteem. This section highlights the influence of affective factors on students' learning. The aim is to establish a reassuring and secure environment in the school and classroom to help students who often suffer from low self-esteem succeed in their learning with confidence, overcome their apprehensions, and feel comfortable communicating in class.

3.1. Motivation and external interactions

Motivation is generally considered an important factor for effectiveness and success in all fields. In education, it is seen as a driving force that facilitates better learning and results in good academic outcomes. This idea is not new. In 1762, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in *Emile*, criticized techniques for teaching reading (which today would be referred to as didactic methods), going even further by writing:

“... a more reliable means than all those others, and the one that is always forgotten, is the desire to learn. Give the child this desire, then leave aside your desks (...) any method will be good for him” (1951, p. 116).

An education focused on motivation for everyone thus appears as a necessity, especially for those whose mission is to educate, instruct, train, and guide. This education can only be situated within a positive orientation based on the postulate of trust in human beings, in their potential, and in their capacity to adapt and regulate their actions in life. This approach encourages granting a certain degree of freedom to the student, respecting them, while surrounding them with a framework that is both secure and stimulating. The resulting pedagogy involves acting appropriately on the relational context and, above all, on oneself, to trigger and develop motivating interactions.

It is also inconceivable to consider the student apart from their physical and social context. To effectively influence a student, it is necessary to act on their environment. The environment, both physical and social, plays a crucial role in shaping the learner's experiences and outcomes.

3.2. The physical environment

Every teacher knows that their classes run much better in one room than another. For students to be attentive and ready to learn, they need to hear and see well, be comfortably seated, not be too cold or too hot, have the room regularly ventilated, and ensure the space is sufficiently spacious, well-lit, clean, and aesthetically pleasing. The physical environment thus creates the conditions for the proper functioning of the three brain zones. For instance, in

a freezing room, bodies contract and close off, hindering communication. We often describe such an atmosphere as “cold” and say that the relationships are “not warm”. Physical and social environments interact. It’s noteworthy that adjectives used to describe human relationships often relate to temperature. Generally, architecture has a clear influence on our physical and affective states, either facilitating or hindering cognitive functioning.

It is crucial to note that this dimension is often insufficiently considered in pedagogy. For example, some teachers neglect the physical preparation of the room, its organization, ventilation, and arrangement; they might ignore setting up tables in a U or square shape and then wonder why students do not communicate. They might write on the board for extended periods with their back to the students or fail to use various transmission channels (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic), focusing solely on content delivery. As a result, students feel neglected and disrespected.

3.3. The Social environment

An individual is inseparable from the human environment surrounding them, both at the level of interpersonal relationships and within the group, organization, and institution. A student entering school for the first time avoids solitude to feel reassured and communicates with one or two classmates, while also being part of a class group. The relational climate in this class can either paralyze and prevent them from expressing themselves due to rivalries or mockeries, or conversely, it can secure, energize, and encourage them to speak up. This atmosphere largely depends, as Carl Rogers insightfully demonstrated, on the teacher’s manner of being and their deep-seated attitudes.

The classroom situation involves an interaction between the teaching and learning processes, which manifests in two essential dimensions:

“the task proposed by the teacher to the students, and the verbal actions-interactions implemented to help them achieve it. These two dimensions, namely the interactions between the teacher and the students, as well as the proposed task, are closely linked.” (Clanet & Maurice, 2009)

Michel Labrot, in *Institutional Pedagogy*, along with other institutionalists, demonstrated in the 1960s how institutions, through their structure and functioning, almost entirely shape individuals. This reflection on interactivity suggests that, in areas where the highest success is sought, it is crucial to think about and act on the context. One cannot consider the student outside

of their class or institution. The majority of a student's behaviors can be explained by the accumulation of interactions between them and their environment, rather than their natural predispositions.

3.4. Self-Esteem

To place a student in the best conditions for developing their learning dynamism, it is essential to instill confidence by demonstrating our belief in their abilities, resources, and capacities. Research shows that a child's success depends not only on their skills but also on their belief in their own abilities (the feeling that they can succeed). Some young people, despite having great potential, lack self-confidence and consequently struggle academically, while others with fewer capabilities succeed very well because they believe in themselves. Self-esteem is a fundamental dynamic component for developmental psychology and therefore for learning. It refers not only to the representation, feeling, or opinion a person has of their own value but also to the internal attitude that predisposes them to act with confidence. Furthermore, self-esteem is a personal need. According to Abraham Maslow, an individual cannot realize and flourish in life if their need for recognition and esteem is not satisfied.

3.5. The Pygmalion effect

The Pygmalion effect highlights that teachers' expectations can significantly influence students' performance and outcomes. When teachers have high expectations for their students, the students tend to be more motivated, confident, and willing to work harder to meet these expectations. Teachers can contribute to this positive cycle by providing encouraging feedback, offering additional practice opportunities, and giving extra support and assistance to help students reach their goals. These high expectations can also encourage students to set higher standards for themselves, which can have long-term positive effects on their self-esteem and confidence in their abilities. Essentially, the belief that teachers have in their students' potential can act as a powerful motivator, helping students to achieve more than they might have thought possible.

4. Methods and materials

Our study was conducted at Ali Boukhalifa Primary School, located in the heart of Batna city. We observed four French teachers in third-grade classrooms. To understand the interactions between teachers and learners, as well as the teachers' behavior toward their students, we used two observation

grids—one for teachers and one for students. These grids were based on criteria related to relational and affective aspects.

The observation grid for teachers included nine criteria, such as their ability to encourage learners, maintain their attention, show tolerance, exhibit friendly behavior, respect toward learners, and their relationship with them. The observation grid for students comprised three criteria: their participation, motivation, and sense of psychological safety.

5. Results and analysis

Upon comparing the results from the teachers' observation grid with those from the students' grid, we found a significant correlation between the teachers' behavior and the learners' motivation and engagement. The analysis of the observation grids for both teachers and students allowed us to classify the Teacher/Learner relationship into three categories: good, bad, and superficial. Each category has implications for the learners' engagement and motivation.

It was evident that what distinguishes a teacher with whom learners have a good relationship is their dynamism, ability to judge mistakes with humor, and responsiveness to not only their learning needs but also their emotional and human needs. Such a teacher acknowledges not only the learner but also the “child” within them. They excel in recognizing and valuing the achievements of their learners, which adds meaning to their efforts.

This positive relationship fosters a pleasant classroom atmosphere, creating a conducive learning environment where learners feel comfortable and secure. This, in turn, motivates them to learn with enthusiasm and pleasure.

We observed that the relationship between teacher (B) and her students was “poor”. This relationship stems from authority and neglects the emotional dimension in the classroom. It lacks love toward the students and shows no tolerance, encouragement, or friendship. The sole intention is to impart knowledge to the students without regard for their emotional needs.

In such a relationship, the teacher's negative attitude may manifest through body language, facial expressions, and remarks. The teacher's nervous behavior and disapproving looks, even if not directly aimed at the student, can make the student feel personally targeted, as if receiving an implicit message from the teacher saying, “you annoy me”. This bad mood can discourage the student, hinder their motivation, and consequently, impair

the effectiveness of the teaching/learning process, creating an unfavorable learning environment.

The relationship we classified as “superficial” is the one teachers (A) and (D) maintain with their students. These teachers exhibit a reserved attitude toward their students, neither showing kindness nor hostility, which can be described as neutrality. It appears that they prioritize students’ skills over their well-being.

A superficial relationship between teacher and student lacks depth and emotional connections. The teacher may seem indifferent or distant toward the student, showing no particular interest in their progress or individual needs. This can also manifest as a lack of open communication and constructive feedback.

Such a relationship can hurt the learning environment, affecting students’ motivation and engagement. Students may feel ignored or underestimated, leading to a decrease in self-confidence and motivation to learn. Therefore, teachers need to develop positive and genuine relationships with their students to foster a stimulating learning environment conducive to learning.

Conclusion

Teachers and educators need to recognize the significance of the affective dimension. The emotions and feelings of learners have a significant impact on their performance and engagement in the learning process. Teachers must consider this dimension to create a positive and stimulating learning environment.

Developing a positive teacher-student relationship will establish both the teacher and the student in a constructive relationship and school experience, placing the student in an open attitude conducive to academic learning. Thus, we observe that the teacher-student relationship and the teacher-student rapport are possible keys to the evolution of successive school experiences and/or academic learning. Finally, we aim to demonstrate that there is no method or magic formula for creating strong bonds with learners. It rather depends on the teacher’s personal attitude and perception of their role.

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Abstract

The teacher's affective impact on the student has always been present in primary school. Every teacher feels, to a greater or lesser extent, the desire to "leave a mark" on their students. Numerous studies have demonstrated that affectivity is indispensable to foreign language acquisition, particularly in learning French as a foreign language (FLE). This article explores the impact of the teacher-student affective relationship on creating a conducive context for learning FLE.

Keywords

Affectivity, Student, Teacher, Relationship

Résumé

L'impact affectif de l'enseignant sur l'élève a toujours été présent à l'école primaire. Chaque enseignant ressent, de manière plus ou moins consciente, le désir de "marquer" ses élèves. De nombreuses études ont démontré que l'affectivité est une partie indispensable de l'acquisition des langues étrangères, en particulier dans l'apprentissage du français langue étrangère (FLE). Cet article explore l'impact de la relation affective entre l'enseignant et l'élève sur la création d'un contexte propice à l'apprentissage du FLE.

Mots-clés

Affectivité, élève, enseignant, relation

الملخص

تأثير المعلم على الطالب عاطفياً دائماً موجود في المدرسة الابتدائية. يشعر كل معلم، بشكل ما، برغبة "في ترك بصمة" على طلابه. أظهرت العديد من الدراسات أن العواطف هي جزء لا يتجزأ من اكتساب اللغات الأجنبية، وخاصة في تعلم اللغة الفرنسية كلغة أجنبية. يستكشف هذا المقال تأثير العلاقة العاطفية بين المعلم والطالب على خلق سياق يسهل تعلم اللغة الفرنسية كلغة.

الكلمات المفتاحية

علاقة، معلم، تلميذ، عاطفية
