

The Influence of Affective Factors on Junior High School Students' English Learning

Xuanying Yang

School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan Normal University, Chengdu, China

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of affective factors on the English learning of junior high school students, with a particular focus on three key areas: motivation, self-esteem and anxiety. Through a comprehensive analysis, it is evident that motivation serves as a crucial internal driving force, influencing students' learning outcomes and enthusiasm. Self-esteem plays a pivotal role in shaping students' attitudes and behaviors towards English language learning. Students with high self-esteem are more confident and willing to take risks in order to try new language expressions. Meanwhile, moderate anxiety can stimulate students' learning enthusiasm; but excessive anxiety may hinder students' learning process. From the findings, this paper proposes a series of recommendations for pedagogical enhancement. These suggestions are intended to facilitate a deeper understanding of the role of emotional factors in English learning and to promote the comprehensive development of students.

KEYWORDS

Affective Factors; English Learning; Junior High School

1 Introduction

1.1 The Importance of English Learning on Junior High School

The middle school stage is a crucial period for language learning, and building a solid foundation in English is vital for the subsequent high school, college, and even career. Junior high school students who engage in English language learning gain access to a broader world and enhance their cross-cultural communication skills. These skills facilitate the understanding of the nuances of different cultures and facilitate the promotion of friendly exchanges and cooperation between countries.

It is of paramount importance that students recognize the value of this learning stage and strive to enhance their English proficiency, in order to lay a robust foundation for their future development and competitiveness.

1.2 The Importance of Affective Factors in Foreign Language Learning

In the 1970s, scholars from both domestic and foreign academic institutions began to investigate the role of affective factors in language learning. Krashen, an American linguist, believes that emotions are made up of learners' motivations, needs, attitudes and emotional states (Krashen, 1985). Psychological research has shown that emotions have a powerful dynamic effect on human cognition. Positive emotions, such as interest and confidence, can directly or indirectly promote English learning (Thomas & Oliver, 2013).

The concept of learning motivation is defined as the internal driving force that motivates learners to engage in language learning. The development of a strong interest in learning or the realization of the importance of language learning for personal development, career prospects or cultural exchange can enhance motivation to learn (Zhang, 2008). Such a robust motivation can prompt learners to become more actively engaged in their learning, thereby enhancing the efficacy of their learning outcomes.

Learners' perception of language learning is defined as the positive or negative learning motivation. A positive motivation serves to enhance learners' capacity to cope with the challenges and difficulties inherent to the learning process, thereby maintaining their enthusiasm and confidence in the learning endeavour.

Self-esteem is the learners' assertion of their own competence and worthiness in the process of language learning. When learners are confident in their language abilities, they are more willing to utilize the newly acquired language knowledge in order to enhance their language proficiency.

Anxiety is a common emotional response among learners engaged in the process of language learning. It is possible that excessive anxiety may impede the learner's ability to focus and retain information, which could negatively impact the effectiveness of their learning. Consequently, reducing learners' anxiety represents a crucial strategy for enhancing the efficacy of language learning.

In conclusion, it can be stated that emotional factors play a significant role in language learning. Satisfying learners' emotional demands is the central task of teaching (Michelle, 2017). In order to enhance the efficiency of language learning, educators should prioritize the emotional needs of learners, stimulate learners' motivation and interest, and

provide appropriate guidance and assistance.

2 Motivation

2.1 Definition

In the field of foreign language learning, motivation means the internal drive that directly drives a person to undertake learning activities.

The term 'learning motivation' refers to a dynamic tendency that triggers and sustains students' foreign language learning behaviour and directs them towards certain academic goals. The construct of learning motivation is primarily constituted of two elements: learning needs and learning expectations. In the context of foreign language learning, learning needs is manifested as a desire for knowledge of the language, language skills, and cultural knowledge. Learning expectations are expressed as the learner's prediction and expectation of the level of foreign language proficiency and achievement they can attain.

2.2 The Classification of Motivation in Learning

The source of learning motivation can be divided into two categories: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation refers to the intrinsic factors that originate from the learners themselves. This is to say that the motivation is generated by the students' interest in the activity itself, without the influence of external forces and without the imposition of external rewards or incentives to elicit a sense of honour. In contrast, extrinsic motivation refers to the motivation that arises from external factors influencing the learner. This can be exemplified by the motivation to learn in order to gain praise from teachers or parents, or to avoid punishment for failure (Zeng, 2013).

According to Ausubel, a famous American educational psychologist, students' classroom learning motivation consists of the following three internal drive.

The cognitive drive is the need to know and understand, the need to master knowledge, and the need to formulate and solve problems systematically. The cognitive drive is directed towards the learning task itself, and the reward for satisfying this motivation is provided by the learning itself.

The drive for self-improvement is the individual's need to earn the corresponding status due to their competence or work ability. In other words, the motivation for self-improvement is not only a means for students to utilize their academic achievements to achieve a ranking or to gain a ranking during their studies, but also a means for them to make contributions and achieve status in their future academic or professional careers.

The affiliative drive refers to the need of an individual to do well in study or work in order to maintain the approval of elders or authorities.

2.3 The Influence of Motivation in English Learning

A robust motivation to learn can ignite the passion and interest of middle school students in English language learning. A positive and proactive attitude towards English learning encourages students to invest time and effort in overcoming difficulties and seeking solutions to problems, which in turn leads to improved results in language learning.

A positive learning motivation enables students to comprehend and master knowledge more effectively, thereby facilitating superior academic performance. When students achieve good grades, their desire for knowledge is satiated, leading to the generation of positive emotional experiences. This, in turn, enhances the original learning motivation, creating a virtuous circle.

Learning motivation enables students to establish clear learning objectives. Students with clearly defined learning objectives are better able to direct their learning process. They are aware of their desired outcomes and are more likely to exert effort to achieve them. The motivation to learn also affects the strategies that students employ during the learning process. Students with positive learning motivation are more likely to select participatory and cooperative learning strategies, which facilitate improvement in their English proficiency through communication and collaboration with others. These learning strategies facilitate the comprehension and assimilation of knowledge, thereby enhancing the quality of learning outcomes.

3 Self-esteem

3.1 Definition

Self-esteem refers to an individual's evaluation of, feelings about, and attitudes towards traits held by him or her. It

indicates the extent to which an individual believes that he or she is capable, important, successful and valuable.

In terms of content, self-esteem is divided into ideal self-esteem and real or actual self-esteem; As for the way it is derived, self-esteem can be divided into inner self-esteem and outer self-esteem. Structurally, self-esteem is divided into global self-esteem and specific or differentiated self-esteem.

3.2 Factors that affect self-esteem

The manner in which parents engage in criticism, instruction, and interaction with their children has a significant impact on a child's self-esteem. In a healthy home environment, children are more likely to develop positive self-perceptions. When parents are overly critical of their children or focus on their children's personality flaws, the children may feel that they have no dignity or value, which can lead to damaged self-esteem.

The educational policy of the school should facilitate the growth of students' personalities and encourage a multifaceted approach to evaluation. This should be done in a way that avoids placing undue emphasis on grades and competition, in order to maintain students' self-esteem. In teaching, it is essential for educators to possess the ability to discern and respond to the emotional fluctuations of their students in a constructive manner. This enables students to perceive a sense of attention and care from their teachers, which in turn fosters a more harmonious relationship between them (Simona, 2013).

Furthermore, the process of peer evaluation and self-reflection enables individuals to gain insight into their own strengths and weaknesses, thereby facilitating adjustments to their self-concept and enhancement of their self-esteem.

3.3 The Influence of Motivation in English Learning

There is a significant correlation between self-esteem and learning motivation. Students with high self-esteem often demonstrate stronger intrinsic motivation and a greater willingness to take the initiative to learn and seek out challenges. This is because success will further enhance their sense of self-esteem. Conversely, students with low self-esteem may avoid challenges for fear of failure or criticism, which can result in a reduction in motivation to learn.

Students who possess high self-esteem tend to evince a greater degree of confidence in their ability to learn English. They are convinced of their capacity to master language knowledge, which imbues them with greater resilience in the face of difficulties. Students with low self-esteem may be reluctant to participate in class activities due to a lack of confidence, which in turn limits their language learning opportunities. This is why students with good grades are more willing to speak actively in class and interact with teachers, while students with poor grades or poor English skills are silent in class and are reluctant to answer questions raised by teachers in English, indicating a psychological state of fear.

The "Affective Filter Hypothesis" in the field of psychology of foreign language education posits that learners' emotional states exert an effect on their language learning (Krashen, 1985). Students with high self-esteem are more emotionally stable and therefore more receptive to and able to process verbal input. Conversely, students with low self-esteem may impede the process of language learning due to emotional obstacles, such as anxiety and nervousness.

4 Anxiety

4.1 Definition

Anxiety is a psychological state in which individuals worry that they will not be able to achieve their goals or overcome obstacles, that their self-esteem and self-confidence will be undermined or that feelings of failure and guilt will increase, resulting in feelings of tension and anxiety.

Learning anxiety is the emotional response of a student who is worried about a specific learning outcome that poses a threat to their self-esteem and sense of worth, either real or expected, during the learning process. In foreign language learning, anxiety refers to the fear or anxiety that learners feel when learning or expressing themselves in a foreign language. Learner's language anxiety is mainly manifested as communication anxiety, class anxiety and test anxiety.

4.2 The Influence of Anxiety in English Learning

In the process of learning the English language, listening represents a pivotal stage. Specifically, when students engage in listening activities, it is challenging for them to maintain focus due to internal discomfort and stress, which impairs their ability to retain crucial information from the listening materials. Over time, students develop doubts about their ability to listen effectively, which in turn exacerbates their anxiety and creates a self-perpetuating cycle (Su, 2017).

Oral expression represents a further crucial element of the English language curriculum, yet anxiety frequently results in students' under-performing in this area. When students engage in oral communication in a classroom setting or with

other individuals, they may experience anxiety due to concerns about the accuracy of their pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary usage(Cao, 2005). Such anxiety will result in a state of nervousness, hesitancy, and difficulty in expressing ideas and thoughts in a fluent and coherent manner. Some students even choose to avoid speaking, on the grounds that they are fearful of making mistakes, which undoubtedly impedes the development of their oral expression abilities.

When students are engaged in reading, anxiety may impede students' capacity to comprehend the reading material in depth. They may remain at the surface level of information acquisition, failing to grasp the author's intention and the underlying meaning.

5 Conclusion

Through in-depth research into the role of affective factors in junior middle school students' English learning, it is not difficult to find that motivation, self-esteem and anxiety play a crucial role in the learning process of students. During the process of teaching, students' thoughts, emotions, experiences and behaviors should be regarded as the subject of teaching(Rogers, 1961). The motivation of junior high school students for learning English varies considerably. It may be driven by a desire for interest, a sense of achievement, self-improvement, or other factors. When students are highly motivated, they are more likely to invest greater time and energy in English learning, which in turn leads to superior learning outcomes. It is incumbent upon teachers to stimulate students' interest in learning by designing interesting and practical teaching activities, such as role-playing and English song learning(Wen, 2022). Educators should provide students with constructive feedback and acknowledgment in a timely manner, thereby reinforcing their sense of accomplishment. Students with higher self-esteem tend to display greater confidence, a willingness to take risks and an eagerness to experiment with new language expressions, which consequently facilitates more effective progress in English language learning. It is imperative that teachers treat every student with respect and refrain from using demeaning or mocking language in class.

Moderate anxiety can encourage students to work harder, but excessive anxiety may hinder students' learning process. Teachers should pay attention to students' emotional state and find and relieve their anxiety in time. In addition, teachers can also adopt cooperative learning and interactive teaching methods to create a relaxed and pleasant learning atmosphere for students and reduce their anxiety level. The essence of learning activity is an emotional activity. Therefore, more attention should be paid to learners' emotions in teaching(Arnold, 1999). In order to facilitate students' acquisition of English, it is essential that educators consider the role of emotional factors in the learning process and implement appropriate pedagogical approaches to engage students, enhance their self-esteem and mitigate anxiety. Concurrently, students must also learn to regulate and manage their emotions, approaching English learning with a more positive and healthy attitude.

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