

INFLUENCES OF TEACHER IMMEDIACY ON ADULT LANGUAGE LEARNERS' THREE DOMAINS OF LEARNING: A LITERATURE REVIEW

ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA TÍNH TRỰC TIẾP CỦA GIÁO VIÊN LÊN NGƯỜI HỌC NGOẠI NGỮ Ở ĐỘ TUỔI TRƯỞNG THÀNH THEO BA MIỀN HỌC TẬP: TỔNG QUAN LÝ THUYẾT

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades, educational researchers and scholars have extensively studied teacher immediacy and its multifaceted effects on learners across various academic disciplines. While numerous studies have demonstrated the positive correlation between teacher immediacy and student outcomes in traditional classroom settings, there remains a need for a comprehensive understanding of how these interpersonal behaviors specifically impact adult language learners. The investigation examines this relationship through the lens of three fundamental learning domains: affective, cognitive, and behavioral learning. This paper seeks to contribute to the theoretical framework of teacher immediacy by drawing its connections with adult language education across existing research.

Keywords: *Teacher immediacy; adult language learners; affective learning; cognitive learning; behavioral learning.*

TÓM TẮT

Trong vài thập kỷ qua, các học giả đã nghiên cứu sâu rộng về tính trực tiếp của giáo viên (teacher immediacy) và những tác động đa chiều của nó đối với người học thuộc nhiều lĩnh vực khác nhau. Tuy nhiên nghiên cứu đã chỉ ra mối tương quan tích cực giữa tính trực tiếp của giáo viên và kết quả học tập của học sinh, chúng ta vẫn cần hiểu một cách toàn diện về những tác động mà tính trực tiếp của giáo viên mang đến cho người học ngoại ngữ ở độ tuổi trưởng thành. Bài nghiên cứu sẽ phân tích tương quan này từ ba khía cạnh: miền học tập cảm xúc, miền học tập nhận thức và miền học tập hành vi, thông qua việc liên hệ các nghiên cứu về tính trực tiếp của giáo viên với lĩnh vực giáo dục ngôn ngữ cho người trưởng thành.

Từ khóa: *Tính trực tiếp của giáo viên, người học tuổi trưởng thành, miền cảm xúc, miền nhận thức, miền vận động.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of “immediacy” was proposed by Albert Mehrabian, who defines it as communication behaviors that enhance closeness, both physical and psychological, among people [1]. Those behaviors vary from verbal (e.g. humor, inclusive personal pronoun, first-name basis) to non-verbal (e.g. eye contact, facial expression, body language) [2] and are thought to increase the effectiveness in communication as “people approach what they like and avoid what they do not” [3]. Later on, the term “teacher immediacy” emerges when instructors of various contexts are observed to have applied those tactics in the classroom to create a supportive learning environment.

Positioned as a “positive influence” [2] which is helpful to students in general, teacher immediacy is particularly relevant to language teaching and learning as both involve communication. A sense of closeness helps learners and teachers interact more, while language acquisition, itself, relies on interaction of any and many forms [4]. Besides, research proves that teachers’ behaviors and personalities can affect “the attitudes and motivation of students” (Gardner & Lambert, as cited in [5]). Consequently, strategies to enhance teacher-student rapport might also support students’ learning journey.

Adult learners are defined as post-puberty individuals, or those who start learning a new language after, normally, the age of 18. They can be college students or office workers, and even the elderly. Unlike younger groups who are often in need of much guidance, adults are experienced, independent, and goal-oriented [6]. Therefore, a friendly and caring instructor might be less likely to impress them or affect their learning process.

This intrigues me as to how, specifically, teacher immediacy influences adult language learners because this group of learners has its distinct characteristics as mentioned above. While much research has been conducted on immediacy, they do not purposefully target the older population nor emphasize how those teaching strategies support or disrupt adults' language learning. For this reason, this paper hopes to provide a comprehensive picture of teacher immediacy's influence on adults' language learning by reviewing prior literature, and from there, highlighting main findings and research gaps that would inform later research.

2. TEACHER IMMEDIACY ON ADULT LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Learners are believed to learn with three major domains regardless of the course subject. The first one, the cognitive domain, relates to the mechanism of information recall and acquisition [7]. The behavioral domain, also called psychomotor, refers to actions one performs such as behavior changes or vocational skills [8]. The last one and the most widely researched in relation with teacher immediacy is the affective domain. In this domain, scholars examine the psychological development of learners reflected through their "beliefs, attitudes, impressions, desires, feelings, values, preferences, and interests" (Friedman; Friedman & Neuman; Picard, et al., as cited in [9]). However, it is notable that the aforementioned realms are interdependent: changes in one's emotion would inevitably affect one's ability to retain knowledge or practice physical skills and vice versa. Meanwhile, most existing teacher immediacy papers solely dwell on a selected aspect, be it affective or cognitive (and scant attention on psychomotor) [10].

Therefore, this paper will synthesize and discuss the possible influences of teacher immediacy on adult L2 learners from all three angles: affective, cognitive, and behavioral learning. To collect relevant studies, two main databases (Google Scholar and Scopus) are used, using four keywords which are: "teacher immediacy", "cognitive learning", "affective learning", and "behavioral" (the last keyword is purposefully cut short to extend the searchability). After initial collection, further filters are added to focus on language learning and teaching, as well as limiting the targeted population to college students, working adults, and senior people. The paper's authors then proceed to synthesize and analyze collected studies to draw out a common consensus as

well as disparities regarding teacher immediacy and adult learners' language learning.

2.1. Teacher immediacy on adult L2 learners' affective learning

Interaction between teachers and students is characterized by both spoken and unspoken components, by either instructional conversations or feelings of like and dislike, of dominance and disobedience [3]. In another sense, a teacher-student relationship cannot be free of affect, disregarding gender, occupation, or age. By investigating numerous studies, Witt and Wheelless affirm that the influences of teacher immediacy "are invariably positive" on students' affective learning [11]. Considering adult learners, high immediacy from teachers is shown to improve various affective factors that are supportive to language learning and mitigate those that hinder the process.

Several examinations on teacher and student communication confirm a strong correlation between an instructor's verbal and/or non-verbal behaviors, and adult students' motivation. Frymier conducting a study on 178 college students finds that teacher immediacy positively relates to student's intrinsic motivation. Notably, her revelation is still applicable for adults who are already highly determined to learn from the beginning [2]. Various other attempts at college students and working adults of different demography also support this conclusion [12, 13, 14, 15], confirming that when instructors apply affinity-seeking strategies, learners become more interested in the subject matters and more invested in learning itself. This rings true for an e-learning setting as well [16, 17]. Furthermore, a systematic review of verbal and non-verbal teacher immediacy and student motivation by Liu reemphasizes this tie, as well as pointing toward moderate correlations with higher student achievements [18]. All in all, findings consistently indicate the significance of teacher immediacy to learners and their learning; for motivation is, oftentimes, the most influential variable ensuring an outcome of high proficiency.

Besides boosting students' motivation, signs of closeness would also affect their perception toward the instructor. Rocca and McCroskey look into the impact of teacher immediacy on students' opinions and conclude that: high teacher immediacy directly generates a homophily between the two, making students feel more connected to their instructor [19]. As adults are independent, they do not need a coaxing figure like children do, but rather a person to communicate with on equal footing. As highlighted in prior studies, such a

sense of similarity might lead to: either a more positive evaluation of the teacher's assertiveness and responsiveness [20], on his/her competence and trustworthiness [21], or higher satisfaction with the instructor and the course [22].

Furthermore, studies of teacher immediacy have attended to one aspect of affective learning that is singularly relevant to language learners: willingness to communicate. Needless to say, communication and its practice is the pillar of language acquisition, and a learner would achieve great proficiency by vocalizing readily and frequently in the target language [23]. Possessing a zeal for interaction is essential for language learners, and the ability to encourage such in a student is equally important for language teachers. Meanwhile, both verbal and non-verbal teacher immediacy have proved to be positively correlated to a student's willingness to talk in class [24, 25, 26]. When the lecturer is immediate, students are more inclined to speak up, to ask questions and clarifications about either the lesson or other areas in respectful manners [27]. This resonates with a much older demographic, as revealed by Borkowska in a research study on 55 years of age or older language learners. Notably, certain teacher immediacy tactics (patience, professional commitment, empathy) that create a welcoming environment would truly help senior learners overcome their fear of speaking up [28].

This reduction of fear could be explained by how immediacy is associated with lessening foreign language anxiety. A study on English-majored first year students by Ballester shows a causal relationship between low lecturer immediacy and high L2 anxiety in students [29]. Titsworth and colleagues (as cited in Manarte, Lopes, & Pereira) similarly assert that effective communication between teacher-students constructs a friendly learning environment, allowing students to show their authentic feelings, hence a reduction in emotional tension (anxiety) for not just each individual but the class as a whole [30].

Unfortunately, most of the studies are conducted on undergraduate L2 learners within a classroom context so there is little data about the working adult group who would operate in a different, less controlled environment.

2.2. Teacher immediacy on adult L2 learners' cognitive learning

Unlike the consistent results from teacher immediacy and affective learning research, opinions around the effect of immediacy on adults' cognitive learning are largely divided.

In some studies, a positive correlation is found between non-verbal immediacy and cognitive learning, as college students concede they can recall knowledge better in classes where lecturers do apply immediate strategies [31, 32]. Similarly, Andersen and Andersen have concluded that: numerous non-verbal behaviors (eye contact, gestures, vocal modulation, proximity, facial expressions, and touch) positively relate to "various measures of cognitive gain" (as cited in [10]). Meanwhile, Gholamrezaee and Ghanizadeh (find both verbal and non-verbal immediacy positively impact Iranian college students' cognitive learning, though only on a moderate scale [32] - nodding to Witt, Wheelless and Allen's meta-analytical review [33].

Additionally, cognitive learning is believed to occur when a student's affective domain is influenced by immediacy. Manarte, Lopes, and Pereira cite recent researchers of the opinion that psychological factors are so vital to learning that enhancing learners' motivation is already "a catalyst of cognitive learning" [30]. Since teacher immediacy is significantly impactful to affective learning, it seems logical that an instructor's affinity-seeking techniques might help create suitable conditions to trigger cognitive learning in adult language learners. For example, studying new language items from an immediate teacher would simultaneously fuel students' determination to learn the language and capture their attention to the lesson, consequently enforcing the understanding and memorization of said information. This indirect relation is advanced by several scholars such as Comstock, Rowell, and Bowers or Kelley and Gorham in terms of attention arousal to cognition; Rodriguez, Plax, and Kearney in terms of non-verbal immediacy to cognitive learning with affective learning as the central causal mediator (as cited in [33]).

Still, others remain skeptical. The main concern would be the difficulty in analyzing one's cognition. Most previous research has assumed that as full-pledged adults, learners can accurately report on their cognitive workings [10], but the actual functioning of the human brain is far more complicated than mere reflections and perspectives. Even the aforementioned empirical studies on non-verbal immediacy do not resonate with intuitive reasoning. Cognitive activation is often measured by recall, synthesis, and information application on verbal cues. Therefore, despite acknowledging it as a means of communication, researchers struggle to explain how non-verbal behaviors link with cognitive learning,

especially when cognitive development is largely assessed via test grade, as asserted by Richmond, Gorham, and McCroskey [10]. Later, King and Witt argue for the use of confidence testing in assessing cognitive learning, which might serve as a more valid tool for linking teacher immediacy, affective learning, and cognitive gain [34].

2.3. Teacher immediacy on adult L2 learners' behavioral learning

Behavioral learning or psychomotor learning refers to acquiring skills with physical movement and mental component. Akin to the other two domains, there is substantial evidence for linearity between teacher's immediacy and students' intentions to partake in activities [13, 10, 31, 35].

Nevertheless, intents do not always transpire into real action, and up to now, very little research has fully confirmed whether teacher immediacy can prompt action in students. Dewaele and Li come close by looking at 2000 Chinese university students' socio-behavioral learning engagement in relation with teacher enthusiasm [36]. While teacher enthusiasm can be interpreted as a sign of immediacy, the actual result only shows small correlations between the two. Therefore, it could be said that no conclusive link has been found between immediacy and actual behavioral learning as of date. Even less relation has been established between teacher immediacy and adult language students' behavioral learning. There definitely lies a gap in research that requires more attention, although existing hurdles are not easy to cross. The main attributors to this scarcity can be methodology challenges or measurement complexity.

3. CONCLUSION

Existing research provides information about teacher immediacy and adult language learners. Out of the three dimensions of adults' learning, teacher immediacy leaves the most significant mark on the affective learning. Apparently, the observed relationship is linear when the higher the immediacy, the higher the affect. Writings on cognition development provide evidence that teacher immediacy might influence in correlation rather than in direct forces, though there are rooms for further discussion. Meanwhile, very little has been concluded on immediacy and adults' behavioral learning, thus, a need for more attention to this aspect.

This paper hopes to deliver a more structured understanding on possible impacts that teacher

immediacy might leave on adult L2 learners, thus highlighting potential research areas of the same theme. First of all, seeing how most existing studies focus on college students, it would be enlightening if more attention would be directed toward the working-age and senior L2 learners. Besides, implementation of a more credible assessment tool for cognitive gain would also be helpful in establishing the true connection between teacher immediacy and cognitive learning. Finally, seeing as how recent studies have started to find certain (though inconclusive) correlations between teacher immediacy and behavioral language learning, more research could be done to broaden the understanding of these two spheres.

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