

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

Yue Su

Sichuan Normal University, Chengdu, Sichuan, China

Abstract: This thesis explores the impact of affective factors such as motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, and self-esteem on junior high school students' English learning, and points out that these factors play a crucial role in shaping the learning process and outcomes. Critical analysis shows that positive affective factors can enhance students' engagement, persistence, and academic performance, while negative ones may hinder learning. However, the thesis also identifies several challenges, including individual differences, classroom environment issues, teacher-related factors, as well as parental and social influences. Based on these findings, this research puts forward practical recommendations, such as creating a positive classroom environment, enhancing learning interest, providing expectations and feedback, advocating cooperative learning, offering teacher professional development opportunities, and involving parents and the community. The conclusion of the study holds that paying attention to affective factors is essential for promoting students' emotional well-being and success in language learning, and further in-depth research in this field is needed in the future.

Keywords: Affective Factors; Junior High School Student; English Learning.

1. Introduction

Affective factors refer to the emotional, social, and psychological dimensions that influence students' perception, participation, and persistence in language learning. For a long time in the past, some teachers have paid excessive attention to the development of intelligence and knowledge, while neglecting emotional development, which has led to emotional literacy (Goleman, 1995). In recent years, affective teaching has become an increasingly important focus for frontline educators. Unlike cognitive factors that focus on intellectual capacities such as memory and problem-solving skills, affective factors delve into the psychological states that determine how learners approach a language, interact with it, and cope with the challenges it presents.

The significance of affective factors in English language learning cannot be overstated. *English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education* (2011 Edition) points out that cultivating student' correct emotional attitudes is an important part of the goals of English courses, which requires teachers to attach importance to the cultivation of students' emotional attitudes in teaching. As a key component of educational psychology, affective education requires teachers, especially English teachers, to master all relevant knowledge in this field solidly. Chen Lin, Wang Qiang, and Cheng Xiaotang (2004) clearly point out that the connection between language learning and emotional investment cannot be ignored.

English learning in the junior high school stage is a critical period for students to transition from basic vocabulary recognition to complex communicative competence, laying the foundation for their lifelong language ability. In traditional educational research, cognitive factors such as learning strategies and language talent have occupied a dominant position, but contemporary research has increasingly highlighted the core role of affective factors in learning success (Wen Yiying, 2022). For adolescents, they are experiencing significant cognitive, emotional and social development. Emotional experiences in English classes profoundly shape their attitudes towards the language, their

willingness to participate in learning activities, and ultimately affect their academic achievements. In the process of junior high school students learning English, special attention needs to be paid to their emotional states. Arnold (1999) mentioned that researching emotions in language learning is of great significance. Emotions are not only related to language teaching, nor do they merely refer to the problems existing in education itself. Instead, they more involve the long-term development of human beings.

The scope of this thesis encompasses an exploration of the key affective factors that influence junior high school students' English learning, including motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, and self-esteem. This thesis will critically analyze their impact on students' learning processes and outcomes, identify the challenges associated with addressing affective factors in the classroom, and propose practical recommendations for teachers and educators to foster positive affective states among students. The objectives of this thesis are to enhance understanding of the role of affective factors in junior high school English learning, highlight the importance of addressing them in teaching and provide actionable strategies to create a supportive learning environment that promotes students' emotional well-being and language learning success.

2. Affective Factors Concerning English Learning

When people are in the process of understanding new things, emotion is the experience and reaction caused by people's psychological attitude towards the thing (Gao Fujian, Wang Shuzhen, 2010). Arnold and Brown (2000) classified affective factors: the first category is factors related to learners themselves, such as learning motivation, inhibition, personality, and anxiety; the second category is factors between learners and between learners and teachers, such as cross-cultural awareness and empathy. Krashen (1981) divided the main affective factors that influence second language acquisition into three categories: motivation, self-

confidence, and anxiety. He regards them as dynamic and adjustable filters that filter “comprehensible language input”. Affective factors form an interconnected system that influences language acquisition through psychological, cognitive, and behavioral pathways. In this thesis, the affective factors related with language learning like motivation, anxiety, self-confidence and self-esteem will be discussed.

2.1. Motivation

Motivation is generally regarded as the need for learning or the desire to learn. Different scholars hold different views on motivation. Gardner and Lambert (1972) believed that motivation is the source of foreign language learners' ability, which can stimulate learning interest and prompt learners to take actions to achieve their goals. Motivation in foreign language learning refers to learners' desire and driving force to learn a foreign language (Dulay et al., 1982). Ellis (1997) argues that intrinsic motivation arises from the desire to obtain answers and intrinsic satisfaction, and that it is the most effective way to enhance learning. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, comes from external factors, such as grades, rewards, parental pressure, or the need to meet academic requirements. While extrinsic motivation can initially encourage students to learn, it may not be as sustainable as intrinsic motivation in the long run. Gardner and Lambert (1972) put forward integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. The former refers to the natural interest in a foreign language and its culture, as well as the motivation to learn for the purpose of integrating into the target language society. The latter refers to the motivation to learn a foreign language as a tool for future purposes such as entering a higher school, choosing a career, and getting a promotion.

2.2. Anxiety

Anxiety is a subjective feeling generated after the nervous system is stimulated, including tension, anxiety, restlessness and worry (Horwitz, 1986). Anxiety is regarded as the most significant negative factor affecting foreign language learning. When students fail to achieve their learning goals, their self-esteem is hurt, and their self-confidence is undermined, they will feel frustrated and tense, which in turn leads to anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) argue that foreign language learners may experience three types of anxiety in the learning process: communicative apprehension, which refers to the anxiety shown when one cannot express their ideas well in the target language; negative social evaluation, which refers to the anxiety exhibited by foreign language learners when they are worried about losing face during learning or using the foreign language; test anxiety, which is the anxiety shown by foreign language learners when taking exams. Communication anxiety occurs when students feel nervous about speaking or interacting in English, fearing that they will make mistakes or be misunderstood. Fear of negative evaluation stems from the concern that peers, teachers, or others will judge their language abilities negatively, leading to a reluctance to participate in language activities. Test anxiety is associated with feelings of stress and apprehension before or during English tests, which can impair their performance.

2.3. Self-Confidence

Self-confidence in English learning is the belief that one has the ability to successfully perform language tasks. Maslow (1943) was the first to define self-confidence. In his

hierarchy of needs theory, he pointed out that self-confidence is an emotional experience generated when the need for self-esteem is satisfied. Huang Xiting (1991) holds that self-confidence is the crystallization of an individual's previous successful experiences. Students with high self-confidence are more willing to take risks, participate actively in class, and persist in the face of difficulties. Conversely, those with low self-confidence may doubt their abilities, avoid challenging tasks, and have a negative attitude towards learning English.

2.4. Self-Esteem

Rosenberg (1979) made a distinction between self-confidence and self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their own worth and value. In the context of English learning, it relates to how students perceive their competence and success in the subject. High self-esteem is associated with a positive self-image, a sense of belonging, and the belief that one is capable of achieving goals. Students with high self-esteem in English learning are more likely to approach challenges with a positive attitude, handle setbacks effectively, and maintain their motivation. Low self-esteem, on the other hand, can lead to feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and a lack of confidence in one's language abilities.

3. Critical Analysis of Affective Factors on Junior High School Students' English Learning

3.1. Strengths of Affective Factors

Positive affective factors can have numerous strengths in junior high school students' English learning. Wen Aiying (2005) pointed out that motivation has a significant impact on English learning, and there is an extremely significant positive correlation between academic performance and motivation. Expectation and estimation of one's ability are the two most important factors affecting academic performance. High motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, drives students to set goals, allocate time and energy to learning, and persist in the face of difficulties. Motivated students are more likely to engage in active learning strategies, such as reading English books, watching English movies, and practicing speaking with others, which can significantly improve their language skills.

Self-confidence and high self-esteem enable students to take risks in using English, such as participating in class discussions, asking questions, and making presentations. Wen Yiyi (2022) found that there is a significant positive correlation between self-confidence and English scores, that is, self-confidence can promote English learning. Self-confidence enables students to keep working hard in the face of learning challenges rather than giving up easily. This active participation not only provides them with valuable practice opportunities but also helps them build their language proficiency and communication skills. Moreover, students with positive self-esteem are more resilient and better able to cope with setbacks and failures, which are inevitable in the learning process. They view mistakes as learning opportunities rather than signs of incompetence, allowing them to continue making progress.

Yang Liheng and Zhang Shan (2017) indicated that the lower the anxiety, the higher the English scores. A low level of anxiety creates a relaxed and supportive learning environment, where students feel comfortable expressing

themselves in English. This can enhance their ability to absorb new information, think creatively, and communicate effectively. When students are not anxious, they are more likely to focus on the content of the language rather than their fear of making mistakes, leading to better learning outcomes.

3.2. Limitations of Affective Factors

While positive affective factors are beneficial, they also have certain limitations. Excessive intrinsic motivation based solely on personal interest may not always align with the academic requirements of the English curriculum. Students may focus on topics they find interesting, neglecting other important aspects of the language, such as grammar and vocabulary, which are necessary for achieving academic success.

Extrinsic motivation, if overemphasized, can lead to a dependence on external rewards. Students may only learn English to get good grades or receive rewards, rather than developing a genuine interest in the language. This can result in shallow learning, where they memorize information temporarily for tests but do not internalize it or develop long-term language skills.

Self-confidence, when excessive, can turn into overconfidence, leading students to underestimate the difficulty of English learning and neglect necessary practice and study. They may avoid seeking help when needed, assuming that they already know enough, which can hinder their progress.

3.3. Challenges Faced in Implementing Affective Factors

3.3.1. Individual Differences

Junior high school students have diverse personalities, learning styles, and emotional backgrounds, leading to significant individual differences in their affective factors. Some students may be naturally confident and motivated, while others may struggle with anxiety and low self-esteem. Addressing these individual differences in a classroom setting can be challenging for teachers, as they need to tailor their methods to meet the needs of each student. It requires a high level of observation, understanding, and flexibility to identify and respond to the unique affective states of each student.

3.3.2. Classroom Environment

The classroom environment plays a crucial role in shaping students' affective factors, but creating a positive and supportive environment can be difficult. Factors such as overcrowded classrooms, time constraints, and a focus on academic performance can create a stressful atmosphere that increases students' anxiety and reduces their motivation. Additionally, negative peer interactions, such as bullying or teasing, can damage students' self-esteem and create a sense of insecurity, making it harder for them to engage in learning.

3.3.3. Teacher Factors

Teachers' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching methods can have a significant impact on students' affective factors. However, some teachers may lack awareness of the importance of affective factors or may not have the necessary skills and strategies to address them. They may focus primarily on teaching content and assessing academic performance, neglecting students' emotional needs. This can lead to a classroom environment that is not conducive to learning, where students' affective factors are not supported, and their learning outcomes are negatively affected.

3.3.4. Parental and Social Influences

Parental expectations and attitudes towards English learning can also influence students' affective factors. High parental expectations may create pressure on students, leading to anxiety and low self-esteem if they are unable to meet these expectations. Conversely, parents who are supportive and encouraging can enhance students' motivation and confidence. Social factors, such as the perception of English as a prestigious language or the influence of peers, can also play a role. Students may feel pressured to learn English to fit in with their peers or to achieve social status, which can affect their motivation and anxiety levels.

4. Practical Recommendations

4.1. Creating a Positive Classroom Environment

Teachers should strive to create a safe, inclusive, and supportive classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves and taking risks. This can be achieved by establishing clear rules and expectations that promote respect and kindness among students, encouraging positive interactions and collaboration, and celebrating students' achievements and progress, no matter how small. Teachers should also be mindful of their own language and behavior, using positive reinforcement and avoiding criticism or humiliation. For example, instead of pointing out students' mistakes in front of the class, teachers can provide private feedback and encourage them to try again.

4.2. Enhancing the Interest of English Learning

To enhance students' motivation, teachers can incorporate a variety of engaging and relevant learning activities into their lessons. This can include using multimedia resources, like videos, songs, and games, to make learning more interesting and interactive. They can also connect English learning to students' real-life experiences and interests, allowing them to see the practical value of the language. If students are interested in sports, teachers can design activities related to sports in English. Additionally, providing students with choices and autonomy in their learning, such as allowing them to select topics for projects or choose their own learning materials, can increase their intrinsic motivation.

4.3. Providing Students with Expectations and Feedback

Teachers can help build students' self-confidence and self-esteem by providing them with opportunities for success. This can involve designing tasks that are challenging but achievable, based on students' current abilities. When students complete these tasks successfully, it gives them a sense of accomplishment and boosts their confidence. Teachers should also provide positive and specific feedback, highlighting students' strengths and progress. Instead of saying "Good job", teachers can say "I really like how you used that new vocabulary word in your sentence." Additionally, encouraging students to set realistic goals for themselves and celebrating their progress towards these goals can help them develop a sense of competence and self-worth.

4.4. Advocating for Cooperative Learning

To reduce students' anxiety, teachers can create a low-pressure learning environment. This can involve minimizing

the emphasis on testing and evaluation, and instead focusing on the learning process. Teachers can provide students with ample practice opportunities in a non-threatening setting, such as pair work or small group discussions, where they can feel more comfortable speaking English. They can also teach students coping strategies for dealing with anxiety, such as deep breathing exercises or positive self-talk. Building positive relationships with students and showing empathy and understanding can help reduce their anxiety and create a more trusting classroom environment.

4.5. Professional Development for Teachers

Educational institutions should provide teachers with professional development opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills in addressing affective factors. This can include workshops, training sessions, and courses on topics such as educational psychology, motivation, and classroom management. Teachers can also benefit from collaborating with colleagues, sharing experiences and strategies, and learning from each other's successes and challenges. By improving their understanding and ability to address affective factors, teachers can better support students' emotional well-being and language learning.

4.6. Involving Parents and the Community

Involving parents and the community in students' English learning can also have a positive impact on their affective factors. Teachers can communicate regularly with parents, providing them with information about their children's progress and ways they can support learning at home. Parents can be encouraged to create a positive learning environment at home, show interest in their children's English learning, and provide encouragement and support. The community can also play a role by organizing English-related activities, such as English clubs, cultural events, or exchanges, which can provide students with additional opportunities to practice English and develop their language skills in a real-world context.

5. Conclusion

In summary, affective factors including motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, and self-esteem, have a significant impact on junior high school students' English learning. Positive affective factors can enhance students' engagement, persistence, and academic performance, while negative ones can hinder their learning (Zhuo & Huang, 2017). However, there are also challenges associated with addressing affective factors, such as individual differences, classroom environment, teacher factors, and parental and social influences.

Practical recommendations to overcome these challenges include creating a positive classroom environment, enhancing learning interest, providing expectations and feedback, advocating cooperative learning, offering teacher professional development opportunities, and involving parents and the community. By implementing these strategies, educators can foster positive affective states among students, creating a supportive learning environment that promotes their emotional well-being and language learning success.

Looking to the future, the role of affective factors in junior

high school English learning is likely to become even more important. As education increasingly focuses on the comprehensive development of students, including their emotional and social well-being, addressing affective factors will be essential. Further research is needed to explore the specific mechanisms through which affective factors influence language learning, as well as the most effective strategies for addressing them in different contexts. By continuing to study and understand the impact of affective factors, we can improve English teaching practices and help more junior high school students achieve success in their language learning journey.

References

- [1] Arnold, J. (1999). *Affect in language learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- [2] Arnold, J., & Brown, H. D. (2000). A map of the terrain. In J. Arnold (Ed.), *Affect in language learning* (pp. 1–15). Cambridge University Press.
- [3] Dulay, A. C., Burt, M. K., & Krashen, S. (1982). *Language two*. Oxford University Press.
- [4] Ellis, R. (1999). *The study of second language acquisition*. Shanghai Foreign Language Teaching Press.
- [5] Gardner, R. C., & Lambert, W. C. (1972). *Attitudes and motivation in second language learning*. Newbury House.
- [6] Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. Mentor.
- [7] Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. A. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125–132. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1986.tb05256.x>.
- [8] Krashen, S. D. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Pergamon Press.
- [9] Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–396. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>.
- [10] Rosenberg, M. (1979). *Convincing the self*. Basic Books.
- [11] Chen, L., Wang, Q., & Cheng, X. T. (2004). *Interpretation of the general high school English curriculum standard (experimental edition)*. Jiangsu Education Publishing House.
- [12] Gao, F. J., & Wang, S. Z. (2010). Investigation and analysis of junior high school students' emotional attitudes toward English learning. *Educational Practice and Research (B)*, (09), 34–35.
- [13] Huang, X. T. (1991). *Introduction to psychology*. People's Education Press.
- [14] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2011). *Compulsory education English curriculum standard*. Beijing Normal University Press.
- [15] Wen, A. Y. (2005). The influence of motivation on junior high school students' English learning. *Curriculum, Teaching Material and Method*, (12), 49–54. <https://doi.org/10.19877/j.cnki.kcjcf.2005.12.013>.
- [16] Wen, Y. Y. (2022). A study on the influence of emotional factors on junior high school students' English learning. *Overseas English*, (08), 167–172.
- [17] Yang, L. H., & Zhang, S. (2017). The influence of junior high school students' English anxiety on English academic performance: The mediating role of English metacognition. *Educational Theory and Practice*, 37(35), 56–58.
- [18] Zhuo, M. J., & Huang, Z. Y. (2017). The influence of emotional factors on junior high school English classroom teaching. *Read and Write (Educational Journal)*, 14(12), 80–81, 4. <https://doi.org/10.16071/j.cnki.cn51-1650/g4.2017.12.067>.