

The Role of Teachers in Emotional Regulation and Student Engagement in Second Language Acquisition: A Positive Psychology Perspective on Teaching Communication Strategies

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Abstract: The role of teachers in emotional regulation and student engagement during second language acquisition (SLA) from the perspective of positive psychology matters. It highlights how the communication strategies of teachers, such as empathy and positive guidance, significantly impact the learning experiences of students. These strategies, often referred to as “teaching communication strategies” or “instructional communication strategies,” include supportive teaching interactions and positive teaching methods. Through interviews and observations, the research identifies that teachers’ application of positive psychology strategies—such as providing constructive feedback, encouraging student collaboration and mutual support, and setting realistic learning goals—effectively enhances motivation and engagement. The findings indicate that teachers’ emotional regulation strategies not only enhance students’ language acquisition abilities but also promote their psychological and emotional well-being, providing new theoretical and practical support for SLA.

Keywords: positive psychology, second language acquisition, emotional regulation, learning motivation, teacher role, teaching communication strategies

1. Introduction

Positive psychology, founded by Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in 2000, focuses on studying human positive emotions, strengths, and the good life. Lake (2013) is one of the pioneering scholars in the field of SLA to explicitly adopt the perspective of Positive Psychology (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014)^[1]. Various emotions, such as anxiety, enjoyment, and boredom, have since received widespread attention. Empirical studies have flourished, and the importance of emotions alongside cognition has gradually gained recognition (Li et al., 2024)^[2]. In the context of second language acquisition, positive psychology emphasizes enhancing students’ language learning outcomes and motivation through the development of positive emotions and psychological resources. For instance, Fredrickson’s broaden-and-build theory suggests that positive emotions can expand an individual’s cognitive and behavioral patterns, thereby enhancing language learning capabilities. In addition, Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis emphasizes the impact of affective factors, which can influence a learner’s ability to receive and process language input.

2. Literature Review

In foreign countries, the study of positive psychology in the field of second language acquisition has seen significant development. For instance, MacIntyre P D , & Mercer S (2014) highlighted the impact of positive psychology, particularly the positive self-beliefs, sense of capability, growth mindset, and optimistic emotions related to positive change, providing perspectives and ideas for research on emotional regulation in the field of second language acquisition^[1]. Additionally, Wang Y, Derakhshan A & Zhang L J (2021) explored the impact of teacher emotions on second language acquisition from a positive psychology perspective, offering insights into emotional regulation in this field^[3].

In contrast, relatively few researchers in China have adopted a PP perspective to study L2 learning emotions. From 2000 to the present, there have been 175 articles on CNKI related to positive

psychology and second language acquisition, indicating increased attention by Chinese scholars to the application of positive psychology in second language learning. However, existing research primarily focuses on the psychological experiences of students, discussing how to enhance language acquisition by boosting students' positive emotions and most studies investigate the relationship between positive emotion and students' academic performance generally.

This study shifts the focus towards the communication strategies employed by teachers. These strategies, encompassing empathy and positive guidance, can be collectively termed as “teaching communication strategies” or “instructional communication strategies (Hattie, 2012).^[4]” Within the field of education, these approaches are also known as “supportive teaching interactions” or “positive teaching methods.” The significance of these strategies lies in their ability to foster a supportive and motivating learning environment.

Empathy involves teachers understanding and responding to students' emotions, thereby building trust and a sense of security. Positive guidance includes providing constructive feedback and encouragement to enhance students' motivation and self-efficacy. These supportive teaching communication strategies significantly impact students' psychological and emotional well-being, as well as their learning outcomes. Through these strategies, this study aims to reveal how teacher emotional regulation plays a crucial role in enhancing student motivation and participation, thus providing new theoretical and practical support for second language acquisition.

Moreover, Chengchen Li (2021) summarized that future research should broaden the scope of psychological studies in foreign language learning by breaking the “classroom boundaries” and promoting the integration of in-class and out-of-class environments^[5]. This is particularly relevant in the context of language teaching in the new technological era. This study includes additional settings such as homework collection and after-school English activities.

3. Theoretical Basis

3.1. Broaden-and-Build Theory by Barbara Fredrickson

The Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson 2001), proposed by Barbara Fredrickson, a prominent figure in positive psychology, explores the impact of positive emotions on individuals' psychological and behavioral aspects^[6]. Positive emotions (such as joy, interest, and satisfaction) can broaden an individual's attention and thinking. This expansion allows individuals to perceive and accept new possibilities and choices. In contrast, negative emotions (such as anxiety, anger, and sadness) tend to narrow an individual's focus, centering attention on threats or problems.

This theory can be applied in education. Teachers can foster a positive classroom atmosphere by praising and encouraging students. This approach promotes positive emotions, thereby enhancing students' motivation and cognitive abilities. Integrating emotion management and positive psychology courses into the curriculum can help students learn how to regulate their emotions, increasing their self-efficacy and psychological resilience.

3.2. Affective Filter Hypothesis by Stephen Krashen

Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis is a crucial component of his Second Language Acquisition theory. This hypothesis posits that a learner's emotional state directly impacts the effectiveness of language input processing.

Affective Filter: The affective filter is a metaphor used to describe emotional factors that influence the processing of language input. When students experience high anxiety or stress, the affective filter “closes,” obstructing the effective processing of language input. Conversely, when students are relaxed, confident, and in a positive emotional state, the affective filter “opens,” facilitating the reception and processing of language input.

Emotional States and Language Acquisition: Krashen suggests that the emotional state of learners—whether positive or negative—can either hinder or help language acquisition. Positive emotional states such as confidence and relaxation can lower the affective filter, making it easier for learners to absorb and process new language inputs. Negative emotions like anxiety and stress can raise the affective filter, blocking language inputs from being effectively processed.

4. Research process

4.1. Research Question

How do teachers' emotion regulation strategies in the process of second language acquisition comprehensively impact students' learning motivation and engagement? This question aims to investigate the comprehensive impact of teachers' emotion regulation strategies, such as promoting positive emotions and guiding negative emotions, on students' overall learning motivation and classroom engagement.

4.2. Research Object

The researcher employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis methods for the study. The research subjects selected were first-year university students who are not majoring in English. The study duration was one year. The researcher conducted the survey using a questionnaire and monitored response time and repetition rate of answers through the software backend to ensure the authenticity and validity of the data. A total of 146 valid questionnaires were collected. The questions were set according to Seligman's (2011) PERMA model, which reflects multiple dimensions of the good life, including Positive Emotion (P), Engagement (E), Relationships (R), Meaning (M), and Accomplishment (A). Researchers used a survey tool developed by Rensis Likert, known as the Likert Scale, to quantify students' attitudes towards language learning^[7]. This scale typically includes five options reflecting varying degrees of agreement or disagreement, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The researcher then selected three students with significantly different responses for further analysis. In our study, we observed significant changes in student attitudes and work quality over the course of the intervention. These changes are summarized and detailed in Table 1 in the appendix. This table provides a comprehensive overview of the initial and final attitudes of the participants, as well as the quality of their work both originally and at the end of the study.

Table 1: Changes in Student Attitudes and Work Quality

Participant	Gender	Initial Attitude	Final Attitude	Original Work	Present Work
Student A	Male	Strongly dissatisfied	Free to share gratitude	Delay&uncertain quality	On time with A's
Student B	Female	Strongly confident	Close to natural	On time with A's	On time with A's
Student C	Male	Normal	High-value of positive	Normal state	On time with A's

4.3. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative text analysis through sentiment analysis with qualitative methods of interviews and observations to explore the impact of teachers' emotion regulation strategies on students' learning motivation and engagement in second language acquisition (SLA).

4.3.1. Qualitative Analysis through Interviews and Observations

Interviews and observations provided a deeper understanding of the emotional and motivational dynamics in the classroom. The researcher conducted detailed interviews with both teachers and students and carried out classroom observations to gather rich, contextual data.

Case Studies

First Student: Initially, this student demonstrated considerable dissatisfaction with the assignment distribution process at the beginning of the class. Upon the teacher's use of a WeChat mini-program to assign tasks, the student not only failed to submit the assignments on time but also made public negative comments. In response to this issue, the teacher provided timely counseling. Prior to the class, the teacher conducted a calm, one-on-one inquiry to fully understand the circumstances. It was found that the student's after-school club activities conflicted with the assignment submission deadlines. The student had completed the assignments but did not manage to submit them successfully, resulting in feelings of frustration and anger. After identifying the cause, the teacher tried to comfort the student by expressing understanding. This behavior can help shift the student's mindset back to a positive state. By applying the broad-and-build theory, the teacher can then develop a better solution and outline a

more promising future for the student.

As the teacher mentioned in the interview:

I noticed that the student was very dissatisfied with the assignment I gave. I felt it was important to understand the cause quickly. Considering the student's self-esteem, I decided to have a private conversation with him before the next class. To ease the tension and build rapport, I first empathized with him and affirmed his character. I said, "Student A, I have always thought you were an excellent and motivated student. What caused such a strong emotional reaction yesterday? Did you encounter any difficulties while completing the assignment?" The student replied, "Yes, teacher, I had a club activity at that time, so I couldn't submit the assignment. I wasn't angry with you." The teacher responded, "I see, so it was a scheduling conflict that made you feel frustrated about not being able to submit the completed assignment." (The student nodded.) The teacher continued, "Next time, could you submit the assignment a bit earlier or discuss the issue with me privately? Also, the negative comments you made in the group were probably impulsive, and you regretted them afterward, right?" The student replied, "Yes, teacher, I understand now" (Student A, personal communication, Oct. 20, 2023).

Both the teacher and the student mentioned this incident during the interview. Subsequently, the researcher referred to the relevant observation guide.

Second Student: The second student exhibits an overall high proficiency in English and strong confidence in her English language learning abilities. She consistently completes her assignments on time and to a high standard. This positive performance persisted throughout the first semester. However, during the midterm of the second semester, she participated in a speech competition. Due to her high self-expectations, she became extremely nervous during the competition, which led to a poor performance and significant disappointment. At this point, the teacher identified a specific issue: while the student displays high levels of foreign language enjoyment and values the importance of English, she lacks sufficient foreign language resilience—grit. Grit refers to the learner's sustained interest in second language acquisition and their commitment to mastering the language as a long-term goal. It involves consistent practice of language content, the use of various self-regulation strategies, and prolonged dedication to language learning (Liu, Fang & Teng, 2021)^[8].

During the interview, the teacher and student discussed a recent speech competition where the student was asked to deliver a story about China in English. The teacher asked, "How did you perform in the competition?" The student responded, "I could recite the speech fluently offstage, but my mind went blank as soon as I got on stage. The judges said my pronunciation was good, but I couldn't remember the content." The teacher replied, "Were you nervous? You have always set high standards for yourself, wanting to perform perfectly, which put a lot of pressure on you, making it hard to remember the content." The student agreed, "Yes, it was heartbreaking." The teacher reassured, "It's okay. I used to feel the same way. You set high expectations for yourself. Next time, try to focus on the experience itself rather than worrying too much about others' evaluations or the final result" (Student B, personal communication, Dec. 15, 2023).

Third Student: The third student was an average performer at the beginning of the first semester. During an interview with the teacher, it was mentioned that the student's first outstanding performance occurred with a writing assignment titled "My Dream Job." The next day, during the sharing session, the teacher highly praised the student's writing and asked him to read it aloud in front of the entire class. The teacher observed that the student was very encouraged, as evidenced by his poised delivery and enthusiastic language. Following this event, the student began to actively participate in class discussions and various competitions, showing significant improvement.

Teacher's Perspective: Q: How do you think these strategies have affected students' motivation to learn? Can you provide specific examples?

A: I believe these strategies have had a significant positive impact on students' motivation to learn. For instance, one student, who was initially an average performer, showed remarkable improvement after being praised for a writing assignment titled "My Dream Job." The next day, during the sharing session, I highly praised his writing and asked him to read it aloud in front of the entire class. From his confident delivery and enthusiastic language, it was clear that he felt very encouraged. Since then, he has become more active in class, regularly participating in discussions and various competitions.

Q: Have you noticed any changes in students' attitudes, participation, or performance?

A: Yes, there have been noticeable changes in students' attitudes, participation, and performance.

For example, the same student who excelled in the “My Dream Job” assignment began to show a much more positive attitude towards learning. He started to actively answer questions in class and participate in extracurricular activities, including competitions. This shift in behavior and increased engagement in class activities have also been reflected in his improved academic performance. (Teacher, personal communication, Oct. 20, 2023)

4.3.2. Quantitative Text Analysis through Sentiment Analysis

To complement the survey data, sentiment analysis was employed to evaluate the emotional tone of teacher-student interactions. This method leverages natural language processing (NLP) to systematically quantify and analyze the emotional content of textual data, providing insights into the affective dynamics of classroom communication.

- Sentiment Scoring

The software provided a sentiment score indicating whether the text was positive, neutral, or negative. This helped in assessing the overall emotional tone of the conversations.

- Magnitude

The magnitude reflected the overall strength of sentiment, indicating the intensity of emotional content.

- Highlighted Keywords

Specific words or phrases contributing significantly to the sentiment score were identified, helping to pinpoint areas that might need improvement in communication strategies.

4.4. Research Finding

4.4.1. Analysis of Sentiment Analysis Results

Fig. 1. Sentiment Analysis Results of Teacher-Student Interaction:

This analysis reflects a predominantly negative emotional tone in the teacher-student interaction. The highlighted words indicate the student’s frustration and regret over their impulsive actions. The teacher’s approach to addressing these emotions, while initially negative, aims to foster understanding and constructive feedback.



Highlighted Words: frustrated, negative comments, impulsive, regretted

Sentiment Score: Negative (-0.64)

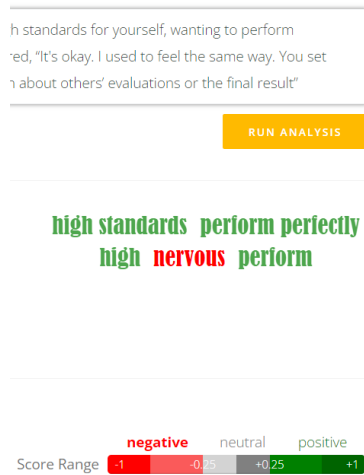
Magnitude: 2.27

Subjectivity: Subjective

Figure 1: Sentiment Analysis Results of Teacher-Student Interaction

Fig. 2. Sentiment Analysis of Teacher-Student Interaction with Positive Guidance:

The analysis here shows a mixture of negative and positive elements. While the student felt nervous and pressured to perform perfectly, the teacher’s response provides reassurance and shares personal experiences to mitigate these negative feelings. This demonstrates the teacher’s role in transforming negative emotions into a learning opportunity.

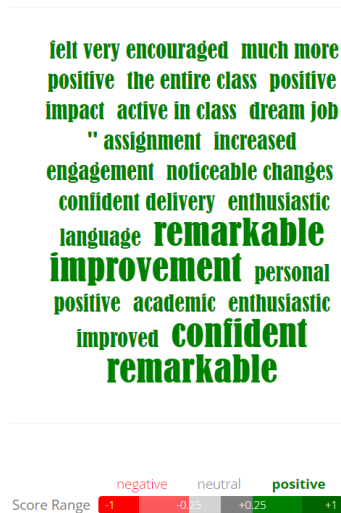


Highlighted Words: nervous, high standards, perform perfectly
Sentiment Score: Negative (-0.60)
Magnitude: 2.43
Subjectivity: Subjective

Figure 2: Sentiment Analysis of Teacher-Student Interaction with Positive Guidance

Fig. 3. Positive Sentiment Analysis of Teacher-Student Interaction:

This analysis highlights the positive impact of the teacher’s praise and encouragement on the student. The significant positive sentiment indicates that the teacher’s strategies effectively boosted the student’s confidence, engagement, and overall academic performance.



Highlighted Words: positive impact, remarkable improvement, confident, enthusiastic, increased engagement, improved academic performance
Sentiment Score: Positive (+0.70)
Magnitude: 6.14
Subjectivity: Objective

Figure 3: Positive Sentiment Analysis of Teacher-Student Interaction

4.4.2. Integrating Positive Psychology and Sentiment Analysis

These three examples show the role of teachers in promoting second language acquisition through the lens of positive psychology. By integrating examples from the broad-and-build theory with Stephen Krashen’s affective filter hypothesis, we can better understand how positive emotions and supportive teacher-student interactions facilitate effective language learning.

Empathy and understanding to broaden perspectives

By addressing the issue with empathy and understanding, the teacher was able to help the student broaden his perspective significantly. Initially, the student experienced considerable frustration due to a scheduling conflict between his club activities and assignment deadlines, which resulted in him not being able to submit his completed work on time. The teacher's approach of engaging in a private conversation, where the student felt safe and respected, allowed the student to express his feelings openly. This empathetic engagement enabled the student to see the situation from a broader perspective. He began to understand that his frustration was not due to a personal failure but rather a logistical issue that could be managed with better planning and communication. By considering alternative solutions, such as adjusting submission times or discussing potential conflicts with the teacher in advance, the student adopted a more positive and proactive approach to future challenges. This shift in mindset aligns with Fredrickson's broad-and-build theory, which posits that positive emotions and supportive interactions can expand an individual's thinking and problem-solving capabilities, thereby fostering resilience and adaptability. According to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, lowering the affective filter (i.e., reducing anxiety and boosting confidence) is crucial for effective SLA. The teacher's empathetic and understanding approach likely reduced the student's anxiety, thereby lowering his affective filter and facilitating better language acquisition.

Building grit through reassurance and shared experiences

From a pedagogical practice perspective, teachers can implement intervention measures to focus on and enhance students' levels of "grit" in second language acquisition (Gyamfi & Lai, 2020)^[9]. By providing reassurance and sharing personal experiences, the teacher was instrumental in helping the student build resilience and coping strategies. During a speech competition, the student, who usually performed exceptionally well, became extremely nervous and forgot her lines, leading to a disappointing performance. The teacher's response was pivotal; instead of focusing on the failure, the teacher reassured the student and shared a similar personal experience of dealing with high expectations and pressure. This empathetic approach helped the student feel understood and supported, reducing the immediate impact of the negative experience. Furthermore, the teacher's advice to focus on the experience rather than the outcome provided the student with practical coping strategies for managing performance anxiety. These strategies are crucial enduring personal resources that the student can draw upon in future high-pressure situations, enhancing her overall resilience. This interaction demonstrates the principle of broad-and-build theory that positive emotions, such as feeling supported and understood, help build long-term psychological resources like resilience and effective coping mechanisms. In the context of Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, this supportive interaction would lower the student's affective filter by reducing performance anxiety and increasing confidence, thereby enhancing her ability to acquire a second language effectively.

Enhancing engagement and performance through positive feedback

This example illustrates how positive feedback and encouragement can significantly enhance a student's engagement and performance. The student, who was initially an average performer, experienced a transformative moment when his writing assignment on "My Dream Job" was praised by the teacher and shared with the class. The teacher's high praise and the opportunity to read his work aloud in front of peers not only boosted the student's confidence but also validated his efforts and abilities. This positive reinforcement led to a noticeable change in the student's behavior. He began to actively participate in class discussions and engage in various competitions. The student's increased involvement and improved performance reflect the core tenet of the broad-and-build theory, which suggests that positive emotions and experiences build enduring personal resources. In this case, the student's enhanced self-esteem and motivation are resources that will continue to support his academic and personal growth. By creating an environment where achievements are recognized and celebrated, the teacher helped the student develop a stronger sense of competence and engagement, which is critical for sustained academic success. In line with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, this positive reinforcement likely lowered the student's affective filter, thereby creating an optimal emotional state for language learning and improving his overall SLA outcomes.

5. Conclusion

It is imperative that educators tailor their teaching approaches to accommodate the diverse personality traits of their students. By gaining a comprehensive understanding of each student's unique personality characteristics, teachers can design and implement more targeted instructional content and methodologies. This personalized approach not only fosters a more engaging learning environment but

also significantly enhances the overall effectiveness of language acquisition. Adapting teaching strategies to align with students' individual personality traits allows for more efficient learning and better academic outcomes in second language education.

Positive Psychology interventions can be utilized as an effective pedagogical strategy that not only enhances foreign language learning but also improves students' emotional experiences associated with language acquisition. These interventions contribute to increasing students' well-being in language learning, thereby fostering a positive classroom environment. Positive Psychology interventions embody strong humanistic educational principles by emphasizing the central role of students. They address both students' cognitive and emotional needs, promoting a balanced and comprehensive educational approach that values knowledge acquisition and emotional well-being equally (Jiang G & Li, C., 2017)^[10].

By combining insights from positive psychology and the broad-and-build theory with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, it is evident that teachers play a crucial role in promoting effective SLA. Through empathy, reassurance, and positive reinforcement, teachers can lower students' affective filters, thereby enhancing their ability to acquire a second language and fostering a more supportive and motivating learning environment. This comprehensive approach not only improves language acquisition but also contributes to the overall development of students' psychological and emotional well-being, which is essential for their long-term success.

In my essay, I have presented some representative fragments for analysis. However, it is essential to acknowledge that emotion is a dynamic and complex state in daily life. Emotions cannot be compartmentalized into fixed periods and defined as students' permanent emotional states. Emotions fluctuate and evolve over time, influenced by a myriad of factors. Therefore, understanding and addressing the emotional experiences of students in second language acquisition requires a comprehensive and continuous approach, rather than a static and simplistic one.

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