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Reflections of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis in Language Classroom: A Study amongst Undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

The present research sets its goal to identify the cause of poor performance of adults' English as foreign language (EFL) learners at the undergraduate level in the Department of English, University of Barishal, as well as to analyze the hypothesis that one of the major reasons behind the failure of the learners may be affective filters and whether the curriculum is a facilitator behind this. The basic intention was to look for answers to questions regarding whether adult EFL learners raise their affective filters to block the incoming input in academic scenarios and whether elements from the curriculum enhance the presence of these emotions among them. To this end, the researcher collected data through questionnaires, based on the experiences of learners in the classroom environment. The results obtained from the study show that there is an alarming presence of affective filters among the concerned learners, and that a change in classroom environment and curriculum might help learners lower their affective filters.

Keywords: Affective filters, Anxiety, Low self-esteem, Negative self-evaluation, and Self-confidence.

INTRODUCTION:

The learning of EFL is a complex process that involves a number of factors like cognitive, meta-cognitive, social, and affective. Affective factors are some non-linguistic variables such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety which affect the acquisition of second or foreign language. They refer to learners' emotional reactions and feelings (e.g., attitudes, motivation, anxiety, self-esteem, inhibition, and so on) that are involved in the learning process. These factors filter out the amount of input in the brain of the learners. In order to be capable of learning English effectively, she or he should feel comfortable and safe in the learning environment. The affective filter, which is a crucial part of Stephen Krashen's theory of Second Language Acquisition, is a hypothesized

impediment to learning brought about by negative feelings.

In Krashen's, (1982) work, he posits, the reason as to why it is possible for someone to attain a huge amount of comprehensible input and still stop short of the native speaker level is explained by the filter hypothesis. In simpler words, the higher the affective filter active in the learner, the more likely that language learning will be impeded; the lower the filter, the more likely that effective language learning will take place. This research work will explore the impact of affective filters on the undergraduate level learners of English department in University of Barishal, in their acquisition of English language skills, whether they are hampering the learning process and consequen-

tially stemming out low performance and competence, and whether the curriculum is in any way responsible for this. The variables of affective filters have been mostly studied in SLA in its own rights, individually, rather than in connection with personality or individual emotional states. Put in a simple way, some individuals report about experiencing intense levels of apprehensive feelings, tensions and fear, when they think about foreign language learning. The major aim of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction program should be that learners end up being able to communicate fluently. In this sense, focusing on communicative competence in the foreign or second language (L2) plays a crucial role in the EFL classroom (Mohammad *et al.*, 2023).

However, traditional classrooms mostly employ interactional patterns that tend to follow paradigms that promote that the teacher be the center of attention, and in charge of providing the L2 input and grammar explanations and instructions, consequently leaving considerable little space for the learners to practice English by themselves in the class sessions. Additionally, a typical scenario in Bangladesh comprises of teachers not tolerating mistakes made by the learners, no matter how minor they are, which increases duress on the language learners. Besides the curriculum often includes procedures or creation or employment of situations where the comfort level of the learners automatically go down, giving them a sense of insecurity during the learning scenario and consequently results in unsuccessful language acquisition. This sort of learning environment adds more psychological burden on the students. Mentions of Bangladeshi students being poor in English even at university levels is often a well discussed and peered into subject in the academic journals and print media. In the universities of Bangladesh, learners arrive with diverse backgrounds. Some are from English medium backgrounds, some come from Bangla medium, some also have Madrasa backgrounds. Consequently, their learning processes are different that affects their acquisition and learning throughout their under-graduation level since it is impossible for the teachers to keep all these different regards in their minds during large classes. As a result, the affective factors are at large in the psyche of a major part of EFL learners. The present research is an endeavor to

shed light on the function of affective filters in EFL classrooms and how the curriculum works behind this among the under graduate students of English department in University of Barishal.

Review of Literature

The Affective Filter Hypothesis was proposed and its influence over foreign language learning process was explained by Dulay and Burt in early 1977. It was first proposed under the name affective delimiters and was further investigated by Stephen Krashen (Dulay *et al.*, 1977; Zafar, 2009). Krashen developed and perfected the hypothesis and put the theory into five central hypotheses. They are called the five components of Krashen's Second Language Acquisition theory. The Affective Filter Hypothesis is one of the components of this theory. This hypothesis is mostly famous for dealing with the emotional sides of acquiring a second language. Since a language student is an individual while subsequently, a part of a group, the learning outcome becomes majorly on what and how the learner feels about the whole learning process (Martos, 2004). Martos, (2004) emphasizes that the domain through which students turn conscious about their environment, while at the same time learn to respond to that particular environment harboring feelings, based on which they learn how to act later. Thereby, this specific hypothesis has a crucial part to play in the way to identify seemingly non-empirical variables that affect any individual learner's acquisition of second language. This hypothesis reports that attitudinal variables that relate to success concerning the acquisition of language, normally are relatable directly to acquisition of language and not always to language learning. The research literature indicates that certain types of affective variables are interconnected to L2 achievement and that performers who have, specific sorts of motivation and good self-image perform better in second language acquisition process. These factors are hypothesized to be more explicitly and directly related to second language acquisition and achievement since they appear, commonly where communicative tests are employed, tests that concentrate on the acquisition and not the learning. Krashen, (1982) reports that the 'Affective Filter Hypothesis' is responsible for capturing the relationship among the affective variables and the acquisition process of the second language by emphasizing

that the ones who acquire are different regarding their strength and level of filters activated in the academic settings. The ones who have attitudes not optimal enough for acquisition of second language will not just be tending to seek low input, but will also be possessing a higher and stronger affective filter. This can happen regardless of them understanding the message, and thus will block the input from reaching the area of

the brain or mental faculty responsible for second language acquisition or language acquisition device. The ones with attitudes that are more conducive to L2 acquisition will not merely look for and obtain more input, but will also own a lower or weaker filter. Thus they will be more welcoming to the input received and it will strike them deeper. The figure below from Krashen's article, (1982) illustrates this concept:

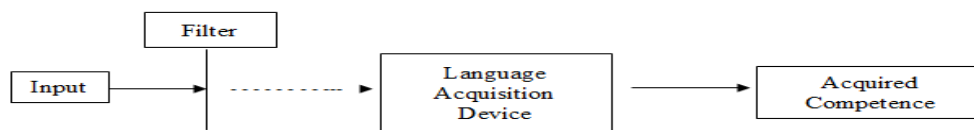


Fig. 1: Affective Filter diagram. This figure illustrates the affective filter.

The extent to which this filter remains high or low is the determiner of its strength in blocking a specific input. Krashen, (1982) also reports that it acts in a way as to determine the accomplishment of learners' level in language acquisition. Krashen, (2003) indicates that first language acquisition takes place effortlessly but acquiring a second language does not take place without effort. Du, (2009) in his study, finds that learners who have high levels of affective filters achieve a lower amount of input whereas learners with low affective filter attain higher level of input into their device of language acquisition. The term language acquisition device (LAD) is used here to refer to the notion that was explored by Noam Chomsky, (2011). The idea that LAD is connected to Krashen's affective filters is primarily based on the fact that since all language learning takes place in LAD, and because learning a language is affected by the filters in one way or the other, the act of the filters affecting the language learning is happening inside LAD. When the effects of these filters are high, the input fails to get through the LAD, resulting in less learning and in a similar fashion, the lesser the degree of existence of such variables in the learners' mental faculty, the more the information gets through to the LAD and thus results in more learning (Rishel and Miller, 2018). Hui, (2012) points out that when a learner has high level of anxiety and low level of confidence & motivation in learning, then the level of input in the brain is immensely affected and reduced. Similarly, if the affective filter is low and self-confidence & motivation is high, then input takes place at a higher level (Ni, 2012). Arnold, (2000) re-

ports that devoting proper attention to affective aspects can result in language learning, and if considerable attention is paid towards affective aspects, those can help to add to the holistic development of language learners. Ellis, (1994) finds a number of factors that can influence the affective state of a learner like anxiety, sense of competition and apprehension. Ellis, (1985) indicates to motivation, self-confidence and anxiety that control the affective state of the learners. The studies of (Bandura, 1986; Cohen & Norst, 1989; Lambert, 1972; Littlewood, 1984) show four barriers of second language learning including anxiety regarding language, low self-image, insufficient motivation, and negative attitudes towards the second language. Brown, (2000) finds both internal as well as external factors in second language acquisition. The internal factors include self-esteem, inhibition, risk-taking, anxiety and empathy. The external factors, rather, comprise of attitudes, second culture acquisition, social distance and language policies. Schumann, (1975) reports that affective variables may play important roles in acquisition of L2. Krashen (1982, as cited in Du, 2009) reported four variables which influence the SLA as, motivation, anxiety, self-confidence and attitude. Extensive search has been conducted on motivation, particularly with consideration to language learning (Dörnyei, 2005, 2001, 1998; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Spolsky, 2000). Another of Krashen's affective filters that affect acquiring any language directly much like motivation is anxiety. It is defined by Martos, (2004) as a general feeling of stress and tension that students

go through while being in a second language acquisition classroom, particularly in scenarios where they are newly enrolled students of the language they are trying to learn. Krashen, (1982) regards 'self-confidence' as the self-evaluation of learners' abilities and attributes regarding the task at hand. The speech of language learners of L2 has been affected adversely if they have a low evaluation of their abilities. As a debilitating factor among second language learners in SLA, this construct has attracted researchers' attention quite a lot (Brown & Marshall, 2006; Brodkey & Shore, 1976; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Watkins *et al.*, 1991) have conducted researches on these factors regarding the success or failure of second language learning. From the aforementioned review of literature, it is observed that different learners from different learning contexts face different types of affective variables while participating in acquisition of a second language in an academic setting. It is also quite evident from the literature review that there have been very few researches carried out in the sphere of learners' English language learning about the impacts of affective filters on L2 learners in the context of Bangladesh. Therefore, the researcher has attempted to conduct a study on various affective filters existing among the learners of peripheral universities in Bangladesh, and their impacts on learners who learn English as a foreign language.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the present study is to investigate the impact of affective filters on students' performance and competence in EFL classrooms and communicative competence at the undergraduate level in English department of University of Barishal in Bangladesh and provide research-based solution. Additionally, it also endeavors to make constructive recommendation based on the results of the study. The specific objectives are -

- 1) To find out the major impacts of the affective filters on undergraduate level EFL learners.
- 2) To find out the problems in current curriculum escalating the affective filters on undergraduate level EFL learners.

Research Questions

As discussed above, this paper pursues two objectives: Firstly, the major impacts of the filters on undergraduate level EFL learners will be investigated. After-

wards, the problems in current curriculum escalating the affective filters on undergraduate level EFL learners will also be examined. Thereby, in an attempt to pursue the above-mentioned goals, the researcher has set two research questions:

- 1) What are the impacts of affective filters as hypothesized by Krashen on learners' achievement in communicative competence in EFL at the undergraduate level of education, if there are any?
- 2) Whether the currently prescribed curriculum and educational system is facilitating the existence of affective filters? If yes, to what degree and what steps are needed to remove these filters?

METHODOLOGY:

The questionnaire has been set by following the model of Krashen, (1982) which has been directional in this research to find out the impacts of affective filters on EFL learners and how the curriculum also has an active part in this. It is also to be noted that the EFL learners of the Department of English from University of Barishal have responded accordingly to the issues because of the filters active in them, represented in Krashen's model. The respondents are one hundred and eighteen (118) undergraduate students of English department at University of Barishal. The questionnaire has two segments. The first segment consists of eight questions while the second part has been set up with seven questions. Each of the questions has been devised in such a way as to locate the answers of the research questions and to fulfill the objectives of this current research. All of the one hundred and eighteen students have been asked to rate each of the statements provided depending on their level of agreement, through the aid of a five-point Likert scale: 1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3=Neutral, 4=Disagree and finally 5= Strongly Disagree. All the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire survey have been treated, recorded, and analyzed through the program of 'Statistical Package for the Social Sciences' (SPSS). Several arithmetic calculations like mean (average) and standard deviation (SD) have been implemented through the use of SPSS to assess the level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The results of the quantitative data (questionnaire survey) have been illustrated alongside their descript-

tions in this section. This particular section is sorted into two parts: the first part deals with the first objective (To find out the major impacts of the affective filters on undergraduate level EFL learners, in relation to research question one). Another part deals with the second objective (To find out the problems in current curriculum that escalates the affective filters in students in relation to research question two). The illustrations and descriptions regarding the quantitative data are as follows-

Objective -1

(To find out the major impacts of the affective filters on undergraduate level EFL learners)

Research Question-1

(What are the impacts of affective filters as hypothesized by Krashen on learners' achievement in communicative competence in EFL at the undergraduate level of education, if there are any?)

Interlocutor's Proficiency (I feel stressed while interacting with someone proficient in English).

15(12.7%) students strongly agree that they primarily have difficulty with someone who is proficient, while 56(47.5%) agree. 3(2.5%) strongly disagree with this while 29(24.6%) disagree. 17 of them remain neutral in this where the percentage stands at 14.5%. The mean here is 3.45 and standard deviation 1.051. It is demonstrated in the upcoming pages.

Issues with the student's accent (My anxiety raises when the interlocutor gets confused with my accent).

26(22%) students strongly agree that they primarily have difficulty with a speaker who confuses his/her accent, while 61(51.7%) agree. 15(12.7%) remain neutral while 16(13.6%) disagree. 2 strongly disagree with the percentage 1.7%. The mean here is 3.79 and standard deviation 0.994. Issues with the student's comprehension skills (I feel fear when I cannot decode the message of the speaker).

31(26.3%) students have strongly agreed that they primarily have difficulty when they are unable to comprehend the message coming across from the speaker, while 60(50.8%) agree. 20(16.9%) remain neutral while 8(6.8%) disagree. None of the students strongly disagree on this point. The mean here is 3.79 and standard deviation 0.994.

Issues with the unfamiliarity of the topic (I feel nervous when the topic is unfamiliar).

35(29.7%) students strongly agree that they have difficulty when they face a completely new topic, while 55 (46.6%) agree. 13(11.0%) remain neutral whereas 15(12.7%) disagree. 2(1.7%) of the students strongly disagree on this point. The mean here is 3.92 and standard deviation 0.980.

Stress and grammatical mistakes (I feel stressed when I am conscious about grammatical mistakes).

22(18.6%) students strongly agree that they are stressed out due to consciousness about grammatical mistakes, while 69(58.5%) agree. 17(14.4%) remain neutral while 10(8.5%) disagree. 2(1.7%) of the students strongly disagree on this point. The mean here is 3.85 and standard deviation 0.873.

Face loss issues (I feel nervous when my fellow students are asked to correct my mistakes).

17(14.4%) students strongly agree that they are motivated in EFL classes when it is conducted in English, while 37(31.4%) agree. 19(16.1%) remain neutral and 40(33.9%) disagree. 5(4.2%) of the students strongly disagree with this point. The mean here is 3.18 and standard deviation 1.174.

Relation between motivation and student's interaction in English (I feel motivated when I am instructed to respond in English in class).

23(19.5%) students strongly agree that they get motivated in EFL classes if they are instructed to respond in English, while 51(43.2 %) agree. 25(21.2%) remain neutral and 21(17.8%) disagree. 1(0.8%) of the students strongly disagree with this point. The mean here is 3.64 and the standard deviation is 1.010.

Relation between nervousness and the expected performance from students (I feel nervous when a certain level of performance is expected from me).

21(17.8%) students strongly agree that they get nervous in EFL classes because a certain level of performance is expected from them, while 61(51.7%) agree. 17(14.4%) remain neutral and 18(15.3%) disagree. 2(1.7%) of the students strongly disagree on this point. The mean is 3.68 and standard deviation 0.995.

Objective -2

(To find out the problems in the current curriculum escalating the affective filters on undergraduate level EFL learners with regard to research question 2)

Research Question-2

Whether the currently prescribed curriculum and educational system is facilitating the existence of affective

filters? If yes, to what degree and what steps are required to remove these filters?

The curriculum setting a certain set of expectations regarding student's performance (My curriculum expects a certain linguistic excellence at the undergraduate level).

13(11%) students have strongly agreed that they get nervous in EFL classes because the curriculum sets a certain level of performance for them to meet, while 76(64.4%) agree. 22(18.6%) remain neutral and 7(5.9%) disagree. 2(1.7 %) of the students strongly disagree on this point. The mean is 3.81 and standard deviation 0.707.

Issues regarding the volume of courses (I feel burdened with the volume of courses)

47(39.8%) students strongly agree that they feel nervous due to volume of courses, while 28(23.7%) agree. 25(21.2%) remain neutral & 14(11.9%) disagree. 4(3.4 %) of the students strongly disagree on this point. The mean here is 3.01 & standard deviation 1.121.

Issues regarding the examination system and procedure (I am comfortable with the examination system and procedure that the curriculum prescribes).

7(5.9%) students strongly agree that their curriculum allows for an examination system and procedure where they can be at ease, while 26(22%) agree. 18(15.3%) remain neutral and 56(47.5%) disagree. 11(9.3%) of the students strongly disagree on this point. The mean here is 3.19 and standard deviation 1.132.

Focus of the curriculum on communicative competence (My curriculum focuses on all four skills allowing ample practice to make me confident).

The table number eighteen is about the factor- Focus of the curriculum on communicative competence. 9 (7.7%) students strongly agree that their curriculum focuses on all four skills, while 21(17.9%) agree. 25(21.4%) remain neutral & 51(43.6%) disagree. 12(10.3%) of the students strongly disagree with this point. The mean here is 3.22 & standard deviation 1.123.

Curriculum on a student-centered learning scenario (My curriculum allows for a student centered learning scenario which motivates me).

8(6.8%) students strongly agree that their curriculum allows for a classroom which is student-centered, while 5 (4.3%) agree. 38(32.5%) remain neutral and 46(39.3%) disagree. 22(18.8%) of students strongly

disagree on this point. The mean here is 3.26 and standard deviation 0.984.

Length of the curriculum (The length of my curriculum is within my comfort level).

2(1.7%) students strongly agree that the length of the curriculum is within their comfort level, while 30(25.4%) agree. 36(30.5%) remain neutral and 49(41.5%) disagree. 4(3.4%) of the students strongly disagree on this point.

The mean here is 3.21 and standard deviation 0.904.

Curriculum allowing a pleasant and supportive classroom (My curriculum allows for a pleasant and supportive classroom for me).

4(3.4%) students strongly agree that curriculum allots a pleasant and supportive classroom, while 50(42.4%) agree. 30(25.4%) remain neutral & 31(26.3%) disagree. 4(3.4%) of the students strongly disagree on this point. The mean here is 3.16 and standard deviation 0.969.

Thereby, from the above discussion and representation of the findings accumulated through the questionnaire survey it has been demonstrated that there exists a huge impact of the affective filters on students, while subsequently, the curriculum is also a prime facilitator regarding this, for the undergraduate level students of the department of English of University of Barishal.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

From the findings and analysis, the researcher believes that the objectives of the current study have been attained and the answers of the two research questions have also been aptly achieved. The detailed representations of this chapter have therefore established that the impacts of affective filters on learners of undergraduate level in University of Barishal pertain to:

Issues with interlocutor's proficiency, issues with student's accent, issues with the student's comprehension skills, issues with the student's unfamiliarity with the topic, evaluation being a motivational factor, stress due to consciousness about grammatical mistakes, loss of face issues, and relation between nervousness and the expected performance from the students. The process in which the currently prescribed curriculum and educational system is facilitating the existence of affective filters are as follows-

The curriculum setting a certain set of expectations regarding student's performance, discomfort issues

regarding the volume of courses, discomfort issues regarding the examination system and procedure, the lack of focus of the curriculum on developing the four skills of language, employing a student-centered learning scenario, lack of curriculum's effort on boosting student's confidence in a scenario where foreign language is involved, displeasure with curriculum length and arrangement of the classroom. Therefore, it can be concluded that the impacts of affective filter on EFL learners of English department of University of Barishal is enormous and the curriculum to a great extent is an enhancer of this. Based on the findings of the current study, some recommendations are provided:

- 1) The learners should try to take the process of learning English as a foreign or second language stress-free, letting go of the inhibitions and prejudice held towards it. This result into the processing of language input becoming more effective.
- 2) The learners are required to practice interacting in English by themselves looking at the mirror which will help them boost their confidence when encountering a situation where they need to use English as a language.
- 3) The learners should remember that progress is an ongoing development. Therefore, they need to practice more with the help of teachers.
- 4) The teachers need to be as friendly as possible with the learners so that the learners are in complete ease during learning process & does not feel any extra pressure during classroom activities.
- 5) The teachers need to remember about constantly encouraging the learners so that they do not feel anxious about being incompetent at some task in the class and pay their full attention.
- 6) The teachers need to motivate the students in a manner that they will feel comfortable to speak up in front of their companions in the class.
- 7) The teaching-learning procedure needs to be encouraged in a way where the learners will be top priority & their autonomy will be ensured in a way to ensure that they feel secured & encouraged.
- 8) The curriculum and examination system should be reconsidered where enough attention should be paid to listening and speaking skills. Traditional examination patterns should also be reconsidered and modified to ensure complete comfort and ease of the learners.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

No potential conflicts of interest to publish it.

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