

A Study on Strategies of English Vocabulary Teaching in Primary School from the Perspective of Affective Filter Hypothesis

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Abstract: Vocabulary is the cornerstone of English learning. Rich vocabulary and high vocabulary application ability play an important role in cultivating students' core competencies in English learning. According to the provisions of the English Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition), students in primary school need to learn more vocabulary. Dull and monotonous vocabulary teaching will lead to students' aversion to learning and hinder the absorption of input knowledge. Based on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, the study proposes vocabulary teaching strategies from four dimensions: teaching objectives, teaching content, teaching methods, and teaching assessment, and combines specific teaching cases to explore the feasibility and effectiveness of applying Affective Filter Hypothesis to English vocabulary teaching in primary school, thereby providing insights into how to play the positive role of emotional factors in English teaching and improve students' English vocabulary competence.

Keywords: Affective Filter Hypothesis; English in Primary School; Vocabulary Teaching; A Study on Strategies.

1. Introduction

English Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) (hereinafter referred to as the "New Standard") states that in terms of vocabulary knowledge, students should understand vocabulary learning is not merely about memorizing words and doing mechanical practice, but about learning to use words to understand and express meanings in specific contexts (Ministry of Education, 2022) [1]. According to the guidelines of the New Standard, primary school students are expected to learn more complex and challenging vocabulary. In the face of these new demands, traditional teaching methods often rely on rote memorization and mechanical practice to enhance vocabulary acquisition. However, these monotonous approaches can lead to student disengagement, manifesting as anxiety, low self-esteem, and reduced motivation, ultimately hindering their ability to absorb new knowledge. Contemporary linguistics underscores the critical role of emotions in language acquisition, particularly in second-language learning, where learners' emotional states are closely linked to their success. Thus, integrating emotional elements into English teaching is highly significant. This paper explores specific vocabulary teaching cases and applies Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis to examine how emotional factors influence language input for primary school students. In addressing these challenges, four teaching strategies are proposed, focusing on teaching objectives, content, methods, and assessment. The goal is to help English teachers leverage emotional factors to reduce students' psychological barriers to vocabulary learning and, ultimately, enhance their English vocabulary skills.

2. Literature Review

(1) Relevant studies abroad

The role of vocabulary in foreign language teaching has long been a subject of debate. Early English language instruction largely relied on the translation method, where the

focus was on grammatical structures, often sidelining vocabulary instruction. This approach did not sufficiently emphasize the development of students' practical language skills. In the mid-20th century, as the grammar-translation and audiovisual methods began to decline, the prominence of grammar teaching started to wane. However, during the cognitive approach era, vocabulary teaching continued to be influenced by traditional grammar-based approaches and lacked its own independent theoretical framework. It wasn't until the 1970s that vocabulary teaching began to receive the attention it deserved, emerging as a core aspect of language learning rather than a mere supplement to grammar instruction. With the rise of communicative language teaching, the importance of vocabulary instruction was further highlighted. This approach promotes the natural acquisition of vocabulary through extensive listening and reading activities, signaling a shift from a grammar-centered to a lexically-centered approach in English teaching. Carter (1982) argued that vocabulary teaching is an essential component of language learning and should be given a central role in language instruction[2]. Wallace (1982) also underscored the importance of vocabulary teaching during this period[3]. Canale and Swain (1981) stated that the main goal of vocabulary teaching is to enhance learners' language competence, suggesting that the ultimate aim of English teaching should be the development of vocabulary skills. Today, vocabulary teaching methods are primarily divided into two categories: implicit and explicit teaching[4].

(2) Relevant studies at home

In China, vocabulary teaching has traditionally played a supportive role in English instruction. In conventional classroom settings, English teachers often rely on vocabulary lists to introduce new words by directly presenting their pronunciation, form, and meaning. These teaching methods, such as translation, the direct method, listening and speaking methods, or communicative language teaching, are often applied without coherence or systematic structure. In practice, teachers may adopt certain methods unconsciously, lacking a

deep understanding of vocabulary teaching theories, which makes it challenging to guide learners in using scientific and emotional vocabulary learning strategies. Moreover, many teachers have a limited understanding of the multifaceted nature of vocabulary knowledge and the developmental stages of learners' vocabulary abilities. This results in difficulties in developing efficient and targeted teaching strategies. Several issues persist in vocabulary teaching in China, including a disconnect between vocabulary instruction and reading comprehension, a lack of vocabulary learning and metacognitive strategies, and a separation between vocabulary consolidation and its real-world use. Research on vocabulary teaching in China began relatively late. In 1983, Wang and Li co-authored *Practical English Lexicology*, which marked a significant step in the independent exploration of English lexicology by Chinese scholars and filled a gap in domestic English teaching research[5]. Wang (2001) predicted that English lexicology would increasingly be recognized as a valuable practical discipline and become an essential part of English teaching[6]. In the 21st century, vocabulary teaching has gradually become a research focus, particularly in the areas of corpus linguistics and teaching lexical chunks. Pu (2000) provided specific suggestions for English vocabulary teaching using corpus data based on empirical research[7]. Zhang and He (2006) published an article, "Corpora-based Senior High School English Vocabulary Learning," in the *Journal of Foreign Language Teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools*, which explored how corpora could address the problem of insufficient vocabulary in textbooks, suggesting that students can learn new words and phrases more effectively through self-observation and analysis[8]. Chen (2020) emphasized the positive impact of teaching lexical chunks on language learning efficiency, considering it a valuable method worthy of further promotion[9].

(3) Summary

A review and analysis of the existing literature, both domestically and internationally, reveals that research on English vocabulary teaching in primary schools primarily emphasizes the instrumental role of language, with relatively less focus on its humanistic aspects. These studies predominantly examine the effectiveness and efficiency of English vocabulary teaching, often overlooking the emotional experiences and psychological changes of students during the learning process. Furthermore, research on English vocabulary teaching based on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis is notably limited. The influence of emotional factors in language learning is crucial and cannot be disregarded. Therefore, conducting research on English vocabulary teaching in primary schools through the lens of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis is valuable. It can guide teachers in recognizing the importance of students' emotional factors, adjusting teaching strategies accordingly, boosting students' motivation, enhancing their self-confidence, reducing anxiety, and ultimately improving both vocabulary acquisition and students' overall language proficiency.

3. Theoretical Basis

(1) Definition of Affective Filter Hypothesis

Affective Filter Hypothesis was proposed by Dulay and Burt in 1977 to explain how emotional factors impact the process of learning a foreign language. They viewed the Affective Filter as an internal mechanism that subconsciously obstructs a learner's ability to take in language due to

emotional influences (Dulay et al., 1982)[10]. In the 1980s, Stephen Krashen, an American language educator, built upon this idea and integrated it into his comprehensive theory of second language acquisition, which includes five core hypotheses, one of which is the Affective Filter Hypothesis. This hypothesis focuses on the link between learners' emotions and their capacity to acquire language. Krashen described the Affective Filter as "an emotional barrier that prevents learners from processing input effectively during the learning process" (Krashen, 1985)[11]. Emotional barriers refer to psychological factors that hinder second or foreign language learning. For language input to be successfully acquired, it must pass through the Affective Filter, which determines whether it will be absorbed. If the Affective Filter is high, language input is blocked or filtered out, preventing it from reaching the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) in the brain. On the other hand, if the Affective Filter is low, language input is more effectively transformed into language intake, allowing learners to more easily access the LAD and complete the language acquisition process. This theory can be represented as follows:

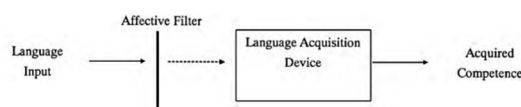


Fig 1. This theory can be represented

The diagram illustrates that the Affective Filter exists outside the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). However, as language input reaches the LAD in the brain, the Affective Filter influences whether learners can access more language input and absorb it effectively. Krashen compares the Affective Filter to an invisible barrier between learners and the language input. In other words, language learning occurs most efficiently when the input is abundant and comprehensible, and the Affective Filter is low, meaning there are no psychological barriers preventing learning. When these conditions are met, students can acquire the language more quickly.

(2) Emotional Factors in the Second Language Acquisition

According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, the Affective Filter plays a key role in explaining individual differences in language learning. Emotional factors act as a filter on comprehensible language input, determining whether it becomes intake. These emotional factors include a learner's motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety levels. In general, when a learner lacks motivation, has low self-confidence, or experiences high anxiety, their Affective Filter is too high or inappropriate. In this case, the learner's ability to absorb comprehensible language input is significantly reduced, hindering the learning process. Conversely, when a learner is highly motivated, confident, and experiences a manageable level of anxiety, their Affective Filter is appropriate or low. In such conditions, the learner's intake of comprehensible language input is maximized, facilitating more effective second language acquisition.

Motivation

The linguist Harmer (1991) describes motivation as the internal force that drives individuals to pursue a particular behavior. When we have an appealing goal in mind, we are more likely to exert all our efforts to achieve it[11]. Motivation is widely recognized by researchers and educators as a crucial factor in learning. Even learners with exceptional language aptitude may struggle to maintain long-term

progress if they lack motivation. Motivated language learners are eager to acquire knowledge, disciplined, proactive, and tend to achieve positive learning outcomes. In contrast, learners with low motivation often find language learning burdensome, remain passive during the process, and typically experience poor results.

Anxiety

Anxiety is the psychological state of tension, worry, and fear that individuals experience when they anticipate failure or perceive a significant threat. It also arises in situations where individuals feel their self-esteem may be at risk. In the context of language learning, anxiety refers to the discomfort, unease, and fear of making mistakes that students feel when using a language. Language-related anxiety can be categorized into three types: (1) Communication anxiety, which involves fear and nervousness during language interactions; (2) Test anxiety, which occurs during exams and can impair performance; and (3) Negative social evaluation, which arises from the fear of being judged negatively when using a foreign language, often due to concerns about losing face.

Self-confidence

Self-confidence refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their abilities and knowledge, along with a positive mindset toward self-actualization and self-worth. It acts as the psychological basis for achieving success. Language learners with high self-confidence are more inclined to take risks, are not afraid of errors, and actively participate in foreign language communication. This attitude provides them with more chances for practical practice, leading to greater progress. On the other hand, learners with low self-confidence often fear mistakes and worry about losing face, which results in missed opportunities for language practice and weaker communication skills.

4. Strategies of English Vocabulary Teaching in Primary School from the Perspective of Affective Filter Hypothesis

(1) Teaching objectives optimize the affective environment

According to the Affective Filter Hypothesis, when setting objectives for English vocabulary teaching, it is important for teachers to focus on creating a positive emotional environment that keeps students' affective filters low. This approach helps maximize learners' vocabulary acquisition potential and supports effective absorption and long-term retention of vocabulary.

The design of teaching objectives should align with the Activity-based Approach to English Language Learning, emphasizing the skills and development students gain by engaging in interesting activities that stimulate motivation. These activities should guide students through a progression from "learning and understanding" to "applying and practicing" to "transferring and innovating." Such activities foster students' intrinsic interest and curiosity in learning English vocabulary, reducing their resistance to vocabulary study. To lower the affective filter and establish a positive, low-pressure atmosphere, vocabulary mastery goals can be set in phases under the broader teaching objectives. These goals should be both challenging and achievable at each stage, helping to reduce anxiety, while providing students with opportunities to experience success. This process allows students to build self-confidence in vocabulary learning

through the continuous achievement of smaller objectives.

(2) Teaching content stimulates learning interest

When organizing English vocabulary teaching based on the Affective Filter Hypothesis, it is essential to carefully select and arrange the content to create a supportive learning environment that minimizes emotional barriers, stimulates motivation, and enhances the effectiveness and retention of vocabulary.

The content should be relevant to students' everyday lives, incorporating themes related to daily activities, culture, entertainment, and personal interests. Additionally, authentic materials such as song lyrics, movie clips, and news reports can be utilized to make the learning experience more engaging and dynamic. In vocabulary instruction, it is crucial to focus on personalized support, offering differentiated teaching that caters to each student's language background and individual needs. Providing tailored resources and guidance helps students who may require extra assistance to overcome challenges. Teachers should also be flexible with the pace and difficulty of the lessons, adjusting based on the class's overall progress and individual student performance to ensure that no student feels overwhelmed.

Beyond the textbook, teachers can enhance understanding by introducing relevant background knowledge. Research shows that integrating language learning with cultural context accelerates language mastery. Students who resist cultural learning often face difficulties in communication due to cultural conflicts. Therefore, to prepare students emotionally and increase their exposure to language input, teachers should approach language teaching from a cultural perspective. This approach allows students to absorb both language and culture simultaneously, reducing emotional barriers and improving vocabulary learning outcomes.

(3) Teaching methods reduce affective filter

Psychologists define interest as a positive and lasting cognitive engagement with something, often accompanied by heightened activity in the brain's thinking center. When students develop an interest in learning English vocabulary, their enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity significantly improve, leading to a reduction in their affective filter. As a result, English teachers should focus on employing scientifically-backed methods that cultivate students' interest in language learning. Below are several effective strategies rooted in the Affective Filter Hypothesis:

Student-Centered Teaching Model: Language learning is an active process where learners don't merely absorb information but actively engage with and choose the information they encounter. Therefore, teachers should encourage students' creativity and integrate it into classroom activities, fostering an environment where students are motivated and engaged. In this model, the role of the teacher is to guide and support students' language interest, ensuring learning feels rewarding and enjoyable rather than burdensome. Additionally, this approach provides students with more understandable input and strengthens their language abilities.

Incorporating Multimedia Technology: Krashen suggests that the success of language learning is closely tied to the amount of comprehensible input received. Multimedia tools can make language input more engaging and accessible, facilitating students' understanding and retention. Therefore, integrating multimedia into lessons is essential. It allows teachers to introduce diverse cultural contexts and create an immersive language learning environment. This approach not

only provides students with richer input but also boosts their motivation to learn the language.

Encouraging Collaborative Learning: Collaborative learning involves students working together to achieve common goals. This approach not only encourages cooperation and collective success but also fosters positive emotional interactions among students. Firstly, cooperative learning reduces anxiety. Being part of a group broadens students' focus, diminishing feelings of anxiety. Discussions and peer feedback allow students to refine their thoughts, which decreases the likelihood of mistakes and alleviates stress. Secondly, cooperative learning strengthens self-confidence. As students collaborate, they contribute to group success, which enhances their sense of value and boosts their self-esteem. This reinforcement of self-worth motivates students to put in more effort, achieve better results, and further build their confidence.

(4) Teaching assessment reduces anxiety

In designing assessments for English vocabulary teaching based on the Affective Filter Hypothesis, it is essential for teachers to focus on students' emotional states and incorporate process-oriented evaluations. A variety of assessment methods should be used to foster students' interest and enthusiasm for learning. By utilizing process evaluations, teachers can monitor students' progress, identify and address issues promptly, and avoid the pressure that comes with relying solely on final evaluations. Teachers should employ a range of assessment techniques, such as evaluating classroom participation, homework completion, group discussions, and presentations, to provide a comprehensive and objective view of students' vocabulary learning and reduce anxiety.

Teachers should also create opportunities for students to showcase their work or speak publicly after completing assignments, recognizing and celebrating their efforts and progress to foster a positive learning environment. Following these demonstrations, teachers can implement positive reinforcement techniques, such as a points system or small rewards, to encourage students when they correctly apply newly learned vocabulary. This helps increase their sense of achievement and motivation to continue learning.

When students make mistakes, teachers should respond with understanding. Mistakes can disrupt students' language activities and potentially diminish their enthusiasm. During the practice phase, teachers can guide students to identify and self-correct their errors. However, in more creative activities, such as role-playing or group discussions, it is important to allow room for mistakes, as students may feel nervous or lack proficiency. The primary goal in error correction should be to maintain students' engagement and avoid creating psychological barriers. The process should aim to build their

confidence while supporting their continued participation in the learning experience.

5. Conclusion

Affective factors play a crucial role in English teaching, particularly in primary school vocabulary instruction. To optimize both the content and process of teaching and learning, English educators should make the most of students' emotional factors. By understanding and applying Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, teachers can better recognize the impact of affective filters on language acquisition. This paper explores the feasibility and effectiveness of incorporating the Affective Filter Hypothesis into primary school English vocabulary teaching, offering insights on how to leverage emotional factors to enhance vocabulary development. It is hoped that future research will further investigate the theory and practice of affective factors in English education, contributing to the achievement of English language teaching objectives.

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