

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

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## Abstract

This paper surveys 58 senior high school students by using the questionnaire combining with the author's internship observation. It aims to explore their affective factors in English learning, such as attitude, motivation, personality and the teacher-student relationship, and find the relationship between these affective factors and English learning. Given the relationship, some suggestions are offered to help learning English.

## Keywords

Affective factors; Senior high school students; English learning.

## 1. Introduction

With the globalization development, and China's reform and opening up is getting deeper and deeper, English teaching has made great progress in middle school. However, it is a prevalent phenomenon that the English teaching focuses on traditional grammar, vocabulary and translation. The affective factors are usually ignored by teachers in English teaching. After investigation, Lu Jiamei finds that there is a general phenomenon of attaching great importance to knowledge and slighting emotion in middle school's teaching. (Lu Jiamei, 2002)

In the background of implementing of quality-oriented education and curriculum reform, students' interest, motivation, attitudes, and emotions play an increasingly important role in improving teaching effect. The merits of focusing on affective factors is not only limited in helping free students' personality, but also shared to promote the healthy development of students' quality. Affective factors have some effect on students' learning and growth.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Definition of Affective Factors

Emotions as a psychological phenomenon, generally refers to one's inner experience that the individual contact with the objective things. The Oxford Dictionary definition of emotion is 'A strong feeling deriving from one's circumstances, mood, or relationships with others.' Affect, as defined by psychologists, refers to 'emotions and an even wider range of phenomena that have anything to do with emotions, moods, disposition, and preferences'. [1]

There is currently no scientific definition of "affective factors". A lot of affective factors are worth careful study, such as: interest in learning, learning motivation, learning attitude and so on. Here, we mainly focus on attitude, motivation, personality.

### 2.2. Types of Affective Factors

#### 2.2.1. Attitude

In psychology, attitude is a psychological construct, a mental and emotional entity that inheres in, or characterizes a person. Allport (1954) states that, 'an attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the

individual's response to all objectives and situations with which it is related'. (Cited in Qiu Lihua, 2008) Garden and Lambert (1972) defined attitude as the persistence shown by the learner in striving for a goal. (Cited in Meng Xuemei, 2004)

### 2.2.2. Motivation

Brown (2002) said: "motivation is commonly thought of as an inner drive, impulse, emotion, or desire that moves one to a particular action". (Cited in Wang Lifei, 2009) It seems safe to claim that a successful learner is motivated properly. There are different kinds of motivation. According to different methods, motivation can be divided into different categories. According to the aims of learning, a motivation can be classified into integrative or instrumental. According to the sources, a motivation can be introduced as two kinds: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

### 2.2.3. Personality

As a saying goes 'no two leaves are identical in the world'. Likewise, every student is special. Everyone has their own unique habits and characteristics. They are different from each other. Here, we mainly focus on the personality.

Ellis (1994) pointed out that personality refers to those aspects of a second language learner's behavior, attitude, beliefs, thoughts, actions, and feelings that are seen as typical and distinctive of that person and recognized as such by that person and others. (Cited in Wang Lifei, 2009) According to Brown (1987), personality factors such as self-esteem, inhibition, anxiety, risk-taking, and extroversion are thought to influence second language learning because they can contribute to motivation and the choice of learning strategies. (Cited in Wang Lifei, 2009)

### 2.2.4. Teacher-student Relationship

Teacher-students relationship refers a specific relationship that forms in the educational activities when teachers and students complete common tasks of education in the process of contacts. This is the most fundamental and vital relationship in the education, maintaining the essential elements of educational activities.

Sukhomlynsky, an educationist from Soviet Russia, once said, 'taking class is mutual labor that teacher and students work together. First and foremost, teacher-student relationship decides whether the teaching and learning labor is successes or not'.

## 2.3. Previous Research

Different from related research at home, foreign educationalists started majoring in language learning at an early time and affective factors about language learning in an earlier time. Since 1960s, Maslow and Rogers lead the Western Humanistic Psychology Theory. With their further exploration, humanistic psychology transfers the key point of research to affective factors in language learning. Under the influence of humanistic psychology, America appears a lot of new foreign language teaching methods in 1970s.

Famous linguists Canadian famous linguists Stern (1983) comes up with affective factors which play a more important function compared with cognitive factors in language learning.

In China, the research about affective factors began in 1980s. Mr. Leng Ran, the pioneer of affective teaching published *Affect and Teaching* in the first issue of *Education Research journal* in 1982. This article sets off a study boom of education for affective education. In 1990s, there were a lot of monographs about affective factors. The professor Zhu Xiaoman published *Affective Teaching Outline*. 'Shu Dingfang(1996) and Wang Chuming(2001) think the learner's emotional control is one of the main factors that influence the effect of learning in the learning process, and Professor Xiang Maoying(2003) thinks that resolving questions helps develop students' potential, and improve the effectiveness of learning English.' (Cited in Xi Yanyan, 2011)

### 3. Research Design

#### 3.1. Research Questions

In this study, two questions are explored:

- 1). What kinds of effect do affective factors have on English learning in senior high school students?
- 3). How to use the affective factors to improve English teaching?

#### 3.2. Research Participants

The questionnaires are written by 58 pupils who are sophomores in senior high school. It is a science class in a county. Their English foundation is in a poor condition.

#### 3.3. Research Methods

The author uses two methods to do the research: questionnaire and observation.

The questionnaire has 16 items that are divided into 4 categories which include the attitude, motivation, personality, the relationship between students and teacher. Each item has five choices: 'Strongly Agree', 'Usually Agree', 'Sometime Agree', 'Usually Disagree', 'Strongly Disagree'. For instance, the first item "In my view, learning English is very important" has five choices: Strong Agree, Usually Agree, Sometime Agree, Usually Disagree and Strongly Disagree. Students can choose anyone to answer the question.

#### 3.4. Research Process

On March 2, 2019, I finished designing the questionnaire on the website named "Wen Juanxing". On March 3, 2019, in the morning, I delivered the questionnaire to my students and asked them to fill it by using the mobile phone. Meanwhile, I asked one of the students to send me an English report card about their last term examination. In the night, all of them finish the questionnaire. I got the data of the questionnaire.

### 4. Results

**Table 1.** The data of attitude

| Item<br>%         | 1      | 2      | 3      |
|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Strongly Agree    | 53.45% | 13.79% | 6.9%   |
| Usually Agree     | 24.14% | 5.17%  | 8.62%  |
| Sometime Agree    | 18.97% | 22.41% | 36.21% |
| Usually Disagree  | 0%     | 17.24% | 20.69% |
| Strongly Disagree | 3.45%  | 41.38% | 27.59% |

As we can see from the above table, the first question 'In my view, learning English is very important' shows us that 53.45% of the students choose 'Strongly Agree'. The second item's 'Strongly Disagree' accounts 41.38%. The first two data tells us that most of the students in this class have a positive attitude towards to English. A right attitude helps students keep a correct brief to learn English. However, only 6.9% of them choose 'Strongly Agree' to the preparing for English lesson. Obviously, most of them don't like to preview the words and texts, let alone to do some review after the class.

**Table 2.** The data of motivation

| Item<br>%         | 4      | 5      | 6      | 7      | 8      |
|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Strongly Agree    | 32.76% | 27.59% | 55.17% | 15.52% | 41.38% |
| Usually Agree     | 25.86% | 34.48% | 22.41% | 13.79% | 31.03% |
| Sometime Agree    | 27.59% | 17.24% | 18.97% | 22.41% | 15.52% |
| Usually Disagree  | 6.9%   | 10.34% | 3.45%  | 27.59% | 3.45%  |
| Strongly Disagree | 6.9%   | 10.34% | 0%     | 20.69% | 8.62%  |

Students who strongly agree “English is interesting” have 32.76%. When they are asked to answer the item “I like learning English”, most of them choose “Strongly Agree” and “Usually Agree”. These two items showcase that lots of pupils are interested in learning English. 55.17% of the students have a “Strongly Agree” attitude towards to “I am fond of listening to English songs and watching English movies”. Colorful culture can promote students to learn English. Only 0% of the students choose “Strongly Disagree”. This shows students’ inner motivation to English. About the eighth question, “Strongly Agree” accounts for 41.38% and ‘Sometime Agree’ accounts for 31.03% respectively. Most of them agree that they want to get a high mark and pass the national college entrance examination. It is the extrinsic motivation that impels them to study English hard.

**Table 3.** The data of personality

| Item<br>%         | 9      | 10     | 11     | 12     |
|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Strongly Agree    | 46.55% | 37.93% | 29.31% | 25.86% |
| Usually Agree     | 25.86% | 32.76% | 34.48% | 22.41% |
| Sometime Agree    | 24.14% | 22.41% | 32.76% | 36.21% |
| Usually Disagree  | 3.45%  | 6.9%   | 1.72%  | 12.07% |
| Strongly Disagree | 0%     | 0%     | 1.72%  | 3.45%  |

These four items are about their personality. From their answers, we can infer that they are extrovert or not. Most of them choose ‘Strongly Agree’ and ‘Usually Agree’ to answer these questions. Therefore, most of them belong to the extrovert personality. From my observation, I found that they like to play with each other after class. They like to talk with each other even they are in a science class. Extrovert personality helps students to learn English better.

**Table 4.** The data of Teacher-students relationship

| Item<br>%         | 13     | 14      | 15     | 16     |
|-------------------|--------|---------|--------|--------|
| Strongly Agree    | 27.59% | 12.07%  | 55.17% | 41.38% |
| Usually Agree     | 31.03% | 18.97%  | 24.14% | 29.31% |
| Sometime Agree    | 32.76% | 34.48%  | 15.52% | 17.24% |
| Usually Disagree  | 6.9%   | 22.41 % | 3.45%  | 5.17%  |
| Strongly Disagree | 1.72%  | 12.07%  | 1.72%  | 6.9%   |

The majority of pupils think their English teacher is friendly, hoping to make friends with their English teachers. 34.48% of the students choose 'Sometime Agree' to answer the question 'If they don't understand English questions, they will positively ask for a help from their English teacher'. It manifests that they seldom talk to their English teacher even they have some trouble in learning English. 55.17% of the students, more than a half, strongly hope that there is an equal atmosphere in the English class. About the sixteenth item, the percentage of 'Strongly Agree' has 41.38% while the percentage of 'Usually Agree' has 29.31%. It reflects that most of the students have the desire to enhance communication with their English teacher. From the chart, we can learn that most of the students would like to make friends with their English teacher.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Research Findings

Positive attitude and motivation make them be willing to learn English, which displays the positive effect of attitude and motivation. However, few students will preview the contents before class. The extroverted personality and good teacher-students cultivate them to learn English positively. Normally, if they have a positive attitude and high motivation, they will do better in their English learning. But, it seems that there is not so strong relationship between positive affective factors and English learning. Moreover, their English cannot only rely on these affective elements. It poses some other elements that affect their English learning.

### 5.2. Application of the Research

This research can be applied to solve some trouble between the affective factors and the English learning in the class. Thus, they can improve their English grade. In English teaching, it would better to make students know the affective factors in learning English. It is the basis for them to make use of affective factors in language learning. The knowledge about the affective factors should be taught. The more students know about this field, the more they can make use of it.

### 5.3. Suggestions for Further Research

There are some weaknesses of the research. First, this research only survey 58 students who come from a class in Grade 2. It isn't enough to reflect all senior high school students. Second, the paper just uses questionnaire and observation. It doesn't interview students about the affective factors and English learning. Third, the number of questions in the questionnaire is not so enough and the content of questions is not so detailed. Finally, the paper only includes four factors of affective factor, lacking some other affective elements.

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