Proceedings of ICEIPI 2025 Symposium: Understanding Religious Identity in Educational Contexts
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.ND25106

Emotional Support and Learning Outcomes: An Educational Perspective on Les Choristes

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Abstract. In the realm of education, affective factors play a crucial and significant role in learning, exerting a profound impact on language learning efficiency and outcomes. In recent years, as educational research has increasingly emphasized the importance of holistic student development, the significance of affective factors in the learning process has gained more attention. Using the film Les Choristes as a case study, this essay explores the ways in which teachers' emotional support impacts students' motivation, engagement, and language acquisition by looking at theories like Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). The study reveals that a safe, supportive, and positive learning environment provided by teachers can effectively reduce students' affective filter, enhance their learning motivation and enthusiasm, and thereby promote the effectiveness of language learning. This research contributes to the ongoing discussion on the role of affective factors in language education and offers valuable insights for educators on creating emotionally supportive study environments.

Keywords: Emotional support, film study, Affective Filter, Zone of Proximal Development, Social-Emotional Learning

1. Introduction

In recent years, the research field of Second language Acquisition (SLA) has increasingly focused on emotional factors. At present, emotional support is a vital educational proposition. Language education, and even the entire field of education, must engage with the emotional experiences and hearts of students. This approach enhances students' enthusiasm for learning, improves teaching quality, and promotes their overall development. Meanwhile, numerous studies have shown that learners' emotional states such as anxiety, confidence and motivation are not merely passive elements in the language learning process; instead, they actively influence learning outcomes in a positive way.

Under this research background, this study combines a literature review and film case analysis of Les Choristes to explore how emotional support strategies influence students' learning processes. It integrates Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, the Zone of Proximal Development, and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) to reveal the internal mechanism by which emotional support promotes language learning and its practical application in the real teaching environments. This research aims

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DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.ND25106

to help educators create a learning environment full of emotional care, provide assistance for the continuous exploration of emotional factors in language education and bring enlightenment for promoting an efficient language learning experience.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis

This hypothesis holds that affective factors act as a "filter" in the process of second language acquisition, located between learners and language input. This "filter", composed of emotional states such as anxiety, confidence and motivation, regulates the flow of language input into the brain's acquisition mechanism.

According to the hypothesis, the situations where language acquisition is best seem to be those that can reduce anxiety levels. Therefore, confidence is of crucial importance [1]. Confident learners dare to take risks in language usage, participate in conversations, and view mistakes as opportunities for growth. Learners lacking confidence may avoid language practice and limit the improvement of language ability. In addition, low anxiety is also a key part of low affective filters. High anxiety can interfere with cognitive functions related to language processing, while a relaxed state enables learners to effectively focus their attention, process information more efficiently and remember new knowledge.

The Affective Filter is influenced by two types of factors: personal traits and the external environment. At the individual level, learning motivation, self-confidence and the degree of anxiety play a key role. Highly motivated learners actively seek knowledge and are more likely to accept language input. Confident people are brave enough to try and regard mistakes as opportunities for growth, while those lacking confidence hinder learning because they are afraid of making mistakes. Meanwhile, anxiety directly interferes with language cognition. The lower the anxiety is, the more conducive it is to the absorption of knowledge. In terms of the external environment, the learning environment and teaching methods are of vital importance. A friendly and encouraging learning atmosphere can reduce learners' anxiety and encourage their active participation, while a competitive and high-pressure environment will push up the affective filter.

2.2. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) refers to the gap between a child's current level of independent problem-solving and the potential level of development they can achieve under the guidance of adults or more capable peers. This concept emphasizes two levels of development for children during the learning process: one is the actual level of development, that is, the ability of children to solve problems without external help; The other one is the potential development level, that is, the higher level of development that children can achieve after receiving appropriate guidance and support [2]. The zone of proximal development is the area between the two. It represents the "teachable moments" of children in the process of learning and development, providing educators with an important basis for understanding children's learning potential and designing effective teaching activities.

According to Vygotsky, emotion and intelligence are not mutually exclusive but closely related, and emotion and cognition are also inseparable [3]. Therefore, teachers' emotional support plays a crucial role in students' learning and cultivation. This can create a learning environment where students feel safe and accepted, and greatly enhance their learning motivation. Additionally, positive

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.ND25106

feedback from teachers also helps to enhance students' self-confidence in learning. Furthermore, in order to promote the improvement of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), teachers need to constantly innovate their teaching models, achieve "professionalization", and ensure that their teaching methods can continue to play a positive role in the Zone of Proximal Development [4].

2.3. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is a process that helps individuals understand and manage emotions, recognize themselves and others in social situations, build and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and develop a set of social and emotional skills.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) consists of five core elements.

Self-awareness is the basis of SEL, involving the ability to perceive one's current emotions, strengths and weaknesses [5].

Self-management is about controlling and regulating one's own behavior and emotions. Emotional regulation enables people to respond appropriately in different situations, such as remaining calm when being criticized [5].

Social awareness emphasizes understanding and establishing connections with others. Empathy enables people to experience and understand the feelings of others, and putting oneself in others' shoes means looking at problems from different perspectives, which is crucial for achieving efficient cooperation in teamwork [5].

Relationship skills are essential abilities for establishing and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships. Effective communication involves both clearly expressing one's own thoughts and actively listening to others, which is vital both in personal relationships and professional environments [5].

Responsible decision-making involves ethical and moral factors, ensuring choices align with personal values and social norms. It requires problem-solving abilities to analyze the situation, explore multiple options and select the best action plan [5].

In conclusion, through social-emotional learning (SEL), students can understand and manage their emotions more efficiently, which is beneficial to their studies and interpersonal communication [6].

3. Emotional support and language learning outcomes in *Les Choriste*

Les Choristes narrates the story of Clément Mathieu, a failed musician who takes a position as a supervisor at Fond de l'Étang, a boarding school for troubled boys in 1949. Mathieu introduces music as a form of connection and healing, he forms a choir, carefully discovering and nurturing the unique talents of each boy. These plots not only demonstrate the power of teachers to guide and teach students with emotions and art, but also provide examples for understanding the important role of emotional factors in the educational process, laying the foundation for the subsequent exploration of the application of emotional support in language learning.

3.1. Confidence and motivation

Upon his arrival at Fond de l'Étang, the students, especially Pierre Morhange, showed significant lack of confidence and responded with defiance. During a small conflict during recess, when Morhange was accused by classmates for disrespecting a teacher, Mathieu did not punish him like the others would have. Instead, he offered a gentle reassurance, suggesting that Morhange was

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merely "covered by dust" and that his true potential remained intact. Later, upon hearing Morhange humming alone, Mathieu did not pressure him but casually asked him to sing short phrases during rehearsal, offering small, consistent encouragement. He also arranged for classmates to applaud Morhange's solo debut in advance, creating a safe emotional space.

According to the Affective Filter Hypothesis, high anxiety and low self-esteem erect emotional barriers that impede learning input. When learners are in a state of high anxiety, cognitive functions related to language processing will be disturbed, while low self-esteem can diminish their motivation to actively engage with new knowledge. Mathieu effectively reduced Morhange's anxiety by gradual encouragement and positive reinforcement, thereby lowering the affective filter and allowing the student to embrace learning and expression naturally.

3.2. Involvement

While organizing the choir, Mathieu noticed that forced participation only triggered resistance. For shy Pépinot, instead of demanding that he sing, Mathieu engaged him through simple rhythm clapping games and imitation drills, helping him gradually integrate into group activities. When assigning vocal parts, Mathieu did not base decisions on academic performance but asked each student about their preferences and respected their choices. During one rehearsal, he intentionally paused mid-song and encouraged the boys to invent their own lyrics, stimulating creativity and a strong sense of ownership.

Based on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, effective learning occurs in the zone between what a learner can do independently and what they can do with guidance. Mathieu strategically lowered the threshold for participation, designing activities that matched students' current abilities but slightly challenged them, helping them move from dependence to active, self-driven participation and fostering cognitive and social development.

3.3. Language acquisition

When teaching the song *Vois Sur Ton Chemin*, Mathieu went beyond literal instruction. He prompted students to engage deeply with the material by asking them to imagine themselves as the children in the song and to consider how they would express the lyrics. This method encouraged students to paraphrase lyrics in their own words and perform the same lines with different emotional expressions—sadness, hopefulness, tenderness. During rehearsals, Mathieu emphasized tone, rhythm, and emotional resonance rather than merely correct pronunciation.

According to SEL, emotional experiences are critical for cognitive development. Students who can regulate emotions are better equipped to comprehend and express complex ideas. By situating learning within emotionally charged contexts, Mathieu cultivated the students' inner linguistic sensitivity and expressive impulse. His approach mirrored advanced language acquisition techniques, where emotional engagement fosters deeper internalization of language structures, rather than rote memorization—a crucial insight for second language acquisition as well.

The plot of the movie suggests that the primary task of teachers is to create a classroom environment with a positive atmosphere. A classroom environment with harmonious teacher-student relationships can promote students' in-depth learning and boost their confidence in mastering challenging content [7]. This means creating a space where students feel at ease, where they can express their emotions and thoughts without any concerns. Teachers lay the foundation for trust by formulating clear rules and advocating respect and friendliness.

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Teachers can impart social and emotional skills through direct teaching and self-demonstration. Studies show that students are largely influenced by teachers' emotional attitudes [7]. Therefore, the social and emotional abilities of teachers themselves are very important. In the classroom, teachers should set a good example. Besides imparting knowledge, they should also provide positive guidance to students. Furthermore, teachers serve as role models for students. The self-control, positive attitude and effective communication they demonstrate in their daily interactions with students will have a profound impact.

4. Implications for real-world education

4.1. The applicability of teaching strategies from the film to real education

The educational methods depicted in *Les Choristes* offer valuable insights for contemporary educators, especially in the field of language acquisition. Clément Mathieu's teaching philosophy is centered around empathy, individualized encouragement, and creative engagement through music. These strategies closely mirror current best practices in inclusive education and language teaching, where emotional well-being is seen as foundational to academic achievement. Teacher emotional support includes the care, understanding and respect that teachers show to students. Moreover, various theories have indicated that such support is very important for stimulating students' learning motivation and cultivating their interest in learning [8]. In practical applications, teachers can stimulate students' sense of belonging and intrinsic learning motivation by encouraging activities such as cooperation, creative expression and emotional connection. By focusing on students' emotional needs, teachers can effectively reduce anxiety levels, thereby enhancing students' confidence and participation in language learning. What's more, Mathieu's attention to individual students' strengths illustrates the importance of differentiated instruction. In modern classrooms, recognizing and nurturing individual talents not only promotes equity but also optimizes learning outcomes. Teachers who adapt tasks to match students' current emotional and academic levels create more inclusive and effective learning environments.

4.2. Enhancing emotional support in language education

In language learning classes, emotional support is crucial for reducing affective filters. Language learning itself carries extremely high emotional risks. Students often feel anxious for fear of making mistakes or being ridiculed. Therefore, it is particularly important for teachers to consciously create a supportive and low-stress environment. Research shows that when teachers employ emotional support behaviors to empower students' decision-making, provide supportive feedback, and create an inclusive and positive learning environment, students' learning motivation will be stronger, and their social and emotional skills as well as task-oriented skills will also improve [9]. Therefore, integrating emotional literacy education into language teaching is not only conducive to the improvement of language ability, but also can promote the comprehensive quality development of students.

4.3. Practical applications of Krashen, Vygotsky, and SEL theories in teaching

According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, teachers should strive to create a relaxed and pleasant learning atmosphere. This can be achieved by granting students the right to choose tasks, avoid public criticism, encourage free expression, etc. Drawing on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory, teachers can provide appropriate support based on students' current levels,

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.ND25106

including a process from demonstration and guiding exercises to independent completion, gradually fostering students' independence. The Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) theory emphasizes the significant role of emotional skills in academic success. Teachers can cultivate students' abilities of empathy, emotional regulation and cooperation through reflection diaries, discussions on emotional themes, group cooperation projects.

4.4. Recommendations for teacher training programs

Given the pivotal role of emotional support in language education, teacher training programs should prioritize cultivating teachers' emotional intelligence. Prospective teachers should receive systematic training in empathetic communication, recognizing and responding positively to student emotions, and other related skills, thereby reducing affective filters and improving students' learning efficiency [10]. The training content should also cover effective scaffolding in the Zone of Proximal Development, classroom emotion management, and integrating SEL principles into daily teaching design. Through forms such as role-playing, peer collaboration, mentor guidance and reflection logs, teachers' emotional teaching ability can be effectively enhanced. In addition, inclusive training is also indispensable. The ways of emotional expression and the teacher-student relationship vary greatly in different backgrounds. Teachers need to learn to flexibly adjust emotional support strategies while respecting students' personality differences and cultural backgrounds.

5. Conclusion

Based on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, Vygotsky's Proximal Development theory and the role of SEL in language education, this paper analyzes the importance of teachers' emotional support on learning effectiveness. With the film as the main case evidence, it provides effective teaching suggestions for language teachers, which is helpful to improve students' language learning experience and learning effectiveness.

However, this study also has some shortcomings. It mainly focuses on one film which lacks case diversity and does not use comparative analysis. Further research should pay attention to the horizontal and vertical comparisons, such as across different periods, ages, countries or regions. In addition, the theoretical framework of this paper can be further expanded to draw more diverse and rich conclusions. Some data analysis can also be added to the research process. In future research,stronger connections with real life should be established to explore some common related education problems and analyze solutions. Future research could also incorporate empirical studies, such as classroom experiments or student interviews, to explore emotional support strategies across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts.

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