

# **The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the affective filter of EFL learners in an online classroom**

**El impacto de la pandemia de la COVID-19 sobre el filtro afectivo de los estudiantes en el aprendizaje de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en un aula virtual.**

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**Resumen:** Introducción: la integración de la tecnología en la enseñanza del lenguaje, especialmente en el contexto de la pandemia COVID-19, desencadenó un proceso de búsqueda de diferentes estrategias pedagógicas. Debido a este cambio drástico en la educación, más la rapidez con la que se dispone de recursos tecnológicos, ha hecho que la tecnología se sitúe en la herramienta más importante en la enseñanza. Por lo tanto, el docente debe considerar en la planificación de una clase, herramientas digitales y metodologías dinámicas para agilizar y motivar a los estudiantes y de esta manera, reducir su filtro afectivo. Objetivo: esta investigación tiene como objetivo determinar la efectividad de Kahoot en la reducción del impacto del filtro afectivo de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera. Métodos: este estudio desarrolló una investigación aplicada con enfoque mixto y alcance descriptivo, con diseño cuasi-experimental. Participaron activamente 42 estudiantes. Para la recolección de datos, se utilizaron dos herramientas principales de recolección de datos, a saber, una encuesta para buscar información sobre el impacto del filtro afectivo de los estudiantes durante las clases virtuales y una prueba previa y posterior basada en la comprensión lectora para verificar el desempeño de los estudiantes en inglés. Conclusiones: los estudiantes están enfrentando experiencias negativas en su aprendizaje del inglés porque su filtro afectivo es alto. Además, luego de la fase de intervención con el uso de Kahoot, los estudiantes mejoraron su desempeño en inglés en la habilidad de comprensión lectora. Por lo tanto, se recomienda continuar buscando recursos digitales motivantes para un mejor desenvolvimiento de los estudiantes.

**Palabras clave:** filtro afectivo - motivación – enseñanza virtual- comprensión lectora – gamificación

**Abstract:** Introduction: the integration of technology in language teaching, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, caused the search for different pedagogical strategies. Due to this drastic change in education along with the rapid access to online resources have placed technology as the most important tool in teaching. Therefore, when planning a class, the teacher must consider digital tools and dynamic methodologies to streamline and motivate students to reduce their affective filter. Objective: the current research aims to determine the effectiveness of Kahoot in the reduction of the impact of the EFL students' affective filter. Methods: this study developed an applied research with a mixed method approach and descriptive scope, with a quasi-experimental design. 42 students actively participated. For the data gathering, two main tools of data collection were used, namely a survey to look for information about the impact of students' affective filter during the virtual classes and a pre and post-test based on reading comprehension to check the students' English performance. Conclusions: the students are facing negative experiences in their learning of English because their affective filter is high. Besides, after the intervention phase with the use of Kahoot, the students improved their English performance in the reading comprehension skill. Therefore, it is suggested to continue sampling innovative technological resources to enhance students' performance.

**Keywords:** affective filter – motivation – remote teaching – reading comprehension - gamification

## **Introduction**

The COVID 19 pandemic has substantially changed people's lives. It has even altered the organizational and functional conditions of educational institutions. The face-to-face mode of education had decades in development and one of the most remarkable aspects in this educational modality is the social integration of the community, especially for young people. Currently that social factor becomes a goal because emergency remote teaching poses a challenge for socialization.

At the beginning of March 2020, the Ministry of Education of Ecuador issued the Ministerial Agreement No. MDT-2020-076 which ordained all students in schools and colleges to work remotely (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2020). This ministerial agreement was issued by the central authority, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, the teachers began to work through virtual platforms; which, until that moment, were not used because in most public schools there is no internet connection in the classrooms.

During the pandemic, students have faced the need to safeguard their physical health. Furthermore, they felt a sense of alienation from their peers. They also felt isolated and alone. All of those facts affected their emotional health (Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020). Thus, both teachers and students faced an unknown environment to them such as online education through platforms that would become virtual classrooms.

According to Morales Valenzuela (2020), students deserve special attention; since, they require training, social protection, quality assurance, facilitation of online and distance learning, complementarity in teaching strategies, psychosocial support, and activities. All of those students' needs are consistent to stop and fight the stress that confinement brings as well as the abrupt change in the teaching-learning process. Therefore, teachers have the challenging task to assist their students to palliate the effects of the pandemic and support students' resilience stage.

Furthermore, English has become one of the most widely spoken languages in the world (Northrup, 2013). Therefore, it is one of the most important in all areas of human development. That is why teaching it became vital. However, learning English as a foreign language has presented many difficulties (Asmali, 2017). In Ecuador, the level of English is considered very low (Education First, 2021). According to the company Education First (2021), Ecuador has ranked 90th out of 112 countries on the English Proficiency Index which not only means that Ecuadorians demonstrate a very low level of English skills but also that they underestimate the global significance of this language. Besides, it occupies the lowest place in English proficiency in South America. In this regard, it is very common to see how most students are not prepared to communicate in this language even though they have studied it during the periods of primary, secondary and higher levels of their formal education (Beltran, 2017). This may indicate that the target language is studied with little interest.

Moreover, when speaking of Affective Filter, it is possible to differentiate emotions and experiences that students reflect in their mood, attitude, and motivation levels (Cofer & Appley, 1964) which can influence the learning process (Krashen, 1982). In other words, the presence of a high affective filter presented as demotivation, low self-esteem and anxiety is one of the main problems that affect students during the classroom activities. The language acquisition, which requires constant interaction, is threatened when the learners' emotional factors do not allow them to respond to the teacher's linguistic stimuli (Krashen, 1982).

Therefore, this research aims to determine the effectiveness of Kahoot in the reduction of the EFL students' affective filter and to generate a general reflection related to the students' affective filter in the area of English as a Foreign Language, in the context of virtual education during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, the contributions that derive from this research deal with the learners' perceptions, emotions and attitudes about how the pandemic and online lessons have impacted their EFL learning process. Additionally, this study gathers information after treatment based on gamification applied to students to reduce their affective filter.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **The affective filter**

Initially, the affective filter hypothesis was posited by Dulay and Burt (1977). They argued that many conscious and unconscious internal factors interact with input in order to produce output. Second language acquisition is affected by "affective delimiters and cognitive organizers" (Dulay & Burt, 1977, p. 99). The former refers to learners' motives that contribute to individual preferences for determined input models; prioritizing aspects of language to be learned and identifying when language acquisition stops. While the latter refers to the internal language processing devices that are in charge of grammar building. Therefore, affective factors make learners delimit their linguistic input in different ways which can be understood as the difference between learner's current output and what can be attained as total output (Dulay & Burt, 1977).

Krashen (1982) claims that "the best methods are those that supply comprehensible input in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear". Thus, Krashen (1982) further developed this hypothesis which involves the learner's attitude, combined with their

feelings, mood and other emotional factors. These, in turn, positively or negatively influence the acquisition and learning processes (Krashen, 1981). This influence is exerted as a filter that enables, prevents or blocks the learning of a language.

On the one hand, this hypothesis articulates, together with the input hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis and the natural order hypothesis; the general theory of second language acquisition formulated in 1983 by S. D. Krashen; on the other hand, it is part of the monitor model, which is explained as the processes of second language development (Alvaréz de Zayas, 2000).

Krashen (1981) distinguished motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety as the three types of affective or attitudinal variables. Learners with a low affective filter are distinguished from those who have a high one by the following issues: seeking and receiving more information, relating to their interlocutors with greater confidence, being more receptive and acting with a lower level of anxiety. Furthermore, the presence of a low affective filter blocks any type of information that reaches the brain, preventing the student from processing information, affecting learning even though other elements of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) are working correctly (Chomsky, 1960 as cited by Krashen, 1981).

The affective filter hypothesis attributes to the emotional factors, elements that are directly related during the acquisition / learning process of a second language (Uquillas & Córdova, 2020). In a study Uquillas and Córdova (2020) reported that those emotional factors alter the students' educational behaviour. They found that students neither used virtual platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, or Google Classroom effectively nor submitted assignments either. Additionally, it was argued that the students' attendance to virtual classes due to those platforms were relatively unusual for students. Another problem was the students' affective filter which was significantly high because they cannot afford computers or internet connection (Munni & Hasan, 2020).

According to Moreno Rodríguez (2017), the affective filter has a very profound effect, creating a blockage of the Language Acquisition Device (innate human ability to acquire language according to Chomsky's theory), and preventing information from being processed and assimilated correctly (Yule, 2010). The experience that students have with respect to learning a language can be positive

or negative. If it is positive, it can be used for the class benefit; on the contrary, if it is negative, it will strengthen a position of resistance towards learning (Cofer & Appley, 1964).

Although the affective filter is part of the process of acquiring a second language, children present a low affective filter which increases with their age. This is because they begin to feel ashamed, fear of being wrong and so they avoid being the object of ridicule from their partners. In the case of adolescents and adults, who have a more developed cognitive level; it is necessary that they are conscious and adopt attitudes such as responsibility and perseverance that lead them to overcome obstacles during this process (Krashen, 1982).

### **Virtual education in the COVID-19 pandemic**

Current studies demonstrate the need for countries to be prepared in cases of a pandemic in the educational field. Although students are protected from serious or fatal critical infections, they can become the sources of spread, which was the main reason for closing educational institutions around the world (Almarzooq et al., 2020). In this context, there are diverse investigations that have been developed on this issue.

Hartshorn and McMurry (2020) analyzed the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on students. In doing this, the researchers worked with a population formed by university students and teachers in the US. In the context of remote education, the researchers applied a survey to find out information regarding the stress levels, English learning and teaching process, and remote education. Furthermore, the surveys answered an open-ended question about their perception on the most difficult issues during the pandemic. The results showed that the educational process decreased for both teachers and learners. Besides, the English teaching-learning process decreased due to other stressors in everyone's lives. Finally, online education was more challenging for students than for teachers. The former had less language development in speaking and writing.

In another research study, Morales Valenzuela (2020) after reflecting about the challenges of this new way of teaching and learning during the pandemic, proposed a series of class plans through the use of games to foster students' motivation to learn. This research faced a lot of difficulties related to the change of mode into virtual teaching. Another reflection appeared as follows: 'if this is hard for teachers, this would be even harder for students. For that reason, the levels of stress are

very high. This reflection is congruent with the results shown by Hartshorn and McMurry (2020) who stated that the teaching and learning processes are not important for the teachers nor the students because other stressors appeared in their lives. Finally, Morales Valenzuela (2020) argued that proposals must include lessons for students to motivate them to participate for better results.

In the same way, Munni and Hasan (2020) investigated the effectiveness and feasibility of the teaching process with university students in a language course focused on listening and speaking skills through Facebook during the COVID-19 pandemic. They aimed to tackle the greatest crisis that occurs in education worldwide through the use of affordable resources to face the changes in the academic activities. The majority of university students from the target population presented high affective filters. According to the authors, all of those problems can be solved through the use of Facebook groups because they are affordable and easy to manage. In the intervention phase, they used videos to improve listening and speaking skills focusing on pronunciation, body language, fluency and accuracy. All of those actions resulted in a successful online learning environment.

Orgilés et al. (2020) developed the first study with a Spanish child population and concluded that 89% of children presented behavioral or emotional alterations as a result of confinement. Therefore, healthy routines and habits must be maintained after quarantine, and the necessary support is also required for most individuals to regain their normal functioning. Although, it is possible that a minority may need psychological support after confinement, especially those who already had psychological problems such as previous trauma, anxiety or depression; developmental disorders; those with caregivers with financial instability or previous psychopathology. In the case of children separated from their caregivers during the pandemic or who have suffered the loss of a loved one, they will be more likely to present psychological problems. These may include fear of infection and separation anxiety, which is why they may need specialized psychological care.

### **Gamification and the affective filter**

Gamification refers to the application of game strategies in spaces or areas whose nature is not mainly playful (Kiruthiga & Arokiaraj, 2020), in order to motivate the change of behaviors towards a specific objective. It is achieved by incorporating game elements (both mechanical, dynamic and

aesthetic) that enhance the user experience, aligning the objectives to be achieved with their wishes and aspirations (Banasik Jozeph, 2017).

Undoubtedly, gamification has emerged as a strategy and as a developing approach in various fields and disciplines, but it is especially in education and communication where it has seen, in practice, a greater space of application. It happens due to the great sources of motivation that games produce in students which is beneficial for their learning process (Krashen, 1982). Regarding this, it can be contended that gamification constitutes an important factor in every human being's learning process due to the rewarding and motivating experiences that it provides.

The implementation of gamification in the classroom favors the approach of students to learn in a fun and playful way. The role of gamification in the field of education is to bring motivation to the teaching and learning process, through the incorporation of game elements and techniques. In other words, this tool is an alternative that allows the student to learn in a fun way and also favors student-teacher relationships (Rodríguez & Santiago, 2015)

Taking into account the above, it is necessary to recognize the difficulties that students have in the development of English proficiency through a didactic strategy that uses the tools of gamification. It is important to mention that these types of strategies can strengthen English skills if they are designed taking into account the context, interests and needs of the student. This coincides with Krashen (1981) who maintains that the student learns English when he understands and receives messages in an interactive way in real settings.

On the other hand, Figueroa (2015) argues that significant tools are essential to intensify the use of the four English skills. That is, gamification can be articulated with the purposes of the teaching and learning processes of the second language. Thus, awakening the interest in learning English, solving problems in their context, developing creativity, interacting with their peers, favoring the work environment in the classroom through challenges, competitions, role plays, among others.

Due to the recency of the covid-19 pandemic, there was little evidence of research on the impact of the affective filter in online classes in the field of EFL/ESL. However, most of the body of research found focused on higher education. Furthermore, it is worth noting that in the school where the target population attends, there is no evidence of any research project to help students



in this field. Thus, the present study is worth studying both from a theoretical and practical position because it is such a timely phenomenon and also because for the purpose of this research which aims to obtain a comprehensive overview of the students' affective filter to potentially take further action. Consequently, this research draws on gamification and focuses on the use of Kahoot within virtual education.

## Methodology

The methodology for this research was focused on applied research with a mixed approach and descriptive scope, with quasi-experimental design. The target population was formed by 42 students from tenth year of basic education during the 2020-2021 academic period. Since the universe is small, the sample was the same number of individuals. Those students got the inclusion criteria to be part of this research.

The inclusion criteria were the following:

1. Students who were registered in Tenth year of basic education according to the lists provided by the Ministry of Education of Ecuador (2021).
2. Students whose parents have signed a written agreement to be part of the research.
3. Students who have enough time to do extra activities.

Therefore, the target population was formed by the students as the next table shows:

*Table 1. Population*

School year	Male	Female	Total
10 <sup>th</sup>	19	23	42
	45%	55%	100%

**Source: Direct research**

The first step was the identification of students' perception and needs about their level of motivation and anxiety through a survey which was designed taking into consideration some previous studies. It was a Spanish adaptation of the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery published by Gardner (2004) and validated by three experts in the area of Psychology. After that, a pre-test was taken by the students to register their level of performance in reading. The pre-test was taken from the reading part of the KET Exam from Cambridge Assessment. This test had five sections with 30 questions which aimed to evaluate the learners' understanding of simple written texts namely posters, booklets, periodicals, and journals.

After detecting students' needs, some academic actions were put into practice to consolidate knowledge. This phase consisted of 8 weeks of intervention classes focused on reading comprehension with the use of Kahoot during 4 hours per week out of normal schedule. There were learning activities before reading, during reading and after reading with the complementation of Kahoot as a form of gamification which was used after each class to reduce students' affective filter. At the end of the treatment period, a post-test was given to the students which had the same structure as the pre-test.

With the data obtained from the survey, the pre-test and the post-test, an Excel database was created that allowed the homogenization of the information. All of those results were analyzed through SPSS statistical software. A frequency and mean comparison were done to assess the students' performance before and after the intervention.

## Results

The population actively participated in the whole process. First, the students fulfilled the requirements that were mentioned in the inclusion criteria of this document to be part of this research. For instance, they made arrangements in their learning schedule to have extra time to participate in the intervention phase. After that, they took the survey and the pretest. Then, the target population took part in the virtual classroom through the Zoom platform for eight weeks. Finally, after the treatment, the students took a post test. Meanwhile, the researcher collected data. Once data were obtained from the entire process, they were statistically analyzed and the results are displayed below.

## Survey

The survey aimed to gather information related to the students' perceptions towards their motivation and anxiety during the Pandemic in their virtual learning. The survey had a battery of 10 questions. With 95% reliability and 5% error; the Cronbach's Alpha was .820. The value obtained is above the validity threshold ( $> 0.7$ ) generally accepted in the specialized literature (Cronbach, 1943; Nunnally, 1978; Tuapanta et al., 2017).

*Table 2. Reliability of survey*

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items

Source: Direct research

The first part of the survey indented to collect information based on the normal development of classes as table 3 shows:

Table 3. Normal class development during the Pandemic and its impact

Normal classes during the pandemic and its impact				
	1. Classes during the pandemic have been done normally because I had internet connection and a computer or smartphone.		2. I feel calm since the pandemic has not affected my desire to learn	
	Fr	%	Fr	%
<b>Totally agree</b>	14	33%		0%
<b>Agree</b>	24	57%	1	2%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	4	10%	12	29%
<b>Disagree</b>		0%	8	19%
<b>Totally disagree</b>		0%	21	50%
	42	100%	42	100%

Source: Direct research

Table 3 shows that students developed classes normally during the pandemic. It means that they had internet connection and technological supplies availability; and how it affected their eagerness to learn. Just four of them felt confused. However, its impact was alarming due to most of the students' motivation having been affected by the pandemic. It may be due to the radical change from the classroom activities to virtual ones and the lack of interaction among students and the rest of the community. Therefore, students needed support in some way to face this change.

The second part of the survey was related to the teacher's role and the students' motivation as table number 4 shows.

Table 4. Teacher's role for the students' motivation

Teacher's role for the students' motivation						
	3. During the Pandemic, my teacher uses motivating virtual tools for the English teaching – learning process.		4. In the virtual classes, my teacher uses motivating strategies to teach like videos, music, or games.		5. The virtual classroom activities are motivating and I feel comfortable to learn English.	
	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%

<b>Totally agree</b>	1	2%		0%	2	5%
<b>Agree</b>	2	5%		0%	1	2%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	4	10%	2	5%	7	17%
<b>Disagree</b>	16	38%	17	40%	18	43%
<b>Totally disagree</b>	19	45%	23	55%	16	38%
	42	100%	42	100%	42	100%

**Source: Direct research**

As the aforementioned table shows, the teacher's role for the target population was not supporting at all for their motivation. The teacher neither uses motivating virtual tools nor motivating teaching strategies. In consequence, the virtual classrooms lack motivation and most of the students do not feel comfortable during the English classes. Even though students had internet connection and technological supplies available, they did not feel motivated to learn during English classes because the teacher does not use videos, music, or games. Furthermore, they do not feel comfortable. All of these issues affected their eagerness to learn.

Thirdly, the survey asked about the main teaching language skills focus made by the teacher.

*Table 5. Main language skills focus in the class.*

<b>6. Teacher's main focus of language skill in the class</b>		
<b>During the virtual classes my teacher focuses on:</b>	<b>Fr</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Speaking</b>		0%
<b>Reading</b>		0%
<b>Writing</b>		0%
<b>Vocabulary</b>	11	26%
<b>Grammar</b>	31	74%
	42	100%

**Source: Direct research**

Interestingly, the teacher's main approach for the English class, according to the students' perceptions, is mainly grammar followed by vocabulary. In this case, there is no interaction nor communication among students in the class. This could be the most important reason for students' demotivation. In this scenery, the students need a change of teaching approach immediately.

The last part of the survey was related to students' level of anxiety and affective filter.

*Table 6. Students' level of anxiety and affective filter*

<b>Students' level of anxiety and affective filter</b>				
	7. I feel frustrated because I am not able to do my teacher's tasks	8. I am afraid during assessment.	9. When I am afraid, I block myself and do not do any activity	10. I feel calm after each class and I look forward to the next one with joy

	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%
<b>Totally agree</b>	19	45%	19	45%	23	55%	1	2%
<b>Agree</b>	14	33%	13	31%	11	26%	1	2%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	2	5%	4	10%	7	17%	3	7%
<b>Disagree</b>	4	10%	3	7%	0	0%	17	40%
<b>Totally disagree</b>	3	7%	3	7%	1	2%	20	48%
	42	100%	42	100%	42	100%	42	100%

**Source: Direct research**

As it is shown in the table above, most of the students feel frustrated because they do not understand what to do in the teacher's proposed tasks. Furthermore, students are afraid during assessment. Perhaps, it happens because the evaluation is just based on grammar as the results of the previous table showed. Moreover, the students feel blocked when they feel nervous and most of them feel anxious because of the anticipation of the next lesson. This part of the survey provided answers that include information to record the students' high affective filter and all the aspects that were previously inquired. These interfere negatively in the English learning process; especially in these times of virtual education during the pandemic. Thus, factors such as frustration because of not understanding tasks very well, fear caused by exams; blockage towards new activities; and the role of the teacher adversely affects the students' performance. Besides, when there is a tense and negative environment, and little student's participation, the learning process will be limited. In this way, the target language is not internalized, understood or analyzed.

In sum, the results from the survey shed light on the high affective filter of the target population. Those young boys and girls are struggling with their English language learning process. For that reason, it is important to achieve a favorable academic environment for learning English as a foreign language and reduce the level of the affective filter. The feeling of satisfaction is an essential factor when determining a student's academic success and motivation in class. This fact would allow the learner to feel proud of their academic development.

### **Pretest and posttest results**

This research involves two main tests; the first one was taken by the students after the survey. Then, based on those results, an intervention plan focused on reading comprehension skills with the use of Kahoot which was developed with students during eight weeks. Finally, the second test or post-test was also taken by the students after the treatment. Consequently, a T- test was applied

to check if there is a significant difference between the means of the pre-test and the post-test through the statistical software SPSS.

*Table 7. Paired samples statistics*

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test	7.98	42	2.552	.394
	Post-test	17.36	42	2.325	.359

  

Paired Samples Correlations				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pre-test & Post-test	42	.445	.003

Source: Direct research

*Table 8. Paired samples test*

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-test - Post-test	-9.381	2.575	.397	-10.183	-8.578	-23.608	41	.000

Source: Direct research

As the tables above show, there was a population formed by 42 valid cases. The individuals corresponded to students from the tenth year of basic education. At the beginning, it is clearly stated that the mean of students in the pretest was 7.98 while the mean in the posttest is 17.36.

In the T-test or paired samples test, it is clearly stated that the 2 tailed significance is .000 which is  $< 0.05$ .

In sum, with 95% of confidence and 5% of error it is concluded that the students' scores in the post test are significantly different from those in the pretest. During the classes, in the intervention, the students felt more comfortable and eager to learn; the reading texts used were according to their age and level. In addition, the use of Kahoot in the formative evaluation, developed each class, provided them some joy and entertainment. Consequently, it may be suggested that their affective filter decreased.

## Discussion

Krashen (1982) attributes considerable importance to affective factors, since, these factors are directly related both to the acquisition and learning process of a second language and to the results obtained as throughout as at the end of that process. The learner's demotivation and high anxiety

are elements that can make language acquisition difficult. On the other hand, the acquisition will be facilitated if there are favorable psychological conditions in the classroom environment like motivation, low anxiety and high self-confidence. In addition, it is not every input that manages to become an acquisition due to the existence of the "affective filter" defined as the block of mind that stops learners from using the comprehensible input received for the acquisition of language. That means that if the affective filter is high, the learner can understand what he hears and reads, but he or she cannot use his or her Language Acquisition Device (Krashen, 1982).

For the linguist, students with a low affective filter; therefore, have better results in their language learning process, when they are not concerned with the possibility of not being successful in learning the language. On the other hand, a student with a high affective filter (unmotivated, with great anxiety and low self-confidence), even if he is intensely exposed to the foreign language, will not reach an acceptable proficiency level. Thus, the ideal situation for students' language achievement will then be the existence of a low affective filter, which will make the learner really focused on their learning process.

In other words, the existence of the affective filter is the main explanation for individual learning differences, especially during this pandemic time where students had to live in a totally different learning situation. That is the reason why it is important to propose alternatives to support students to lower their affective filter.

However, research in the Ecuadorian primary and secondary schools was not found. Regarding this, a collapse was perceived in the target population. The results from the survey taken by the students evidenced that there was not a clear link between new technologies and teaching. The teacher does not manage technological resources at all. Therefore, there is a lack of motivation in the English language classes.

Those results also provided responses that contain information to understand how the affective filter and all the aspects that surround it negatively interfere with the English learning process. The results indicate that there is no teacher-student interaction. Thus, the lack of factors such as security, trust, comfort when interacting, the existence of rapport, support from the teacher, a

harmonious and dynamic environment, a reliable assessment and the role of the teacher as facilitator are evident and these factors negatively affect the teaching-learning process.

The teaching-learning environment in the present study negatively affects the acquisition of knowledge of a foreign language. The pre-test results showed poor performance in reading comprehension skills; possibly due to aspects such as a tense environment, a lack of motivation and insecurity at the time of the evaluation. That is, the methodological strategies used by the teacher influence the learning process. The aspects that concern the teacher's profile should be, among others, to have a humanistic vision of the learning process, to use playful, interactive, productive methodological strategies, to stop conducting monotonous classes, or to be not very dynamic and traditional in teaching strategies. The results of this research show methodological problems regarding the needs of students in the context of virtual education due to the pandemic and their learning expectations. The lack of these aspects can establish barriers that prevent the good academic and human development of the class.

One of the goals of the present study was to identify the influence of the Kahoot tool to reduce the students' affective filter. For this purpose, the Kahoot resource was used, which is interactive, dynamic and simple. It should be noted that part of its educational success is due to the fact that large infrastructures are not required to support it, it only needs a Wi-Fi connection and a device, namely a tablet, a computer or a smartphone.

Likewise, the sessions focused on reading comprehension that used the reading texts provided by the Ministry of education for the tenth year of basic education were also based on games. They were developed in a virtual environment through the Zoom platform that encourages healthy competition among students individually or in groups, because it rewards those who respond by saving the results online (Kahoot, 2021). This tool can be used with different objectives: to diagnose previous knowledge on a topic, to know the most important aspects of a unit before starting it or once it is finished or perhaps as in this study, to check what has been learned, to evaluate the degree of understanding of a certain reading among others (Kaur & Naderajan, 2019).

The improvements of the initial results implied the evolution of the literal aspects; the understanding of what the text actually expressed was improved, it was remembered with precision



and correctness. At the inferential level, students progressed by establishing relationships between parts of the text to infer relationships, information, conclusions, or aspects that were not written; for this they needed to interpret and identify the main idea and the author's intention. Based on this, it is important to consider that there are technological resources that support the development of reading comprehension that serve as tools for evaluating reading comprehension.

The teaching and learning process must improve to allow the development of skills that will help in the students' learning, not only the grammatical approach as the literature indicates ( Harmer, 2007; Richards and Rodgers, 2001) Among the factors listed are interacting with peers, implementing communicative practices and a more participatory environment, planning classes in an interactive, playful and motivating way so that students do not feel frustration after each class (Morales Valenzuela, 2020) even more in this pandemic where students have been greatly psychologically affected.

## **Conclusions**

The results of this study have a series of important implications for the future practice of teaching with regard to the management of motivation, and students' affective filter. To begin with, keep in mind that motivation is a personal matter and it will always be positive for learning. On the other hand, anxiety, which can positively influence responsibility, as well as affect students' performance, creates physical discomfort and struggles regarding the language. When it has been affected by bad experiences with the language, the teacher can make use of strategies and activities to boost it.

Based on the premises listed above, the conclusions for this research are the following:

1. A comprehensive reflection related to students' affective filter in the EFL students was developed. The results from the survey proved that students are facing a tremendous negative experience in the English language learning field. They are facing demotivation due to some methodological practices. The teacher is the person in charge of providing support for the students; however, in this research, the students' perception about the classes are mainly negative. They are afraid of assessment; consequently, they do not have a good performance in reading comprehension as the pretest results showed.

2. An intervention in the context of virtual education was developed based on gamification. There were 12 weeks of intense motivation through the use of Kahoot, a technological resource that contributed to students' improvement. After the treatment, it was proved that students were more effective in reading tasks; thus, their scores improved significantly.
3. It is suggested to use this technological support in other grades of basic education to scaffold students in their learning journey. Therefore, further research in the areas of self-esteem, teacher's and students' affective filter post confinement, and the impact of teacher's performance regarding students' learning may be some areas to delve into in the future.

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