

Affective factors in the process of teaching foreign languages to trilingual students

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1. AFFECTIVE ACTORS – DEFINITION AND ROLES IN THE FL PROCESS

- Affective factors are a multifaceted and intricate phenomenon, characterized by varied attitudes, motivations, and anxiety in relation to the FL process.
- Affective factors play a crucial role in the process of teaching foreign languages, particularly for trilingual students. These factors refer to the emotional, psychological, and social aspects that can either enhance or hinder language acquisition.

(Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Young, 1991; Williams & Andrade, 2008; Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012; Bensalem, 2017; Hewitt and Stephenson 2012; Jin et al. 2015; Pérez Castillejo 2019; Dewaele et al. 2023)

1. AFFECTIVE ACTORS – DEFINITION AND ROLES IN THE FL PROCESS

1. **Motivation** - **Intrinsic motivation** (internal desire to learn) and **extrinsic motivation** (external rewards) are vital for language learning. Trilingual students might have diverse motivational drivers based on their previous experiences with learning multiple languages. **Positive experiences with their first two languages can fuel a strong sense of accomplishment, leading to higher motivation for learning a third language.**

2. **Anxiety (Language Learning Anxiety)** - Language anxiety can have a detrimental effect on learning a foreign language. Fear of making mistakes, performance anxiety, and negative self-assessment can inhibit language learners, including trilingual students.

3. Self-Esteem and Confidence - High self-esteem and confidence in one's ability to learn languages can encourage risk-taking and active participation, which are crucial for language acquisition. Trilingual students who are already successful in managing multiple languages may have a boost in confidence, which helps them navigate challenges in learning an additional language. Conversely, learners who struggle with any of their previously learned languages might have lower self-esteem, which can negatively affect their willingness to engage fully in the learning process.

4. Language Learning Beliefs - Learners often hold strong beliefs about how languages should be learned, which can either help or hinder the learning process. Trilingual students may have formed specific ideas about language learning strategies based on their experiences with L1 and L2. These beliefs might help them, especially if they've found successful methods for previous language learning.

5. Cognitive Load and Mental Flexibility - Trilingual learners have already developed significant cognitive skills through managing two languages, such as increased mental flexibility and the ability to switch between languages (code-switching).

6. Learner Autonomy - Trilingual students might have higher levels of autonomy and self-regulation in their language learning processes. Autonomy in language learning refers to the learner's ability to take responsibility for their own learning, manage their time, and use resources effectively.

7. Social Environment and Peer Influence - The social environment in which trilingual learners are immersed plays a significant role in shaping their affective factors. For instance, peer relationships and interactions with fellow learners can either foster or inhibit language use. Trilingual students might feel more comfortable working with peers who are also multilingual, as they share common experiences

AIM OF THE STUDY

Taking into consideration the scientific research concerning affective factors in foreign language teaching and their potential influence on trilingual education, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) What kinds of affective factors appear in the process of developing FL competence of trilingual university learners learning English as L2 and German as L3?
- (2) Is there any relationship between the affective factors and teaching FL to trilingual learners?
- (3) What kinds of difficulties disturb the FL progress of trilingual university students?

PARTICIPANS AND THE CONTEXT

- The data were collected from 30 participants, 17 females, and 13 males;
- All were undergraduate Applied Linguistics students (2 BA).
- Applied Linguistics is a three-year degree program designed to advance the academic and professional development of students who want to learn about applied linguistics and apply it to real-world problems in language use and teaching.
- Regarding the length of studying L2, it ranges from 10 to 18 years (average 15.2) and L3 from 6 to 12 years (average 8.2). 17 participants aspire to be future foreign language teachers and 13 study to be future translators.

STUDY INSTRUMENTS

- **THE QUESTIONNAIRE** – consisted of ten closed-ended questions. The first five asked about the students' personal information; the remaining questions focused on affective factors they applied in the FL process (motivation, language anxiety, shyness, self-confidence)
- **THE INTERVIEW** – the in-depth interviews provide the researcher with a comprehensive view of what the participants perceive. The purpose of employing a qualitative method for this study is to obtain comprehensive opinions of the respondents to what they feel about their trilingual students' application of affective factors in the process of acquiring foreign languages



THE STUDY RESULTS

Research question 1: What kinds of affective factors appear in the process of developing FL competence of trilingual university learners learning English as L2 and German as L3?

- A significant percentage of the study participants 73% (22 out of 30 students) claim that attitudes like shyness or lack of self-esteem in the FL process are caused by varied aspects like type of personality, not being fluent in the foreign language, not being prepared for the lesson or lack of ideas to be shared with the interlocutors;
- Anxiety is caused by not being aware of different cognitive and metacognitive strategies or techniques that can be implemented into the learning process 86% (26 out of 30 trilinguals);
- The study participants think that some trilingual students lack both instrumental and integrative motivation to develop their foreign language competence 60% (18 out of 30 participants);
- A great percentage of the interviewees is of the opinion that lack of self-esteem in the FL learning process is also a crucial affective variable controlling the FL learning 73% (22 out of 30 students);
- Almost all the study participants perceive anxiety or worry to make failure as an essential blocking factor in the FL process 86% (26 out of 30 trilinguals)

THE STUDY RESULTS

Research question 2: Is there any relationship between the affective factors and teaching FL to trilingual learners?

- The results show that the existence of affective variables in the FL process depends on the order of the acquired languages;
- The second acquired foreign language is more affected by the affective factors. Trilingual students feel more insecure about their FL process in the acquisition of the second foreign language;
- Thus, it can be assumed that the longer the time of studying a foreign language the less frequent the chance of appearing affective factors hindering the FL learning process;

THE STUDY RESULTS

Research question 3: What kinds of difficulties disturb the FL progress of trilingual university students?

- The obtained results indicate the two main categories, namely **linguistic and psychological problems**.
- The results of the pilot study show that trilingual learners still have problems even though they managed to complete the first year of intensive FL courses. As the study participants 85% (25 out of 30 study participants) claim, the most faced linguistic problems of the students are vocabulary and grammar;
- A significant percentage of teachers 73% (22 out of 30 trilinguals) state there appear some psychological problems like being not enough confident to speak or having difficulty expressing ideas in a foreign language. The possible cause of this may be that linguistic competence is still not enough developed in the second learned language and more work is required to overcome the psychological barrier to communicating with other language users;
- 60% (18 out of 30 study participants) think that there appear problems with intonation or understanding different language accents, which may suggest that trilingual learners find it difficult to deal with stress and they unable to put the right emphasis on the right part of the word. They are hesitate to speak if they do not know how to pronounce the words and they often do not know how to response if the pronunciation of their partner is not understandable.

CONCLUSION

- The study has presented evidence for the existence and application of affective factors in the process of teaching foreign languages to trilingual learners (especially shyness, anxiety, lack of motivation);
- Unwillingness to develop language competence also stems from a lack of both instrumental and integrative motivation;
- The conducted study also reveals some problems that trilinguals encounter in their FL process. It shows that students encounter linguistic dilemmas, for instance vocabulary, grammar as well as pronunciation;
- The research indicates, foreign language teachers notice some difficulties in trilingual students' speaking process both the first and second learned foreign languages

LIMITATIONS

- The study has its limitations in terms of both internal (like history, maturation etc.) and external (small research group etc.) like validity. This makes the results not generalisable to a wider population and not even to the university population itself for the reason stated above;
- With all that in mind, the study still offers its own contributions to the body of research knowledge, as well as implications for students, teachers, and curriculum designers;

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