



Ciencia Latina Revista Científica Multidisciplinar, Ciudad de México, México.
ISSN 2707-2207 / ISSN 2707-2215 (en línea), enero-febrero 2026,
Volumen 10, Número 1.

https://doi.org/10.37811/cl_rcm.v10i1

THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL STATUS IN A SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS

**LA INFLUENCIA DEL ESTADO EMOCIONAL EN EL PROCESO DE
APRENDIZAJE DE UNA SEGUNDA LENGUA**

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The Influence of emotional status in a second language learning process

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ABSTRACT

This article was conducted with the primary objective of investigating the influence of emotional status on the Second Language Learning Process (SLLP) among students in the language degree program at the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco (UJAT). The importance of this research lies in identifying how negative emotions-particularly anxiety, fear and depression-act as barriers to motivation, engagement and persistence, while positive emotions such as happiness, enthusiasm, hope and joy can facilitate language acquisition, as well as examining the link between Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory and learner's real experiences. The study was carried out under a quantitative method through an online survey administered to 81 undergraduate participants. Results showed that most students predominantly experience negative emotions, with anxiety as the most frequent and impactful, followed by stress, fear, depression and frustration, consistent with SLA literature. Positive and mixed emotions (joy, enthusiasm, hope, panic) were also reported, along with coping strategies (music, sports, meditation, therapy, reflection). Participants highlighted the university environment-teacher behavior, interpersonal dynamics, communication and fear of judgement-as a key factor modulating emotions. These findings underscore emotional status as an essential influence on persistence and success in second language learning process.

Keywords: second language, learning process, negative emotions, positive emotions, emotional status

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La Influencia del Estado Emocional en el Proceso de Aprendizaje de una Segunda Lengua

RESUMEN

El presente artículo se realizó con el objetivo principal de investigar la Influencia del Estado Emocional en el Proceso de Aprendizaje de una Segunda Lengua (SLLP) entre estudiantes de la licenciatura en idiomas de la Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco (UJAT). La importancia de esta investigación radica en identificar como las emociones negativas- particularmente la ansiedad, el miedo y la depresión- actúan como barreras para la motivación, el compromiso y la persistencia, mientras que las emociones positivas, como la felicidad, el entusiasmo, la esperanza y la alegría, pueden facilitar la adquisición de la lengua, así como examinar la relación entre la teoría de la adquisición de una segunda lengua (SLA) y las experiencias reales de los aprendices. El estudio se llevó a cabo bajo un método cuantitativo mediante una encuesta en línea aplicada a 81 participantes de nivel licenciatura. Los resultados mostraron que la mayoría de los estudiantes experimenta predominantemente emociones negativas, siendo la ansiedad la más frecuente e impactante, seguida de estrés, miedo, depresión y frustración, lo cual es consistente con la literatura especializada en SLA. También se reportaron emociones positivas y mixtas (alegría, entusiasmo, esperanza, pánico), junto con estrategias de afrontamiento (música, deporte, meditación, terapia, reflexión). Los participantes destacaron el entorno universitario- comportamiento docente, dinámicas interpersonales, comunicación y miedo al juicio- como un factor clave que modula las emociones. Estos hallazgos subrayan el estado emocional como un elemento esencial en la persistencia y el éxito en el proceso de aprendizaje de una segunda lengua.

Palabras clave: segunda lengua, proceso de aprendizaje, emociones negativas, emociones positivas, estado emocional.

*Artículo recibido 02 enero 2026
Aceptado para publicación: 30 enero 2026*



INTRODUCTION

Emotions play a crucial role in the Second Language Learning Process (SLLP), significantly influencing students' ability to acquire a new language. Positive and negative emotions, shaped by personal experiences both inside and outside the classroom, can affect students' motivation, confidence, and overall engagement in the learning process. For instance, feelings of anxiety or insecurity may hinder language acquisition, while positive emotions, such as curiosity or enthusiasm, can enhance it. Consequently, the ability to manage emotions effectively in various academic and personal contexts is essential for students to overcome challenges associated with the SLLP.

To understand the role of emotions in the Second Language Learning Process (SLLP), it is essential to define emotions within a theoretical framework. Scherer defines emotions as “an episode of interrelated, synchronized changes in the states of all or most of the five organismic subsystems in response to the evaluation of an external or internal stimulus event as relevant to major concerns of the organism.” This definition highlights the complex, multifaceted nature of emotions, which can influence students' cognitive and affective responses during language learning. Similarly, “emotions fulfill informative, calibrating, identifying, existential, and motivating functions. Emotions capture the world as either positive or negative, important or unimportant, and are used to determine and assign weightings (to set up a kind of hierarchy). They emerge automatically (involuntarily), are difficult (or hardly possible) to control and are (to some extent) influenced by culture”. These definitions underscore the dynamic role of emotions in shaping students' motivation and engagement in the SLLP, as emotional responses to classroom or personal challenges can either facilitate or hinder language acquisition. (Mordka, 2016, pág. 29) (Scherer, 1987, pág. 4)

Building on the definitions of emotions, these can be further classified into positive and negative categories, each with distinct implications for the Second Language Learning Process (SLLP). Richards (2020) identifies several positive emotions, such as “confidence, curiosity, enjoyment, enthusiasm, happiness, interest, passion, joy, pride and satisfaction” which can enhance students' motivation and engagement in language learning. Conversely, negative emotions, including “anger, annoyance, boredom, dissatisfaction, frustration, jealousy, madness, stress, anxiety, depression, and fear,” may hinder students' ability to acquire a second language effectively. These emotions are often triggered by



academic challenges, such as uncertainty about career goals, or personal experiences that shape students' emotional status during classroom interactions. Consequently, understanding these emotional dynamics is critical for fostering an effective learning environment in the SLLP.

Negative emotions, such as depression, fear, and anxiety, significantly influence students' emotional status, thereby impacting their performance in the Second Language Learning Process (SLLP). According to research on the role of emotions in teaching, these emotions can lead to frustration, reducing students' confidence and motivation to engage in language learning. Consequently, learners may disengage from the SLLP, investing less time and effort in developing their language skills. In severe cases, students may even consider withdrawing from language courses late in the semester. Richards (2020) further explains that "these negative emotions carry out disappointment on students whose goals are too far away to reach". Thus, addressing these emotional challenges is essential to support students' success in second language acquisition.

Building on the impact of negative emotions, positive emotions also play a critical role in shaping students' emotional status in the Second Language Learning Process (SLLP). Fredrickson (2001) argues that "emotions can be scheduled to focus on specific thought-actions that can affect the learning process in a second language," suggesting that positive emotions, such as joy or curiosity, can enhance students' engagement and cognitive flexibility during language acquisition. In contrast, negative emotions like depression can undermine students' motivation, distracting them from focusing on language learning goals. For instance, depressive states may reduce students' willingness to participate in classroom activities, thereby hindering their progress in the SLLP. Addressing these contrasting emotional influences is essential to fostering an effective learning environment for second language acquisition.

To explore the specific impact of negative emotions on the Second Language Learning Process (SLLP), depression emerges as a critical factor influencing students' emotional status. Depression impairs memory, a key component of language acquisition, thereby reducing students' ability to process and retain linguistic information effectively. This emotional state often leads to decreased motivation, causing students to disengage from learning activities and, in some cases, abandon their language studies altogether. Consequently, depression creates significant obstacles to developing receptive skills, such as



listening and reading comprehension, which are essential for successful second language acquisition. (Rashtchi et al., 2012)

Furthermore, depression is a pervasive mental health issue that affects over 350 million individuals worldwide, with profound implications for the SLLP. Depression can range from mild impairment to severe psychological distress, potentially undermining students' engagement in language learning. In the classroom, depressive emotional states may manifest through reduced participation and difficulty concentrating, hindering students' linguistic development. Moreover, language use can serve as an indicator of students' emotional status, reflecting the challenges posed by depression in the SLLP. Addressing these effects is crucial for fostering an effective learning environment and supporting students' progress in second language acquisition. (Losada y Crestani, 2016)

Following the discussion of depression, fear represents the second major negative emotion influencing students' emotional status in the Second Language Learning Process (SLLP). According to the site Very Well Mind fear is defined as “a protective, primal emotion that evokes a biochemical and emotional response,” often triggered by perceived threats, whether physical or psychological. In the context of language learning, fear manifests prominently as the fear of failure, which arises when students repeatedly encounter difficulties without achieving progress. This emotional state undermines students' self-confidence, discouraging them from engaging in language learning activities. Consequently, fear can lead to disengagement, reducing students' willingness to participate in classroom tasks and hindering their progress in second language acquisition. (Fritscher y Block, 2024, pág. 1)

The fear of failure, combined with external factors such as daily life challenges, social environment, and economic pressures, exacerbates the difficulties of learning a second language. These factors contribute to students' reluctance to take risks or pursue new learning opportunities, further shaping their emotional status in the SLLP. For instance, fear can manifest as academic pressure, causing students to lose focus and struggle with linguistic tasks. When combined with depression, fear intensifies students' tendency to disengage, sometimes leading them to consider abandoning their language studies despite significant effort. Research highlights that fear is a common emotional barrier in academic settings, underscoring the need to address it to foster an effective learning environment for second language acquisition.



Concluding the exploration of negative emotions affecting the Second Language Learning Process (SLLP), anxiety emerges as the third critical factor shaping students' emotional status. Anxiety is particularly pronounced among advanced students, significantly impacting their performance by fostering uncertainty about their linguistic abilities. This emotional state can lead students to question the value of continuing their language studies, as anxiety undermines their confidence in speaking or performing tasks. Furthermore, anxiety may contribute to social withdrawal, transforming classroom interactions into challenging experiences that hinder language acquisition. Addressing anxiety is thus essential for supporting students' progress in the SLLP. (P. D. y R. C., 1989)

Building on the effects of anxiety, this emotion often escalates depending on students' social and academic contexts, profoundly influencing their emotional status. Anxiety should not be dismissed lightly, as it is closely correlated with difficulties in social engagement, a critical component of second language acquisition. Learning a second language requires active practice and interaction, beyond passive activities like reading or listening. For example, at the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco (UJAT), many English language students struggle to participate in classroom activities requiring oral use of the language, reflecting the pervasive impact of anxiety on their willingness to communicate. These challenges highlight the need to address anxiety to foster an effective learning environment.

The impact of anxiety on students' preparedness and foundational knowledge in the SLLP is particularly evident in their willingness to communicate:

Communicative competence can affect a learner's willingness to communicate, a fact that was incorporated in willingness to communicate pyramid model, which also incorporated lower anxiety, higher perceptions of competence, the desire to speak to a specific person at a specific time, in addition to personality characteristics, intergroup climate, and context (out of a total of 12 factors) as variables influencing a learner's willingness to engage in L2 oral communication. (MacIntyre et al., 1998) stated by (Hardacre y Güvendir, 2020)

At institutions like UJAT, this model underscores how anxiety reduces students' confidence in using English, limiting their participation and progress in second language acquisition. Addressing these emotional barriers is crucial for enhancing students' communicative competence and fostering effective language learning.



This study aims to elucidate why students in the language degree program at the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco (UJAT) often experience indecision and consider abandoning their studies, focusing on the role of emotional status in the Second Language Learning Process (SLLP). By identifying and classifying the emotions that influence language acquisition, from the most to the least consequential, this research highlights how depression, fear, and anxiety affect students' motivation and persistence. Drawing on academic sources and observations at UJAT, the study seeks to provide students with strategies to manage these emotional barriers and enhance their success in language learning.

The primary objective of this research is to help students understand how negative emotions shape their emotional status, often leading to incomplete academic goals, such as abandoning their language degree. These emotions, including depression, fear, and anxiety, are particularly challenging in the UJAT context, where students face academic pressures from classroom dynamics and institutional demands. Such pressures can foster negative thoughts, undermining students' confidence and motivation. By identifying these emotional challenges, students can explore resources and strategies to mitigate their impact and sustain their commitment to the SLLP.

At UJAT, negative emotions significantly influence students' emotional status within the language degree program, creating a complex interplay that can either inspire a passion for learning or lead to disengagement. Depression, fear, and anxiety often distract students from their academic goals, reducing their motivation to participate in language learning activities. These emotional barriers are particularly pronounced in the UJAT context, where institutional and social factors exacerbate their impact. Addressing these challenges is essential to fostering a positive emotional status and supporting students' success in the SLLP.

Having examined depression, fear, and anxiety, it is critical to synthesize their collective impact on the SLLP at UJAT. As scholars such as (MacIntyre et al., 1998) and (Hardacre y Güvendir, 2020) have demonstrated, these emotions act as significant barriers, reducing students' confidence and willingness to engage in language learning tasks. Negative emotional states can lead to decisions that derail academic progress, fostering a desire to abandon language studies. Consequently, fostering a positive emotional status is essential for students to overcome these barriers and achieve success in second language acquisition.



METHODOLOGY

This project was made by using a quantitative methodology based on an online survey. The survey is divided into three sections: on the first the objective is to know the role of emotions in the process of learning a second language. This part is formed by four three. The second objective is to find the emotions that affect the learning process of a second language and is formed by six items. The third objective is to rank the emotions from the one that affects the most to the one that affects the least the learning process of a second language that is based in the recollection of the items belonging the first two objectives.

Results:

Specific objective:

Know the role of emotions in a second language learning process

Question one: what kind of emotions students experience the most at certain point of the degree? Most of the students mentioned that anxiety is the emotion that they may experience the most.

In the second place the stress, depression, sadness, fear, happiness, joy, panic, enthusiasm, hope and frustration are mostly the ones who undergraduate experiment at the language's degree program.

Question two: how can you manage emotions in the process of learning a second language?

Students provided a variety of strategies:

- a) having confidence in themselves.
- b) sleeping.
- c) eating their favorite food while doing their duties.
- d) Doing sports.
- e) seeking support from friends.
- f) Looking for psychological therapy.
- g) thinking no one is perfect so it doesn't matter if I make mistakes.
- h) keeping relaxed and not letting anxiety take control of their performances in the classroom.
- i) seeking help from teachers,
- j) meditation,
- k) listening to music



- l) reflecting the origin of every negative emotion focusing on the personal reason or in others situations.
- m) Talking about personal challenges with parents.

Question three: do you think the college environment plays an important role in the process of learning a second language?

Some alumni agreed on the answer that college environment might affect SLA because teachers and friends play an important role in the confidence of someone to enhance their abilities in the proper manner. Moreover, if they could work in a comfortable environment, the process of learning will not only become easier, but also would influence the emotions and people around them. Also, they mentioned that it affects mainly when they are emotionally weak, everything can affect them and it is more common in younger people that have been growth with an enormous fragility.

Specific objective:

Find the emotions that affect the learning process of a second language.

Question four: which of these emotions can affect your performance at the process of learning a second language?

This section was made by two questions and three items in Likert's scale. The emotions were:

- Anxiety. – 68/81 chose this option. Almost all of them agreed that this emotion affects SLLP.
- Fear. –65/81 chose this option. Almost all of them agreed that this emotion is also affecting SLLP.
- Depression. – 55/81 chose this emotion. More than the half of students disagreed that this emotion affects SLLP.

At the moment of making the selection for these factors which seems to be influenced by the anxiety, there were considered the following factors such as: emotionally, physically, mentally, academically and others, to determinate how anxiety affect the performance in the classroom. – even though, they were random answers (too much, none and others). A higher amount of undergraduate considers that this emotion affects the most: mentally, followed in second place by emotionally, and with a similar number in third place they considered that physically and academically affects the least in the classroom.



To continue, a higher number of students consider that fear influence in first place emotionally, in second place mentally, in third place there is academically, followed by physically and letting others in fifth place. Depression is next, being the students who selected by a majority that mentally influence the performance in the classroom, letting in second place emotionally just by a minimum number of votes, academically stays in third place with physically achieving fourth place and others in fifth place.

Following with the demonstration of results, we have question number five: from your point of view, do these emotions affect or benefit your performance as a student of the BA Moderns Languages? This questions just continue reaching our second objective. A majority of undergraduates answered to this question with “yes, they affect” but providing different opinions of the reason why they are considering emotions affect their performance when learning SLA. For example, one of them explained that fear can affect in a negative way, because makes him to ask himself if is worthy to participate in some of the activities in classroom even though that anxiety is helping in some way to finish my homework or school projects. Other student answered that, anxiety gave him the opportunity to get to know me better; to control myself but at the same time it can affect me if I don’t know how to control it. Depression, is another way to think and fear can motivate me to do something or sometimes just block what I should be pursuing.

However, some students did not choose any option. A few of them answered that both “affect and benefit” can happen, because it helps to overcome obstacles that negative emotions put in their paths and prepares them to face properly what is about to come to their life’s. Also, depending and how emotions are managed and the type of situation they are living for example, family situations, economic, social and even healthy ones they can feel concentrated at the moment to focus on SLA.

Question six: do you think teachers affect the status of emotions when learning SL, help you overcome them or make it worse?

Students answered in the majority that it will be depending on the teacher’s behavior and thoughts. Some of the teachers as students are mentioning are really comprehensive. It is up to their knowledge and experience. For example, some teachers based on classrooms behaviors or difficulties take decisions. Teachers may encourage the student to keep working and improving, while others don’t. In addition, pupils mentioned as well that teachers play an important role in the process of learning, they can help



students overcome negative emotions and feel safe in a classroom environment. This can lead also to the teacher's way of teaching and how students may deal with that. Many times, the way they are teaching is not helping to gain confidence in what we are doing and delays the SLA. Another minor number of students just answered "no" or don't think teachers affect the status of emotions when learning a second language.

Specific objective three:

Rank the emotions that affect a second language learning process.

Based on the information collected by the undergraduate language students the results for the rank continuous as follow:

Anxiety is the emotion that leads the rank followed by fear and leaving depression on the third place.

Discussions:

As results were totally concluded, now we can discuss what has been recollected so far. In the beginning of this research, we were focusing in the result from the first objective which is to know the role of emotions in the process of learning a second language. Here I was able to found what students consider the importance of emotions when learning a second language. First, based on my research and information that I have found, the emotions that were playing an important role affecting SLLP and were discovered by some of the authors were: anger, annoyance, boredom, dissatisfaction, frustration, jealousy, madness, stress, anxiety, depression and fear.

According to the items and questions applied to the undergraduates from the UJAT, most of the students mentioned that anxiety is one of the emotions that a student may experience the most. In the second place the stress, depression, sadness, fear, emotion, happiness, joy, panic, enthusiasm, hope and frustration are mostly the ones who undergraduate experiment at the language's degree program. So, based on the information what I can identify is that negative emotions mentioned by these authors in the beginning, were the ones who at the end pupils also chose and experience when learning SLLP. As a matter of fact, this is a prove that also could be some other emotions that maybe are not playing an important role while aiming a second language but are also part of the process for some of the students like emotion, happiness, joy, panic, enthusiasm, hope and frustration. As a part of the research, I can



also notice that the main three emotions who are currently associated with my theory, are the same emotions that students are also experiencing in the language's degree program.

In fact, no only just emotions. As part of the survey and with the purpose for obtaining more data about the pupil's point of view, there are two other questions applied in order to identify the reason and what are they basing their answers. The first one is how they can manage emotions and if classroom environment is also part of the process. These questions were asked with openly answers. They (students), determined and highlighted some important things such as the way managing emotions. They mentioned that emotions cannot be managed at all, because in some point they may start to feel insecure o dealing with a higher level of stress by the fact that they do not know if learning a second language has been really aimed or if all the knowledge it is applicable in a test.

In the other hand, pupils may handle these emotions by listening to music, taking therapy, talk to their parents, doing sports, eating their favorites food or even meditation. In addition, I was also able to find that the majority of answers, students agreed that college's environment plays an important role in the process of learning a second language. Some of the answers they provided are pointing to the way communication, students' behavior, interpersonal relationships, teachers and judgement are some factors that may provoke anxiety, depression and fear. In fact, it is something that some authors mentioned in the article, the way different scenarios of any matter; good or bad may influence the way we are feeling and college might be key to one of those scenarios.

CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the profound and multifaceted role of emotions in the Second Language Learning Process (SLLP), revealing them not merely as peripheral influences but as a core existential force that shape the human endeavor of acquiring a new language. Learning a second language is, at its essence, an act of self-transcendence: it confronts the learner with vulnerability, uncertainty, and the perpetual tension between limitation and possibility. Emotions, as dynamic responses to this confrontation, mediate the path toward linguistic competence and personal growth, echoing philosophical views that see education as the cultivation of an integrated self-one capable of embracing emotional complexity rather than suppressing it.



The literature reviewed underscores the predominance of negative emotions-particularly anxiety, fear, and depression-as significant barriers to effective second language acquisition (SLA). These affective states, often rooted in perceived threats to self-worth, competence, or social standing, elevate the affective filter, hinder, motivation, impair cognitive processing (e.g. memory and attention), and contribute to disengagement or even abandonment of studies. Positive emotions, such as enjoyment, hope, enthusiasm, joy, and pride, conversely, broaden cognitive resources, foster resilience, and enhance engagement, aligning with broaden-and-built theories that posit positive affect as a catalyst for perseverance and resource-building in challenging learning contexts.

Empirical findings from the survey of UJAT undergraduates in the language degree program provide compelling support for these theoretical claims while adding nuance. Anxiety emerged as the most frequently experienced and impactful emotions, followed by stress, fear, depression, and frustration-mirroring the literature's emphasis on debilitating negative effects. Notably, participants also reported positive (happiness, joy', enthusiasms, hope) and mixed emotions (e.g., panic), indicating that affective landscape of SLA is not exclusively negative but includes facilitative elements that can coexist with challenges. Students identified the university environment as pivotal: interpersonal dynamics, teacher behavior, communication patterns, judgment fears, and relational climate either motivation. These insights highlight the ecological nature of emotional experiences in SLA-the classroom as a microcosm where external scenarios profoundly influence internal states.

In philosophical terms, this convergence between theory and lived experience invites reflection in the human condition in learning: negative emotions, while constrictive, can serve as signals for self-awareness and adaptation, prompting deeper inquiry into one's limits and potentials. Positive emotions, in turn, expand horizons and build enduring resources among UJAT students-particularly in contexts of academic pressure, social evaluation, and uncertainty about proficiency-underscore the intricate emotional dynamics inherent to second language transcends linguistic mechanics; it demands the navigation of this emotional spectrum as in integral part of becoming a more resilient, self-aware communicator in an interconnected world. By recognizing emotions as a fundamental shaper of the learning journey, the study affirms their enduring influence on motivation, persistence, and ultimate in the SLLP.



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