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STUDENTS' AFFECTIVE READING STRATEGY USE VIS-A-VIS THEIR PERFORMANCE IN READING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract

This study investigates the implementation and impact of affective reading strategies among Grade 12 students in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Recognizing a significant gap between teachers and students in utilizing these strategies for English reading comprehension, the research addresses the chronic underutilization of affective learning within the Ethiopian high school system. The purpose of the study is to examine the extent to which students employ affective reading strategies and to evaluate their impact on English reading comprehension, while identifying gaps in implementation and proposing ways to enhance affective learning practices. Using a combined descriptive-correlational design, data were collected via self-administered questionnaires (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.757) and reading comprehension tests from 267 randomly selected students. Results revealed students frequently employ strategies focused on anxiety reduction (e.g., self-encouragement, mean=3.72) and attention to physical responses (mean=3.68), but show low adoption of collaborative strategies like peer discussion (mean=2.19) or structured approaches like checklists (mean=1.72). Crucially, a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$) was found between overall affective strategy use and reading comprehension performance. The findings underscore the importance of affective strategies in language learning, highlighting their contribution to emotional resilience and academic success, while revealing significant variability in student preferences and usage patterns. This suggests a need for tailored instructional approaches to bridge the implementation gap and fully leverage affective learning's potential in Ethiopian English education.

Keywords: Language learning strategy, affective learning, reading comprehension, reading strategy, emotions, correlation

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Introduction

Affective learning, which focuses on emotions, attitudes, and values, is gaining traction among educators as a key part of the learning process. It's not just about what students learn, but how they feel while learning, and it plays a big role in how well they understand what they read. Emotions like self-worth, motivation, anxiety, confidence, and even a willingness to take risks all shape how students pick up new skills, especially in language learning (Habok& Magyar, 2017).

By weaving affective learning strategies into education, we can create a richer, more engaging experience for students. It's not only about teaching facts but also about nurturing the emotional side of learning. This approach helps students stay motivated, feel good about themselves, and develop a deeper connection to what they're learning. It's about building a strong foundation for success by addressing both the mind and the heart.

Afdaleni (2017) highlights some big wins from affective learning strategies: they spark greater engagement, lift students' emotional well-being, boost confidence, sharpen social skills, encourage a love for learning, and lead to better academic results. These strategies help students feel more secure and make learning more enjoyable, empowering them to take charge of their own progress and adapt to new challenges with ease.

Vaughn et al (2024) point out that emotions are at the core of how we learn. Understanding affective learning can supercharge emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and self-confidence. Stander (2022) adds that one of the most significant hurdles for students, especially in language learning, is figuring out how to grow into skilled, independent learners. Teachers also face challenges in supporting struggling students, especially if they haven't tapped into affective learning strategies to help address those emotional barriers.

Research by Par (2020) shows that students who are tuned into affective learning strategies tend to outperform their peers. These successful learners have a toolbox of emotional skills and know how to adapt their learning to different situations. Zare (2013) explains that affective learning helps students manage their emotions, which is critical for improving language skills. Students who embrace these strategies often feel more confident and less anxious, while those who don't may struggle and fall behind.

Ultimately, as these researchers suggest, emotions play a huge role in how well we learn languages. Positive feelings and attitudes can make learning a language more successful and enjoyable, while negative ones can hold students back. By focusing on affective learning, we can help students not just learn better but also feel better about the journey.

2. Theoretical framework

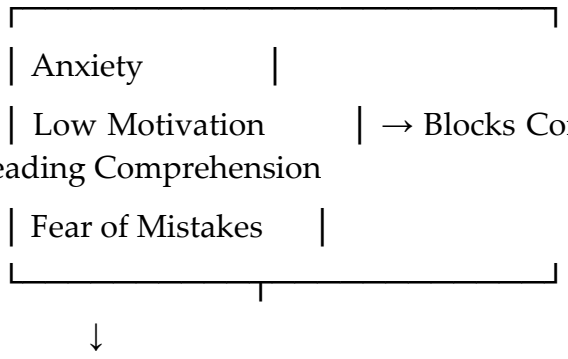
2.1 Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982)

This research is based on Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, from 1982. This foundation is particularly relevant to the research question being investigated: the relationship between the students' affective reading strategy use and their performance in reading comprehension. Krashen's theory emphasizes the significant influence of emotions, such as lowering anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence, in the learning process, particularly in acquiring new languages or skills, including reading comprehension.

So, what's the Affective Filter Hypothesis? It says that emotions can either help or block someone from learning something new. Imagine a brain equipped with a "filter" that regulates the amount of new information that is allowed in. When learners are motivated, self-assured, and calm, their filter is relaxed, enabling them to soak up new knowledge effortlessly. However, when they feel anxious, stressed, or uncertain about themselves, that filter becomes restrictive, making it more difficult to learn, even when the content is straightforward and accessible.

Figure 1: Relationship between Affective Learning Strategies and Reading Comprehension

High Affective Filter (Negative Emotions)



Psychological Barrier

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Limited Engagement with Texts

Low Affective Filter (Positive Emotions)

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│ Confidence │

│ High Motivation │ → Facilitates Input Processing → Enhanced Reading Comprehension

│ Safe Learning Environment │

└──────────────┬───────────────┘

↓

Openness to Input

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Active Interaction with Texts

3. Statement of the problem

In recent years, there's been a lot of buzz among educators about using affective learning strategies—techniques that tap into students' emotions to boost language learning and support their well-being. But there's a big disconnect between teachers and students when it comes to actually putting these strategies into practice, especially for reading comprehension. This is a persistent issue in Ethiopian high schools, where English language teaching often misses the mark on fully harnessing the power of affective learning.

In my 25 years of teaching English, I've seen firsthand how students struggle. Many find it tough to use strategies like self-motivation or focusing deeply on their reading. They also have a hard time tuning into their physical responses, managing stress, or staying motivated—key ingredients for success in language classes.

There are plenty of reasons why both teachers and students are hitting roadblocks. Teachers might not have the training or tools they need to make these strategies work, while students often struggle to connect with them in

a meaningful way. As a result, these approaches aren't fully woven into the curriculum, which holds back both language learning and emotional growth (Karpicke et al., 2009).

Thus, this research is essential to emphasize the importance of equipping students with the necessary tools to manage their emotions effectively, alongside promoting an environment that boosts their self-confidence and personal development. By focusing on affective learning strategies, teachers can cultivate a more comprehensive educational experience that enhances language skills and fosters students' emotional resilience.

4. Research questions

4. 1. To what extent do students apply affective learning strategies during reading comprehension activities?

4. 2. Is there any significant correlation between students' affective reading strategy use and reading comprehension performance?

5. Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the present study are:

1. Students make extensive use of affective reading strategies during reading comprehension activities (H1).

2. There is a positive correlation between the students' affective reading strategy use and their performance in reading comprehension (H1).

3. Most students do not regularly employ various affective reading strategies when involved in reading comprehension activities (H_0).

4. There is no correlation between the students' affective reading strategy use and their performance in reading comprehension (H_0).

6. Review of related literature

6.1 Affective Learning and Its Impact

Back in 1948, a group of psychologists and educators gathered at a major American Psychological Association conference to tackle a big question: how can we create a framework for education that goes beyond just teaching facts? This meeting was a game-changer. It sparked the idea of affective learning—the emotional side of education that shapes how students feel, think, and connect with what they're learning. According to

Gano (2009), this moment was pivotal because it pushed for a system that not only improves how teachers design lessons but also deepens the link between learning and personal growth.

So, what exactly is affective learning? It's all about the emotions, attitudes, and values that influence how students respond to information and interact with their peers and teachers. The 1948 framework gave teachers a way to create classrooms where emotions matter, helping them tap into students' unique strengths, interests, and feelings. It serves as a reminder that education involves not only intellectual development but also emotional engagement. By emphasizing feelings, educators can ignite enthusiasm, create a sense of community, and support students in becoming well-rounded individuals prepared to face life's difficulties.

6.2 What Affective Learning Looks Like

Researchers like Guthrie and Klauda (2014) broke affective learning into five key levels, each tied to different aspects of a student's life. On a personal level, it's about building skills like effective studying, emotional intelligence, and self-confidence. For example, good study habits help students tackle schoolwork with confidence. Emotional intelligence—the ability to understand and manage emotions—helps them build strong relationships both in and out of the classroom. And self-esteem—belief about an individual's ability—drives them to take risks and push through tough moments.

At a group level, affective learning shapes how students interact with their classmates and the wider world. It's about creating a classroom vibe where everyone feels valued and motivated. Zeynali et al (2015) pointed out that students don't just absorb facts—their emotions, expectations, and personal experiences shape how they understand the world. For instance, when students feel their teachers and peers believe in them, they're more likely to stay engaged and put in the effort. On the flip side, low expectations can lead to disengagement.

Emotions play a crucial role in how well we remember information. Research by List (2021) indicates that when we connect with ideas while feeling positive emotions like excitement, curiosity, and joy, our ability to retain those memories improves significantly. This suggests that fostering positive emotional states can enhance our comprehension of difficult

concepts, making it beneficial to seek out and nurture these feelings during the learning process.

Hortwitz (2010) adds that emotions don't just help us remember—they also deepen our understanding. When students connect emotionally with what they're learning, they're more likely to grasp concepts fully and think creatively. But if emotions are ignored, as Weinstein and Underwood (2014) warn, the subject matter can lose its meaning, leaving students disconnected. Altmann et al (2012) emphasize that how students feel about themselves affects how they learn. A positive classroom atmosphere—where students feel safe and supported—encourages them to take risks and dive into their studies. Krathwohl and Anderson (2000) found that confident students are more likely to tackle challenges, while those who feel defeated may struggle. That's why early interventions, like reading programs, are so important—they help students build confidence before self-doubt creeps in (Dörnyei, 2005). Plus, fostering positive values in the classroom helps students make good choices and grow into thoughtful, engaged citizens.

6.3 The Role of Emotions in Language Learning

Positive emotions like curiosity, excitement, and pride can greatly boost students' motivation to learn. When learners feel curious, they are eager to explore a language, and excitement drives them to try new things. Pride in their accomplishments encourages them to keep pushing forward, leading to better understanding and skills. However, negative emotions such as anxiety and frustration can hinder progress. Anxiety may cause students to fear mistakes, making them reluctant to participate or take risks, especially with challenging topics. It's important for teachers and students to understand how emotions affect learning. By creating a supportive environment that encourages curiosity and addresses negative feelings, they can enhance the learning experience and make it more enjoyable and successful (MacIntyre and Gregersen, 2012).

Moreover, emotions play a crucial role in how well we remember things. Positive feelings, like having fun conversations in the language we are learning, help our brains make stronger connections, making it easier to recall vocabulary and grammar. For instance, if we enjoy chatting with a friend in the target language, we are more likely to remember the words

used. On the other hand, negative emotions such as stress or boredom can make it harder to focus and remember information. Stress can prevent clear thinking, leading to forgetfulness, while boredom can cause us to not pay attention and understand less. In short, our emotions greatly affect our learning and memory, so creating enjoyable learning environments is important for better retention (Richards, 2022).

7. Method

7.1 Study Design

A combination of descriptive and correlational research approaches was employed to collect the necessary data. The types of emotional reading strategies used by students were outlined using the descriptive approach. The relationship between these strategies and the students' reading comprehension performance was explored through the correlational approach.

7.2 Participants

Grade 12 students from high schools in Addis Ababa, enrolled during the 2024 academic year, were selected for the study. These students were chosen due to their proximity to high school graduation and the likelihood of having developed a robust set of strategy skills throughout their primary, junior, and high school education. A total of 267 students from five high schools were randomly selected for participation.

7.3 Tools Used

Data were gathered using a self-administered questionnaire containing eight questions and a reading comprehension test. The questionnaire was designed to identify the reading strategies currently employed by students. Responses were provided by students on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (never or almost never) to 5 (always). The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were verified, with the reliability of the affective reading strategy questions confirmed by a Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.757. The reading comprehension test was used to evaluate the students' understanding of the text and to determine whether their strategy use influenced their reading scores.

8. **Result**

Table 1

Mean and standard deviation of affective reading strategies

Strategy items	Mean	Rank	Std. Deviation
Reducing anxiety during exam sessions	3.9588	High	1.15451
Self-encouragement to avoid anxiety	3.7154	High	1.21142
Paying attention to the positive and negative physical responses	3.6779	High	1.22629
Taking a risks to answer difficult questions	3.6367	High	1.22284
Getting immersed while reading a text	3.5805	High	1.16822
Practicing progressive relaxation strategies before reading	3.0824	Moderate	1.14757
Discussing thoughts with peers regarding the usage of reading strategies	2.1948,	Low	1.19817
Using checklist to remember challenges	1.7191	Low	, 0.76565
Grand Mean = 2.9956			Av. SD = 1.1506

The aforementioned table provides a comprehensive overview of the mean and standard deviation for a variety of affective reading strategies, systematically organized based on their mean scores. Notably, the strategies designed to alleviate anxiety during examination periods, alongside self-encouragement strategies aimed at mitigating anxiety, exhibit mean values of (X = 3.9588 and 3.7154), with corresponding standard deviations of (SD = 1.15451 and 1.21142), respectively. These findings indicate that such strategies are among the most widely adopted by students. The relatively low standard deviation values (SD = 1.15451 and 1.21142) suggest a strong consensus among students regarding the perceived effectiveness and benefits of these strategies for managing anxiety in academic settings.

The data also reveals that students employ a variety of affective reading strategies, which are crucial for enhancing their reading experiences and

comprehension skills. Specifically, the strategies of paying attention to both positive and negative physical responses, demonstrating a willingness to take risks when addressing challenging questions, and engaging deeply while reading are notably prevalent among the students. The mean values for these strategies are recorded as (X = 3.6779) for attention to physical responses, (X = 3.63367) for risk–taking in challenging questions, and (X = 3.5805) for deep engagement in reading. These mean scores suggest a generally positive inclination towards these strategies, indicating that students recognize their importance in the reading process.

However, the accompanying standard deviation values – SD = 1.22629 for attention to physical responses, SD = 1.22284 for risk–taking, and SD = 1.16822 for deep engagement – highlight a significant degree of variability in how students perceive and utilize these strategies. For instance, the relatively high standard deviation for the strategy of focusing on physical responses (SD = 1.22629) points to a diverse range of perspectives among students regarding its effectiveness. This suggests that while some students may find it beneficial to be aware of their physical reactions during reading activities, others may not see the same value.

Moreover, the mean and standard deviation values for the strategies of taking risks to answer difficult questions and immersing oneself in reading further illustrate the complexity of students' attitudes towards these strategies. The mean scores indicate that students generally acknowledge the importance of confronting challenges in reading tasks, which is a positive sign for fostering resilience and critical thinking skills. However, the variability in response, as indicated by the standard deviations, reflects a spectrum of opinions on the value of risk–taking in reading comprehension activities. Some students may thrive on the challenge and view risk-taking as an essential part of their learning process, while others may feel uncertain about stepping outside their comfort zones.

The average score for the strategy of becoming fully immersed in reading (X = 3.5805) suggests that students typically engage deeply with the reading material during comprehension activities, indicating that this strategy may enhance both understanding and retention. Additionally, the average score for the strategy of employing progressive relaxation during reading comprehension tasks (X = 3.0824) implies that students possess a moderate

level of agreement and experience with the use of progressive relaxation strategies.

In contrast, engaging in discussions with peers and utilizing a checklist to recall challenges, with mean values of (X = 2.1948 and 1.7191), indicates that these strategies yield the lowest average scores, suggesting that students perceive them as less effective for enhancing their reading comprehension activities. Furthermore, the standard deviation (SD = 1.19817) reflects a degree of variability in student opinions, indicating that these strategies, especially the use of checklists for recalling challenges during reading comprehension tasks, are not well-received.

Generally, the data underscores the significance of affective reading strategies in students' learning, and also shows students' individual differences, how these strategies are perceived, and applied. This variability suggests that teachers should consider tailoring their strategies to support diverse student needs and encourage a more inclusive environment for developing effective reading strategies. By fostering an educational setting that values both risk–taking and self–awareness, language teachers can help students navigate the complexities of reading comprehension more effectively.

Table 2

Overall correlation between students' reading strategy use and reading score

Affective reading strategy use	N	Pearson correlation (r)	Level of significance sig (2-tailed)
Students' affective reading strategy use vs. their reading performance	267	0.60	0.001

The analysis of the aforementioned table reveals a notably strong positive correlation between students' utilization of affective reading strategies and their corresponding performance in reading comprehension, as evidenced by the Pearson correlation coefficient (r = 0.60). The correlation coefficient (r = 0.60) indicates that as students use more affective reading strategies, their reading comprehension performance tends to improve.

9. Discussion

The data analysis indicates that strategies of "reducing anxiety during exam sessions" (Mean = 3.9588, SD = 1.15451) and "self-encouragement to avoid

anxiety" (Mean = 3.7154, SD = 1.21142) emerged as the most widely adopted, with high mean scores and relatively low standard deviations. This suggests that students consistently recognize the value of anxiety management in enhancing their reading performance. The low standard deviations indicate a strong consensus among students regarding the effectiveness of these strategies, likely due to their direct impact on creating a calm and focused mindset during high-pressure reading tasks.

Strategies such as "paying attention to positive and negative physical responses" (Mean = 3.6779, SD = 1.22629), "taking risks to answer difficult questions" (Mean = 3.6367, SD = 1.22284), and "getting immersed while reading" (Mean = 3.5805, SD = 1.16822) also received high mean scores, indicating their frequent use. These strategies reflect students' willingness to engage deeply with reading material and tackle challenges, which are critical for developing resilience and critical thinking skills. However, the relatively higher standard deviations suggest variability in how students perceive and apply these strategies. For instance, some students may find monitoring physical responses helpful, while others may not prioritize it, possibly due to differing levels of self-awareness or comfort with metacognitive strategies.

The strategy of "practicing progressive relaxation strategies before reading" (Mean = 3.0824, SD = 1.14757) received a moderate mean score, indicating that while some students find it useful, it is not as widely adopted as anxiety-reduction or engagement strategies. In contrast, "discussing thoughts with peers" (Mean = 2.1948, SD = 1.19817) and "using a checklist to remember challenges" (Mean = 1.7191, SD = 0.76565) had the lowest mean scores, suggesting they are perceived as less effective. The low adoption of peer discussions could stem from a lack of structured opportunities for collaboration or students' preference for individual learning. Similarly, the low mean score for using checklists may indicate that students find this approach cumbersome or irrelevant to their reading process.

The standard deviations for most strategies (ranging from 0.76565 to 1.22629) highlight significant variability in students' perceptions and application of affective reading strategies. For example, the high standard deviation for "paying attention to physical responses" (SD = 1.22629) suggests diverse opinions on its utility, possibly influenced by individual differences in self-awareness or emotional regulation skills. This variability

underscores the need for personalized approaches to teaching reading strategies, as a one-size-fits-all model may not address the diverse needs of students.

The grand mean of 2.9956 and average standard deviation of 1.1506 further indicate that while affective reading strategies are generally valued, their perceived effectiveness varies across individuals. This variability could be influenced by factors such as students' prior experiences, learning styles, or the instructional context in which these strategies are introduced.

When it comes to the correlation between strategy use and reading performance, the Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.60$, $p = 0.001$) indicates a strong positive relationship between the use of affective reading strategies and reading comprehension performance. This finding suggests that students who actively employ affective strategies—such as managing anxiety, engaging deeply with texts, or taking risks—tend to achieve better reading outcomes. The statistical significance ($p = 0.001$) reinforces the reliability of this relationship, highlighting the importance of affective factors in reading success.

Since there is a strong positive correlation between students' reading scores and their use of affective reading strategies, the alternative hypothesis (H1) is likely acceptable, and the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected.

The strong correlation implies that affective reading strategies may enhance students' emotional and cognitive engagement with reading tasks, leading to improved comprehension and retention. This aligns with prior research suggesting that emotional regulation and motivation play critical roles in academic performance.

For instance, Oxford (1990) confirms that learners can better manage their self-confidence and develop constructive learning attitudes in language studies by employing affective learning strategies. These approaches help language learners align their surroundings with their personal learning strengths, enhancing their emotional resilience. Such capabilities may also empower learners to navigate challenges encountered while mastering a new language, significantly contributing to the development of their reading skills.

Oxford goes on to emphasize that reducing anxiety and increasing self-awareness can enhance students' concentration and memory, enabling

them to engage more effectively with reading materials. This improved focus allows learners to access prior knowledge more readily, think critically, solve problems, manage physical symptoms, and help them remain calm. Additionally, self-encouragement practices foster students' belief in their abilities, boosting their motivation and willingness to tackle difficult tasks.

Aydin (2008) also contends that regulating emotions, fostering motivation, recognizing physical responses, and engaging in progressive relaxation assist students in staying alert during stressful situations or when they find their focus waning. This awareness allows them to implement corrective measures, utilize relaxation techniques, and preserve a sense of calm and concentration. Furthermore, managing their physical reactions and alleviating anxiety empowers students to gain greater control over their emotions and thoughts. This leads them to approach exams with increased confidence and perform close to their potential, ultimately resulting in improved outcomes over time.

10. Conclusion

The findings highlight the critical role of affective reading strategies in enhancing students' reading comprehension performance. Strategies focused on anxiety reduction, risk-taking, and deep engagement are widely adopted and associated with better reading outcomes, as evidenced by the strong positive correlation ($r = 0.60$). However, the variability in strategy use underscores the need for personalized and inclusive teaching approaches. By addressing underutilized strategies and fostering a supportive learning environment, educators can help students develop effective reading habits that enhance both their academic performance and emotional resilience.

11. Recommendations

1. Differentiate Instruction: teachers should avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. They should apply diverse options, allowing students to choose and develop strategies that resonate with them personally.

2. Model and Scaffold: teachers should actively demonstrate the use of affective strategies (e.g., think-aloud for self-encouragement, guided peer discussion sessions) and provide structured practice opportunities within reading lessons.

3. Normalize Emotional Management: There should be an opportunity for the students to discuss anxiety management, and this should be an integral part of the learning process.

4. Promote Collaborative Learning: teachers should design reading comprehension activities that inherently require and encourage peer discussion and reflection on reading processes and challenges.

5. Actively Explore Strategies: students should be proactive in trying out different affective strategies (especially collaborative and structured ones) discovered through teachers or resources that help them to enhance individual learning needs and reduce anxiety. Moreover, participating in study groups to share feelings and experiences would scale up their affective learning skills.

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