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The Influence of Affective Factors on Middle School Students' English Learning

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Abstract: Based on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, this study explores the influence of affective factors on middle school students' English learning. The research found that affective factors like motivation, confidence, and anxiety have a significant impact on middle school students' English learning effect. Motivation is the key factor to drive students' learning, and both intrinsic motivation (such as interest) and extrinsic motivation (such as needing to pass tests) can significantly improve the learning effect. Self-confidence has a direct impact on students' language input reception efficiency. Students with high self-confidence have lower affective filtering and are more likely to receive comprehensible input. Anxiety, however, makes this affective filter stronger and blocks learning. Teachers can optimize students' affective experience by stimulating intrinsic motivation, enhancing self-confidence and relieving anxiety, so as to improve English learning effect.

Keywords: Affective Factors, Middle School Students, Affective Filter Hypothesis.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Middle school is a critical time for students learning English. During this stage, students need to strengthen the basics they learned in elementary school while building a solid foundation for future English studies in high school and college. As an important subject, English plays a key role in middle school. At the same time, middle school students are in adolescence-a special period for their affection growth. Teenagers often experience emotional ups and downs, become more sensitive, and develop stronger self-awareness. These psychological traits directly affect their attitude, motivation, and effectiveness in learning English. During this time, affective factors like motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence, not only affect student' participation in class, but also have a profound effect on the quality of language input and output (Krashen, 1982)[17].

English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022) also points out that English learning has both instrumental and humanistic sides. Teachers shouldn't only focus on language skills and knowledge but also care about students' affection. The standards state: "Make students feel the joy of learning and their teacher's trust, helping them grow healthy, confident, and positive" (Ministry of Education, p. 47)[10]. This shows how important affective factors are in teaching English.

1.2. Affective Factors

Emotion refers to the complex subjective experience and response mode of individuals to internal or external stimuli. This is a broad concept covering many aspects. From the perspective of foreign language teaching, Alpert (1960) has highlighted the significance of affective factors. He noted that these factors, which are related to language teaching, can have a multifaceted impact on students' learning effectiveness[11]. Specifically, they have the potential to promote students' learning and stimulate their initiative. However, it is also important to recognize that these same factors may trigger negative learning emotions.

Since the 1970s, a significant body of research has been dedicated to exploring the role of affective factors in second language acquisition, and many theories have emerged, such as Giles' "Accommodation Theory", Schumann's "Acculturation Model" , and Krashen' "Monitor Model." Among them, the Affective Filter Hypothesis in Krashen's Monitor Theory is the most influential. In this hypothesis, Krashen pointed out that affective factors in language learning include motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Based on Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, this study mainly discusses the influence of affective factors on middle school students' English learning.

1.3. Research Significance

This study explores the influence of affective factors on middle school students' English learning based on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, aiming at further enriching and perfecting the related theories of affective factors. By focusing specifically on middle school students, the research offers fresh perspectives and solid evidence about how affective factors shape language learning. By revealing the impacts of affective factors on middle school students' English learning, teachers can better understand students' affective needs, so as to pay more attention to the cultivation and regulation of affective factors in the teaching process.

2. Theoretical Basis -- Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis is a significant theory in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The hypothesis suggests affective factors serve a filtering function in language learning. Specifically, this filter influences both the initial reception of target language input by learners and its subsequent absorption into their developing linguistic system(Krashen, 1982)[17]. Krashen defines affective factors as psychological states such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. These factors together constitute a "filter", which determines the learners' acceptance of language input. When learners are in a relaxed, positive, and confident state, the affective filter is lowered.

Consequently, linguistic input passes more readily through the filter, thereby facilitating language acquisition. On the contrary, if learners feel anxious, lack of self-confidence or lack of motivation, affective filtering will increase, which will hinder the reception of language input and thus affect the effect of language learning (Krashen, 1985)[18]. Based on the Affective Filter Hypothesis, teachers should pay attention to students' emotional state in the teaching process and strive to create a relaxed and positive learning atmosphere to reduce students' affective filtering.

3. The Specific Influence of Affective Factors on Middle School Students' English Learning

3.1. Motivation

Motivation, as one of the key factors in the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982)[17], is the internal drive that pushes learners to actively take part in English learning and keep learning over time. For students, motivation directly affects their acceptance efficiency of language input. High motivation level can significantly reduce emotional filtering and promote language acquisition; On the other hand, insufficient motivation will strengthen the filtering effect and hinder the learning effect (Krashen, 1985)[18].

Motivation is typically classified into two primary forms: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation comes from interest; and interest is central to intrinsic motivation. Students with strong interest in English actively join classroom activities and explore English knowledge, showing much better learning results than students lacking interest. For example, through gamification teaching, such as English word chain and role-playing, students' task motivation can be stimulated and students can learn English in a relaxed and happy atmosphere. Extrinsic motivation mainly comes from outside factors like exams or competitions. Although external motivation can also motivate students to learn English, its effect may not last as long as internal motivation. For example, students may study English hard because they want to get high marks in exams, get praise from teachers or meet parents' expectations. However, this motivation may quickly fade after students reach their goals. Research shows that excessive dependence on external motivation may lead to students' boredom in English learning, thus affecting the learning effect. Therefore, teachers should balance the intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, and guide students to transform extrinsic motivation into intrinsic motivation, so as to improve the persistence and enthusiasm of learning.

Research shows motivation is influenced by multiple factors. On the cognitive level, Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory states that a student's belief in their own English ability strongly predicts their choice of tasks and persistence[12]. Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to try challenging activities like speaking. On the emotional level, learning anxiety harms motivation, such as classroom silence caused by speaking anxiety. On the social environment level, teachers' feedback mode regulates motivation by influencing how students explain success or failure. Weiner's (1985) Attribution Theory emphasizes that attributing failure to lack of ability, such as "I was born with poor English", will lead to decreased motivation, while attributing failure to controllable factors, such as hard work and strategy adjustment, can stimulate action[22]. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs offers important clues for motivation support. Middle students' English learning motivation is closely linked to growth needs like respect and self-fulfillment. When the classroom environment meets their security needs (such avoiding public criticism) and belonging needs (such as group cooperation and recognition), students are more likely to develop stable intrinsic motivation (Maslow, 1943)[19]. In teaching practice, Wu Guorui (2023) found through experiments that using game-based methods can increase student participation and make learning more engaging. Combining game thinking and mechanics to give students timely feedback and rewards sparks both their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation[6].

Therefore, teachers should use various strategies to build and boost students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in daily teaching based on their individual differences and learning needs. Teachers should also design tasks at different difficulty levels to meet the growth needs of students with different self-efficacy, helping them keep a positive learning attitude and high enthusiasm during learning, thus improving English learning results.

3.2. Self-confidence

Self-confidence refers to learners' positive evaluation and belief in their own English ability, which directly affects the reception efficiency of language input. According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, students with high self-confidence have a lower affective filter, making it easier for them to take in comprehensible input. However, low self-confidence strengthens the filtering effect and hinders the internalization of language (Krashen, 1985)[18].

Middle school students' level of self-confidence shows a strong positive link with their use of learning strategies (Oxford, 1990)[20]. People with high self-confidence tend to adopt meta-cognitive strategies such as goal planning and social strategies such as actively seeking dialogue, which form an enhanced loop of "confidence- strategy- success". On the contrary, people with low self-confidence often avoid communication tasks. This avoidance is especially noticeable during adolescence – because adolescent students are sensitive about self-image, and they see language mistakes as a threat to their self-esteem . This lead to higher performance anxiety, which further stops them from speaking.

Self-confidence is domain-specific. A student might feel strong confidence in reading but experience high anxiety in speaking. This difference comes from how they explain success or failure. Weiner (1985) pointed out that attributing oral failure to stable factors (such as my pronunciation is born poor) will weaken self-confidence, while attributing it to controllable factors (such as poor preparation) will maintain self-efficacy[22]. Teaching practice shows that specific micro-skill training (e.g., using speech analysis software to show pronunciation improvement visually) can increase students' speaking confidence and significantly lower their affective filter (Gregersen, 2003)[14].

Therefore, teachers should build systems to develop middle school students' self-confidence. Teachers should help students locate language mistakes as a normal part of learning. Written feedback can be used for highly anxious students, and effort attribution is emphasized for students with low efficiency (Weiner, 1985)[22].

3.3. Anxiety

Anxiety is a psychological state where a person worries about not reaching goals or overcoming obstacles, showing as

nervousness about possible harm to self-esteem or confidence, or increased fear of failure and guilt. In language learning, foreign language anxiety specifically means the fear and unease learners feel when learning or using the target language (Horwitz et al., 1986)[16]. For middle school students in adolescence, their high sensitivity and self-awareness make anxiety a key affective factor. It mainly shows in three ways: communication anxiety like nervousness when speaking, classroom anxiety like fear of teacher questions, and test anxiety like pressure from grades. This anxiety strongly increases the affective filter, blocking the learning of comprehensible input.

There are many causes of anxiety, and learners' low self-efficacy and external competitive environment constitute the core inducement. Learners' subjective cognitive deviation of language learning difficulty further induces anticipatory anxiety. Teachers' teaching philosophy (such as too high frequency of error correction) and teacher-student interaction mode (such as public criticism) will also aggravate the anxiety level (Young, 1991)[23].

According to the characteristics of middle school students, Su and Guo (2023) put forward a series of intervention strategies. First, teachers should change their teaching views, stop overly focusing on test scores, pay attention to individual student differences, set learning goals at different levels, and build equal, positive teacher-student relationships to create a relaxed and supportive learning environment. Second, through home-school cooperation, create a warm family atmosphere, guide parents to change their views on education, focus on their children's mental health, and avoid too much criticism or blindly chasing high scores. In addition, schools should set up psychological counseling rooms with professional counselors and stress-relief tools to help students release negative feelings. Teachers should also run regular mental health activities, like themed class meetings or educational videos, to share knowledge and teach ways to handle stress, building student confidence. Finally, guide students to manage their own anxiety through music, sports, sleep, or talking, helping them stay positive[4]. These practices directly support Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis core idea – lowering anxiety weakens the affective filter, improving language learning (Krashen, 1985)[18].

4. Research on Interventions for Affective Factors

Research on affective interventions aims to improve learners' affective states through systematic strategies, thereby enhancing the efficiency of language learning. Internationally, multi-dimensional approaches have been developed. For boosting motivation, Dörnyei's (2001) "Motivational Teaching Practice Framework" proposes four principles for task design: setting specific goals, making progress visible, creating step-by-step challenges, and giving quick feedback. This builds inner motivation by increasing the perceived value of tasks and learners' belief in their ability[13]. For managing anxiety, Oxford's (2017) "Strategic Emotion Regulation Model" highlights training in metacognitive strategies, which helps reduce harmful anxiety[21]. For building confidence, Gregersen and MacIntyre's (2014) "advantage-focused approach" encourages recording small improvements, reshaping self-perception by making achievements visible[15].

Regarding the impact of affective factors on middle school students' English learning, Chinese researchers have also conducted many studies. Guo Qiang (2024), after experiments confirming the influence of affective factors on learning outcomes, suggested fostering positive feelings by creating enjoyable learning environments and increasing the fun of English learning[1]. He also recommended easing negative affections by reducing test anxiety and offering psychological support. Zhang Mingxian and Guo Jidong (2024) found that teacher emotional support directly and positively predicts student behavioral engagement in English learning and also has an indirect effect through satisfying basic psychological needs[8]. Xue Bing (2024), researching writing anxiety among 413 middle school students, discovered that writing anxiety has a strong negative link with self-regulation strategies. High anxiety leads to more avoidance and less active strategies. His study suggests reducing anxiety through task design and encouraging feedback[7]. Jia Jingying (2023) revealed that middle school students' English learning self-efficacy positively correlates with classroom performance, with the link strengthening in higher grades; the ability to overcome setbacks was the strongest predictor of performance[2]. Luo Yuan (2023), focusing on teacher correction methods, confirmed that correction methods significantly impact motivation; ignoring emotional needs weakens motivation, proposing strategies like diversifying who gives corrections and paying attention to emotional needs[3]. Wen Yiying (2022), using surveys and observations, found that middle school students' English learning motivation is mostly external. Communication anxiety is the most common form of anxiety[5]. Zheng Hefang (2020) noted that low motivation shows as classroom passivity and weak self-study, being more common in boys and higher-grade students, requiring interventions tailored to different levels based on Self-Determination Theory[9].

5. Conclusion

Based on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, this study explores the influence of affective factors on middle school students' English learning, revealing the mechanisms of core affective factors in the English learning process, and proposing corresponding teaching intervention strategies.

The research finds that motivation is a key driver for middle school students' English learning. Intrinsic motivation can more sustainably stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning, while extrinsic motivation has a stronger short-term motivational effect. Self-confidence has a significant positive impact on middle school students' English learning. Students with high self-confidence are more willing to participate in classroom activities, dare to express their views, and can face mistakes positively. Research shows that teachers' positive feedback and encouragement can significantly enhance students' confidence, thereby improving learning outcomes. Therefore, teachers should help students build self-confidence through positive evaluations and personalized guidance. Anxiety has a significant negative impact on middle school students' English learning. Students with high anxiety levels exhibit avoidance behaviors in English learning, such as avoiding asking questions in class and not participating in oral practice.

In summary, affective factors significantly influence English language acquisition among middle school learners. Teachers should pay attention to students' affective states during the teaching process and optimize their affective

experiences through strategies such as stimulating intrinsic motivation, enhancing self-confidence, and relieving anxiety.

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