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| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

The Role of Literature in Achieving Proficiency in Language Use: The Case of ESL

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| **ABSTRACT**

It has been observed that many users of English in Nigeria do not possess the required level of competence in the language despite its second language status, with its attendant high functional load. This paper seeks to discover the role of literature in achieving proficiency in the use of the English language. To this end, it is targeted at exploring literature in English as a veritable resource in achieving the required proficiency among Nigerian users of English as a second language. The study population consists of final year students of the Department of English language and Literature of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka in Nigeria. Questionnaires and participant observations were adopted as the instruments for data collection. It was discovered that students who have more exposure to literary works are more proficient in using the English language. It, therefore, concluded that making students read literary works, listen, dramatize, and recite them will acquaint them with the comprehensible input they need to achieve the requisite competence in the language.

| **KEYWORDS**

1. Introduction
English enjoys a very prominent status as the most widely spoken language in the world. Hornby 2013, for instance, observes that "one in five of the world's population speaks English with some degree of competence (R 91), and according to Veghese 1989 "it is the most international of languages" (3). Its native speakers are "spread over three continents of the world namely, Australia, Europe and America" (Veghese 1989, p. 1). It is taught and spoken as a second language in the former British colonies and in many countries in Europe and as a foreign language in Japan, China, Dubai, and some other countries in Asia and Latin America.

English is the language of international diplomacy and political propaganda, trade, international sports commentaries, music and entertainment industries, communication, science and technology, and lots more (Onuigbo and Eyisi 2009, Ugwuanyi and Omeje 2013). It is the only language that unites multilingual Nigeria and enables her people to communicate among themselves and with the world. Little wonder Igwedibia (2019) observe that "it is undoubtedly the most important legacy of the British colonial masters to Nigeria" (Introduction). As a second language in the country, English is the language of administration, legislation, trade and commerce, politics, sports, the law. In the education sector, it serves both as a school subject and a medium of instruction (Atanda and Jaiyeoba 2011, p. 93). For this reason, a reasonable degree of proficiency in the language is essential for a successful educational career in the country.

A second language is a language in which a speaker has a lesser competence than the one s/he has in his native tongue. It is "a language in which a bi- or multilingual person conducts parts of his everyday activities, sharing this role with another language in which the person has a greater linguistic facility or intuitive knowledge" (Afolayan 1995, p. 123). English as a Second Language (ESL), therefore, refers to the learning of English as a second/third /fourth language and its use as a "crucial communicative medium in a multilingual setting" next only to the native language (Onuigbo and Eyisi 2009, p. 35).

Despite the functional load of the English language nationally and internationally, many Nigerians do not have the requisite competence to use the language effectively (Ugwuanyi and Omeje 2013, p. 38). This study argues that if Nigerian learners of English begin to pay more attention to the study of literature in English, they will have the opportunity of encountering the language in its context of use, that is, in the literary pieces they read, and naturally, pick up the language from them.

Nwachukwu-Agbada (2003), Umeasiegbu (2003), and Nnamdi-Eruchalu (2011) have written on the importance of Literature to learning language as chapter contributions to Use of English textbooks. Keshavarzi 2012 makes a case for the use of literature as a source for teaching the English language. His reasons are that literature is "a good source of accurate diction, diverse sentence patterns, passionate narratives, ... it enhances ESL students' knowledge of culture and society" among others (p. 555). Amer 2012 makes a proposal for making Literature a part of L2 learning as done in L1 learning. He observed that it would foster "a learning environment that will provide comprehensible input and a low affective filter". Ugoji 2016 also wrote on the need to make Literature in English a tool for learning English. Among her observations are that literature is "a tool for learning extensive reading, meaning extendibility in words, complexities in syntax, creative manipulation of phonemes" (p. 6). But as far as this scholar knows, investigations into the role of literature in English in the learning of the English language among students of English in Nnamdi Azikiwe University and using a survey research design has received little scholarly attention, and this is the motivation for this research. It will address the following research questions:

i.   Are ESL Learners exposed to literature in English?
ii.   Are there motivations for ESL learners to study literature in English?
iii.   Is literature in English beneficial to ESL learners in achieving proficiency in the English Language?

2.0. Literature Review
2.1. Language and Literature
Humans use language in different contexts, and the context in which it is used determines the type of language that is used. In other words, the appropriate language in one context may be inappropriate in another. Literature is one of such areas in which language is used uniquely to communicate meaning. By literature, we mean "works of art in the form of 'high art' composed in prose or verse form" (Simpson, 2004, p. 2). That is, literature which is produced "from the imaginative power of man" (Ezeaku, 2014, p. 1). A good number of imaginative literature still exists as oral traditions in the forms of undocumented folk tales, proverbs, folk songs and dances, myths and legends in less literate societies of the world.

There is no literature without language (Olaoye 2013, p. 749). Literature makes use of language that is more patterned and more figurative and ornate. Literary artists go for elegance in their choice of language. To achieve this, they use all the stylistic embellishments they can avail themselves of to foreground their language in order to achieve the desired effect.

2.2. Theories of Second Language Acquisition
Second language learning (SLL) research has advanced tremendously in recent years as scholars from linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics, applied linguistics, neurolinguistics, and education approach it from an interdisciplinary perspective, attempting to give a plausible explanation of how children and adults acquire a new language after they had acquired their first language. It is essentially a very viable area of research because a large number of people the world over are involved in second language learning for different purposes, thereby prompting researchers, educators, curriculum planners to seek the best ways to facilitate its successful learning. To this end, many theories of second language acquisition have been developed and applied to the teaching and learning of English as a second language. Larsen_Freeman and Long (1991) in Menezes (2013) puts the number of second language acquisition theories at about forty (p.1), but she argues that none of them has been able to give a thorough explanation of SLL.

Some of the most popular of these theories include behaviourism, acculturation, sociocultural theory, universal grammar hypothesis, interaction hypothesis, Comprehensible input, output hypothesis, and others (Menzes 2013).

Behaviourism- It dominated the field of Psycho; logy (especially Psychology of learning) from the late 1800s and early 1900s. It was popularized by John B. Watson (1919, 1925) (Kalat 2008, p. 203), but B.F. Skinner was the most radical of all (225). It explains learning in terms of stimulus-response, which through constant practice marked by imitation and supported by reinforcement leads to habit formation. It insists that the object of psychological investigation is "observable, measurable behaviours, not mental processes" (Kalat 2008, p. 203). Consequently, cognition was completely shut out from their theorizing, while the environment's items for learning were given prominence. Larsen_Freeman and Long (1991) in Menezes (2013) observes that the use of behaviourism as an explanation for SLL does not go beyond pronunciation and rote-memorization of formulae" (405).

Acculturation Model - This theory of second language acquisition was propounded by John Schumann and is based on the social psychology of acculturation (Schumann 1986). It involves using such factors as altitude, proximity to the target language, desire

to assimilate, congruence of the two cultures, and so on to predict the learner's level of proficiency in the target language (Friedrichsen 2020, p. 7). The model predicts that what determines success in language acquisition is the level of the learner's acculturation to the target language group (Schumann 1986).

Sociocultural Theory-The theory was propounded by the Russian Developmental psychologist Lev. S. Vygotsky and centred on "language as a socially mediated process" (Menezes 2013, p. 406). The sociocultural theory attempts to capture the context, action and motives of second language events between individuals who are simultaneously social and cognitive (Xiangui, 2005, p. 120).

Universal Grammar Hypothesis - This is Noam Chomsky's criticism of behaviourism in which he argued that children have innate language faculty that facilitates language acquisition and that they do not become proficient users of their language by imitation (Myles 2010). She goes on to note that the innate faculty will later become Universal grammar. Though a theory of first language acquisition, it has proved very useful in explaining second language acquisition.

Comprehension Hypothesis- This was developed by Krashen. It is based on Chomsky's assumption that language is an innate faculty (Menezes (2013). That is, it involves mental processes. The comprehension hypothesis comprises five hypotheses.

Interaction Hypothesis - It came as a criticism of Krashen's input only as of the basis of language acquisition and highlighted the roles of interactions and conversations in language acquisition. Menezes 2003 cited Larsen-Freeman and Long as being in favour of the Interaction Hypothesis "because they evoke both innate and environmental factors to explain language learning (p. 406).

Output Hypothesis- Swain's 1985 comprehensible output hypothesis is yet another second language learning theory. She sees both input and output as complementary to each other. She remarks that "... if all you do is provide students with input, and students don't get a chance to use the language, there are a lot of things that the students don't learn. So Krashen is wrong" (De, Sales, and Sales 2020, p. 4).

All the theories are useful in some ways in explaining second language acquisition, though none has been able to offer a holistic explanation of how language is acquired. Menezes sees them as incomplete and unable to describe the field of SLL fully because it is a complex phenomenon (p. 407). They are also useful in some ways in explaining the role of literature in attaining proficiency in the language. The behaviourist theory, for instance, explains language learning in terms of verbal behaviour in which an activity that is reinforced is practised until it becomes a habit. A learner who forms the habit of reading literary works soon discovers their innumerable contributions to the learning process in the areas of the vocabulary and the grammar of the target language. This naturally motivates him or her to read them the more. To cognitive theorists, language learning involves "gradual automatization of skills through stages of restructuring and linking information to old ones" (Xiangui, 2005, p.122). A learner who understands the importance of literature in the acquisition of a target language and reads it as often as he/she should have unlimited access to the language because he/she finds himself or herself in the world created by the artist in which the actors or characters live and interact with one another. This gives him or her the opportunity to gradually pick the underlying grammar of the language by linking new knowledge to already existing ones. The sociocultural theory regards learners as social beings and active participants in the learning process. This theory sees language learning as a means of equipping students with the skills and competence to use the target language both in and outside classroom settings. Through learning a new language, the learner joins a new culture (Xizngui 2005). Literature exposes the learner to the target culture, making him or her an insider in the community created in the text.

2.3. Theoretical Framework
Krashen's Comprehension Hypothesis is the theoretical framework that would drive this work because, among other things, it draws a distinction between acquisition and learning in adults and debunks Lennerberg's Critical Stage Hypothesis that the Language Acquisition device disappears after puberty (Krashen 1982, p. 10). This is proof that students can acquire a second language to an extent. Again, literary works provoke interest and engage students' attention in class works and are therefore considered a rich source of comprehensible input if the affective filter is kept under check. Krashen's Comprehension Hypothesis comprises five hypotheses. They include:

A. The Acquisition Learning Distinction,
It states that the adult second language acquirer has two ways of developing competence in the target language. These include acquisition and learning. He describes the acquisition as being similar but not identical to child language acquisition (Krashen 1982, p. 10). He goes on to note that it is a subconscious process as the acquirer is not aware he/she is acquiring language; rather, he/she observes that he/she is using the language. He describes it as an implicit process whereby the person picks up the language (p. 10). Learning, according to him, is the conscious knowledge of the rules or the grammar of the language (10). This involves formal learning of the grammar of the language. He describes it as an explicit process.

B. The Natural Order Hypothesis

It claims a natural, predictable order that language acquisition follows. According to him, acquirers show a tendency to acquire certain grammatical morphemes earlier than others (p.12).

C. The Monitor Hypothesis

This hypothesis centres on second language performance and so deals with the productive skills of speaking and writing through which competence in a language is measured. He claims that acquisition explains utterances and makes learners fluent in the language and that learning only serves as a monitor or 'editor' (p. 15). He observes that learning makes changes to the acquired utterance after it has been produced. According to Bahrani (2011), as cited by Friedrichsen (2020), the monitor holds the information learned until the learner is ready to use the language (p.11). Also, Abukhattala (2012) in Friedrichsen observes that monitor can be underused, overused or appropriately used depending on the acquirer's confidence in the acquisition (p.11). Krashen notes that given time, optimal monitor users make all the corrections they can to improve their output when it comes to writing and planned speech (p. 18-19).

D. The Input Hypothesis

This seems the most important of his hypothesis because of his importance on comprehensible input (Friedrichsen p. 11). Krashen observes that it attempts to answer the most important question in the field of second language acquisition on how language is acquired (p. 20). According to him, the Input Hypothesis relates more to acquisition than to learning. The acquisition takes place when adequate and comprehensible input is presented to the learner. Once the acquirer understood the input, it would automatically provide the i + 1 he /she requires to acquire the underlying rules of the language. Language production then comes when the acquirer is ready. He states that the best and perhaps the only way to teach speaking is simply to provide comprehensible input.

E. The Affective Filter

This is yet another important hypothesis of the Comprehension Hypothesis. It dwells on the effect of such affective variables as motivation, self-confidence and anxiety in language acquisition. These impede or facilitate language acquisition by raising or lowering the filter (Krashen 1982, p.31). He observes that when the filter is raised, it prevents comprehensible input from reaching the language acquisition device (LAD), thus impeding acquisition, but when it is lowered, comprehensible input reaches the LAD and facilitates acquisition.

2.4.LiteraryGenres

At this juncture, we shall discuss the genres of literature. These include poetry which is the oldest form of literature and the first to gain the attention of scholars, probably because it existed in its oral form in most societies of the world ever before the invention of writing (Gilbert 1967). Many poets have defined poetry in diverse ways. Wordsworth defined it as "a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquillity" (William Wordsworth Lyrical Ballads, n.p.). Egudu (1979) sees poetry as "the method of literary expressions which suggests by means of imagery, rhythm, and sound" (p. 4). Poems are better enjoyed when recited because that is when the sound effects are mostly perceived and appreciated. In the words of Applebee, Bermúdez, Blau, Caplan, Elbow, Hynds, Langer and Marshall (2000), "in poetry, ideas and emotions are tightly compressed into a package where everything- the meanings and sounds of words, the lines breaks, even the empty spaces - is designed to create an effect or to convey a message or an experience" (p. 93).

Poems make extensive use of imagery and figures of speech (Cubedo 2003). Poets use imagery to produce pictures in the minds of the audience by appealing to the five senses of touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste. Figures of speech refer to ways of using language to convey a meaning beyond the literal meaning of words. They violate the language's graphological, phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic rules for stylistic effect (Yankson 1987). The manipulation of language to achieve special poetic effects is uncommon in our day-to-day use of languages. This displays special mastery of the language on the part of the artist and constitutes a poetic licence. Consider this excerpt:

Had we but world enough, and time,

This coyness, Lady, were no crime.

We would sit down and think which way

To walk and pass our long Love's Day.

(Marvel, 2017, n.p)

Therefore, the language of poetry is not marked by the rigidity of rules. Mastery of poetic devices adds to the learner's competence and boosts his/her confidence in the use of the language. Recitation of poems sharpens the intellect and makes the memory to be at alert.

The prose is another genre. It has two major subgenres named fiction and nonfiction. Fiction is based on invented/ imaginary stories with fictitious characters, events, and settings. It includes novels, drama, poetry, legends, myths, horror, fantasy, fairy tales, short stories, historical fiction, science fiction, and others that involve made up stories. Fiction was derived from the Latin word 'fictio', which means 'a shaping', 'a counterfeiting' (Kenedy and Gioia, 2005, p. 3). Works of fiction may be inspired by real persons and events, but they usually spring from the writer's imaginations. So, they tell imaginary stories concocted from life experiences and events. The commonest forms of prose which students are exposed to are novels and short stories. Experienced writers deploy sentence, phrasal and clausal variations, different grammatical rules, foregrounding, and so on in their works, thus bringing students in direct contact with elements of the language which they could have been struggling to master informal English language classes.

Another one is drama. Here, the audience is exposed to correct usages and learns to compliment speech with the right actions and vary its tones when speaking to communicate the desired message. Dramatic monologues train the learner in the act of rhetoric, which helps to develop speaking skills. The audience often imitates the speech of some of their favourite actors. Apart from presenting real-life use of language, drama employs the use of dialogue to a large extent. As the audience watches the actors take turns in addressing each other, they are groomed in the use of the language in conversation, which forms the bulk of our day to day use of language. Plays dramatize different aspects of the life experiences of humans as they live in their society. In other words, real-life situations are imitated to reveal the tenable things in society.

A language is a viable tool used to recreate human experiences in drama. It is used to piece together all the elements of drama to produce a comprehensive work. So, the audience watches the actors use well-constructed expressions in the English language and pick a language from there.

3. Materials and Methods
The survey research design was adopted for the study. The researcher observed students of the Department of English Language and Literature, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria, and distributed questionnaires to ninety final year students chosen by purposive sampling. Only Eighty-two (82) copies were retrieved and analyzed. Eight of the students did not return the questionnaires I gave to them. Final year students were chosen because they had done all the courses required of them for the award of Bachelors degree in English, so they are in a position to evaluate the role of literature or otherwise in the level of proficiency they have attained in the language. The aspect of observation was based on the researcher's experience and a long period of interactions with the student of the Department. They are made to major in either language or literature stress in their third and final years. The implication is that those in language stress are taught more language courses, while those in literature are taught more literature courses. The analysis was done in such a way that the data collected provided answers to the research questions raised above.

4. Results and Discussion
4.1 Research Question I
Are ESL Learners exposed to literature in English?

Question 1: Do you read literary works?

Table 1 showing whether students read literary works

Response	Number	percentage
Yes	82	100
No	0	0
Total	82	100

All the respondents indicated that they read works of literature. This is because they are all students of English and Literary studies, so literature is a crucial part of their course of study.

Question 2: Which of the literary genres do you like most?

Table 2 showing students' preference for the different genres of literature

Literary Genre	Frequency	Percentage
Drama	9	10.9
Poetry	70	85.4
Prose	3	3.7
Total	82	100

Table 2 shows that 9 of the respondents who make up 10.9% of the population indicated that they have a preference for drama. 70 representing 85.4% like poetry, while 3 representing 3.7% like 2.4 prose.

Question 3: Which of them do you read often?

Table 3 showing the literary genres the students read most

Literary Genre	Frequency	Percentage
Drama	5	6.1
Poetry	75	91.5
Prose	2	2.4
Total		100

Table 3 shows that 6.1% of the population, which represents 5 respondents, replied that they read drama more often. 91.5%, which stands for 75 respondents, indicated that they read poetry more often, while 2.4%, which represents 2 respondents, shows they read prose more often.

Question 4: How often do you read literary works?

Table 4 showing the rate at which they read literary works

Rate of Reading	Frequency	Percentage
Very often	51	62.2
Once a week	12	14.6
Once a month	13	15.9
Not often	6	7.3
Total		100

51 of the respondents representing 62.2% of the population, indicated that they read literary works often. 12, which stands for 4.6%, showed that they read them once a week, 13 representing 5.9% indicated they read them once a month, while 6 representing 7.3% indicated that they do not read them often.

Question 5: About how many literary works have you read in the past month?

Table 5 showing number of literary works read in the past month

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
One	8	9.8
Two	15	18.2
More than two	59	72
Total		100

8 respondents representing 9.8 said they read one literary piece in the past month, 15 respondents that stand for 18.2 %, indicated that they read two literary pieces, while 59 representing 72%, said they read more than two.

It is obvious from the foregoing tables that the students are exposed to literary works.

4.2 Research Question II: What motivations have ESL learners to study literature in English?
Question 6: Who is your favourite Artist?

44 respondents comprising 53.7% indicated that Chinua Achebe is their favourite artist; 17 comprising 20.7% showed that Chiamanda Adichie is their favourite artist; 4 comprising 4.9 % indicated Dan Brown; 2 comprising 2.4% respectively indicated that Henry Ibsen and Shakespeare are their best artists. The remaining 15.9% indicated that Kendrick Lamar, James Patterson, Virginia Woolf, Abubakar Ibrahim, Mario Puzzo, Ifeoma Okoye, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Danielle Steel, Emeka Nwbueze, Samuel Becket, Hardly Chase, and Nora Roberts are their best artists.

Question 7: Why is the artist your favourite author?

Reasons bordering on themes, plot, unique style, and artistic choice of language and careful choice of words were prevalent in the respondents' responses.

Question 8: What motivates you to read literary works?

Enlightenment, entertainment, exposure to reality, desire to learn how the artist resolves crises are some of the motivators noted by the students. Others include a desire to improve and increase their vocabulary, to be more proficient in the use of English, a love for reading, and the urge to write like the artists.

Questions 9: Are literary works part of your course of study?

Table 6 showing whether literary works are part of their course

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	69	84.2
No	13	15.8
Total		100

69 respondents representing 84.2%, noted that literary works are part of their course of study, while 13, representing 3.8%, said they are not.

Question 10: Are all the literary works you read recommended by your lecturers?

Table 7 showing whether the students read literary works based on lecturers' recommendations

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
yes	15	18.3
No	67	81.7
Total		100

15 respondents representing 8.3%, indicated that they read only the literary works recommended by their lecturers, while 67 respondents representing 81.7%, indicated that they read works of arts not recommended by their lecturers.

The analysis of this research question shows the students have motivations ranging from the artists and how they handled their works, the desire to acquire vocabulary or proficiency in English, exposure, and so on.

4.3 Research Question III: Is literature in English beneficial to ESL; learners in achieving proficiency in the English Language?
Questions 11: Do you think the literary works you read have impacts on your use of the English Language?

Table 8 showing the effect of reading literary works on the use of the English language

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	80	97
No	2	3
Total		100

80 of the respondents representing 97% of the population affirmed that the literary works they read have impacts on their acquisition and use of the English language, while 2, representing 3% of the respondents, said literary works do not have impacts on their use of the English language.

Question 12: Do you think literature contributes to the English language learning?

Table 9 showing students' responses on whether literature contributes to the learning of English

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	78	95.6
No	2	4.4
Total		100

78 respondents that represent 95.6% of the population was of the opinion that literature contributes to the learning of the English language, while 4 of them that represent 4.9% of the population insisted that literature does not contribute to the learning of the English Language.

Question 13: Do you think paying more attention to literature can make you a better user of the English language?

Table 10 showing students' responses on whether paying more attention to literature will make them better users of the language.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	78	95.6
No	4	4.9
Total		100

78 respondents representing 95.6% of the population was of the view that paying more attention to literature can make them better users of the English language, while 4 of them, representing 4.9 %, maintained that paying more attention to literature cannot make them better users of the English language.

Based on my long period of interactions with present and past students of the Departments who majored in either language or literature stress, experienced over time in the grading of scripts and supervision of projects, I observed that those who majored in Literature in English are a better use of the English language than those who majored in the English language. This could be because those who majored in Literature usually have more direct contact with the communicative English of the literary works, unlike those who majored in language who are taught the grammatical rules of the language abstracted from contexts. The analysis of this research question affirms that literature helps in achieving proficiency in the English language.

The analysis above reveals that all the respondents are exposed to the three major genres of literature as part of their course of study. Of the three genres, the majority of the students showed a preference for poetry over the other genres and were mostly exposed to it. Fiction is the least preferred and the least read. The study did not investigate the reason for their choice of poetry, whose language is more compact and more tasking to understand. On who their favourite artists are, more than half of them indicated that it was Chinua Achebe. Others chose Chimamanda Adichie, Ibsen Brown, and many others as their favourite artists. What attracted them to the artists included their handling of the theme and plots of their works with finesse and their careful choice of language. The analysis also revealed that the students are motivated to read literary works for entertainment and enlightenment purposes and become proficient users of the English language and good literary artists. A good number of the students believe that literary works are useful for the acquisition of the English language, and the more attention they pay to them, the more they become proficient in the use of English.

5. Conclusion

Literature brings about interest, entertainment, maximum participation in class works and many more, and so plays important roles in the learning of the English language. Novels are written by proficient users of the English language expose acquirers to acceptable expressions in the language, thereby bequeathing them unconsciously with the rules of the language. Drama exposes them to the use of language in situations which mirror real life. Recitation of poems makes the memory to be at alert and sharpens the intellect. The more language learners are exposed to literary works written in the target language, the more they pick up the language and gradually become proficient in it. This supports Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which "predicts that ... an approach that provides substantial quantities of comprehensible input will do much better than any of the older methods" (30). Since it has been established from the analysis above that students, show great interests in literary works, making them the source of materials for

teaching and learning in the language classroom as proposed by Amer (2012), Keshavarzi (2012, and Ugoji (2016) would be rewarding and make acquisition simpler. This study specifically supports Amer 2012's claim that using literature as a tool for teaching language provides comprehensible input and lowers affective filter.

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