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LOWERING THE AFFECTIVE FILTER: STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING IN CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTS DURING WAR-TIME

Teaching in challenging environments, such as war-affected settings, presents numerous obstacles for educators. Designing lessons in such conditions requires clear thinking and strategies to bridge the gap between instructional objectives and effective material delivery. In war-affected settings, pupils' cognitive abilities may be suppressed, making it essential to consider the affective filter and its impact on language learning.

Previous research has explored teaching in challenging circumstances, but there is a lack of focus on war-affected environments when lowering the affective filter is especially crucial for effective language acquisition. The article aims to equip teachers with strategies to lower the affective filter and create an environment that fosters confidence and language acquisition during the war. For the research, the author analysed scientific sources regarding teaching foreign languages in the challenging environment, explored the essence of the phenomena "challenging circumstances" and "affective filter" as well as techniques how to reduce it.

To create a supportive classroom environment, educators should provide choices, opportunities for pupil voice, and activities aligned with pupils' passions to enhance motivation. Cultivating a sense of belonging, valuing pupils' individuality, and developing an inclusive environment promote self-confidence. Establishing a safe classroom where mistakes are encouraged and a growth mindset is fostered helps alleviate anxiety.

In war-affected settings, creating a supportive classroom environment is crucial for effective language learning. By addressing the affective filter through motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety-reducing strategies, educators can empower learners, promote language development, and foster growth despite challenging circumstances.

Key words: *affective filter, educational environment, teaching, language learning, motivation, strategies.*

Statement of the problem. Teaching in challenging environments requires educators to overcome various obstacles and ensure effective learning despite adverse conditions. Challenging environments encompass a wide range of circumstances, such as large classes, mixed-abilities classrooms, demotivated pupils, limited resources, poor learning environments, and social problems. However, one of the most challenging tasks arises when providing education amidst periods of wars (as in the case in Ukraine) or military conflicts.

Designing lessons in challenging environments becomes particularly important, requiring solitude and clear thinking to bridge the gap between instructional objectives and effective material delivery. Under martial law, when pupils' cognitive abilities are suppressed and distorted, processing information and maintaining long-term concentration may prove difficult. Thus, it is essential to consider the affective filter and its impact on pupils' language learning.

Analysis of previous research and publications. The issues of teaching in challenging circumstances have been explored by different scientists and pedagogues for decades. For example, summarizing own pedagogical experience in Bengal, M. West defined challenging circumstances as the need to provide quality education in schools with large classes, crowded classrooms full of extremely poor pupils who could not read or write, etc. Regarding those challenges West focused on practice-oriented pedagogy and learner-centred approach prioritizing, for example, the recycling of new language and linking language learning with the wider curriculum [1]. Also, C. Sowton was inspired by West's research and continued exploring the problem of teaching in challenging circumstances regarding the 21st century demands (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic) and he provided teachers with some practical ideas for teaching in low-budget and/or low-resource situations like a simplified procedure for flipped learning which is quite beneficial. The author also focused mainly on teaching large, mixed-ability and/or mixed-aged classes, teaching without textbooks, teaching inexperienced learners, the issues of motivating and empowering learners, involving parents, guardians and/or local community, etc. For example, C. Sowton summarized his experience and suggested principles for good online learning and teaching emphasizing the balance between synchronous and asynchronous mode [2, p. 154–156].

C. Chapman studied networking in urban and challenging contexts and whether it could encourage

school improvement [3]. A. AlMunifi and A. Aleryani made the first attempt to investigate the effects of Yemen's armed conflict on higher education [4]. However, they didn't provide with practical ideas or practice. T. Bharati examined the long-term impact of the India-Pakistan war of 1999 on the educational attainment of children born to families of soldiers who survived the war [5]. Scientists have also studied psychological aspects like vulnerabilities of children and adolescents in Syria [6] and adverse effects of war and armed conflict on children [7, p. 69–70]. These studies were devoted to the analysis of the direct and indirect effects of war and armed conflict on exposed children, particularly, psychological and physical effects on children's well-being which explains the essence of psychological aspects, but the scientists didn't aim at studying educational aspects and/or providing teachers with practical ideas for teaching in warfare-related environment.

Such past studies are primarily focused on analysing the impact from challenging circumstances on children in different geographical areas, their psychological conditions and ability to continue learning.

In addition, regarding the challenges pupils might face in the classroom setting even in peaceful times, scientists also studied the issues of lowering the affective filter as a potential block of cognition when mastering any subject. Thus, S. Krashen explained the essence of the affective filter defining it as an imaginary wall that rises in the mind and prevents input. The affective filter refers to the emotional and psychological factors that influence second language acquisition. Motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety are three key variables affecting language learning. When the affective filter is high, pupils experience stress, anxiety, lack of self-confidence, reluctance to participate, boredom, and disinterest. Moreover, currently pupils' cognitive abilities are suppressed and distorted, processing large amounts of information and long-term concentration could be rather difficult. On the other hand, when the affective filter is lowered, pupils feel safe, become risk-takers, interact with peers, and engage actively in the learning process [8]. Krashen's Monitor Model has been evaluated and discussed by some researchers in the context of teaching in the 21st century and its significance has been testified in the field of second language acquisition and second language teaching [9, p. 1459–1464] as well as some ides of lowering the affective filter focusing on all its aspects like lack of self-confidence and motivation as well as reducing anxiety have been suggested and approved in practice [10].

Currently, researchers have already studied the impact of the affective filter on learning abilities in second language acquisition and stated that teaching strategies should be based on the context of reducing the overall stress related to classroom learning [11, p. 1232–1240], [12, p. 463–470], etc. However, the studies focused on the classroom setting without any attention to challenging conditions as in the case in Ukraine under the war-fare-related environment.

Aim and tasks. The article **aims** to equip teachers with strategies to lower the affective filter and create an environment that fosters confidence and language acquisition during the war.

To achieve this aim, the following **tasks** have outlined:

1) to examine various stages of a lesson when facilitating effective learning in challenging environments through incorporating techniques such as relating to learners, encouraging risk-taking, and focusing on practical activities;

2) how to empower learners, alleviate their affective filters, and promote language development despite adverse circumstances.

For the research, general scientific and theoretical **research methods** were used, such as: analysis of scientific sources regarding teaching foreign languages in the challenging environment; synthesis, generalization, explanation are used to clarify the essence of the phenomena "affective filter" and "challenging circumstances".

Presentation of the main materials. Lowering the affective filter is critical in the classroom, as elevated filters impede language acquisition. Classroom environments intentionally designed to lower the affective filter foster increased language development, as more input is allowed to pass through. Highly motivated pupils who feel confident and safe are more receptive to learning. Hence, it is imperative for teachers to understand and address the affective filter, particularly in challenging environments.

Considering the situation in Ukraine, where the war has had a profound impact on pupils' emotional well-being, teachers must address the affective filter. By replacing information noise with effective tasks, exercises, and psychological support, teachers can help stabilize pupils' mental systems, reduce stress and anxiety, and facilitate language learning. However, it is crucial to balance the curriculum and create a sense of normalcy while providing support and understanding.

To create a welcoming classroom environment that lowers pupils' affective filters, teachers can apply similar strategies used to make visitors feel at home. Let's explore these strategies based on Krashen's three categories:

1. Motivation.

1.1. Offering choices, allowing pupils to select their study topics, and empowering them to decide how they demonstrate understanding can enhance motivation.

1.2. Providing opportunities for pupils to express their voice in the learning process fosters enthusiasm.

1.3. Engaging pupils in activities aligned with their passions boosts motivation by making the learning experience compelling and relevant to their lives.

2. Self-confidence.

2.1. Cultivating a sense of belonging, valuing pupils' individuality, and creating an inclusive classroom environment promotes self-confidence.

2.2. Pronouncing pupils' names correctly and developing a deeper understanding of their identities beyond the classroom can enhance their self-assurance.

3. Anxiety.

3.1. Establishing a safe classroom environment where pupils are not afraid to make mistakes helps reduce their affective filters.

3.2. Encouraging a growth mindset and demonstrating that errors are a natural part of the learning process can help pupils embrace challenges and growth.

3.3. Being mindful of our verbal and nonverbal communication, including body language, plays a crucial role in alleviating pupils' anxiety, even for those who may not be fluent in English yet.

By implementing these strategies, educators can effectively decrease pupils' affective filters, creating an environment conducive to learning and growth. Still, it is best to follow the curriculum and try to normalize the situation (if possible).

Anyway, at the beginning of each lesson, it is worth supporting pupils and emphasizing the positive aspect: everyone is safe, hope lives, everything will be Ukraine and so on. It is considered necessary to start by updating the so-called "contract": reminding about the rules of the lesson, if necessary, discuss new ones (e.g., how to act when the air raid alarm starts) [13, p. 104]. It is especially important if there are new pupils in the classroom (for example, pupils who are forced resettles). Working in these circumstances, a teacher should think of additional support of newcomers and suggest them to choose "subject buddies" from the pupils who have been studying in the class for a while.

In addition, it is essential to organize warming-up activities or icebreakers and set the tone even for the entire day. For example, 1) ask pupils what starts with letter "s" and can be placed in a box/jar/ or a bag and taken to the journey to …; 2) ask a pupil to choose a piece of paper with a word or a phrase (relevant to the topic) and then within a certain limit of time draw it on the blackboard to make his or her classmates guess; 3) get a learner to start with the letter "a" and see if he or she can think of a word for the relevant topic that either starts with that letter, or contains it; then ask the next learner to proceed with the letter "b"; to make this task more challenging a teacher may ask learners to write a sentence with this word; 4) get learners to work together to come up with a ten point action plan for how to solve the problem like "A man is stuck on the moon, how do we get him down?" or "While travelling your money was stolen, what would you do?" and so on. It is important to encourage learners to say at least one word in English (it may concern their thoughts or they may continue a phrase "For me Ukraine/…/happiness is/ means…") during warming-up stage. These tasks may help learners get their brains into action and help teachers analyse their emotional state, adapt further activities (if necessary) and relief tension [13, p. 104–105].

Learners who forced to move because of the war should not be forced to participate in all the classroom activities, they should be given some options and space. Otherwise, their anxiety may increase which means the increase of the affective filter as well.

One of the strongest techniques a teacher can use with learners is to simply share his or her own failures and feelings when it comes both to learning new things and witnessing the terrible military events in Ukraine. Also, some pupils may be more comfortable (from the emotional perspective) to share their thoughts and feeling using another language (Ukrainian, for example).

However, given the fact that secondary and senior school pupils have free access to information and are aware of the scale of the destruction, it is appropriate to direct their thoughts and energy. If they show special interest, they may be involved in dynamic exercises and activities (including via social networks) using already acquired knowledge and mastered vocabulary, join the information resistance, inform the public abroad about the events in Ukraine: it gives pupils a sense of involvement in a common important cause and promotes the practical application of knowledge, skills and abilities. When faced with challenges, pupils do not have to have psychological problems, but on the contrary, with the support of adults (including teachers) they can demonstrate post-traumatic growth and psychological resilience [13, p. 105].

Therefore, it is recommended to present educational material without overloading pupils with theory and a large number of exercises. However, the teacher should still be able to help pupils distract themselves from military events through educational activities. Information should be divided into short blocks, which will be followed by practical activities and/or a visual result, as well as to set individual goals with pupils and celebrate growth.

It is worth mentioning that stimulating recall of prior learning also helps activating background knowledge: a teacher connects the new lesson to past instruction by sharing details that might have made the class come alive.

When presenting the content, scaffolding is really helpful as it is designed to make information and tasks

accessible to pupils without misleading them and avoiding ambiguity. Graphic organizers, pictures, and charts can all serve as scaffolding tools. Graphic organizers are very specific in that they help kids visually represent their ideas, organize information, and grasp concepts such as sequencing and cause and effect.

A teacher could ask pupils to share their own experiences and ideas about the content or concept of study and have them relate and connect it to their own lives. Sometimes a teacher may have to offer hints and suggestions, leading them to the connections a bit, but once they get there, they will grasp the content as their own.

With all the diverse learners in classrooms, there is a strong need for teachers to learn and experiment with new scaffolding strategies. Moreover, when pupils are given guidance on how to approach their learning, such as through guided activities or information about common mistakes to avoid, their learning speed improves as they are less prone to wasting time or feeling frustrated due to incorrect information or misunderstood concepts.

At the end of the lesson, teachers usually have practice and elicit performance. Sometimes it is a mixture of practice and evaluation. Learners have to demonstrate understanding of the instructions. It could consist of a group work or an independent practice. Still learners have to interact directly with the materials, exchange the information. Practical strategies, activities and "takeaways" are the most valuable resources.

As for homework, it is recommended offering pupils mini-projects that will activate their creativity and related with specific actions and real-life situations. It is appropriate to use the functionality of various applications. However, some topics (like "My Hometown", "My House", etc.) could become triggers for some pupils, that is why it is better to paraphrase them (for instance, "The Town of My Dreams", "The House of My Dreams", etc.)

When lowering the affective filter, the attitude to the mistakes should be emphasized. A teacher's task is to support his or her learners and form an adequate attitude to mistakes as a natural step to success and to encourage applying continuous effort without overemphasizing error correction. Formative evaluation and providing learners with feedback are essential as a teacher becomes a guide who helps pupils prepare for a later testing environment.

By organizing the educational process and providing pupils with a tool for interaction with the world, teachers help them stabilize the mental system after disorganization by wars, reduce stress and anxiety hence lower the affective filter.

Conclusions and suggestions. This article explores techniques to lower the affective filter and promote effective language learning in challenging classrooms. By leveraging motivation, self-confidence, and reducing anxiety, teachers can create welcoming and inclusive environments. By examining various stages of a lesson and incorporating techniques such as relating to learners, encouraging risk-taking, and focusing on practical activities, educators can facilitate effective learning in challenging environments. Providing choice, voice, and relevance can enhance motivation, while fostering a sense of belonging and respect enhances self-confidence. Embracing errors as part of the learning process, adopting a growth mindset, and utilizing positive nonverbal communication can help alleviate anxiety.

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Кирпа А. В. Зниження афективного фільтра: стратегії викладання в складних умовах під час війни

Викладання у складних умовах, наприклад, у місцях проведення воєнних дій, створює численні перешкоди для педагогів. Розробка уроків у таких умовах вимагає чіткого мислення та стратегій для подолання розриву між навчальними цілями та ефективним поданням матеріалу. В умовах війни когнітивні здібності здобувачів освіти можуть бути пригнічені, тому важливо враховувати афективний фільтр і його вплив на вивчення мови.

Деякі аспекти щодо викладання в складних обставинах вже були висвітлені у попередніх дослідженнях, але недостатньо уваги приділялося вивченню особливостей викладання в умовах війни, коли зниження афективного фільтру є особливо важливим для ефективного засвоєння мови. Метою статті є представлення стратегій, що допоможуть вчителям знизити афективний фільтр та створити середовище, що сприятиме впевненості та засвоєнню мови під час війни. Автором проаналізовано наукові джерела щодо навчання іноземних мов у складних умовах, досліджено сутність феноменів «складні обставини» і «афективний фільтр», а також прийоми його зменшення.

Щоб створити сприятливе середовище в класі, викладачі мають надати здобувачам освіти можливість обирати і висловлюватися та добирати види роботи на уроці, що відповідатимуть інтересам здобувачів освіти та сприятимуть підвищенню їхньої мотивації. Формування відчуття причетності, повага індивідуальних особливостей і розвиток інклюзивного середовища сприяють становленню упевненості здобувачів освіти у своїх здібностях. Створення безпечного навчального середовища, в якому заохочують помилки та сприяють розумовому розвитку, допомагає зменшенню почуття тривоги.

У регіонах, постраждалих від війни, створення сприятливого середовища у класі має вирішальне значення для ефективного вивчення мови. Впливаючи на афективний фільтр за допомогою стратегій мотивації, впевненості в собі та зменшення почуття тривоги, педагоги можуть розширити можливості здобувачів освіти, сприяти розвитку мови та стимулювати зростання, незважаючи на складні обставини.

Ключові слова: *афективний фільтр, освітнє середовище, навчання, вивчення мови, мотивація, стратегії.*