Bridging the Gap: Change in Class Environment to Help Learners Lower Affective Filters

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Abstract
The present research was aimed at identifying the cause for poor performance of adult English as foreign language (EFL) learners in Saudi Arabia, as well as to test the hypothesis that one of the major causes behind learners' failure may be affective filters. The basic question to answer for the research was whether adult EFL learners raise their affective filters to block the input under the influence of certain affective factors, and whether a change in the class environment brings a change in learner motivation. To this end, data were collected through questionnaires, and a model teaching programme, based on a change in classroom environment, was developed and tested with a group of learners at the selected university in Saudi Arabia. The results obtained from the study show that EFL learners in Saudi Arabia raise affective filters, and that a change in classroom environment does help learners lower their affective filters. The study is very significant as its findings may prove helpful to EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia to create a conducive environment in their classes to help learners feel at ease to learn English, which at times is emotionally intimidating to some learners. The study is concluded with a recommendation that EFL teachers may replicate the experiment in their settings to test the efficacy of the hypothesis on psycholinguistic aspects of foreign language learning.
Keywords: affective filters, anxiety, classroom environment modification, negative self-evaluation, self-confidence

Introduction

In Saudi Arabia English is taught as a foreign language. But, commonly, learners' linguistic skills are noted to remain below acceptable standards. Al-Seghayer (2011), for instance, points out that the standard of English has fallen down in Saudi Arabia considerably. Our observation is that among several reasons behind this systemic failure, one possible reason is that adult learners come to the class with affective barriers to learning English, and the classroom environment may have something to do with it as it may be a bit intimidating to some learners (Saba, 2013; Al-Nasser, 2015). Affective barriers may be multiple; individual-specific as well as common barriers affecting a larger learner population, but lack of motivation, low self-confidence and anxiety affect almost all, and therefore, are the commonest of all barriers. Study of English language learning barriers is a comparatively new field of research for Arabic scholars working in the area of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education specific to the Arabic region. We have chosen this field specifically for two reasons: there are not many studies in this area, while there is an urgent requirement to explore the cause-and-effect relationship between EFL learning and the barriers hindering it. We have made an attempt to identify the affective barriers, if any, hindering the learning process of adult Saudi EFL learners, and to test through an experimental study whether a few changes in the classroom setting would help learners change their negative self-evaluation concerning EFL learning. Our emphasis is on investigating three major affective factors, i.e., low motivation, low self-confidence and high language anxiety, which Krashen (1987) calls "Affective Filters." Krashen's idea is that only comprehensible input is not enough for successful acquisition of a foreign language. There is a need for language learners to be receptive to the input received. The processing of the input can be negatively affected if learners are bored, angry, frustrated, nervous, unmotivated or stressed out. In such mental conditions, learners do not process the input, or rather, they 'screen' the input. Krashen calls this screen as "affective filter." Our belief is that frustration and nervousness may be induced by a certain kind of class atmosphere.

Research Background: Literature Review

Affective Filters and Foreign Language Learning

If teaching of a subject doesn't produce the expected results despite the best facilities for learners, right environment for learning and the right approach to teaching, the problem may lie either with the teaching materials in use or with the learners' tendency to raise their affective filters. Teaching of English in Saudi Arabia faces a similar conundrum. The restrictive space in the classroom between the teacher and the students appears to be a possible factor behind affective screening of the input. Adult learning may get affected negatively by several factors, resulting in poor learner performance. Such factors are termed as 'barriers' in the present paper. Conn (1995) groups barriers into three categories: "institutional barriers" (practices that exclude or discourage adults), "situational barriers" (arising from one's life situation), and "dispositional barriers" (attitudes and perceptions about oneself as learner). Dispositional barriers are psychological in nature as they reflect the attitude of learners towards something, for instance, language learning, that induces them to visualize it negatively. The major dispositional barriers to second language (SL) learning are four: language anxiety, low self-image, lack of motivation, and negative attitude towards the language (Bandura, 1986; Cohen & Norst, 1989; Lambert, 1972; Littlewood, 1984). These dispositional barriers may prompt SL learners to not allow any input filtering into their brains. In language teaching contexts, this situation is termed as 'raising affective filters,' and the concept was popularised by Stephen Krashen (1981) through his "affective filters hypothesis." Since then

several research studies have proved the real-time existence of affective filters among FL learners, influenced by affective factors, such as low motivation, low self-confidence and high anxiety (Andrade & Williams, 2009; Clement, Dornyei, & Noels,1994; Cohen & Norst,1989; Dislen, 2013; Dörnyei, 1998; Du, 2009; Gardner & Lambert,1972; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope,1986; Huitt, 2001; La Spisa, 2015; MacIntyre & Gardner,1989; Ni, 2012; Örmeci, 2013; Ranjbar & Narafshan, 2016; Schumann, 1975; Watkins, Biggs, & Regmi, 1991).

SL learners may raise their affective filters for various reasons, such as disinterest, tiredness, bad health, and so on. Schumann (1975) speaks of the affective variables like, language shock, culture shock, attitude, motivation and ego permeability to SL acquisition and suggests that affective variables may play an important role in adult SL acquisition. Bialystok (1997) believes that "correspondence between language structures in the first and second language is the most important factor affecting acquisition" (p. 124). Fear of ridicule by peers may cause anxiety; lack of knowledge of language fundamentals at advanced age may cause low self-image; lack of motivation may be caused if learners visualize no significance of SL in their lives. Mother-tongue influence also plays a role in causing affective barriers. Our focus in the present study is on classroom environment, which to some learners may not appear to be conducive, prompting them to have low motivation, low self-confidence and high anxiety.

Motivation
Motivation has been studied extensively, specifically with regard to language learning (Dörnyei, 2005, 2001, 1998; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Spolsky, 2000). Researchers find a relationship between motivation and human behaviour, that is, if motivated, man behaves positively, whereas, if unmotivated, he behaves negatively (Dislen, 2013). In SL learning theory, motivation is a construct, affected by intrinsic or extrinsic factors, and a change in variables usually brings about a change in learner motivation (Huitt, 2001; Lasagabaster et al., 2014). Gagne (2003) notes that personal initiatives enhance autonomous motivation (p. 385). To us 'motivation' is an 'affect' and 'attitudinal complex' (based on Dörnyei 1998), the state of learners' mental make-up initiating the action of learning and maintaining it till the goal is achieved. The point is significant as we assume that motivation can be enhanced and learners may be induced to shed psychological inhibitions if their motivation levels are raised. Harper (2007) believes that "meaningful choice engenders willingness, and the willingness is the door to increased motivation" (p. 25). Ranjbar and Narafshan (2016) also note that "teachers' instrumental motivation is the most important factor in predicating the students' integrative motivation.

Research on motivation as an affective factor and its effects on language learning show mixed results. Yazigy (1991) doesn't find a strong relationship between students' attitude towards English and their performance in the language. On the other hand, Al-Mekhlafi (2010) finds that "motivation plays a very significant role in learning a foreign language" (p. 158). Ragu Ram et al. (2015) also report a positive relation between motivation and foreign language learning. A few other researchers who find a positive relation between these constructs include Bialystok (1997), Du (2009), Khan (2011), Ni (2012), Örmeci (2013), and Huang (2015).

Self-Confidence

We have used the term 'self-confidence' to denote self-evaluation, i.e., learners' evaluation of their abilities and attributes vis-à-vis the task at hand. If SL learners have a low evaluation of their abilities, their speech is affected adversely. The construct has attracted researchers' attention as a debilitating barrier among SL learners. Brodkey and Shore (1976), Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Watkins, Biggs, and Regmi (1991) studied factors for success in language learning, including self-confidence, and as notes Brown and Marshall (2006), their results show that self-confidence is an important variable in SL acquisition, "particularly in view of cross-cultural factors of second language learning…" (p. 142). Learners' self-confidence, can be enhanced through some measures, such as generating "a feeling of responsibility and independence" among learners (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Dişlen, 2013; Gerndt, 2014; Grant & Dweck, 2003; Nakamura, 2000; Scharle & Szabo, 2005). Deci and Ryan (2000) put greater emphasis on learners' autonomy to boost their self-confidence. Autonomy is concerned with the atmosphere a teacher creates in the class: a positive atmosphere leads to greater learner autonomy which in turn enhances their self-confidence. Though this claim is refuted by Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994) who say that self-confidence and anxiety show no relationship to classroom atmosphere, the present research is founded on the premise of a direct relationship between classroom atmosphere and learner self-confidence.

Anxiety

Anxiety is an emotion associated with the feeling of stress, tension, and worry. In FL learning context, anxiety is reflected in learners' nervousness in using the language. An anxious learner may avoid using the language with others. There may be a few similarities between FL anxiety and communication anxiety in general (Horwitz et al., 1986), but Allwright and Bailey (1991) find that high language anxiety can deprive FL learners of even their normal means of communication. Language anxiety may prompt learners to apply less challenging strategies, but such strategies may be less productive. Steinberg and Horwitz (1986) report that anxious learners avoid difficult messages and go for less interpretive messages than they do if free from anxiety. Even simple oral tasks make anxious learners nervous, and they feel jittery if their performance is evaluated (Allwright and Bailey,1991; Price,1991). FL learners may be affected by anxiety in any of the language skills (Andrade & Williams, 2009; Brown & Marshall, 2006; McIntyre, 1995; McIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Reading anxiety is very common in the Arab world, and a number of studies are devoted to the construct (Abdullah & Rahman, 2010; Abu-Ghararah, 1999; Aida, 1994; Al-Shboul et al., 2013; Alghothani, 2010; Awan et al., 2010; Elkhafaifi, 2005). Mainly three components of FL anxiety are identified by researchers, namely, *communication apprehension*, *fear of negative social evaluation*, and *test anxiety* (Horwitz, Horwitz. & Cope, 1986; Macintyre & Gardner, 1989). The conclusion these researchers draw is that "foreign language anxiety can be distinguished from other types of anxiety and that it can have a negative effect on the language learning process" (Macintyre & Gardner, 1991, p. 112). Krashen (1981) claims that, "There appears to be a consistent relationship between various forms of anxiety and language proficiency in all situations, formal and informal. Anxiety level may thus be a very potent influence on the affective filter" (p. 29). Our premise is that certain measures can be taken to train EFL learners to lower their anxiety. We follow Schumann's (1975) idea that teachers can create conditions which make the learners less anxious, make them feel accepted and make them form positive identifications with speakers of the target language. La Spisa (2015), for example, finds that "use of talk cards lowers the language anxiety of adult learners and they show motivation to speak

English" (p. ii). Paquette and Rieg (2008) used music as a tool for school children to develop literacy, and concluded that "integrating music into children's everyday activities promotes literacy development" (p. 231).

The Objective of the Current Research

The nature of the arrangement of the space between teacher and learners in the classroom, in literal as well as figurative sense, may prove to be one of the factors strongly influencing affective factors. If the space is arranged in an extremely formal way, it may prove to be intimidating to some learners, prompting them to raise their affective filters. There is a lack of research on affective factors in the Arab region, and studies on the difficulties of adult EFL learners are mostly focussed on issues like, problems in reading, orthography, pronunciation, etc (Al-Jarf, 2008;Al-Nasser, 2015; Al-Nofaie, 2010; Kadwa, 2012). A few studies that deal with affective factors (e.g., (Abu-Ghararah, 1999; Alghothani, 2010; Al-Shboul et al., 2013; Awan et al., 2010; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Khan, 2011; Yazigy, 1991), though comprehensive in themselves, ignored classroom environment as a possible cause of negative influence of affective factors on learners. None of the researchers uses rearrangement of classroom space as a measure to help adult learners lower their affective filters. Moreover, the findings of research on motivation and learners' performance in EFL are inconclusive, leaving a gap for further investigation. In addition, Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994) find no relationship between self-confidence, anxiety and classroom atmosphere, but their findings cannot be taken to be conclusive since other researchers' findings (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Dişlen, 2013; Gerndt, 2014; Grant & Dweck, 2003; Nakamura, 2000; Scharle & Szabo, 2005) show that learners' self-confidence can be enhanced through some measures, such as changing the classroom atmosphere. The point needs further exploration. Therefore, our research objective is to test whether developing a feeling of responsibility and independence among learners leads to better performance in learning English.

Hypotheses

The observed behaviour of English learners at the selected university in Saudi Arabia, as well as the mismatch between extensive linguistic input and the desired outcomes led the researcher to hypothesize that –

H1: A number of adult EFL learners in English Majors develop high affective filters, and thus, raise a psychological wall between themselves and the linguistic input to filter out the input while learning the target language.
H2: The major factor behind affective filters is learners' negative self-evaluation owing to language production anxiety, low self-confidence and low motivation to learn English.
H3: There is a direct relationship between classroom atmosphere and learners' negative self-evaluation causing learners to raise affective filters in EFL classes.
H4: A change in classroom atmosphere can bring about a change in learner self-evaluation helping them lower their affective filters to learn English.

Research Questions

To test the truth of each hypothesis, the present study has been designed to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: Do some adult EFL learners in English Majors in Saudi Arabia raise affective filters not allowing linguistic input?
RQ 2: Are language production anxiety, low self-confidence and low level of motivation the major factors behind learners' affective filters?
RQ 3: Is there a direct relationship between classroom atmosphere and learners' negative self-evaluation causing learners to raise affective filters in EFL classes?
RQ 4: Can a change in classroom atmosphere bring about a change in learner self-evaluation helping them lower their affective filters to learn English?

Methodology
The present research investigates all the above-mentioned issues, i.e., affective filters, factors causing affective filters, potential relationship between classroom atmosphere and learners' negative self-evaluation, and the effect of change in classroom atmosphere on learner self-evaluation, using mixed methods research methodology. Quantitative data have been collected through (i) questionnaires, and (ii) pre-test and post-test. Qualitative data are generated through analysis and interpretation of the numerical data. Mixing of methods occurs at certain levels of data analysis and interpretation. Questionnaires are used to collect data from learners on their feelings concerning anxiety, self-confidence and motivation. These data are analysed to ascertain the level of affective filters raised by learners to block input of English. Based on the results obtained, the experimental teaching is carried out implementing the measures designed to help learners lower their affective filters. The measures included the following steps:

- No direct questions to be asked from learners in the class.
- Classroom setting changed to give a feel of informal learning atmosphere.
- Learners shared responsibilities to help their peers overcome anxiety.
- Learners shared their learning with their peers.

The study was quasi-experimental involving an experiment with learners to test the efficacy of the measures. The following sub-sections provide further details on the chosen research method.

Research Setting and the Participants
The study was conducted with participants from English Major students at a selected university in Saudi Arabia. The participants were only girls. The ages of participants ranged between 18 to 22 years. They had undergone six years of training in English. English is taught as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia and commonly English is not spoken anywhere except in conversation with a non-Arabic-speaking person. In conclusion, there are hardly any occasions for English language learners to use and practice English.

Data Collection: Instruments
Questionnaires and paper-based tests are the instruments used in the study to collect numerical as well as descriptive data. The questionnaire was adopted from Seyhan (2000). Seyhan's questionnaire was found suitable for the present study because of the similar nature of the two studies, though a few modifications were made in it according to our requirements. The number of questions was cut down to 24, and the questions were rephrased to elicit responses on the constructs relevant to the present study, i.e., motivation, language anxiety and self-confidence in

speaking English. The questionnaire comprised statements measuring the feelings of learners on a 5-point Likert scale – 1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Neutral, 4. Agree, and 5. Strongly agree. The distribution of credit on attitude for a *positive direction* statement was 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, whereas for a *negative direction* statement it was 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Positive direction statements agreed with or confirmed the meaning of the stated hypotheses. Negative direction statements prompted the students to assert that they had no affective filters and that they do not block linguistic input in the class.

Measurement Techniques
Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach, 1951) was employed to test the Validity and reliability of the modified questionnaire. For the 24 item questionnaire piloted with 20 students the obtained Alpha value was 0.78, which is significant, as J. M. Cortina (1993) states that a commonly accepted value of Alpha is .60. The pre- and post-tests were checked repeatedly to establish validity, reliability and clarity.

To calculate Cronbach's Alpha, Kuder and Richardson formula 20 has been used:

$$\alpha = (k / (k\text{-}1)) \times (1\text{-} \Sigma \, Var/Var)$$

Where,
k = number of items [statements] in the questionnaire
Var = variance [population standard deviation] of obtained scores for each item
Σ Var = sum of variance of the individual items
SPSS (version 12.0) has been used for statistical analysis of the numerical data.

Research Procedure
A Pre-test to check students' entry level competence in English was conducted before the experimental teaching, and after the teaching a Post-test was conducted. The results obtained from Pre-test were used to compare with Post-test results to ascertain learners' progress. After Pre-test, the selected learners were divided into 'Treatment' and 'Control' group. The treatment group was taught English for two weeks with new measures, while the control group was given placebo teaching.

Data Analysis
To answer RQ 1, data collected as participants' responses to questionnaire statements in three variable forms, i.e., agreement, disagreement and neutral, were analyzed. To answer RQ 2, participants' responses to questionnaire statements grouped into three clusters eliciting responses to three variables – motivation, self-confidence and anxiety – were analyzed separately

As regards seeking answers to RQ 3 and RQ 4, the achievement grades of treatment and control group participants in pre-test and post-test were compared, and the post-test grades obtained by treatment and control group participants were also compared. A *t*-test was run to check the significance of the difference in grades. The higher achievement grades of the treatment group participants were associated with the change in classroom atmosphere introduced by the researcher in the experimental teaching session.

Results

An overview of descriptive statistics of the variables used in the study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 *Results Obtained from Questionnaire Analysis: Mean, SD and Variance*
N = 55

No		General			Motivation			Self-Confidence			Anxiety		
1.		Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
2.	Mean	29.291	53.791	16.875	29.875	57	13.125	29.0	49.9	20.9	28.833	56	15.166
3.	S.D.	16.964	21.009	8.163	21.748	23.397	4.549	12.749	15.687	8.621	19.187	27.720	9.239
4.	Variance	275.78	422.998	63.859	413.859	479	18.109	146.29	221.49	66.89	306.805	640.33	71.138

Affective filters and Adult Saudi EFL Learners

In general, roughly 30% of the experimental subjects expressed that they are influenced by affective factors in EFL learning, and thus, raise their affective filters. It is a considerably large number. Roughly 16% of the subjects remained neutral, therefore, undecided whether their problems in learning English arise from affective factors or not. If we consider this population too as influenced by affective factors (their undecided nature hints at that), the number of students influenced by affective factors will rise dramatically. Even otherwise too, those who claim their English learning woes do not arise from affective factors are nearly 53% of the tested population, leaving the rest 47% in the category of the affected. This answers RQ 1 in the affirmative, that adult EFL learners in Saudi Arabia are influenced by affective factors, such as low motivation, low self-confidence and high language anxiety, indicating that they raise their affective filters in English classes. The answer to RQ 2, which concerns the effects of the major affective factors, lies in the number of learners responding to the clusters of statements pertaining to these factors. The number of learners influenced by the said factors is roughly the same as in the general case (i.e., low motivation = 29%, low self-confidence = 29%, high language anxiety = 28.5%).

Classroom Atmosphere and Affective Filters

The preliminary results obtained from the statistical analysis of pre-test and post-test grades scored by treatment and control group participants are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2 *Preliminary Results from Pre-Test and Post-Test*

	Pre-Test			Post-Test		
	Mean	SD	Variance	Mean	SD	Variance
Treatment Group N = 25	20.84	6.20	38.47	28.76	5.86	34.44
Control Group N = 25	19.88	8.22	67.61	21.48	5.93	35.26

A cursory glance at Table 2 reveals a marked difference in grades scored by treatment and control group participants in the post-test. The treatment group mean scores are higher with a difference of 7.28 marks from the control group mean scores. Treatment group participants have bettered their grades from the pre-test as well, with a significant difference of 7.92 marks. The control group participants have also bettered their grades but only with an insignificant increase of 1.6 marks.

Further results obtained from statistical analysis of this data, with *t*-test, are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3 *Descriptive Statistics of Treatment and Control Group Mean Scores, with t-test*

Sl. No.		Pre-Test			Post-Test			df (n-2)	*t*-test value
		Mean	SD	Variance	Mean	SD	Variance		
1.	Treatment Group	20.84	6.20	38.47	28.76	5.86	34.44	48	4.637*
2.	Control Group			67.61			35.26	48	0.788**
3.	Treatment vs. Control Group (Pre-Test)	19.88	8.22	-	21.48	5.93	-	48	0.466***
4.	Treatment vs. Control Group (Post-Test)	- -	- -	-	- -	- -	-	48	4.360****

*Significant at p\.005
**Not significant at p\.005
***Not significant at p\.005
****Significant at p\.005

The *t*-test values displayed in Table 3 reveal two trends. The observed *t* values 4.637 and 4.360 for the difference in the marks of treatment group participants in post-test and the difference in treatment and control group participants' marks in post-test respectively are significant at α-level .005 (confidence level 99%) and df 48. Whereas, the observed *t* values 0.788 and 0.466 for the difference in the marks of control group participants in post-test and the difference in the pre-test marks of treatment and control group participants respectively are not significant at α-level .005 (confidence level 99%) and df 48. The significance of the first set of *t* values answers RQ 4, while non-significance of the second set of *t* values answers RQ 3.

Discussion
The primary objectives of the present research were to investigate if Adult EFL learners at the selected institution in Saudi Arabia raise affective filters under the influence of certain affective factors not allowing input in the class, and whether a change in the classroom atmosphere can bring about a change in the negative learner self-evaluation to encourage them to lower their affective filters. Classroom atmosphere in Saudi Arabia tends to be more formal, and therefore formidable, to some learners, even intimidating to some, especially when it comes to English language, cultural restrictions and other social factors (Saba, 2013; Al-Nasser, 2015). Al-Nasser

notes about Saudi students that, "There is fear of learning in the students' minds as classroom atmosphere is intimidating and discourages student participation of any sort, viewing it as an unnecessary interruption" (p. 1616). The results obtained from statistical analysis of questionnaire data suggest that some adult EFL learners at the selected institution are influenced by affective factors and block input in English classes. Though the number of such learners is not very high, still it is significantly high, and if the 'neutral' participants are added to them, the number rises higher. Therefore, H1, that *a number of adult EFL learners in English Majors in Saudi Arabia develop high affective filters, and thus, raise a psychological wall between themselves and the linguistic input to filter out the input while learning the target language* is supported by research. Further analysis of the questionnaire data reveals that the reasons behind participants' negative screening are low motivation to learn English, low self-confidence to use English in context and high language anxiety. This supports H2, i.e., *the major factor behind affective filters is learners' negative self-evaluation owing to language production anxiety, low self-confidence and low level of motivation to learn English* as 29% of the subject population report the influence of these affective factors on their English learning experience.

Previous studies in this academic field have also identified similar issues with adult EFL learners. Guiora (1983), for example, notes that "foreign language learning is psychologically an extremely challenging process, threatening the individual's self-esteem and outlook towards the world around him" (p. 8). Andrade and Williams (2009) find that language anxiety affects 75% of the learner population, and the debilitating aspects of anxiety hinder the learning of about 11% of them. McIntyre (1995) and McIntyre and Gardner (1991) find a set of factors affecting learners' language anxiety, such as deficit in listening comprehension, reduced word production, impaired vocabulary learning, and so on. Lack of motivation among FL learners is also a common issue. Dislen (2013) counts several factors affecting learner motivation, such as age, solving multiple choice questions, syllabus density, overload, health issues, traditional teaching methods like expository teaching, lack of comprehension, noise in class, too many similar type exercises, and so on. Learners' self-confidence rests on several factors. Elliot and Church (1997) and Elliot and McGregor (2001), for instance, observe that if parents do not allow their children to be self-supportive and provide overprotection to them, their children may lack self-confidence in future life.

Analysis of the grades of treatment and control group participants in the post-test show a significant difference in treatment group participants' grades, in comparison to their grades in pre-test as well as in comparison to the grades scored by control group participants. The results support H4 that *a change in classroom atmosphere can bring about a change in learner self-evaluation helping them lower their affective filters to learn English*. Control group participants show only a marginal increase in their grades in post-test in comparison to their pre-test grades. This indicates that since the learners were given only placebo teaching, they still evaluated themselves negatively regarding their capabilities to learn English. The finding supports H3 that *there is a direct relationship between classroom atmosphere and learners' negative self-evaluation causing learners to raise affective filters in EFL classes*.

The relationship between class environment and affective factors has been explored in previous studies, with findings more or less similar to that of the present study. Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels

(1994) find no relationship between these constructs, whereas other researchers (such as Scharle & Szabo, 2005; Nakamura, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Dişlen, 2013; Grant & Dweck, 2003; Gerndt, 2014) find that learners' self-confidence can be enhanced through some measures, such as changing the classroom atmosphere. Huitt (2001) suggests that teachers can help improve learners' motivation by displaying the significance of a language like English. Brown's (2001) suggestion is that "humour can play a positive role breaking monotony in the class and bringing in motivation" (p. 89). Paquette and Rieg (2008) used music to motivate children, and concluded that "integrating music into children's everyday activities promotes literacy development" (p. 231). Their experiment was not directly related to affective filters but it does throw some light on the possibilities that input is allowed by learners in a comparatively casual and relaxed environment, which, in other words, helps them lower their affective filters. La Spisa (2015) finds talk cards useful to lower the language anxiety of adult learners and to motivate them to speak English. Longworth (2003) comments that the "inspirational skill of teachers can be stimulating… Teachers should be equipped with knowledge of psychology of learning, motivation tactics and the ways to overcome barriers to learning boosting learners' confidence" (p. 23). In a nutshell, classroom environment affects learners' affective filters and a change in the environment changes the situation accordingly.

Conclusion

To sum up, the findings of the present research suggest that adult Saudi EFL learners are influenced by affective factors, such as low motivation, low self-confidence and high language anxiety, and therefore raise their affective filters to block input in class. Furthermore, the findings suggest that there is a direct relationship between classroom atmosphere and learner's negative self-evaluation causing learners to raise their affective filters. Therefore, a positive change (favourable to learners) in the classroom atmosphere brings about a positive change in learners' attitude towards English and encourages them to lower their affective filters.

The present research, to the best of my knowledge, may be the first of its kind in Saudi Arabia since the affective filters issue is a hitherto unexplored area of research. The researcher recommends that EFL teachers/scholars may replicate the experiment by changing formal classroom setting to bring in more learner-friendly informality in their respective settings with a new set of participants to confirm/reject the findings of the present study so that an informed consensus would arise among EFL practitioners. Only then the idea that a positive change in classroom atmosphere brings about a positive change in the attitude of EFL learners towards learning English can be advocated for a universal application.

Strength and Weaknesses of the Study

The primary strength of the present study is that it explores a hitherto unexplored area of research in Saudi Arabian contexts. The study highlights one of the major factors responsible for, commonly, poor performance of adult Saudi EFL learners, and suggests empirically tested corrective measures.

The limitation of the present study is the limited scope of the research as the researcher conducted this study using a small number of subjects from one college enrolled in courses, such as Linguistics, Literature and Semantics. Moreover, the selected participants were only females,

excluding male students from the study. The research issue bears significance not only for students from both sexes but also for all the students in the Kingdom, so, the research setting should have been larger to draw any definitive conclusions. But, the researcher worked bound by certain cultural restrictions, which became the limitations of the study.

It is hoped that future research studies will address these issues and will arrive at more encompassing conclusions.

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