

Analysis of the Affective Factors of High School Struggling Students' English Learning Based on Affective Filter Hypothesis

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Abstract: The increasing prominence of English parallels the relentless march of globalization. In China's high schools, it stands as one of the trio of core subjects, a testament to its pivotal role in today's interconnected world. Yet, despite its undeniable importance, a subset of students grapple with the challenge of learning English and find themselves ensnared by the hurdles they encounter. Turning to the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed by Krashen, we recognize that motivation to learn, self-confidence, and anxiety are pivotal elements that profoundly impact language acquisition. These three affective factors act as a filter that can either facilitate or impede language learning. This essay will delve into an analysis of an English struggling learner through the lens of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, aiming to unearth insights that may guide high school English teachers in supporting their students who face similar educational barriers. By understanding how affective factors influence language absorption, educators can better tailor their instructional strategies and foster an environment conducive to overcoming the linguistic challenges faced by these learners.

Keywords: The Affective Filter Hypothesis; Struggling Students; English Learning.

1. Introduction

English teaching quality in China has significantly improved recently, and this improvement can be proved in students' increased proficiency in using the language and their enthusiasm for learning it. At the same time, the issue of English struggling students in high school is particularly prominent, which has a serious impact on the improvement of their overall quality and development and it also violates the original intention of quality education, which is to cultivate multilevel, all-round talents for the cause of socialist modernization, and to make possible the full potential of every educated individual.

There are many factors that affect students' English learning, such as intelligence, learning environment and so on. But little attention has been paid to the fact that students' emotional factors also affect their English learning. Prior research has shown that high school students may experience difficulties in learning English due to insufficient learning motivation, excessive anxiety, and lack of confidence. As a result, further research should be done on "affective factors". This paper employs Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis as the theoretical framework for exploring why affective factors cause high school students to struggle to learn English following a case study, with the goal of providing some suggestions for enhancing the English learning of high school struggling students.

2. The Affective Filter Hypothesis

"Affective filtering" was originally proposed by Dulay and Burt, who believed that affective filtering is a kind of internal processing system, which subconsciously controls the learner's assimilation of language through affective factors, aiming at explaining how affective factors affect the process of foreign language learning[1].

On this foundation, Krashen proposed the Affective Filter Hypothesis in the early 1980s. He viewed affective factors as

an adjustable filter that could facilitate or hinder language input, including motivation, confidence, and anxiety[2]. The "affective filter" will be weak if the learner is highly motivated, confident, and not very anxious, and vice versa. Language acquisition will not occur if the "affective filter" is too strong because it will create barriers in the brain that prevent language input from entering the language acquisition mechanism. Only through reducing the psychological barriers and decreasing the "affective filter" will students be able to achieve active study.

2.1. Motivation

Harmer believed Motivation is the inner drive that propels a person toward the accomplishment of a particular behavior[3]. Filgona and Sakiyo put forward that the success of learning depends on whether the learner is motivated[4]. As a result, it's crucial for students to stay motivated when studying English because that motivation can help them perform better.

2.2. Confidence

Confidence is a psychological characteristic that reflects the degree of trust in an individual's ability to successfully accomplish an activity. Wang believed that students may overcome some challenges and reach their full potential in language learning if they have self-confidence[5]. To sum up, confidence has close relationship with the effect of language learning.

2.3. Anxiety

The efficacy of students in learning English depends on their level of anxiety to some extent. Xue mentioned, meanwhile, that the fear of utilizing the target language is what is meant by language learning anxiety, not anxiety in the general sense[6]. Moreover, it is one of the key elements influencing language acquisition.

3. Struggling Students

The description of struggling students has been viewed from three different angles by the educational community: ranking criteria, subject criteria, and developmental factors. Whatever the criteria, they can never be fair, accurate, and scientific at the same time because they each have their own benefits and drawbacks. According to Sun, struggling students are those who have normal intelligence, but due to certain reasons (internal and external), their knowledge, ability, habits, methods, and other elements have some defects, which cause their learning efficiency is low, and being hard to meet the basic requirements set out in the standards of the school academics[7]. However, it should be noted that those defects are reversible through the employment of appropriate learning and teaching methods.

4. Case Study

4.1. Basic Information about the Case

I met student A, a 16-year-old boy, during the internship. A moved up from a township junior high school with excellent grades, but did not do well in English. At the same time, he caught my attention in the first week because his poor English grade and behaviors in English class.

In both the entrance exam and the monthly exams, he scored poorly in English. Besides, he frequently procrastinates in English class or engages in activities unrelated to classroom instruction. When his peers talk, A does not listen intently and is quickly sidetracked. Additionally, he does not complete his schoolwork correctly, making numerous spelling errors in simple terms. What's worse, he rarely pays close attention to what others are saying in group discussions, acts more like a bystander, and keeps his opinions to himself.

4.2. Analysis of the Case

A's classroom behaviors make it simple to comprehend why his English grades are poor. You may wonder what specifically is driving him to exhibit these habits that compromise his academic performance? The Affective Filter Hypothesis will then serve as the theoretical foundation for the paper to analyze A from perspectives of motivation, confidence, and anxiety.

Firstly, let's begin by considering motive. The author discovered during conversations with A that A's motivation for learning was unclear. He was compelled to learn English because he needed to pass an English test in order to graduate or enter a higher school, but he did not truly understand the importance of learning the language or enjoy it while doing so. In other words, A only studies English to get by, lacks excitement and initiative, lacks strong learning motivation, and has a negative attitude toward learning English.

From the standpoint of self-confidence, A's previous educational experiences had undermined his confidence in learning English because his junior high school English teacher frequently blamed him. Moreover, when he transfers to senior high school, he encounters more excellent classmates and his own weak foundation may have made him more reluctant to participate in English classroom activities. Meanwhile, due to the number of students in the class, the English teacher does not provide enough one-on-one attention and feedback. Gradually, A's confidence in learning English had been influenced severely.

The level of anxiety rises as the learning content and difficulty increase in high school. In addition, A's learning strategy is flawed, and he continues to rely heavily on the teacher, just as he did in junior high school, and does not take the initiative to learn, which makes him feel more anxious in high school.

5. Implication

In view of the case study mentioned above, the author gets some implications for solving the English-learning dilemma brought by affective factors. They are as follows:

Innovate teaching methods: making teaching methods innovative is a wonderful way to spur struggling student's learning motivation. For instance, employ tasks in teaching. To ensure that students understand the lesson's objectives and are actively developing their language skills, teachers should first assign clear and pertinent learning tasks, which will help students consistently advance their all-around language abilities. Simultaneously, the activities should be issues of interest to the students and "real-situation tasks" to the greatest extent possible.

Cultivate confidence: In order to improve struggling students' confidence, we should make creating good learning atmosphere and building a harmonious teacher-student relationship our top priority. What's more, teachers ought to communicate with struggling students frequently and guide them analyze themselves correctly, thus to find their own merits. By doing so, their confidence will be improved and thus the function of "filter" can be weakened.

Reduce anxiety: mastering proper learning methods is a good way to reduce anxiety for that will lead students to learn efficiently. Guide students to make plans before leaning can help them set goals and know what they need to do without the remind of teachers. Besides, this can develop their habit of self-discipline, so as to help them get out of "learning difficulties" as quickly as possible.

6. Conclusion

The importance of examining the affective factors that impact struggling students cannot be overstated, as they play a significant role in language acquisition. While acknowledging the potential for bias due to the focused exploration of a single case study, this research offers valuable insights and recommendations grounded in Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. These suggestions are designed to aid teachers in supporting students who face learning difficulties in their English language studies. By understanding how motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety can influence language learning outcomes, educators can develop more effective strategies to help struggling learners overcome their challenges. All in all, this study hopes to encourage educators to pay meticulous attention to the affective domains in their teaching practice, thereby creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students.

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