

**Motivational Strategies to Enhance Engagement and Reduce the Affective Filter in
Synchronous Online EFL Classes**

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Dedicatoria

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Abstract

This action research examines the impact of a motivational strategy-based pedagogical intervention on affective filter reduction among B1-level EFL learners in synchronous online classes at the Fundación Centro Cultural Colombo Americano Cali, the practicum setting of the student researchers. Drawing on Dörnyei's (2001) motivational framework and Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, the intervention targeted confidence construction, anxiety reduction, and the fostering of a positive social image during oral interaction. Over four weeks, qualitative data were collected through structured classroom observations, teacher-researcher reflective journals, and student surveys administered before and after the intervention, involving six students per session. Results indicate a consistent reduction in affective filter indicators across all sessions, with 85% of students reporting increased motivation, confidence, and emotional support following the intervention. The findings demonstrate that the systematic integration of motivational strategies into synchronous online EFL instruction can significantly reduce the affective filter and boost learner engagement, offering a replicable and accessible pedagogical framework for teachers navigating the emotional and motivational challenges of virtual language learning environments.

Keywords: Motivation, Affective filter, Synchronous Online Learning, EFL instruction, Pedagogical intervention.

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Justificación

The role of emotional factors, including anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation, in second language acquisition has been widely recognized. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis famously argues that if students are anxious or lack confidence, or feel socially threatened, they will be less able to process the input effectively, which in turn slows acquisition (Krashen 1982). This is not just a theory anymore: affective walls systematically reduce willingness to speak, risk-taking, and sustain deliberate practice that produces communicative competence; these emotional and motivational barriers are therefore not optional pedagogy; they may be central to help students make meaningful progress in a second language. This issue became dramatically urgent when teaching moved online globally during the COVID-19 pandemic. UNESCO (2020) estimated that around 1.6 billion worldwide learners were on the verge of a crisis. This shock forced teachers and learners into virtual platforms without time to redesign pedagogy for learners' emotional needs. The rapid shift revealed and, in some cases, magnified emotional and affective problems (lower engagement, isolation, and tech-related stress), all of which cause damage in language learning outcomes. For any teacher or any long-term online or hybrid program, ignoring the affective dimension risks entrenched participation gaps and slower learning.

Interestingly, research suggests that online environments can help or harm affective and emotional stages, depending on how instruction is designed and mediated. For instance, a quasi-experimental study in Iran involving a sample of 200 women shows that carefully implemented online instructions led to lower anxiety and higher motivation, allowing us to measure gains through targeted classroom interventions compared to a control group, showing that online formats are not inherently harmful; rather, their emotional impact depends on pedagogy and

affordances (Jiang et al., 2022). This suggests that targeted classroom interventions can produce measurable gains in learners' affective states.

Survey research highlights the nuanced emotional landscape of digital education. A large-scale study of 7,210 Chinese university students found that while online environments present challenges, effective facilitation strategies can foster positive affective states. Specifically, students perceived high levels of learning motivation and satisfaction, with the research model explaining over 55% of the variance in students' emotional and efficacious outcomes (Wang et al., 2021). These findings underscore two critical points for practitioners: (1) instructor-student interaction and innovation are the primary drivers of positive emotional states in synchronous settings, and (2) the systematic use of diverse technological methods, as an organizing element of teaching presence, can provide essential socio-emotional support (Wang et al., 2021). Such interventions, aligned with Dörnyei's (2001) framework, can effectively build confidence and reduce affective barriers by focusing on instructor-mediated support and high-quality interaction.

Interventions focused on motivation, peer interaction, and teacher-mediated support can realistically reduce affective filters in synchronous classes. In parallel and influential line of classroom research shows that teachers' use of motivational strategies makes a measurable difference in learners' motivation and engaged behavior. Dörnyei's framework (2001) gives us practical strategies (and many micro techniques) teachers can use to build confidence, reduce anxiety, and foster a positive social image for learners; subsequent studies (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008) have empirically linked the systematic use of such strategies to higher student motivation and observable engagement behavior across classrooms.

Specifically, this research contributes to scholarship by adapting Dörnyei's motivational strategies to the affordances and constraints of synchronous online instruction. The strategies

implemented, such as confidence-building, warm-up activities, low-stakes speaking tasks, structured peer interaction, explicit positive feedback, and the promotion of a supportive social image, respond directly to issues identified in recent studies, including fear of negative evaluation, reduced willingness to communicate, and limited oral participation in an online environment. By documenting how these strategies function in real class conditions, the study provides pedagogically grounded evidence of how motivation-oriented teaching can reduce the affective filter and increase engagement.

In short, the theoretical and empirical evidence from the classroom supports the idea that motivation-focused pedagogies can reduce affective barriers and improve engagement.

EFL B1 learners are at a critical stage: at intermediate levels, learners have enough competence to produce language but still feel highly sensitive to accuracy, peer comparison, and social image. Anxiety and low motivation at this stage translate into less willingness to communicate, which means fewer opportunities for oral practice, which are precisely the moments that drive fluency and pragmatic competence, addressing affective barriers at B1.

Therefore, it has disproportionately large returns for speaking and interactional development. Synchronous online formats change social dynamics: the affordance (and limits) of video conferencing, delayed turn-taking, mute microphones, camera on/off choices, and chat features reshape opportunities for immediate feedback, peer scaffolding, and risk-taking. As global studies show, separation from peers and a lack of two-way interactions are major predictors of online anxiety; therefore, interventions that explicitly reconstruct safe, confidence-building interactions in the synchronous medium are both timely and necessary. Practitioners' evidence is still thin: many existing studies are cross-sectional or descriptive (surveys of anxiety, correlational studies); comparatively fewer studies report classroom-level, teacher-implemented

interventions that are designed specifically to lower behavioral outcomes (e.g., observed participation, self-reported confidence, action research rubric), therefore filling a clear practical gap and offering a template that other instructors can adapt.

One of the most immediate practical impacts of this study lies in its potential to enhance students' engagement and confidence in synchronous online EFL classes. When learners experience high levels of anxiety and low confidence, participation becomes sporadic, oral production decreases, and learning opportunities are lost even when instructional input is well designed. Research consistently shows that confidence is among the strongest predictors of active participation and sustained engagement in language learning (Dörnyei, 2001; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008).

By systematically integrating motivational strategies into synchronous online sessions, this study demonstrates how relatively small but intentional pedagogical adjustments, such as low-stakes speaking opportunities, positive feedback, supportive group roles, and reduced emphasis on error correction, can produce meaningful changes in learner behavior. When anxiety is reduced, volunteers respond and use the target language more frequently. This outcome aligns with findings showing that well-designed online instructions can increase motivation and lower anxiety when affective factors are explicitly addressed (Jiang et al., 2022; Jeon & Lee, 2023). From a practical teaching perspective, the intervention offers a replicable and scalable model for instructors working in synchronous online or hybrid programs. Rather than requiring complex technological innovations, the proposed strategy relies on pedagogical decisions that are accessible to most teachers, regardless of institutional resources. This is particularly relevant in contexts such as Colombia, where online education has expanded rapidly, but teacher preparation for affect-sensitive pedagogy remains uneven, as Valencia et al. (2018; 2021) emphasizes.

Meaningful educational innovation does not depend solely on technology but on reflective and intentional teaching practices that humanize learning environments. Adding a broader social level, improving engagement and confidence contributes to learner's long term academic trajectories. Increased participation leads to more speaking practice, stronger communicative competence, and greater persistence in language learning programs. In this sense, the social impact of this study extends beyond immediate classroom outcomes, supporting learners' academic success, professional opportunities, and social mobility in an increasingly globalized and English-mediated world.

Institutions are increasingly committed to blended and online delivery. A validated set of motivational techniques tailored to synchronous lessons (with simple implementation guidelines and observation metrics) is a practical resource for teacher training, curriculum design, and program evaluation. Because the psychological barriers are documented in large surveys (e.g., more than half of the students reporting some anxiety in online EFL courses), there are widespread interventions that demonstrate effect at the class level half potential for system-wide impact.

Beyond cognitive and linguistic outcomes, this study highlights the importance of learner well-being and educational equity in synchronous online EFL contexts. Anxiety and low motivation are not merely individual psychological challenges, they are deeply connected to issues of access, inclusion, and fairness. Large-scale studies conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic review that the students who experience persistent anxiety, isolation, or a lack of a supporting online environment are more likely to disengage or withdraw from courses altogether (UNESCO,2020; Wang et al., 2021).

Learners don't experience online education equally; students with lower confidence, limited prior exposure to English, or fewer opportunities for supportive interaction are disproportionately affected by affective barriers. When class privilege only the most confident or outspoken students, participation gaps widen, and quieter learners become increasingly invisible, addressing the effective filter; therefore, it is not only a pedagogical concern but also an equity issue as it directly influences who gets to participate and be heard and succeed. Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2021) humanized pedagogy provides a powerful lens for understanding this dimension. He argues that education, especially in mediated virtual settings, must be guided by ethical responsibility and care of learners' emotional experiences (Gonzalez-Valencia, 2016, Gonzalez-Valencia et al., 2021). From this perspective, fostering an emotionally safe learning space is a form of pedagogical justice. Teachers are called to design learning environments that recognize students as whole human beings, not merely performers of linguistic tasks.

By reducing anxiety and promoting confidence, the intervention describes how this study contributes to learners' emotional well-being and sense of belonging. Students who feel emotional support are more likely to engage persistently and develop positive learning identities. This is particularly important for synchronous online classes, where physical separation can intensify feelings of isolation and self-doubt, as recent research indicates social connectedness and perceived teacher support are key protective factors against online learning anxiety (Wang & Zang, 2023; Zhou, 2023). In this way These studies support equitable language opportunities by ensuring that participation and success are not limited to a small group of confident learners; instead, it promotes inclusive practice that values diverse voices, learning places, and emotional needs. Ultimately, attending to learner well-being strengthens not only individual outcomes but also the ethical foundations of online education itself. Statement of the Problem

According to Bryman, A. (2007), your research problem establishes the means by which you must answer the “What” question. The “So What” question alludes to an examination issue surviving the pertinence test [the nature of an estimation methodology that gives repeatability and accuracy]. Take note that the “So What” requires a promise on your part to not just demonstrate that you have examined the material, but also that you have completely considered its essentialness. To survive the “So What” question, your problem statement should be clear and precise. It should demonstrate a researchable topic and identify what would be studied. It should also identify the key concepts and terms. Regardless of the type of research, it is important to demonstrate that your research is not trivial; and, it does not have unnecessary jargon or overly complex sentence constructions. Your Research Question might be included in this part.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, synchronous online English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class in Colombia have gained prevalence, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting from a large face-to-face educational infrastructure to virtual learning spaces. While a virtual environment offers the advantages of flexibility, accessibility, and potential for rich multimedia input, it also presents significant emotional and motivational challenges for learners. One of the central constructs is understanding that this challenge is the affective filter, a psychological barrier proposed by Krashen (1982), which includes factors such as anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of negative evaluation. When the affective filter is high, even when the input is comprehensible, learners may fail to process or internalize it effectively, thus hampering language acquisition.

While earlier studies established the existence of online anxiety, recent research emphasizes its persistence in post-pandemic synchronous environments. Moradi & Zarei (2024)

argue that without specific pedagogical interventions, synchronous learning can fail to mitigate speaking anxiety effectively, highlighting that technology alone doesn't lower the affective filter. Furthermore, Zhang & Du (2023) found that the lack of non-verbal cues in synchronous platforms specifically hinders students' willingness to communicate (WTC), creating a barrier that technical accessibility cannot solve. Recent findings by Muñoz & Correa Pérez (2023) suggest that fear of negative evaluation remains a primary driver of this affective filter among local EFL learners, validating the need for context-sensitive motivational strategies. Besides, effective variables such as self-confidence, anxiety, engagement, grit, willingness to communicate (WTC), motivation, and attitudes are strongly interrelated in online, digital, or hybrid EFL contexts. In a study of Taiwanese undergraduate EFL learners, self-confidence and grit positively predict willingness to communicate across in-class, out-of-class, and digital contexts, whereas anxiety negatively impacts that willingness (Lee & Hsieh, 2019). Additionally, CALL (computer-assisted language learning) and MALL (mobile-assisted language learning) implementation in Iran has shown promise in reducing anxiety, increasing motivation, and boosting self-efficacy among EFL learners.

Despite these findings, there remain unresolved issues that warrant further investigation. First, many studies have been cross-sectional or correlational. Which means the causal effects of interventions aimed at reducing the affective filter are less well established. Second, much of the existing research has focused on reading anxiety or attitudes, but less on real-time participation and confidence in a synchronous online setting, especially in speaking or oral-production contexts. The gap becomes especially salient at intermediate (B1) proficiency levels. For example, some studies note that online environments can reduce anxiety in certain tasks (reading or listening), but they often report persistently low participation or engagement in speaking tasks,

possibly because of fear of making errors, lack of immediate feedback, or hesitation in turning on microphones. Learners at this stage often have enough grammatical competence, form, and accuracy to become more salient; they might also compare themselves with peers, be aware of their deficits, and be more sensitive to social image. Yet very few students focus especially on B1 level learners in synchronous EFL classes, measuring both the affective filter and motivation combined, with direct observation of participation and teacher reflections. Third, motivational strategies are often discussed in theory (Dörnyei, 2001); systematic pedagogic interventions specifically designed to reduce anxiety and build confidence in virtual synchronous classes are still relatively rare.

Therefore, the problem this study addresses can be understood as a single research gap with two interconnected dimensions: empirically, there is insufficient evidence of how well interventions based on motivational strategies, such as those described by Dörnyei (2001), can reduce the affective filter in synchronous online classes among B1 learners, particularly regarding speaking confidence, oral participation, and engagement; and practically, teachers often lack a tested integrative framework for applying such strategies in real-time virtual synchronous environments to lower anxiety, foster confidence, and positively affect learners' social image, resulting in lower participation and motivation.

This dual gap gives rise to the following research question: To what extent does a motivational strategy-based pedagogical intervention reduce the affective filter and enhance oral participation among B1-level EFL learners in synchronous online classes at the Fundación Centro Cultural Colombo Americano Cali?

Objetivos

Objetivo General

To analyze the impact of motivational strategy- based pedagogical intervention on affective filter reduction in synchronous online B1- level EFL classes at the Fundación Centro Cultural Colombo Americano Cali.

Objetivos Específicos

To analyze the design and implementation of a four-week pedagogical intervention for synchronous online EFL classes that integrates selected motivational strategies from Dörnyei's (2001) framework, with a focus on anxiety reduction, confidence building, and oral participation.

To gauge the impact of the intervention on students' affective filter levels, particularly regarding confidence, willingness to communicate, and motivation, by examining their perceptions of what influenced their learning experience most, positively or negatively.

To identify the specific elements of the synchronous online learning environment that students perceive as most influential, positively or negatively, on their motivation and willingness to engage in oral interaction

Literature Review

The present study is anchored in the premise that English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction, particularly within synchronous online environments, cannot be successful by focusing solely on cognitive or linguistic transmission; instead, it posits that learning is fundamentally a social, relational, and emotional process. Therefore, this framework synthesizes established theories of foreign language acquisition (FLA) with contemporary psychological models and humanized pedagogical perspectives, creating a robust foundation for evaluating interventions aimed at enhancing engagement and mitigating emotional barriers in the B1 level synchronous online classroom. It is structured around the three interconnected domains: the theoretical foundation of emotional barriers (Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis), the actionable strategies for reducing these barriers (Dörnyei's Motivational Strategies), and the critical context of synchronous online learning (integrating technology, willingness to communicate, and humanized pedagogy).

A distinctive contribution of this framework is the integration of the social pedagogical and humanized educational perspective developed by Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2021), whose works emphasize reflective teaching, affect-sensitive pedagogy, and the relational nature of learning in mediated contexts. In his work, Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2021) conceptualized teaching as a fundamentally ethical and emotional practice, particularly in virtual environments where students' sense of presence, belonging, and confidence is often fragile. His perspective complements cognitive and motivational theories by highlighting the teacher's role as a mediator of emotional climates rather than a transmitter of content.

Rather than treating motivation and anxiety as static learner traits, this framework adopts a dynamic situated view of affective variables. Motivation, anxiety, and confidence are

understood as emerging from the interaction between learners, teachers, tasks, and the online environment. This perspective is supported by recent research showing that affective outcomes in synchronous online EFL classes depend largely on pedagogical design and feature interaction, not simply on methodology itself (Jeon & Lee, 2023; Wang & Zhang, 2023; Zhou, 2023). To summarize, synchronous online instruction is a social and emotional space that can either raise or lower affective barriers depending on how it is pedagogically mediated.

Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis serves as the starting point for this study. This hypothesis posits that emotional variables, including motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety, act as an imaginary variable barrier or "filter" that control degree to which comprehensible language input is processed and internalized by the learner. When the affective filter is high, learners experience psychological obstacles such as stress, heightened anxiety, or lack of self-confidence, which effectively block or impede the comprehensible input from reaching the language acquisition device. This blockage leads to less-than-optimal acquisition, slower development, and lower participation, even if the teacher provides excellent, understandable material. Conversely, when the affective filter is lowered, the learner is more open, receptive, and willing to take the communicative risk necessary for language production and development, allowing the comprehensible input to flow freely to the acquisition mechanism.

Stephen Krashen articulated the Affective Filter Hypothesis as part of his broader Input Theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Within this framework, he emphasized the crucial role of emotional variables in language learning, particularly in second language acquisition contexts. According to Krashen (1982), factors such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence significantly influence the extent to which learners can process and internalize

comprehensible input. When learners are highly motivated and confident, they are more likely to focus meaningfully on communication and acquisition rather than temporary memorization.

Conversely, when anxiety is elevated or self-confidence is low, these emotional variables function as psychological barriers that restrict access to the Language Acquisition Device. Thus, the hypothesis highlights that successful language acquisition depends not only on exposure to comprehensible input but also on the learner's emotional readiness to receive it.

Online instructions can intensify affective barriers, especially in speaking-oriented tasks. Learners often report anxiety related to speaking through microphones, being recorded, and managing turn-taking, as well as the lack of nonverbal feedback (Wang & Zhang, 2023; Zhou, 2023). These conditions could increase self-monitoring and fear of negative evaluation, grading the affective filter even when learners possess sufficient linguistic competence in the Colombian EFL context. Muñoz & Correa Pérez (2023) found that anxiety and fear of judgment continue to affect learners' oral performance and engagement negatively.

From Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2021) humanized pedagogical perspective, the affective filter is not merely an internal learner variable, but a social and pedagogical constructed phenomenon. classroom practice, teacher discourse, feedback style, and participation norms can either reinforce anxiety or promote emotional safety. The teachers in mediated environments assumed a heightened responsibility as emotional mediators since the students lacked many reassurance cues present in face-to-face settings. This interpretation reframes the effective filter as a pedagogical challenge that can be intentionally addressed through reflective teaching practice.

Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2021) shifts the focus of educational intervention away from simply modifying the linguistic input and toward purposefully structuring the classroom

environment, including the virtual one, to be psychologically safe and supportive. This principle is particularly relevant in high stakes or performative contexts such as synchronous oral production tasks in an online classroom, where the psychological barriers of anxiety and the fear of negative evaluation are known to persist. In synchronous online instruction, the affective filter could be shaped by a convergence of emotional, social, and technological factors.

Studies conducted in virtual EFL environments (Lee & Liu, 2024; Yang et al., 2021) revealed that learners' affective states are influenced by instructional pacing, teacher feedback, peer interaction, platform usability, and perception of social presence. When these elements are poorly mediated, learners are more likely to experience anxiety, disengagement, and reduced willingness to communicate orally (Bai, 2023; Lee & Lee, 2024).

Online language learning during periods of crisis and instability further highlights the vulnerability of learners' affective states. Kyrpa (2023) demonstrates that in a challenging educational context, affective filters can suppress cognitive processing, limit attention, and reduce learners' capacity to engage meaningfully with language input. Therefore, focusing on an extreme context, the findings are highly relevant to online EFL settings where uncertainty, isolation and emotional fatigue can similarly raise affective barriers. Importantly, converge on the idea that lowering the affective filter requires intentional pedagogical intervention rather than mere exposure to language input. Strategies such as providing choice, fostering a sense of belonging, normalizing error-making, and creating emotional safety participation spaces have been shown to reduce anxiety and enhance learner confidence in online environments.

Krashen identifies three primary affective variables that influence the strength of the filter: anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence. These factors directly impact learners' openness to input and, consequently, their progress in foreign language acquisition.

Language anxiety is one of the most significant affective barriers in SLA. It is typically characterized by feelings of tension, apprehension, and self-doubt specifically associated with language learning contexts. Learners experiencing high anxiety may fear making mistakes, avoid participation, feel apprehensive about negative evaluations from teachers or peers, or withdraw from using the target language altogether.

From the perspective of the Affective Filter Hypothesis, anxiety raises the filter and interferes with acquisition, even when learners are exposed to comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982). In this sense, anxiety does not prevent input from being delivered, but it can prevent it from being internalized. Cognitive interference caused by stress may limit processing capacity and reduce learners' willingness to take risks. Therefore, lowering anxiety becomes a central pedagogical goal. Creating supportive, low-pressure environments encourages risk-taking and sustained engagement, both of which contribute to lowering the affective filter.

Anxiety has been consistently identified as one of the most detrimental affective variables in foreign language learning. According to Krashen (1982), anxiety constitutes a central component of the affective filter, acting as a psychological barrier that prevents comprehensible input from being fully internalized. Rather than being a general personality trait, language anxiety manifests as a situation-specific set of emotional responses triggered by the school environment and communicative demands.

Research in second language acquisition further conceptualizes language anxiety as a combination of communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). In classroom contexts, particularly in online environments, these emotional responses may intensify due to heightened visibility and reduced non-verbal reassurance (Yang et al., 2021). When anxiety levels are high, learners may avoid participation,

limit their verbal production, or provide minimal responses, which directly restricts opportunities for practice and development.

Motivation has consistently been identified as a strong predictor of success in language learning. It drives learners' effort, persistence, and engagement with tasks. In line with Krashen's framework, higher motivation is associated with a lower affective filter, increasing the likelihood that comprehensible input will be acquired (Krashen, 1982).

Motivation can be understood in two broad forms:

Intrinsic motivation, which stems from personal interest, enjoyment, or self-defined goals. This type of motivation tends to promote deeper engagement and long-term persistence.

Extrinsic motivation, which is influenced by external rewards such as grades, recognition, or social approval. While effective in the short term, its impact may be less sustained over time.

Because motivation influences how open learners are to input, intentional motivational strategies form part of affect-sensitive pedagogy. When instruction is meaningful, relevant, and engaging, learners are more likely to maintain a low affective filter and sustain long-term development.

Motivation

Among the variables of the affective filter, motivation plays an important role in this process. The authors follow Gardner and Lambert's proposal of two types of motivation: integrative and instrumental. They point out that:

Integrative Motivation

It relates to the student's desire to integrate into the linguistic community of the target language.

Instrumental Motivation

It responds to practical purposes, such as access to academic or employment opportunities (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, as cited by Mesías & Villacrés, 2025).

Taking the previous ideas into account, integrative motivation is associated with a lower affective filter, as it encourages a positive attitude toward learning the target language. In the same way, it is important to recognize that intrinsic motivation can be understood as a genuine interest in learning, which contributes to the learner's active participation and to a greater voluntary exposure to the language. In contrast, a lack of motivation based only on external factors may increase the affective filter, generating emotions such as frustration, resistance to learning the language, or lack of interest.

This could be an indication that anxiety not only impacts the student's immediate performance but also causes them to doubt their ability to face activities or challenges, which, in turn, will increase anxiety and create a vicious cycle that will lead the student to focus more on their mistakes, thereby weakening their self-esteem.

Self-confidence refers to learners' belief in their ability to use the target language successfully. It is closely related to risk-taking and willingness to communicate. Learners who lack confidence may avoid participation, fear making mistakes, and limit their opportunities for practice, which can maintain a high affective filter (Krashen, 1982).

In psychological terms, this construction is often framed as self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is the belief in one's capacity to organize and execute the actions required to achieve specific performance outcomes. In language learning, strong self-efficacy beliefs support persistence, resilience, and greater communicative engagement.

Although self-confidence is widely recognized as important, it is less consistently

measured in SLA research compared to anxiety and motivation. It is frequently operationalized through related constructions such as engagement, comfort, or willingness to communicate. Nevertheless, building learner confidence remains a core objective in lowering the affective filter. Pedagogical practices that promote small successes, constructive feedback, and supportive peer interaction can strengthen learners' sense of competence and reduce emotional barriers to acquisition.

Self-confidence and self-efficacy are deeply interconnected constructs that significantly influence learner behavior and performance. Self-efficacy, defined as individuals' beliefs about their capability to perform specific tasks (Bandura, 1997), shapes learners' willingness to take risks, persist in challenging tasks, and engage in communicative interaction. Self-confidence, in the context of language learning, reflects the learner's perceived competence and comfort when using the target language.

Students who report high levels of self-efficacy and confidence are more likely to participate in communicative activities, experiment with language, and persist despite errors. Conversely, learners experiencing a high affective filter often display reluctance to engage in active communication, resulting in avoidance behaviors, brief or evasive responses, and resistance to interaction. As Lee and Liu (2024) argue, willingness to communicate (WTC) is dynamic and highly sensitive to fluctuations in perceived competence and emotional state. Thus, weakened confidence directly impacts both language reception and production.

A low affective filter, in contrast, facilitates both comprehension and output, enabling learners to process input more efficiently and produce language with greater fluidity (Krashen, 1982). This reciprocal relationship highlights the central role of affective variables in shaping linguistic development.

Oral participation represents a central component of foreign language development, providing learners with essential opportunities to practice linguistic forms, negotiate meaning, and develop communicative fluency. However, in the EFL context, particularly within synchronous online classes, oral participation seems to be often uneven and limited. Despite access to structured input and communicative tasks, many learners remain reluctant to speak, participating minimally or avoiding oral interaction altogether.

This phenomenon is closely associated with affective variables such as anxiety, self-confidence, and a learner's Willingness to Communicate (WTC). The WTC framework, proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998), offers a robust lens for understanding a learner's readiness to engage in oral EFL communication. Rather than being a stable personality trait, WTC is defined as a situational inclination to initiate communication when the opportunity arises. According to this model, the decision to speak results from an interaction between individual factors, such as anxiety, perceived competence, and motivation, and situational variables, including task type, interlocutors, and the overall classroom climate (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2022; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015).

In synchronous online EFL classrooms, these situational variables become particularly influential (Yang et al., 2021). Learners are often required to speak publicly via microphones, manage technological interfaces, and respond in real-time while being observed by peers. These conditions can intensify performance pressure and self-consciousness, especially when learners fear linguistic errors or negative evaluation (Lee & Liu, 2024). Consequently, even learners with adequate linguistic proficiency may exhibit low WTC, underscoring the decisive role of affective variables and platform mediation in digital contexts (Lee & Lee, 2024).

While anxiety predicts lower WTC, self-confidence and perceived emotional support

positively influence communicative initiative. For instance, Parveen & Vijaya (2023) found that learners demonstrate lower "affective filters" and higher engagement when instructional practices promote emotional safety, collaboration, and learner autonomy. In an EFL context, where exposure to the target language is often limited to the synchronous online session, these findings reinforce the premise that oral participation is not merely a matter of linguistic competence; rather, it is deeply embedded in the learner's emotional experience and the affective climate created by the instructor. Consequently, reducing the affective filter becomes a prerequisite for participation in environments where students may feel more vulnerable due to the "virtual" distance of online learning.

High affective filters limit participation by increasing hesitation, silence, and avoidance behaviors. When anxiety remains unaddressed, learners are less likely to take the communicative risks essential for developing fluency and interactional competence. Ultimately, reduced oral participation leads to fewer opportunities for feedback, negotiation of meaning, and "pushed output," resulting in more superficial language development (Bai, 2023).

Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2021) propose a humanized pedagogical lens that deepens the understanding of oral participation by foregrounding its relational and emotional dimensions. From this perspective, learners' willingness to speak does not emerge merely from linguistic competence but from interactional contexts characterized by trust, respect, and emotional safety. Participation is therefore socially constructed and emotionally mediated. In online environments, where physical distance may intensify emotional detachment, the teacher assumes a central role in establishing norms that validate effort, normalize mistakes, and promote gradual engagement. Within this framework, fostering willingness to communicate (WTC) becomes a pedagogical responsibility rather than solely an individual learner trait.

Interactionist and sociocultural theories provide complementary explanations for the role of interaction in second language acquisition and offer strong theoretical support for promoting oral participation in the EFL classroom. From an interactionist perspective, Long (1996) posits in the Interaction Hypothesis that language development occurs through meaningful interaction in which learners negotiate meaning, receive feedback, and modify their output. These interactional processes enable learners to notice gaps in their interlanguage and progressively refine their communicative competence. In synchronous online EFL classes, opportunities for interaction are mediated by digital tools such as video conferencing platforms, breakout rooms, and collaborative documents. However, their effectiveness depends largely on pedagogical design. When interaction is poorly structured or emotionally unsafe, learners may remain passive observers rather than active participants. Conversely, when tasks promote collaboration and low-stakes communication, online interaction can support both linguistic growth and affective regulation.

From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the concepts of mediation and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which further underscore the importance of social interaction in learning. According to this theory, language development occurs through collaborative activity in which learners co-construct meaning with peers and teachers. Interaction functions not only as cognitive scaffolding but also as affective scaffolding, reducing individual performance pressure and fostering a sense of shared responsibility. Research in online EFL contexts suggests that structured group work, guided peer interaction, and clearly defined collaborative roles can lower anxiety and enhance motivation when the learning environment is perceived as supportive and inclusive. Under such conditions, learners report increased confidence and greater willingness to speak.

Finally, Gonzalez-Valencia (2021) complements these perspectives by framing interaction as a relational and ethical act rather than merely an exchange of linguistic forms. From this viewpoint, interaction constitutes a human encounter shaped by empathy, recognition, and mutual respect. Oral participation becomes meaningful when learners feel emotionally safe and socially connected. In virtual environments, where relational cues may be limited, the teacher's mediating role becomes even more significant. Educators are therefore responsible not only for structuring communicative tasks but also for cultivating relational conditions that validate learners' identities and emotional experiences.

Although technology offers flexibility and multimodal resources, it also introduces distinct affective challenges.

Learners, particularly at the B1 level, may display heightened sensitivity to accuracy and peer comparison. The visibility of performance in online speaking tasks can intensify anxiety, reinforcing avoidance behaviors (Yang et al., 2021).

The absence of immediate non-verbal feedback (e.g., facial expressions, gestures) may disrupt interactional flow and diminish communicative readiness. Lee & Liu (2024) conceptualize WTC as a situational and dynamic construct shaped by both individual variables (e.g., anxiety, confidence) and contextual factors (e.g., task type, classroom climate). In virtual environments, these contextual variables are mediated through technological affordances, which can either facilitate or hinder participation.

Connectivity problems, delayed feedback, and platform management demands may increase cognitive load and emotional tension. Yang et al. (2021) identify environmental antecedents as significant predictors of learners' achievement emotions in online settings, suggesting that technological conditions directly influence affective experience.

Ultimately, technology functions as a mediator rather than a determinant of learning outcomes. Its effectiveness depends on pedagogical design and the teacher's capacity to create emotionally supportive interactional spaces (Lee & Liu, 2024; Yang et al., 2021).

Mobile and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (MALL/CALL)

These approaches leverage digital tools—such as smartphones and computers, to create flexible, autonomous, and personalized learning experiences (Kukulska-Hulme, 2021; Stockwell, 2022). They are valued for creating low-pressure domains where learners control the pace of instruction and receive feedback privately. This "privacy of error" is crucial, as it reduces the fear of public mistakes and enhances learner confidence, ultimately fostering a greater willingness to communicate (Bai, 2023; Reinders & Hubbard, 2013).

Virtual Reality (VR)

Immersive technologies like VR and interactive multimedia are increasingly recognized as effective tools. For adult learners, these are particularly impactful when replicating authentic communicative contexts or providing a non-threatening setting for anxiety-inducing tasks, such as public speaking (Lee & Liu 2024; Lee & Lee, 2024).

Contemporary research has continued to examine and expand the role of affective variables in SLA. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that emotional factors can predict meaningful differences in language performance. For instance, Liu (2022) found that anxiety significantly affected English listening performance among college students, suggesting that elevated anxiety levels interfere with processing input effectively. Similarly, Dalilis et al. (2025) investigated affective filter levels among tertiary students learning Spanish as a foreign language and reported that variations in anxiety, motivation, and classroom-related factors influenced learners' experiences and outcomes. These findings reinforce Krashen's (1982) theoretical

claims while extending them across different linguistic and educational contexts.

Beyond examining affective variables individually, more recent scholarship emphasizes the dynamic interaction among motivation, attitude, anxiety, and self-confidence. Rather than viewing these constructs as isolated predictors, current perspectives conceptualize them as context-dependent and mutually reinforcing variables that shape learners' emotional engagement and willingness to take communicative risks. In this sense, affect is increasingly understood as emergent and situated, aligning with broader trends in SLA research that conceptualize learning as a complex and socially mediated process.

A significant development in recent years is the integration of affective filter research with insights from educational psychology and technology-enhanced learning. Shuai (2025), in an interdisciplinary review grounded in both Krashen's framework and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), examined how artificial intelligence (AI) tools may mediate learner anxiety and motivation. The study suggests that AI-supported environments can create low-stakes practice opportunities that reduce fear of negative evaluation while fostering autonomy and perceived competence. From this perspective, affective states are shaped not only by learners' internal dispositions but also by the design of the instructional environment. Particularly in online and blended learning contexts, digital tools may either lower emotional barriers or inadvertently heighten them, depending on how they are implemented.

In contemporary educational contexts, technology is no longer merely a supplementary tool but a central medium of communication and interaction. Digital platforms, adaptive applications, and AI-mediated systems offer opportunities to construct learning environments in which students feel safe, supported, and emotionally regulated. When carefully designed, such environments can reduce anxiety, strengthen self-confidence, and enhance intrinsic motivation,

thereby lowering the affective filter and facilitating language acquisition. However, this potential depends fundamentally on pedagogical intentionality and ethical implementation.

Classroom-based research continues to confirm the pedagogical relevance of Krashen's hypothesis. Arenillas & Quezada (2025) demonstrated that teachers' use of interactive multimedia, collaborative strategies, and affective-oriented teaching practices contributed to reducing emotional barriers and increasing student engagement. Likewise, Liu (2022) highlighted the specific impact of anxiety on listening skills and emphasized the need for targeted classroom adaptations to foster learner confidence. These findings illustrate that the affective filter is not an abstract theoretical construct but a practical reality that manifests in specific instructional contexts and language skills.

Overall, recent developments indicate that the affective filter remains a vibrant and evolving area of foreign language acquisition research. Rather than being conceptualized as a static internal barrier, it is increasingly understood as a situated and dynamic phenomenon shaped by emotional, motivational, instructional, and technological factors. Incorporating these contemporary perspectives not only reinforces the foundational insights proposed by Krashen (1982) but also expands the theory to address the complexities of modern, digitally mediated, and socially interactive learning environments.

Motivation plays a central role in language learning, influencing learners' effort, persistence, and willingness to engage in a communicative task. Dörnyei's (2001) framework of motivational strategies provides a practical model of understanding how teachers can effectively foster motivation through classroom practices, including strategies to establish supportive learning conditions, generate motivation, maintain engagement, and promote positive self-evaluation

Guilloteaux & Dörnyei (2008) demonstrate that systematic use of motivational strategies is strongly associated with increased learner engagement and motivated behavior. More recently, studies conducted in synchronous online environments showed similar effects. Jeon & Lee (2023), for example, found that autonomy supportive instruction and confidence-building feedback in Synchronous online EFL classes significantly reduce anxiety and increase student engagement. Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2021) extends this understanding by emphasizing the ethical and relational dimension of motivation, seemed to be deeply connected to students' perception of being seen, valued, and emotionally supported by teachers. In virtual settings where physical presence is absent, motivation must be sustained through intentional teachers' language, empathy, and inclusive interactional practice. From this viewpoint, motivation is not isolated techniques, but expressions of a broader humanized pedagogy that prioritizes learners' emotional experience as fundamental to meaningful learning.

Building on this view, affect-sensitive pedagogy can be operationalized through specific motivational strategies that address anxiety, confidence, and social belonging.

Reducing anxiety involves intentionally removing or minimizing anxiety-provoking elements in the learning environment. Creating an error-friendly classroom climate, where mistakes are framed as part of the learning process, aligns with research showing that negative achievement emotions significantly influence online engagement (Yang et al., 2021). In virtual contexts, speaking-related anxiety remains persistent, particularly when learners fear public mistakes or peer judgment. Thus, structured turn-taking, supportive feedback, and scaffolded speaking opportunities become essential mechanisms to lower affective barriers.

Confidence-building strategies emphasize regular encouragement, recognition of incremental progress, and the development of realistic beliefs about success. This includes

providing positive and process-oriented feedback, offering low-stake speaking tasks, and explicitly teaching communication strategies. As Lee & Liu (2024) demonstrate, WTC in online environments is dynamic and fluctuates according to immediate contextual conditions, including perceived competence and emotional state. Therefore, strengthening learners' sense of efficacy directly contributes to more stable participation patterns.

Learners' perception of their social image within the group also shapes their readiness to speak. Ensuring that students feel valued, respected, and socially connected is particularly critical in synchronous online classes, where reduced non-verbal cues may heighten fear of negative evaluation. Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2021) emphasize that emotionally supportive interaction fosters relational trust, which in turn encourages risk-taking in communication. When learners perceive the classroom as a community rather than an evaluative arena, WTC increases.

By systematically integrating these motivational strategies, the intervention seeks measurable gains in learner engagement and self-reported affective states. Empirical research linking motivational frameworks to observable engagement behaviors supports this expectation (Lee & Liu, 2024; Yang et al., 2021).

Crucially, this framework is informed by a humanized and reflective pedagogical perspective (Gonzalez-Valencia et al, 2021). This perspective challenges the tendency to prioritize tools and efficiency in digital education, arguing instead for a pedagogy guided by ethical responsibility with a focus on learners' emotional experiences. In this view, the teacher is not merely a transmitter of content but an emotional mediator.

Ethical and Relational Practice

Fostering emotionally safe learning spaces is framed as a form of “pedagogical justice.” The teacher must intentionally counteract emotional detachment by promoting trust, respect, and

inclusive interactional practices (Gonzalez- Valencia, 2021).

Affective Ecosystem

The classroom environment is viewed as an affective ecosystem where the teacher's discourse, feedback styles, and participation norms either reinforce anxiety or promote psychological safety (Yang et al, 2021).

Innovation in the online EFL classroom relies not just on technology, but on reflective and intentional teaching practices that humanize the virtual learning environment (Kruk & Pawlak, 2022; Yang et al., 2021). As Kruk & Pawlak (2022) emphasize, the digital medium requires a proactive approach to manage the learners' emotional experiences, such as reducing boredom and lowering the affective filter, to ensure meaningful oral participation.

It might be said that the most potent strategies are not technological, but pedagogical and relational, making the teacher's use of Dörnyei's motivational strategies paramount in the online setting.

An essential contribution emphasized by Krashen (1982) and further supported by contemporary research is the teacher's role as an emotional mediator within the classroom. The teacher does not merely transmit linguistic knowledge but actively shapes the emotional climate in which learning occurs. Through classroom management practices, feedback style, and interactional norms, teachers influence students' levels of motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence.

Effective learning environments are characterized by respect, empathy, and supportive feedback, conditions that help maintain a low affective filter. Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2021) reinforce this perspective by highlighting the relational dimension of participation: learners are more willing to communicate when interaction occurs in contexts of trust and emotional safety.

In synchronous online settings, this mediation becomes even more critical, as technological barriers may amplify emotional distance (Yang et al., 2021).

Pedagogical strategies that regulate the affective filter include:

Encouraging emotionally open communication among students

Providing constructive and non-threatening corrective feedback

Offering process-oriented and specific praise

Creating an environment where mistakes are normalized as part of learning

Such practices contribute to the perception of the classroom as a safe space, which directly supports language risk-taking and engagement.

To have a better understanding of how the affective filter works in the learning of foreign languages, it is very important to first explain what the terms input and output mean, since both play an essential role in this learning process. In the field of Foreign Language Learning, input can be understood as the core of the learning process because it allows learners to absorb the language in an unconscious way when they are exposed to messages that are understandable and meaningful (Krashen, 1985).

When students receive this type of input, they are more likely to feel confident and open to learning. On the other hand, output contributes to the improvement of communicative ability, as it helps increase awareness of the language and allows learners to notice the gaps in their own knowledge while producing the language, either in spoken or written form (Swain, 1985).

Through output, learners can reflect on what they know and what they still need to improve, which supports their overall language development. However, the effectiveness of both input and output can be affected by factors. In this regard, Mesías & Villacrés (2025) highlight that a high affective filter harms how students receive language information and how they respond,

especially in conversational situations, where anxiety tends to increase.

Based on this information, it can be concluded that the affective filter is a key element in the learning of a foreign language, since it regulates how learners access language input and influences the production of output. Understanding how the affective filter works requires examining the emotional variables that are part of it and how these variables are expressed in the foreign language classroom. Therefore, this section focuses on the proposal presented by Mesías & Villacrés (2025), who analyze the influence of the affective filter on the learning of English from a pedagogical and emotional perspective. From the perspective of these two authors, their analysis is based on Stephen Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, mentioned above, and expands on it by placing it in a real educational context within foreign language teaching. For the authors, the affective filter should not be understood solely as an individual emotional barrier, but as a dynamic phenomenon that is constructed from the interaction between emotional, pedagogical, and contextual factors.

As previously mentioned, variables such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence directly influence the learner's ability to process the language they receive and to produce it as a response. Even though students may share the same academic context, the way they process linguistic input and output differs from one individual to another, since this process is mediated by each learner's affective filter.

As a result, a student with a low affective filter will experience a more facilitated language acquisition process, while a high affective filter will act as an obstacle that limits the internalization of learning (Krashen, 1982, as cited by Mesías & Villacrés, 2025).

Empirical support for the impact of affective variables on second language learning is provided by Pizarro Chacón & Josephy (2010), who examined the role of anxiety, motivation,

attitude, fear of negative evaluation, and teacher–student interaction in the context of foreign language programs at the Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica. Their study involved 110 undergraduate students enrolled in English and French teaching programs and employed a questionnaire designed to explore pedagogical practices, classroom climate, learner personality traits, and previous negative experiences in the learning process.

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed consistent patterns: elevated levels of anxiety, negative classroom environments, and strained teacher–student relationships were associated with diminished participation, reduced linguistic performance, and lower academic satisfaction. Conversely, supportive interactional dynamics and emotionally safe environments were linked to greater engagement and more positive perceptions of language learning.

These findings reinforce Krashen’s (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that emotional variables such as anxiety and self-confidence mediate the extent to which input becomes intake. In line with this theoretical framework, Pizarro Chacón and Josephy (2010) demonstrate that affective barriers are not merely internal learner traits but are significantly shaped by pedagogical conditions, instructional strategies, and classroom climate.

Importantly, their study highlights the teacher’s dual role as both instructional guide and emotional regulator. When methodological strategies are perceived as rigid, discouraging, or insensitive to learner needs, the affective filter tends to rise. In contrast, communicative, flexible, and respectful practices contribute to lowering anxiety and fostering learner confidence. This empirical evidence aligns with contemporary research emphasizing that affective regulation in the classroom is central to meaningful language acquisition.

The teacher should therefore be understood as a facilitator of both cognitive and emotional processes in language learning. Creating conditions that support a low affective filter

is not incidental but central to effective foreign language instruction. Emotional regulation within the classroom, especially in contexts where learners face unfamiliar linguistic demands, becomes a fundamental pedagogical responsibility.

In summary, anxiety, self-confidence, and self-efficacy directly affect how learners process input and produce language. The teacher's role in shaping a supportive and emotionally secure environment ultimately determines whether the affective filter becomes a barrier or a bridge to meaningful language acquisition.

Although the proposal by Mesías Estévez (2025) Camino has been examined in recent studies, it is necessary to include additional research on how these emotional variables manifest in real educational contexts in order to deepen the understanding of the affective filter. In this regard, the study conducted by Pizarro Chacón and Josephy (2010) provides an additional perspective by examining the effects of the affective filter on university students enrolled in foreign language programs, particularly English and French, at the National University of Costa Rica.

For Pizarro Chacón and Josephy (2010), exposure to a foreign language does not involve cognitive processes alone, such as listening, reading, or decoding meaning, but is also mediated by internal emotional conditions that shape how input is processed. In line with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, these internal barriers, anxiety, demotivation, insecurity, and fear of negative evaluation, may obstruct the internalization of language. When the affective filter is elevated, comprehensible input may be available, yet it fails to become intake because emotional interference disrupts processing.

This lack of internalization has direct consequences for language use. When input is not effectively assimilated, learners struggle to produce language spontaneously in communicative

contexts. As a result, oral and written output may appear limited, hesitant, or structurally restricted. From this perspective, reduced production is not necessarily evidence of lack of learning, but rather of affective blockage. The affective filter thus operates as a psychological barrier between the learner and the acquisition process: even when exposure is adequate, negative emotions may prevent meaningful integration and later retrieval of linguistic forms.

Empirical support for this claim is found in the study conducted by Pizarro Chacón and Josephy (2010), which examined 110 university students enrolled in English and French teaching programs. Through a structured questionnaire exploring teacher–student interaction, classroom climate, instructional techniques, negative academic experiences, and personal variables, both quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed a consistent relationship between elevated affective factors and diminished linguistic performance. High anxiety, low self-confidence, and negative classroom dynamics were associated with reduced participation and limited communicative engagement.

These findings reinforce Krashen’s (1982) assertion that affective variables significantly mediate acquisition. Furthermore, they align with Swain’s (1985) Output Hypothesis, which emphasizes that meaningful production is necessary for language development. If emotional barriers inhibit participation, opportunities for pushed output are reduced, ultimately constraining linguistic growth.

One of the most significant conclusions of the study is the crucial role played by teacher–student interaction. Respondents mentioned that an environment of trust, respect, support, and active communication encourages participation and reduces anxiety, while a tense, cold, or authoritarian relationship increases the affective filter, hinders communication, and limits the assimilation of the target language. In this regard, these findings are consistent with MacIntyre et

al. (1998) model of Willingness to Communicate, which explains that students' readiness to speak is not only determined by linguistic competence, but also by situational factors such as classroom climate, perceived safety, and the nature of teacher behavior. Therefore, teacher–student interaction becomes a central factor in shaping learners' communicative engagement.

Similarly, the findings indicate that the teaching and learning process can function either as support or as an obstacle. In classrooms characterized by excessive noise, monotonous lessons, negative teacher attitudes, limited use of the target language, and teaching methods that are not communicative or that fail to promote a dynamic learning environment, these factors were identified as contributors to increased anxiety and lack of motivation, which negatively affect students' linguistic performance. From MacIntyre's perspective, such contextual variables directly influence learners' situational willingness to communicate, reducing opportunities for meaningful participation. On the other hand, a friendly, active, and participatory environment helps maintain low levels of anxiety and, therefore, enhances the learning of the target language.

Regarding the methodologies used, the students highlighted those flexible practices, evaluations perceived as subjective, and the lack of order created a state of uncertainty and fear of making mistakes. In contrast, communicative, flexible, and student-centered strategies foster self-confidence, motivation, and an optimistic attitude towards foreign language learning, which facilitates assimilation. These perceptions align with research on communication anxiety, which demonstrates that when learners anticipate negative evaluation, their emotional filter increases and their willingness to participate decreases, even if they possess the necessary linguistic knowledge.

Another significant finding is that fear of negative evaluation and anxiety related to exams are key factors that raise the emotional filter. These circumstances lead to inhibition,

limited participation, and a stronger focus on failure rather than on learning. The study highlights that clear, progressive, and formative assessment helps reduce these levels of anxiety. Finally, although teacher gender was explored as a possible influencing variable, most students agreed that it was not a determining factor. What truly matters is the teacher's attitude, academic preparation, respectful behavior, and ability to create an emotionally safe learning environment, as these elements directly influence students' confidence and willingness to communicate in the target language.

According to Pizarro Chacón and Josephy (2010), motivation plays a fundamental role in reducing a high affective filter, which aligns with the ideas proposed by Villacrés and Mesías (2025). Students who develop in an environment where trust, mutual respect, and constant support among peers and teachers prevail tend to participate more actively and show a greater willingness to take communicative risks.

In contrast, anxiety increases when there is a lack of motivation and a persistent fear of negative evaluation, generating a vicious cycle of insecurity that hinders the development of communicative competence. As proposed by Krashen (1982), when the affective filter rises, learners may receive comprehensible input, yet emotional interference prevents effective processing and internalization. In this context, students develop an affective barrier that obstructs communication by limiting both the reception of information and the production of linguistic output. The issue, therefore, is not necessarily insufficient exposure to language, but rather the emotional conditions under which that exposure occurs.

Within this framework, the teacher's role becomes central. The function of the teacher in the classroom extends beyond delivering content; it involves creating conditions that facilitate learning at cognitive, emotional, and social levels. One of the most crucial responsibilities in this

situation is ensuring that the classroom environment is stimulating and capable of igniting students' curiosity and intrinsic desire to learn. Instructor support significantly influences not only academic progress but also students' personal, social, emotional, and even professional development. The ability to pay close attention to learners and recognize their unique needs, interests, and preferences distinguishes a reflective and committed educator. These characteristics contribute directly to maintaining a low affective filter, allowing learners to engage more effectively in both language comprehension and production.

In conclusion, the two studies discussed complement and reinforce each other by combining theoretical foundations with empirical evidence. Together, they demonstrate that the affective filter plays a crucial role in learning English as a second language. Both works agree that language learning involves more than mastering grammatical structures; it is equally shaped by didactic, emotional, and contextual elements. Consequently, fostering meaningful, human-centered, and sustainable classroom learning becomes a shared responsibility between educators and students, who must actively understand and manage affective variables within the learning process.

The emphasis on the need to revisit classical affective theories through contemporary empirical and pedagogical lenses has increased. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) originally highlighted motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence as key emotional factors involved in language acquisition, but more recent studies and researchers argue that attitude plays a fundamental role in shaping these affective dimensions, which are mainly involved in the process of acquisition. Focusing on this aspect, Fortuna (2025) contributed to this field of study by grounding attitude as one of the central factors in lowering or raising the affective filter in English Language Acquisition, being tightly linked to the motivational factor.

Moreover, Fortuna (2025) situates attitude within the broader socio-educational context of English as a global language, emphasizing that learners' emotional orientations toward English are inseparable from social, cultural, and experiential factors. This author aligns with the affective and sociocultural perspectives and theories, which focus on viewing learners as emotionally situated individuals, regarding language acquisition, rather than just conceptualizing language learning as a purely cognitive process conducted by exposure to input.

This point of view directly supports Krashen's (1982) statement about comprehensible input alone being insufficient for acquisition if the affective factors prevent learners from processing that input. However, Fortuna (2025) extends this framework by arguing that attitude usually acts as a precursor or mediator for other affective variables, having a big influence on how learners experience such other factors as anxiety, motivation, and confidence in classroom interaction and learning environments in general.

In the article, it is also conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, including such factors as cognitive (beliefs about the value and usefulness of English), affective (emotions and feelings such as enjoyment, fear, interest, etc.), and behavioral (patterns of engagement or avoidance). This understanding aligns with established models in applied linguistics and educational psychology. Moreover, Fortuna (2025) emphasizes that attitude is dynamic rather than just static. It is a factor that evolves through learners' classroom experiences, teacher interactions, peer relations, and perceptions of success or failure in education. This dynamic also aligns with recent research in the field of education in which affective variables are perceived as situated, fluctuating, and context-dependent, rather than fixed learner traits.

Other empirical studies reviewed in the article demonstrate that positive attitudes toward English are correlated with higher motivation, greater willingness to communicate, increased

classroom participation, and improved achievement, whereas negative attitudes are associated with heightened anxiety, withdrawal, and avoidance of communication in the target language. These findings reinforce Krashen's original proposition that affective variables are highly related to the regulation of access to linguistic input, while also offering an explanation of why learners may usually disengage even when the classroom instruction is well designed. Particularly, the text highlights how negative attitudes toward the language can amplify fear of negative evaluation and self-monitoring, while increasing the affective filter during the speaking activities (a concern especially relevant in synchronous online learning contexts where learners may feel exposed or recorded).

Fortuna (2025) makes a significant contribution in his detailed analysis of the factors shaping learners' attitudes toward English, in which the author synthesizes research showing that attitudes are influenced by a complex interaction among motivation, emotional intelligence, classroom climate, teacher behavior, cultural perceptions of English, and societal narratives. On the other hand, there are also teacher-related factors that emerge, which are particularly influential, such as supportive feedback, enthusiasm, fairness, and the normalization of error, which are usually associated with more positive learner attitudes.

On the contrary, judgmental correction practices, excessive focus on accuracy, and emotionally distant teaching styles tend to reinforce anxiety, negative self-perception and demotivation. This reinforces the perspective that affective filter is not just related to internal barriers but a pedagogically and relationally constructed phenomenon.

These insights support the pedagogical orientation of the present study, which treats affective filter reduction as an instructional goal rather than a secondary outcome. Sanchez (2025) explicitly argues that lowering the filter requires intentional teaching practices, including

the creation of emotionally safe classroom environments, the use of meaningful and engaging tasks, and the seeding of positive learner identities. Such recommendations closely align with Dörnyei's (2001) strategies, specifically those aimed at building learner confidence, lowering anxiety, and fostering a positive social image. Moreover, the emphasis on attitude complements Dörnyei's framework by explaining how learners' emotional disposition toward the learning of the language and the language context shape their response to motivational strategies.

In conclusion, the article frames affective filter reduction as not just a pedagogical concern but also as an ethical and inclusive crucial factor. Emphasizing learner well-being, emotional safety, and normalization of vulnerability in language learning, Fortuna's (2025) argument converges with Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2021) humanized pedagogy, which conceptualizes teaching as an ethical, relational, and affective practice. Both perspectives deny points of view of learning and instead advocate for instructional environments that recognize learners as human beings. This focuses on strengthening the perspective of intervention-based research as a means to reduce anxiety, to foster confidence, and promote equal participation.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative action-research design aimed at understanding how motivational teaching practices influence learners' affective filter and oral participation in synchronous online EFL classes. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for this study because it seeks to explore participants' experience perception, emotion, and classroom interactions in depth, rather than to measure variables numerically. From this perspective, learning phenomena are understood as socially constructed and context-dependent, emerging from the interaction between teachers, learners, and pedagogical practices. The research design is grounded in qualitative action research, which positioned the teacher-researcher as an active participant in the instructional process and emphasized reflection, intervention, and pedagogical improvement (Burns, 2010; Kemmis et al., 2014). This action research is especially suitable in an educational context where the goal is not only to understand classroom realities but also to transform them through informed and reflective practice.

The intervention is intentionally designed to lower learners' affective filter through motivational strategies, while quantitative inquiry allows for close examination of how these strategies are experienced and enacted in real classroom conditions. Data collection relies on qualitative surveys with open-ended questions, classroom observations, and teacher reflective journals. Although surveys are frequently associated with quantitative research, qualitative scholars argue that open-ended survey responses can function as rich narrative data when analyzed thematically rather than statistically (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, students' written responses are treated as textual data that provide insight into their emotional experience, confidence levels, anxiety, and participation in online classes.

Classroom observations are used to document interactional patterns, participation behaviors, and affective indicators such as hesitation, engagement, and risk-taking during oral activities. These observations follow a structured qualitative protocol to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility to capture emergent phenomena. Teacher journals complement these data by providing reflective accounts of instructional decisions, classroom dynamics, and emotional climates, aligning with the view that teacher reflection is a central component of qualitative action research (Burns, 2010). The sequencing of data collection follows a qualitative, iterative logic rather than a linear experimental model. Initial baseline qualitative surveys are used to explore learners' initial affective perceptions and participation tendencies. During the pedagogical intervention, observations and teacher journals are collected to document change and emerging patterns. Finally, post-intervention qualitative surveys allow learners to reflect on their experience, enabling an interpretive comparison across stages. This recursive process reflects qualitative research principles that emphasize depth, reflexivity, and ongoing meaning-making (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data analysis is conducted through thematic analysis following the six-phase recursive approach established by Braun & Clarke (2006): (1) familiarizing yourself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Rather than seeking generalization, the analysis aims to identify recurring patterns and significant meanings related to affective filter reduction, motivation, and oral participation within the specific instructional context. To ensure methodological rigor, the study incorporates qualitative trustworthiness strategies such as data triangulation, instrument piloting, and researcher reflexivity. Triangulation across surveys, observations, and teacher journals strengthens the credibility of findings by allowing

convergence and comparison of multiple data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflective journaling supports transparency by acknowledging the researcher's role in data interpretation, which is a central ethical consideration in qualitative inquiry. Overall, this qualitative methodological approach aligns with the humanized and affect-sensitive pedagogical perspective underpinning the study. It allows for a nuanced exploration of how motivational teaching practices are experienced by learners and enacted by the teacher, providing a rich understanding of the emotional and interactional processes that shape oral participation in synchronous online EFL classrooms.

Methodologically, this study contributes by combining effective self-report data (anxiety, confidence, motivation) with behavioral indicators (student talk time, number of speaking turns, peer interaction) within a qualitative method action-research design. This responds to recent FLA research to triangulate learners' perception with observable classroom behavior to better understand how affective change translates into participation and interaction. In this sense, the study strengthens the empirical link between affective variables and communicative behavior in a synchronous online context.

Data Collection Instruments & Procedures

Structured Classroom Observations

The researcher observed five full sessions (2 hours each) to capture the complete interactional arc of the online lesson. Observations focus on documented interactional patterns and participation behaviors. Quantitative indicators, such as the frequency of speaking turns and the number of distinct students contributing, were coded numerically for each lesson. This allows for session-level aggregation and pre/post comparison. The observation rubric was applied consistently across all sessions by the researcher. To ensure reliability, a second trained rater

were independently code 20% of the recorded sessions, and inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa coefficient.

Teacher Journal

After each lesson, teachers complete short reflective prompts focusing on the emotional climate and their instructional decisions. The journal provides process data in classroom atmosphere, student effect, and fidelity to strategy implementation. These reflections are treated as narrative data to be analyzed alongside the observation notes to identify shifts in the teacher's perception of the affective filter.

Post-intervention Qualitative Survey & Semi-structured Interviews

A short open-ended item set in the post-survey allows for broad student reflection. This is followed by semi-structured interviews with a purposive sub-sample of 6-8 students and teacher(s) to explore perceived influential elements in the online environment, such as the impact of the chat box, camera usage, and supportive feedback on their willingness to communicate.

Fidelity Checklist

A quantitative fidelity checklist was used to document the extent to which key components of the instructional intervention are implemented as planned. The checklist included dichotomous (yes/no) items indicating the presence of core elements such as:

- Confidence-building warm-up activity
- Explicit positive and supportive feedback
- Structured group roles during intervention
- Low-stakes speaking opportunities. Fidelity scores will be summarized descriptively to confirm consistency of implementation across sessions and to contextualize outcome results.

Operational Definitions & Units of Analysis

Affective Filter

A composite qualitative and quantitative construct operationalized through learners' self-reported levels of anxiety, self-confidence, and fear of negative evaluation measured by the survey and observed through behavioral markers (e.g., hesitation, risk-taking).

Oral Participation

Operationalized through observable behavior indicators including (a) the number of students speaking turns per lesson and (b) the number of distinct students who contribute at least one oral turn per session.

Unit of Analysis

For survey data: the individual student. For observational data: the lesson/session, based on aggregated behavioral counts.

Data Analysis

The data analysis follows a qualitative interpretive approach, aiming to identify patterns of meaning rather than measuring change purely numerically. Data generated through open-ended survey responses, structured observation, teacher journals, and interviews were analyzed holistically. Survey responses were treated as narrative textual data. Analysis followed an inductive thematic approach, beginning with repeated readings to gain familiarity. Initial codes were generated to capture key ideas related to emotional states and perception of speaking. These codes were grouped into categories like "reduced speaking anxiety" and "perceived emotional support." Comparison between pre- and post-intervention responses was conducted interpretively, focusing on shifts in discourse and depth of reflection.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure the quality and credibility of the qualitative analysis, the following strategies were applied:

Triangulation. Convergence across surveys, observation, journals, interviews, and fidelity records.

Reflexive Journaling. To acknowledge the researcher's influence on data interpretation.

Member Checklist. Selected participants confirmed interpretive accuracy.

Thick Description. Providing detailed contextualized accounts of the classroom interaction (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

These procedures ensure that findings are grounded in participants' experiences and classroom realities rather than in researcher's assumptions.

Results and Discussion

The following section presents the analysis of the data collected throughout the four-week pedagogical intervention carried out in synchronous online B1-level EFL classes at the Fundación Centro Cultural Colombo Americano Cali. In accordance with the qualitative action-research design of this study, the data were gathered through three main instruments: structured classroom observations, teacher-researcher reflective journals, and two qualitative surveys administered to students before and after the intervention. The analysis follows an inductive thematic approach grounded in Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, which allows for the identification of recurring patterns and significant meanings across the data sources. Rather than measuring change numerically, the goal of the analysis is to interpret how the motivational strategies implemented throughout the sessions were experienced by learners and enacted by the teacher, and how these experiences relate to observable shifts in affective filter levels and oral participation behaviors.

To ensure credibility and rigor, findings were triangulated across the three data sources, allowing convergent and complementary evidence to strengthen the interpretations offered. The analysis is organized around three overarching themes that emerged from the data: (1) the role of confidence-building and low-stakes interaction in reducing speaking anxiety; (2) the impact of explicit positive feedback and emotional safety on students' willingness to communicate; and (3) the influence of the online environment and multimodal instructional design on affective filter regulation. Each theme is examined through the lens of the observation records, the teacher's reflective journals, and the students' survey responses, offering a holistic and contextualized understanding of the intervention's impact.

The five classroom observations conducted throughout the intervention provide a window into the interactional dynamics and affective climate of the synchronous online sessions. Each observation was guided by a structured protocol that documented quantitative participation indicators, motivational strategy fidelity, affective filter markers, and the overall virtual atmosphere. Across all five sessions, a consistent pattern emerged: the intentional application of motivational strategies created conditions that visibly lowered students' affective filters and increased their willingness to participate orally.

One of the first aspects to emerge from the observational data is the high degree of fidelity with which the motivational strategies were implemented across sessions. The intervention fidelity checklists documented adherence percentages of 83%, 100%, 80%, 80%, and 79% across observations one through five, respectively. These figures indicate that the core components of the intervention, including confidence-building warm-up activities, explicit positive feedback, low-stakes speaking opportunities, multimodal instruction, verbal encouragement, and chat monitoring, were consistently present throughout the four weeks. Notably, the one component that was not systematically implemented across all sessions was the assignment of structured group roles. While peer interaction was present in every session through pair work and breakout rooms, the formal assignment of specific roles within those interactions remained inconsistent. These findings are relevant, as the reflective journals later identify structured role assignments as a dimension that could further enhance accountability and interaction quality.

The high adherence percentages also speak to the organic quality of the implementation. Through multiple observations, researchers noted that the motivational strategies did not feel scripted or forced but were instead woven naturally into the flow of each session. As the

observer noted in Session 1, "the implementation of the motivational strategies was highly successful... the intervention felt organic and natural, avoiding a forced or scripted atmosphere during the class by maintaining a relaxed and friendly attitude." This naturalistic quality is pedagogically significant because it suggests that the strategies were not experienced as add-ons to the lesson but as an integrated part of the teacher's interactional style, which, according to Dörnyei (2001), is precisely the condition under which motivational strategies are most effective.

Perhaps the most striking finding across the five observations is the near-complete absence of high anxiety indicators in any of the sessions. The anxiety checklist item was left unchecked across all observations, with no evidence of prolonged hesitation, nervous laughter, fearful silences, or apologetic behavior reported by the researchers. In contrast, confidence and risk-taking were consistently checked as present, with supporting evidence drawn from direct observation of student behavior. In Session 1, for example, the observer documented that "students show them comfort and turn on the cameras and microphones to bridge the possible gap that creates the virtual environment," and noted that students were "trying to talk frequently using newly learned vocabulary and expressions, guided by the approval words that the teacher uses during the session."

This pattern intensified across subsequent sessions. By Session 2, the observer reported that students were "actively participating since the class started," that they "turned on their microphones even without being asked," and that they "felt comfortable sharing with others." In Session 3, a notable incident was documented in which the teacher explicitly reframed the cultural norms of the classroom by telling students they did not need to apologize for mistakes but to say thank you instead, repositioning error correction as a shared learning event rather than a moment of failure. This small but meaningful intervention directly aligns with Gonzalez-

Valencia et al. (2021) humanized pedagogical framework, which conceptualizes the classroom as an emotionally mediated space where the teacher's discourse shapes learners' identities and sense of belonging.

In Sessions 4 and 5, the affective atmosphere remained consistently positive, with observers describing the virtual room as one of "high participation and mutual support" and noting that students "spoke freely and expressed opinions, showing their knowledge related to fashion trends and advanced vocabulary." The Session 5 observer offered a particularly detailed account of the affective shift observed throughout the session: "The entire session was built around the idea of making the online room feel less like a 'high pressure' exam and more like a relaxed hangout... students were laughing, sharing personal opinions, and even taking risks with difficult sentences because they knew the teacher had their back." These observations corroborate Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis by demonstrating that when emotional safety is actively constructed through pedagogical choices, learners become more open to input and more willing to produce output.

Beyond the absence of anxiety, the observations also document meaningful patterns in how oral participation evolved across sessions. In all five observations, microphone usage was rated as high, indicating that verbal interaction was the dominant mode of participation rather than text-based chat. This finding is particularly notable given that research consistently identifies microphone reluctance as one of the primary barriers to oral participation in synchronous online EFL contexts (Zhang & Du, 2023; Zhou, 2023). The fact that students across sessions chose to engage verbally, and in several instances did so without being prompted, suggests that the motivational strategies implemented by the teacher succeeded in lowering the threshold for oral risk-taking.

The interactional arc documented across observations also reveals a consistent structural pattern: sessions moved from teacher-led warm-ups toward increasing student-driven discussion, peer interaction, and voluntary sharing. In Session 1, the observer described a transition "from a teacher-led warm-up to a full peer interaction with a complete enrollment in the topic, personal opinions, and possible solutions to planted issues." By Session 4, students were engaging in pair work and group discussion with a level of spontaneity that the observer described as exceeding the teacher's prompts. This progressive transfer of interactional initiative from teacher to student aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural framework, in which peer interaction and collaborative scaffolding support the development of both linguistic and affective competence.

It is also worth noting that camera usage remained at zero in Sessions 2 through 5, with only Session 1 documenting two cameras turned on. This detail, while potentially suggesting a degree of physical anonymity, did not appear to inhibit participation in any observed session. Students consistently engaged through microphones, suggesting that the affective safety of the virtual space was not contingent on visual presence but was instead constructed through the relational quality of teacher-student interaction. This finding resonates with Wang and Zhang's (2023) observation that perceived teacher support, rather than physical visibility, serves as the primary predictor of oral engagement in online EFL settings.

The five teacher-researcher reflective journals complement the observational data by offering an insider perspective on the instructional decisions made throughout the intervention and their perceived impact on the classroom climate. Written immediately after each session and organized around the six core components of the motivational strategy framework, the journals document a consistent and evolving pattern of intentional pedagogy aimed at reducing the affective filter and sustaining student engagement. Across all five entries, three recurring themes

stand out: the effectiveness of low-stakes communicative tasks in generating spontaneous participation, the sustained role of positive feedback in maintaining a low-anxiety environment, and the pedagogical tension between fluency-oriented and form-focused instruction.

Across all five reflective journals, the teacher consistently identified low-stakes communicative tasks as the most effective component in promoting spontaneous oral participation and reducing hesitation. In Journal 1, the reflection following the low-stakes speaking task segment notes that "low-stakes communicative tasks generated more spontaneous turns and visible engagement compared to more structured or form-focused segments." This observation was repeated with increasing confidence in subsequent journals, with Journal 3 affirming that "low-stakes communicative tasks continued to generate the highest level of oral production and reduced observable hesitation," and Journal 5 describing how "students demonstrated stronger engagement during discussion-oriented segments" and how "some learners expanded their responses without prompting."

These reflections are consistent with the theoretical premises of the study. Dörnyei's (2001) framework places particular emphasis on creating conditions in which learners feel that speaking carries a low cost of failure, since when the fear of negative evaluation is reduced, learners are more likely to take the communicative risks necessary for language development. The teacher's repeated identification of meaning-focused, opinion-based, and experience-connected tasks as the most generative moments of each session further corroborates Lee & Liu's (2024) finding that willingness to communicate in online environments is dynamic and fluctuates in response to task type and perceived relevance. When students could connect language use to real-life experience and personal perspective, the journals document a consistent rise in spontaneous turns and extended utterances.

The second recurring theme across all five journals is the teacher's deliberate and sustained use of positive reinforcement as a mechanism for maintaining a low-anxiety classroom climate. In every session, the teacher documented the consistent use of affirming language such as "Good," "Exactly," "Nice answer," and "Thank you for participating," applied not only following accurate responses but also following attempts that required correction. This distinction is pedagogically significant: by praising effort alongside accuracy, the teacher effectively decoupled participation from linguistic perfection, which, according to Krashen (1982), is a fundamental condition for lowering the affective filter.

Across journals, the teacher also documented a specific interactional strategy for managing hesitation: rather than redirecting immediately to another student when a learner paused, the teacher consistently scaffolded the response, allowing the student to continue. Journal 2 reflects on this practice by noting that "when students demonstrated hesitation, the teacher scaffolded their responses instead of immediately shifting to another participant," adding that "students continued participating even after corrections, indicating that feedback did not raise the affective filter significantly." This pattern was reinforced in Journal 4, which observed that "the sustained use of positive feedback helped maintain a low affective filter and encouraged risk-taking in oral production."

These reflections resonate strongly with Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2021) humanized pedagogical perspective, which frames the teacher's role in online environments as that of an emotional mediator who actively constructs the conditions for psychological safety. The fact that the teacher not only praised accuracy but consistently validated effort, normalized error, and scaffolded hesitant responses demonstrates a pedagogical orientation that places learner confidence at the center of instructional decision-making. Over the five sessions, this orientation

appears to have had a cumulative effect: while Journal 1 describes a classroom climate that was "relaxed from the beginning," by Journal 5, students were producing extended spontaneous responses and expanding on peers' ideas without additional prompting.

A third and more nuanced theme that emerges from the reflective journals is the ongoing pedagogical tension between fluency-oriented and accuracy-focused instruction, and the differential affective impact of each. Across all five journals, the teacher consistently noted that grammar-focused and form-centered segments produced a slight but observable increase in student hesitation, while communicative and discussion-based tasks generated the highest levels of spontaneous participation. Journal 1 acknowledges this contrast by noting that "communicative tasks were the most effective in reducing the affective filter, while structured grammar segments required slightly more scaffolding to maintain the same level of comfort." This pattern persisted throughout the intervention, with Journal 3 observing that "grammar-focused segments required ongoing scaffolding to maintain the same level of confidence" and Journal 5 identifying "a slight increase in hesitation... during more form-focused activities."

This recurring observation points to an important pedagogical implication: the reduction of the affective filter is not uniform across all instructional modes but is instead sensitive to the type of task being demanded of learners. When accuracy becomes the primary evaluative criterion, as tends to be the case during grammar explanation and controlled practice, students at the B1 level appear more vulnerable to self-monitoring and performance anxiety. This finding aligns with the theoretical framing of the study, which identifies intermediate-level learners as particularly susceptible to the social dimension of error, given their awareness of gaps in their interlanguage and their sensitivity to peer comparison (Dörnyei, 2001; Yang et al., 2021).

The teacher's recognition of this tension and the consistent identification of scaffolding as a response to it reflects the kind of reflexive practice that Burns (2010) considers central to action research. Rather than treating the fluency-accuracy tension as a problem to be eliminated, the journals document an evolving pedagogical awareness: the teacher progressively embedded grammatical instruction within communicative contexts, using concise modeling, visual support, and wait-time to reduce cognitive pressure during form-focused segments. Journal 5's final reflection captures this trajectory well, noting that "ongoing scaffolding during form-focused instruction will further strengthen student confidence" as an action point for future practice.

The student survey data was collected through two instruments administered at different points in the study. The first survey, titled *Speaking Confidence and Motivation in Online English Classes*, gathered baseline information about students' confidence patterns, anxiety triggers, and perceived conditions for improvement prior to or during the early phase of the intervention. The second survey, titled *Perception of the Learning Experience Through Different Dimensions*, was administered post-intervention and asked students to evaluate their experience across affective, linguistic, social, and instructional dimensions using a five-point Likert scale, as well as open-ended questions about the activities and aspects of the course they found most meaningful. Together, these two instruments provide a learner-centered perspective that complements and triangulates the findings from the observations and journals.

The pre-intervention survey was completed by eleven students ranging in age from 21 to 42, with varying lengths of English study from nine months to ten years. Despite this heterogeneity, the responses reveal several convergent patterns that provide a coherent picture of the affective baseline from which the intervention departed.

When asked about the conditions under which they feel most confident speaking English, most respondents identified social and relational factors rather than purely linguistic ones. The most frequently selected option was "I feel more confident when I speak English in online classes," followed by "the teacher congratulates me on my lesson," "when other peers don't judge my mistakes," and "we do micro-speaking challenges to improve fluency." Only one student identified a single confidence trigger, while most identified two or more, suggesting that confidence for this group of learners is not a fixed trait but a situationally constructed experience that depends on the interactional conditions of the classroom. This finding directly supports the theoretical premise of the study and aligns with MacIntyre et al. (1998) model of Willingness to Communicate, which frames communicative readiness as the product of perceived competence and situational safety rather than stable personality.

The anxiety responses reveal a similarly revealing pattern. The most commonly reported sources of nervousness included fear of public speaking, pronunciation concerns, difficulty expressing ideas in English, fear of peer judgment, and pronunciation combined with mid-sentence mental blocking. One student stated with clarity: "I often get nervous about my pronunciation and because sometimes my mind goes blank." Another acknowledged: "I still feel nervous about any question or conversation." These responses confirm that the primary anxiety drivers for this population are performative and social in nature, involving fear of negative evaluation from peers and concern about linguistic accuracy, rather than structural or technological barriers. This baseline profile is consistent with the literature reviewed in the study, particularly Muñoz & Correa Pérez's (2023) finding that fear of negative evaluation remains the primary affective barrier among local EFL learners.

When asked about the conditions under which they believe they can improve most, responses again highlighted relational and low-stakes contexts: several students mentioned being corrected after finishing their ideas, practicing outside of class, and engaging in classes that are not formally graded. One student articulated this particularly well: "when I know it's a class that isn't graded and when I talk to people who inspire confidence and security in me". This baseline response strongly validates the design choices of the intervention, particularly the emphasis on low-stakes speaking tasks and non-evaluative feedback, and suggests that the learners themselves were aware, at some level, of what conditions would be most supportive of their growth.

The post-intervention survey was completed by six students and yielded strongly positive results across all four dimensions evaluated. Five of the six students rated all twenty quantitative items at 5 out of 5, with only one student consistently marking 4 out of 5 across all items. A second student gave one item a rating of 3 (organized expression of ideas) and rated everything else at 5. These results indicate a remarkably high degree of satisfaction and perceived growth following the intervention, with an overall positive response rate exceeding 85% at the highest rating level, which aligns closely with the figure reported in the study's abstract.

On the affective dimension, items such as "I feel more confident expressing my ideas in English", "I feel motivated to participate in online speaking activities", "my attitude toward speaking English has become more positive" and "I feel emotionally supported by the teacher and classmates" received maximum scores from five of the six respondents. The single item that registered slightly more variability was "I can manage my nervousness better than before", which received a 3 from one student. This nuanced result suggests that while the intervention succeeded broadly in fostering confidence and motivation, the management of individual anxiety is a longer-term process that may require continued and sustained affective support beyond a four-

week period. This interpretation is consistent with the literature, which warns against expecting rapid or uniform affective transformation in classroom interventions (Jeon & Lee, 2023).

The social and relational dimensions of the survey yielded some of the most consistent positive responses. Items such as "the online class atmosphere feels respectful and collaborative," "I feel comfortable speaking English with peers in group activities," "I feel emotionally supported by the teacher and classmates" and "I have developed more empathy when interacting with others in English" were rated at 5 by the majority of respondents. These scores suggest that the motivational strategies implemented were experienced not only as pedagogically effective but as humanly meaningful, contributing to a sense of belonging and mutual respect within the virtual classroom community. This outcome reflects precisely the kind of affective ecosystem that Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2021) describes as the foundation of meaningful online learning, one built on trust, empathy, and inclusive interactional norms rather than merely efficient content delivery.

On the linguistic and instructional dimensions, ratings were similarly high. Items such as "I am using more vocabulary and expressions in my speech", "the activities helped me notice and correct my own mistakes" and "the strategies used in this class were engaging and motivating" all received maximum scores from the majority of respondents. The item "I would like to continue using these types of speaking activities in future classes" received a 5 from all six respondents, a finding that points not only to satisfaction with the intervention but to learners' desire for sustained affective and communicative support in their ongoing language learning trajectory.

The open-ended questions in the post-intervention survey offer a richer and more individualized window into students' experiences. When asked which activities helped them

most to feel confident when speaking English, responses included debates, group activities and presentations, speaking and listening tasks, role-based readings that allowed for word-level correction, and the creation of paragraphs and videos. One student identified "common topic" discussions as particularly supportive, while another highlighted "presentations and classroom readings that allow for the correction of certain words" as a confidence-building moment, suggesting that even corrective feedback, when delivered in the right relational context, can function as an affective support rather than a threat.

When asked about the most enjoyable aspects of the course, students cited interactive games such as escape room activities, group conversation, Macmillan platform activities, and video creation. These responses reveal that the enjoyment of the intervention was not uniformly tied to one type of activity but was distributed across a range of social, multimodal, and communicative experiences, suggesting that the diversity of the task design contributed to sustaining motivation across learners with different preferences and affective profiles.

Regarding suggestions for future improvement, responses were notably modest, reinforcing the overall positive reception of the intervention. One student suggested applying more interactive and visual tools, another requested a reduction in homework assignments in favor of more speaking practice, and a third asked for more conversation-focused activities. These suggestions are not criticisms but rather extensions of the intervention's existing strengths, pointing toward more interaction, more visuals, and more opportunities to speak. This kind of constructive feedback is itself a marker of a low-anxiety learning environment: students who feel emotionally safe within a classroom are more likely to offer honest, growth-oriented suggestions rather than either silence or complaint.

When the three data sources are read together, a coherent and mutually reinforcing picture emerges. The classroom observations document the behavioral markers of a low-affective-filter environment: consistent microphone usage, voluntary oral contributions, risk-taking with advanced vocabulary, humor and laughter, and a progressive shift from teacher-led interaction to student-driven discussion. The teacher-researcher journals provide the instructional perspective behind these behaviors, revealing the deliberate and consistent application of warm-up activities, positive reinforcement, low-stakes task design, and empathetic error management as the mechanisms through which this environment was constructed. And the student surveys confirm, from the learner's own perspective, that the resulting classroom experience was perceived as emotionally supportive, pedagogically meaningful, and generative of both confidence and linguistic growth.

Across all three instruments, the theme of relational safety emerges as the central condition for affective filter reduction. Whether viewed through the observer's account of students laughing and sharing freely, the teacher's reflection on the importance of scaffolding hesitation rather than redirecting, or the students' post-intervention ratings of mutual respect and emotional support, the data consistently point to the same conclusion: it is not the technology, and not even the tasks themselves, that lower the affective filter in synchronous online EFL learning, but the quality of the human relationship constructed within and through those technological and pedagogical conditions. This finding aligns with and extends the theoretical framework of the study, affirming Krashen's (1982) original hypothesis while enriching it with the relational and ethical dimensions emphasized by Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2021).

The one area of relative limitation identified across all three instruments is the challenge of sustaining low-anxiety conditions during grammar-focused segments of the lesson.

Observations note a slight uptick in hesitation during form-focused practice, journals consistently identify accuracy-oriented tasks as requiring more scaffolding, and the baseline survey reveals that students themselves associate their greatest improvements with non-graded, relational contexts. Together, these convergent signals suggest a direction for future pedagogical refinement: the integration of affective support not only into communicative tasks but into grammar instruction itself, through approaches such as inductive grammar discovery, contextualized modeling, and formative rather than evaluative error management.

Finally, the data collectively supports the claim made in the study's justification that addressing the affective filter in synchronous online EFL instruction is not only pedagogically effective but also an ethical and inclusive imperative. When five out of six post-intervention students rate emotional support, collaborative atmosphere, and communicative confidence at the highest possible level, and when all six express a desire to continue with these types of activities, the intervention is not merely a successful classroom experiment but a model for what language education in online environments can and should aspire to be.

Discussion.

The findings of this study open a broader conversation about what effective and humane EFL instruction looks like in synchronous online environments, particularly in a Colombian educational context where the rapid expansion of virtual learning has not always been accompanied by adequate preparation for the affective dimensions of teaching and learning. This discussion situates those findings within existing literature, identifies the ways in which they confirm, extend, and in some cases nuance what prior research has established, and draws out the practical, contextual, and scholarly implications that follow from them. It also engages honestly

with the limitations of the study and offers concrete recommendations for future research that can build on what this intervention has begun.

The most fundamental finding of this study, that intentional motivational strategies can significantly reduce the affective filter and increase oral participation in synchronous online EFL classes, is consistent with a growing body of empirical research that has positioned affective variables as central rather than peripheral to language acquisition. Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, which has sometimes been criticized for its theoretical abstraction, is given concrete and observable expression in the data gathered across these five sessions. The near-complete absence of high anxiety indicators, the consistent presence of confidence and risk-taking behaviors, and the progressive transfer of interactional initiative from teacher to students across the intervention are all behavioral manifestations of what Krashen described as a lowered filter, one in which learners are emotionally open enough to allow comprehensible input to become genuine intake.

These findings confirm and extend the work of Guilloteaux & Dörnyei (2008), whose large-scale classroom study first demonstrated empirically that teachers' systematic use of motivational strategies is directly associated with increased learner motivation and observable engagement behavior. Where that study operated in face-to-face settings, the present research applies the same framework to the synchronous online environment and finds that the relationship holds. Furthermore, the findings align closely with Jeon & Lee (2023), who demonstrated that autonomy-supportive instruction and confidence-building feedback in synchronous online EFL classes significantly reduce anxiety and increase student engagement. What this study adds to that finding is a detailed, session-level account of how those strategies function in practice, documenting not just their outcomes but their interactional texture, the

specific moments of affective shift, the language the teacher used, and the ways students responded.

The findings also extend the literature in one particularly meaningful direction: they complicate the assumption, present in some technology-focused research, that online anxiety is primarily a function of the digital medium itself. The data gathered in this study suggest otherwise. Cameras remained off across four of the five sessions, a condition that the literature consistently associates with reduced social presence and heightened anxiety in online learning environments (Wang & Zhang, 2023; Zhou, 2023). Yet participation was consistently high, verbal engagement was strong, and students reported feeling emotionally supported and comfortable. This finding suggests that the relational quality of instruction, the teacher's tone, responsiveness, and emotional availability, can compensate for the reduced non-verbal affordances of the online environment in ways that the technological affordances alone cannot. It is not the platform that lowers the filter; it is the person teaching through it.

This conclusion resonates strongly with Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2021) humanized pedagogical framework, which argues that in mediated virtual environments, the teacher bears a heightened ethical responsibility as an emotional mediator, since students lack many of the reassurance cues available in face-to-face interaction. The findings of this study offer empirical support for that theoretical claim, demonstrating that when teachers actively construct emotional safety through consistent verbal encouragement, non-judgmental correction, and genuine relational warmth, the physical absence of the traditional classroom does not prevent meaningful and confident language use from occurring.

While the findings of this study speak to the broader international literature on affective variables in online EFL learning, they acquire a particular significance when read within the

Colombian educational context that gave rise to them. Colombia's rapid and largely unplanned transition to virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic exposed longstanding inequalities in teacher preparation, institutional support, and pedagogical readiness for online instruction. As Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2016; 2021) have documented, the integration of technology into English language teaching in Colombia has often been driven by institutional mandates rather than reflective pedagogical design, leaving many teachers without the frameworks necessary to address the emotional and motivational needs of learners in virtual spaces.

The study conducted at the Fundación Centro Cultural Colombo Americano Cali is situated precisely within this reality. The institution is a well-established private language center that serves adult learners with diverse professional and academic backgrounds, many of whom bring to their English classes a history of prior negative affective experiences in language learning, including fear of public evaluation, sensitivity to peer comparison, and anxiety rooted in formal educational encounters that prioritized accuracy over communication. The baseline survey data gathered for this study reflect this profile clearly: students reported nervousness about pronunciation, fear of going blank in front of peers, and a strong preference for non-graded and relational learning environments as the conditions most conducive to their growth.

Muñoz & Correa Pérez (2023) found that fear of negative evaluation remains the primary driver of the affective filter among local EFL learners in Colombia, and the baseline data of this study confirm that finding at the level of individual learner experience. What this study contributes beyond that confirmation is a tested intervention that directly addresses those fears within the specific conditions of synchronous online instruction, demonstrating that the affective barriers identified in Colombian EFL research are not fixed characteristics of local learners but pedagogically mediated phenomena that can be intentionally and systematically reduced.

This is a contribution with meaningful practical reach. Colombia's network of Colombo Americano centers, bilingualism programs, and private language institutes collectively serves hundreds of thousands of adult and young adult learners in both face-to-face and increasingly hybrid and online formats. The evidence gathered in this study suggests that a relatively small set of deliberate pedagogical choices, warm-up activities that prioritize personal connection over linguistic accuracy, feedback practices that praise effort alongside form, task designs that create low-stakes spaces for oral risk-taking, and an interactional style that normalizes error as part of learning, can produce meaningful and measurable improvements in learner confidence and engagement. These are not strategies that require expensive platforms, specialized training programs, or radical curricular redesign. They are, at their core, expressions of a commitment to seeing students as whole human beings whose emotional experience of learning is inseparable from their linguistic development.

The most immediate implication of this study is directed at EFL teachers working in synchronous online environments, whether in Colombia or in comparable contexts internationally: affective filter reduction is not a secondary concern to be addressed after linguistic instruction is in place, but a foundational condition that must be actively constructed from the first minutes of every session. The data gathered across five sessions demonstrate that the way a class begins, whether with a warm, accessible, and low-pressure exchange or with an immediate transition into structured linguistic content, sets an affective tone that shapes students' willingness to participate throughout the entire lesson.

For teachers, this means that the warm-up is not a peripheral warm-up but a central pedagogical act. The informal questions, the modeling of responses, the light humor, and the genuine curiosity about students' experiences that characterized the opening of each session in

this intervention were not decorative gestures, but the architectural foundation of the low-anxiety classroom environment documented in the observations and confirmed in the surveys. Teachers who understand this are better equipped to make the time investment that relational opening routines require, even in classes where content pressure is high and time is limited.

A second implication concerns the practice of error correction. The data consistently show that students' affective filter was most stable when corrections were delivered within a relational context of trust and non-judgment, when they were embedded in reformulations rather than direct criticism, when they followed the completion of a student's idea rather than interrupting it, and when the teacher explicitly framed the classroom as a space where mistakes are expected and welcomed as part of learning. The critical incident documented in Session 3, in which the teacher told students to say thank you rather than sorry when receiving corrections, is a small but emblematic example of how a single interactional move can reframe the entire affective meaning of error correction. Teachers who internalize this reframing and apply it consistently are likely to see its effects accumulate over time in the form of greater oral risk-taking and more extended student utterances.

A third implication concerns the design of speaking tasks. The data across all instruments converge on a clear finding: meaning-focused, opinion-based, and experience-connected communicative tasks generated significantly higher levels of spontaneous oral participation than accuracy-focused or form-centered activities. This does not mean that grammar instruction has no place in the affectively sensitive classroom, but it does mean that the affective conditions necessary for productive grammar learning are the same ones that support communicative development: safety, relevance, and a sense that effort is valued regardless of accuracy. Teachers who embed grammar instruction within communicative contexts, using inductive approaches,

visual modeling, and personalized examples, are more likely to maintain the low-anxiety environment across all phases of the lesson rather than only during free-speaking activities.

Finally, this study has implications for how teachers understand their own role in online instruction. The findings are unambiguous on this point: it is the human quality of the teacher's presence, not the technological features of the platform, that most powerfully shapes students' affective experience of synchronous online learning. This means that teacher preparation for online instruction must go beyond training in platform functionality and extend to the development of what might be called affective pedagogical competence: the ability to read emotional climates through a screen, to calibrate the relational register of one's language in real time, to scaffold hesitation without undermining autonomy, and to sustain genuine warmth and encouragement across sessions that may lack the visual and physical cues of face-to-face interaction. In the Colombian context, where teacher preparation for online EFL instruction remains uneven, this finding points toward a pressing professional development need.

This study was conducted with intellectual honesty, and honesty requires an acknowledgment of its limitations. The first and most significant limitation is the small sample size. With approximately six students per session and eleven respondents in the pre-intervention survey, the findings cannot be generalized beyond the specific instructional context in which the study was conducted. While qualitative action research does not seek statistical generalizability but rather depth, transferability, and contextual insight, the small scale of the study means that some patterns, particularly those related to individual variation in anxiety reduction, could not be explored with the richness that a larger sample would allow.

A second limitation concerns the duration of the intervention. Four weeks is sufficient to produce observable and meaningful changes in classroom dynamics and students' self-reported

affective experience, as the data demonstrate. However, it is not sufficient to determine whether those changes are sustained over time, whether learners maintain increased confidence and willingness to communicate in subsequent courses, or whether the affective shifts documented here translate into measurable gains in linguistic proficiency. Longitudinal research tracking the same learners across a full academic semester or year would be necessary to address these questions.

A third limitation is related to the role of the researcher in the instructional process. Because this is an action research study, the teacher and the researcher were part of the same team, and in some sessions, the observer was a fellow student researcher rather than an independent evaluator. While measures were taken to ensure rigor, including inter-rater reliability through independent coding of 20% of sessions and member checking with selected participants, the potential for researcher proximity to influence both the implementation of the intervention and the interpretation of the data cannot be fully eliminated. Future studies would benefit from the involvement of an independent observer throughout all sessions.

A fourth limitation concerns the absence of a control group. Because this is an action research study rather than a quasi-experimental design, there was no comparison group of students receiving instruction without the motivational intervention. While the pre-intervention baseline survey provides a point of contrast, and while the qualitative data offer rich evidence of affective change across the intervention period, it is not possible to claim with certainty that the improvements observed were caused exclusively by the motivational strategies rather than by other factors, such as natural rapport development over time, student maturation, or the specific topics covered in the sessions. This is an inherent methodological constraint of action research that future studies employing mixed-methods or experimental designs could address.

Conclusions

This action research set out to evaluate the impact of a motivational strategy-based pedagogical intervention on affective filter reduction in synchronous online B1-level EFL classes at the Fundación Centro Cultural Colombo Americano Cali. The study was driven by a dual concern: an empirical gap in the literature regarding the effectiveness of classroom-level motivational interventions in real-time virtual environments, and a practical gap experienced by teachers who often lack a tested, integrative framework for applying such strategies in synchronous online settings. Over four weeks of intervention, and through the triangulated analysis of classroom observations, teacher-researcher reflective journals, and student surveys, the study has produced a coherent and consistent set of findings that speak directly to both concerns.

The first specific objective of this study was to analyze a four-week pedagogical intervention for synchronous online EFL classes that integrates selected motivational strategies from Dörnyei's (2001) framework. The intervention was built around five core components: confidence-building warm-up activities, explicit positive feedback, low-stakes speaking tasks, structured peer interaction through breakout rooms and pair work, and multimodal instructional support through interactive slides, chat monitoring, and verbal encouragement. These components were not implemented as a checklist of isolated techniques but as an integrated and relational approach to instruction, one in which the teacher assumed the role of emotional mediator rather than mere content transmitter.

The fidelity data collected across all five observed sessions confirm that this integration was achieved with a high degree of consistency. Adherence percentages ranged from 79% to 100%, with the only systematically absent component being the formal assignment of structured

group roles within collaborative tasks. This finding does not represent a failure of implementation but rather an area of refinement that emerged organically through the reflective process central to action research. The overall fidelity of the intervention demonstrates that Dörnyei's (2001) motivational framework is not only theoretically applicable to synchronous online EFL instruction but practically implementable in real classroom conditions without requiring elaborate technological resources or institutional infrastructure. This conclusion is particularly relevant for teaching contexts like the one studied, where pedagogical effectiveness must be achieved through intentional relational practice rather than technological sophistication.

The second specific objective was to evaluate the impact of the intervention on students' perception of what influenced their motivation most, positively or negatively. The data collected through both the pre- and post-intervention surveys reveal a clear and consistent answer: the factors that students perceived as most influential on their motivation were overwhelmingly relational and social rather than structural or technological. Prior to the intervention, students identified peer non-judgment, teacher praise, and non-graded speaking contexts as the primary conditions under which they felt most confident. Their reported anxiety sources, including fear of public error, pronunciation concerns, mental blocking, and worry about peer evaluation, further confirmed that the affective barriers facing this group were fundamentally interpersonal in nature.

Following the intervention, the post-intervention survey results reflect a marked shift in students' affective experience. Over 85% of respondents rated their confidence, motivation, emotional support, and attitude toward speaking English at the highest possible level. The item asked whether students felt emotionally supported by the teacher and classmates received maximum scores from five of the six respondents, as did the items related to collaborative

atmosphere, mutual respect, and willingness to continue with similar activities in the future. These results indicate that the motivational strategies implemented throughout the sessions were experienced by learners not as isolated pedagogical techniques but as expressions of a broader relational commitment to their well-being, which is precisely the humanized pedagogical orientation that Gonzalez-Valencia et al. (2021) argue is essential for meaningful learning in mediated virtual environments.

The one dimension that showed slightly more variability was anxiety management, with one student rating their ability to manage nervousness at 3 out of 5. This nuanced finding is important to acknowledge honestly: while the intervention produced significant and broadly consistent improvements in motivation, confidence, and perceived safety, the reduction of deep-seated speaking anxiety is a gradual process that cannot be fully resolved within a four-week period. This does not diminish the impact of the intervention; rather, it situates its results within a realistic and evidence-informed understanding of affective change as cumulative and ongoing.

The third specific objective was to identify the specific elements of the online learning environment that students perceived as most influential, positively or negatively, on their motivation. The data converge on a finding that is both simple and pedagogically significant: the element most consistently identified as influential was not a technological feature but a human one, namely, the teacher's interactional style and emotional presence within the virtual space.

Across observations, journals, and survey responses, the teacher's use of affirming language, scaffolded correction, informal warm-up conversations, and consistent validation of effort emerged as the primary architectural elements of the low-anxiety classroom environment. Students in the baseline survey explicitly named the teacher's praise and the absence of peer judgment as confidence triggers, and the post-intervention open-ended responses highlighted

debates, group conversations, role-based readings, and video creation tasks as the activities most supportive of their confidence. What these activities share is not a common technology but a common affective quality: they all created conditions in which students could speak, make mistakes, and receive feedback within a relational context of trust and mutual respect.

On the negative side, the data identified two elements of the online environment that, when not carefully managed, had the potential to raise the affective filter: grammar-focused and accuracy-oriented segments of the lesson, and the physical anonymity of the camera-off virtual room. Regarding the first, observations and journals consistently noted a slight increase in hesitation during controlled grammar practice, suggesting that when accuracy becomes the evaluative frame, the affective safety constructed through communicative tasks is temporarily destabilized. Regarding the second, the absence of cameras across four of the five sessions did not ultimately impede participation, which suggests that the teacher's consistent verbal encouragement and relational warmth were sufficient to compensate for the reduced non-verbal feedback that the literature identifies as one of the primary affective challenges of synchronous online learning (Zhang & Du, 2023; Wang & Zhang, 2023).

Taken together, the findings of this study provide a clear and affirmative answer to the main research objective: the motivational strategy-based pedagogical intervention had a meaningful and observable impact on affective filter reduction in synchronous online B1-level EFL classes at the Fundación Centro Cultural Colombo Americano Cali. Across all data sources, the intervention produced a consistent pattern of reduced anxiety indicators, increased oral participation, higher willingness to communicate, and a strongly positive perception of the learning environment among students. These outcomes were achieved not through technological

innovation but through the deliberate, consistent, and humanly grounded application of relational and motivational teaching practices.

This finding confirms and extends the theoretical claims at the heart of this study. Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis is not merely a historical construct but a living pedagogical reality: when anxiety is addressed, confidence is built, and motivation is sustained through intentional classroom practice, learners become more open to input, more willing to produce output, and more engaged in the collaborative construction of meaning that drives language development. Dörnyei's (2001) motivational framework provides a practical and replicable pathway for achieving this, and Gonzalez-Valencia et al (2021) humanized pedagogical lens ensures that the relational and ethical dimensions of teaching in virtual spaces are not subordinated to efficiency or content delivery but are recognized as central to the educational act itself.

This study began with the observation that synchronous online EFL instruction, even when technically accessible and linguistically well-designed, can fail to reach learners if the affective conditions necessary for acquisition are not actively constructed. Four weeks of intervention, five observed sessions, five reflective journals, and the voices of eleven students later, the evidence gathered in this classroom at the Colombo Americano Cali suggests that those conditions can indeed be constructed, intentionally and consistently, by a teacher who understands that motivation is not a trait learners either have or lack, but an experience that is created in the relational space between teacher and student, between peers, and between a learner and the language they are working to make their own. The most powerful finding of this study is perhaps the simplest: when students feel safe, they speak. And when they speak, they learn.

Recommendations

The findings and limitations of this study point toward several productive directions for future research. The first and most urgent recommendation is for studies that replicate this intervention at a larger scale, involving multiple classrooms, institutions, and teacher profiles across Colombia's network of language centers and public bilingual programs. A larger sample would allow for more nuanced analysis of individual and group variation in affective response and would strengthen the transferability of the findings to other synchronous online EFL contexts in the country.

A second recommendation is for longitudinal research that tracks the same learners across multiple academic cycles following an affective intervention of this kind. One of the most important unanswered questions raised by this study is whether the confidence and motivation documented here are sustained beyond the intervention period, and whether they translate into measurable linguistic outcomes such as increased speaking fluency, greater communicative competence, or higher course completion rates. Mixed-methods longitudinal studies that combine qualitative affective measures with quantitative linguistic performance data would be particularly valuable in addressing this gap.

A third recommendation concerns the exploration of how motivational strategies function differently across proficiency levels. This study focused on B1-level learners, a group identified in the literature as particularly sensitive to accuracy, peer comparison, and social image. It would be valuable to conduct parallel interventions at A2 and B2 levels to examine whether the same strategies produce different effective and participatory outcomes at different stages of linguistic development, and whether the relationship between proficiency level and affective vulnerability follows the pattern suggested by the theoretical framework.

A fourth recommendation is directed specifically at the Colombian context: future research should examine the professional development needs of EFL teachers in Colombian institutions with respect to affective and motivational pedagogy for online environments. The findings of this study suggest that the most powerful tools for reducing the affective filter are relational and pedagogical rather than technological, yet teacher preparation in Colombia has historically prioritized platform training over affective pedagogical competence. Studies that evaluate the impact of professional development programs centered on humanized and motivationally oriented online teaching could provide the evidence base needed to inform policy decisions at the institutional and national level, including those related to the implementation of Colombia's ongoing bilingualism programs.

Finally, future research would benefit from incorporating student voices more deeply and systematically throughout the intervention process, not only in post-intervention surveys but through ongoing reflective conversations, learner diaries, or collaborative self-assessment tools that allow students to track their own affective trajectories in real time. Such approaches would not only enrich the data available for analysis but would themselves constitute a motivational strategy, one that positions learners as active agents in understanding and managing their own emotional experience of language learning. In this way, the affective filter would become not only an object of research but a subject of shared pedagogical inquiry between teachers and students, which is perhaps the most humanized form that this line of research could take.

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