

An Introduction to the Relationship Between Foreign Language Learning Anxiety and Learning Effectiveness in Middle School Learners

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Abstract: In recent years, there has been a significant advancement in the field of Positive Psychology, which has the potential to enhance the well-being of middle school students. These students often experience emotional challenges, including feelings of nervousness and happiness. The issue of nervousness in learning foreign languages has been a central concern in English education for quite some time. If middle school students do not effectively manage their nervousness, it can lead to negative consequences. This paper will explore the impact of foreign language learning anxiety on learning effectiveness of junior high school students, analyzes the mechanisms of test anxiety, communication anxiety and negative evaluation, explores the mediating roles of emotional intelligence, learning motivation and learning strategies in reducing anxiety and enhancing effectiveness, and proposes effective methods to reduce anxiety.

Keywords: Foreign Language Learning Anxiety; Academic Performance; Secondary English.

1. Introduction

Humanistic psychology emphasizes that individual positive traits such as optimism and resilience, as well as socially positive traits such as empathy, are essential for enhancing mental health and well-being (Ren, 2006) [12]. The development of positive psychology should shift towards a focus on positive human strengths and virtues rather than an excessive focus on past psychological problems. "This means that psychology should take as its point of departure the study of actual and potentially constructive human strengths, virtues and faculties. By advocating a positive reinterpretation of human psychological phenomena, various factors that promote individual well-being can be explored (Ren & Ye, 2004) [12]. Meanwhile, Han and Xu (2020) [5] insisted Positive psychology focuses on subjective positive experiences, individual positive traits and collective positive environments to enhance well-being, mental health and success. Learners' positive affective experiences and stable emotional states have a significant impact on learning outcomes. When learners feel happy, confident and accomplished in the learning process, they are more likely to stay engaged and achieve better learning outcomes. On the contrary, negative emotions such as anxiety and frustration may hinder the learning process and reduce learning effectiveness (Li et al, 2023) [9]. Individual factors such as gender and second language level, as well as socio-environmental factors, including socio-cultural perceptions and teacher behaviors, have an impact on learners' emotional states. Together, these factors contribute to the learning process, influencing learners' motivation, engagement, and ultimately learning outcomes. Understanding these interactions can help design more effective teaching strategies that promote positive emotional experiences for learners and reduce the interference of negative emotions, thus improving the efficiency and effectiveness of second language acquisition (Dewaele, 2019) [1].

The famous psychologist Carl Jung believed that anxiety is

an internal human conflict, which may stem from the incongruity between the individual ego and the collective unconscious, and that anxiety is not only a negative emotion, but also has an important psychological function. Horwitz et al. (1986) [6] believed anxiety in foreign language learning is clearly defined as "a unique complex of self-awareness, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors", and the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, FLCAS) has been developed, which provides researchers with a systematic tool for assessing the anxiety level of learners, and helps to reveal the psychological and emotional state of the process of foreign language learning. The FLCAS is widely used in research and educational settings to identify students who may be experiencing high levels of anxiety in language classes, which can negatively impact their learning and performance. The scale consists of 33 items that students rate on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," to indicate how much they agree with statements that reflect common feelings and reactions in language learning situations. Scale application plays a key role in anxiety level measurement by allowing researchers and educators to accurately assess learners' anxiety levels. Foreign language anxiety is one of the challenges learners often face when learning a foreign language, and it can interfere with the acquisition and improvement of language skills. This anxiety may stem from a fear of language errors, difficulties in communicating with native speakers, or lack of confidence in social interactions (Yu, 2015) [15]. Argaman & ArbuRabia (2002) [7] found "here is a significant negative correlation between foreign language learning anxiety and academic performance." Liu & Jackson (2008) [8] found that learners' level of foreign language anxiety was significantly negatively correlated with foreign language achievement based on the FLCAS scale. Some studies have pointed out that moderate foreign language anxiety can promote learners' deepening of understanding and motivate them to study and prepare harder, thus improving learning outcomes. This anxiety can serve as

a motivation for learners to focus more on the learning task and improve their learning efficiency.

2. The Relationship Between Nervous on Foreign Language Learning and Learning Performance

The FLCAS measurement scale developed by Horwitz & Cope (1986) consists of 33 questions that can be categorized into three major aspects of anxiety: test anxiety, communication anxiety, and negative evaluation anxiety (Sun, 2019)^[13]. Each of these anxiety pairs has a significant effect on the effectiveness of learning for middle school students.

Communication anxiety is usually defined as an emotional and psychological state that occurs when communicating, speaking, or expressing thoughts, and this anxiety can have a significant impact on an individual's learning and performance. In this paper, we will explore the definition of communication anxiety, the factors that influence it, its specific manifestations, and its potential role in academic performance. This anxiety may stem from a lack of confidence in expressing oneself, concern about the judgment of others, or fear of social situations. Communication anxiety is influenced by a variety of factors, including social experience, cultural background, the importance of the communication situation, and the individual's level of social skills. For example, the stress of facing the floor or making one's own statements in public may exacerbate anxiety, whereas performance may improve in familiar and supportive environments.

Test anxiety refers to the emotions of nervousness, uneasiness, and worry experienced when facing a test, which may affect a student's academic effectiveness and performance. Compulsory education is characterized by testing, and students are given many tests throughout their three years of study, and each test has different purposes and standards, bringing different academic pressures to middle school students. For example, test anxiety may lead to impairments in cognitive functioning; as anxiety increases, students have difficulty processing and recalling information effectively, and this increased cognitive load reduces learning effectiveness and test performance.

Negative appraisal refers to criticism of an individual's ability, behavior, appearance, or other aspects. It usually carries a negative sentiment or direction, is intended to point out the individual's deficiencies or mistakes, and may be accompanied by blame, sarcasm, or negativity. Negative evaluations can be in the nature of direct verbal criticism or written feedback, or indirectly in the form of innuendo, indifference, or an attitude of being ignored. In educational settings, negative evaluations may come from teachers, peers, or parents and relate to aspects of a student's academic performance, engagement, or social behavior. They can sometimes have a profound effect on an individual's self-perception and emotional state, which in turn affects behavioral performance and learning outcomes. These negative comments are more than superficial criticisms; they can profoundly affect an individual's self-esteem and self-perception, leading to emotional distress and diminished academic motivation.

3. Causes of Anxiety and Learning Effectiveness in Foreign Language Learning

3.1. Emotional Intelligence

"Emotional intelligence, or emotional intelligence, is an important ability for individuals to perceive, cope with, and regulate their emotions. It not only enables individuals to better understand their emotional states, but also promotes emotional and intellectual growth through reflection and appropriate emotional regulation. (Mayer & Salovey, 1997)^[11]". Yu (2015)^[15] and his group found significant correlations between students' emotional intelligence, foreign language learning anxiety and English language learning achievement." Emotional intelligence plays an important role in foreign language learning, not only does it encompass the variety of emotions that learners experience during the learning process, but it also has a profound effect on learning outcomes (Gleason, 1995)^[3]. Research has shown that foreign language learners who possess higher levels of emotional intelligence typically exhibit lower levels of anxiety about learning a foreign language. These learners are likely to be more efficient in their language skills (MacIntyre, 2002)^[10] and to be able to achieve more significant learning gains in the learning process.

3.2. Learning Motivation

Li (2020)^[9] insisted that the effect of learning motivation on foreign language learning anxiety and learning effectiveness is realized by moderating learners' emotions and attitudes. High motivation usually leads to lower anxiety and higher learning outcomes, while low motivation may lead to higher anxiety and lower learning outcomes. Highly motivated learners are more inclined to invest more time and effort in their learning, they have a stronger desire to succeed in their learning and are therefore more likely to achieve positive learning outcomes. Lowly motivated learners, on the other hand, are likely to show lower learning outcomes because they lack the intrinsic motivation and desire to overcome difficulties and challenges in learning.

3.3. Learning Strategy

The way learning strategies are used in foreign language learning has an important mediating role in both learning anxiety and learning effectiveness. By adopting effective learning strategies, learners are able to better manage their emotions and attitudes during the learning process, thereby increasing learning effectiveness and reducing anxiety. Specifically, the use of effective learning strategies can help learners to better manage and cope with learning tasks, thereby reducing anxiety and enhancing learning outcomes.

4. Ways to Reduce the Anxiety of English Learning in Middle School

4.1. Cultivate Emotional Intelligence

Firstly, enhancing students' emotional competence can effectively regulate their foreign language learning anxiety. Han and Xu (2020)^[5] believed that emotional competence enables students to better understand and manage their emotional responses, and thus to be more relaxed and focused when learning a foreign language. On the other hand, English teachers are not only facilitators of language learning, but

they should also have a high level of emotional intelligence, i.e., emotional intelligence, as well as a low level of anxiety about learning a foreign language. Teachers' emotional intelligence can help them to better understand their students' emotional states, detect possible anxiety problems in time, and motivate students through effective communication and support to help them overcome negative emotions.

4.2. Stimulate Learning Motivation

To reduce junior high school students' anxiety when learning English, it can be achieved by developing their motivation to learn. Firstly, teachers can help students set clear and definite learning goals so that they can plan their learning and reduce unnecessary tension. Second, providing positive feedback and encouragement motivates students to actively explore and experiment in their learning, thus building self-confidence in their learning (Xue&Wang, 2022)^[14]. In addition, creating a supportive and positive learning environment is also key, including encouraging students to share their learning experiences with their peers and to support and co-operate with each other. Teachers can guide students to discover the fun and usefulness of learning and enhance their interest and motivation in learning English. Finally, educators should promote the idea that learning is a process and that failure and challenges are part of growth, encouraging students to learn from their mistakes and to believe that they can overcome difficulties. By doing so, students' motivation will be enhanced, which will reduce the anxiety that arises in the process of learning English and make it easier for them to face learning challenges and make progress.

4.3. Develop Learning Strategies

To effectively combat foreign language learning anxiety, a collaborative effort between students and teachers is paramount. Students should set realistic goals, engage in regular practice, utilize diverse learning resources, and seek support when needed, while also reflecting on their progress to build confidence. On the other hand, teachers play a crucial role in fostering a positive classroom culture that encourages mistakes as part of the learning process, employing a variety of teaching methods to cater to different learning styles, and providing constructive feedback that highlights progress. Firstly, teachers can teach students appropriate learning methods, such as time management, goal setting and revision techniques, which can help students plan their learning in an orderly manner and reduce the pressure of learning tasks. Secondly, encouraging students to adopt deep processing strategies, such as relating to the learning content, to understand and remember knowledge instead of simply memorising it mechanically can help improve learning effectiveness and self-confidence. They can also integrate technology to offer interactive learning experiences, encourage peer interaction, and teach anxiety-reduction techniques. Adjusting assessment methods to be more inclusive and promoting language awareness can further help students understand the nature of language learning and how to navigate its challenges.

5. Conclusion

Affective factors, especially motivation and anxiety, play a crucial role in the process of second language acquisition. Foreign language learning anxiety is an important topic in English education research, which accompanies the students'

learning process and, if not handled properly, can have a negative impact on learning effectiveness. This paper explores the impact of foreign language learning anxiety on learning effectiveness in junior high school students, and analyses the mechanisms of test anxiety, communication anxiety and negative evaluation. It was found that emotional intelligence, learning motivation and learning strategies play a mediating role in reducing anxiety and enhancing learning effectiveness. Therefore, a series of effective anxiety reduction methods are proposed, aiming to help students better manage their emotions and improve their learning effectiveness. By improving students' emotional intelligence, enhancing motivation, and adopting effective learning strategies, anxiety in foreign language learning can be effectively reduced and thus learning effectiveness can be enhanced. These findings have important practical implications for both educators and students, helping to create a more positive and supportive learning environment for students' foreign language learning.

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