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

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Abstract: The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) advocates guiding students to enjoy learning, reflecting a research shift towards students' learning processes and highlighting the critical role of affective factors in learning outcomes. However, current research specifically addressing affective factors in junior high school English teaching remains insufficient. This paper defines affective factors and summarizes the distinctive emotional characteristics exhibited by junior high school students during English learning. It then delves into the specific roles key affective factors—namely anxiety, motivation, and self-esteem—play in shaping their learning experiences and outcomes. By analyzing how these factors influence engagement, efficiency, and language acquisition, the study aims to raise educators' awareness of the profound significance of affective dimensions in English pedagogy. Emphasizing the necessity to understand and cater to students' emotional needs, the paper argues that addressing affective factors is crucial for improving learning effectiveness, fostering a positive learning environment, and ultimately promoting the development of students' core literacy in English education.

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

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, English is not only a tool for communication, but also a bridge for acquiring knowledge and expanding horizons. Mastering English has become one of the essential skills for students in modern times. Since the 1980s, the focus of language teaching research has shifted from studying how teachers teach to how learners learn. *The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition)* further emphasizes that English teaching should not only pay attention to what students learn, but also to whether they like to learn, and that teachers should guide students to enjoy learning and learn well.[1] In recent years, research in the fields of educational psychology and applied linguistics has also gradually recognized the importance of affective factors in language learning. Affective factors are the most dynamic internal factors affecting the learning effects of foreign language learners[2], learners' affective state will directly affect their learning behaviors and learning effects [3]. The junior high school stage is a critical period for students' English learning, and the learning experience at this stage often has a profound impact on students' future language development. Therefore, exploring the role of affective factors on junior high school students' English learning is of great theoretical and practical significance to improve teaching methods and enhance learning effects.

However, in junior high school English teaching, although teachers have realized that affective factors can have a certain effect on learning, there are fewer studies on the specific role of affective factors on English learning and they are rather superficial. As an important factor affecting junior high school students' English learning, affective factors deserve the attention of every educator and learner. Based on the elaboration of affective factors and emotional characteristics in junior high school students' English learning, this paper further explores in depth the role of affective factors on junior high school students' English learning, with a view to providing more comprehensive support and more theoretical references for junior high school students' English learning, raising the importance of relevant educators' attention to the affective factors in English teaching, and helping English educators to better understand the affective needs of their students, create a learning environment conducive to the emotional development of students and promote the realization of the English teaching goal of the formation of students' core literacy.

2. Affective Factors

2.1. Definition of Affective Factors

In order to better explore the role of affective factors in English learning, the concept of affective factors needs to be clearly defined. Affective factor belongs to the subjective category, which is the experience of people's attitudes in the process of judging whether something objective meets their needs.[4] In language learning, affection refers to the learner's feelings, sensations, moods, and attitudes in the process of learning. [5] In the field of psychology, affection is usually understood as an evaluative mental state, which not only reflects an individual's preference for a particular object or event, but also motivates the individual's behavior. Although the definition of emotion has not been completely standardized down, the role of emotion is undeniable, as Beane said, all the things that happen inside the school cannot be separated from emotion, and the controversy in the definition of affection makes us more motivated and make greater efforts.

2.2. Classification of Affective Factors

Affective factors can be categorized from several perspectives. Affective factors can be categorized into positive and negative affective factors. Positive affections create a mental state conducive to learning, while negative affections can interfere with the proper development of learning potential. [3] Arnold classified affective factors in second language acquisition into two main categories, namely, learners' individual factors and affective factors between learners and teachers. Individual factors include anxiety,

inhibition, introversion and extroversion of personality, and motivation, and affective factors between learners and learners or between learners and teachers include empathy, classroom communication, and intercultural awareness.[6] In the research on the role of affective factors on junior high school students' English language learning, this paper mainly focuses on the affective factors of anxiety, motivation and self-esteem for in-depth description. In foreign language learning, Anxiety is a psychological state of nervousness, worry and uneasiness that learners may experience during the language learning process. [7] Motivation refers to the learner's intrinsic drive and goal orientation to learn a language, which is a psychological state of an individual that initiates and maintains action.[8] Self-esteem is the degree of self-confidence of the individual [9] and it is the learner's trust and assurance in his or her ability to learn the language.

2.3. The Necessity of Studying the Role of Affective Factors in Language Learning

Previous studies on affective factors in language learning have initially shown the importance of affective factors in the process of language learning. Relevant studies have shown that affective factors play a certain role in students' learning efficiency, learning strategies, learning methods and the ability to use language, which is important for the overall development of students. A positive affective state can stimulate learners' cognitive potential, improve language learning efficiency and make the learning process more efficient.[10] At the same time, considering affective factors is crucial to the development of learning strategies, which helps learners to be more flexible and effective when facing learning challenges. Affective factors also have a direct impact on the actual use of language, especially in oral communication and written expression, where a good emotional state can promote more natural and fluent language output[8]. More importantly, the cultivation of affective health and affective intelligence is crucial to the personal growth of learners, which can help them develop positive outlooks on life, values, and intercultural communication skills[11]. This can lay the foundation for the future social life and professional development of learners. Therefore, studying the role of affective factors in language learning is not only a necessity to improve the effectiveness of language learning, but also an inevitable requirement to promote the overall development of individuals.

To summarize, it is crucial to study the role of affective factors in language learning, and this research has profound significance in promoting learning efficiency, enhancing learning motivation, improving learning strategies, improving language use ability, and supporting the overall development of learners. Although negative affective factors can reduce the effectiveness of learning, as long as teachers can correctly recognize the impact of affective factors on students' learning, reasonably use positive affective factors in teaching, and avoid the role of negative affective factors, they can better contribute to the realization of the teaching goal of students' core literacy development. The definition of affective factors not only provides a theoretical basis for understanding the affective characteristics and influences on junior high school students' English learning, but also has important practical significance for designing effective English teaching strategies and promoting students' affective development and language proficiency. Through an in-depth study of affective factors, teachers can better meet students' affective needs and create a more positive and supportive learning environment.

3. Affective Characteristics of Junior High School Students' English Learning

Before exploring the specific role of affective factors on junior high school students' English learning, it is necessary to understand the affective needs and common affective problems that junior high school students show in the process of English learning. These characteristics not only reflect the psychological state of individual students, but also provide educators with an important basis for adjusting teaching strategies.

3.1. Affective Needs of Junior High School Students' English Learning

The affective needs of junior high school students in English learning are multidimensional and profoundly affect their learning attitudes and learning effects. Junior high school students are in the critical period of forming self-identity, and they are eager to find their place in social groups.[12] In English learning, this need is reflected in the desire for peer and teacher recognition. When students are able to communicate fluently in English in the classroom or get good grades in English competitions, they not only feel a sense of achievement, but also gain recognition in the class or study group, which can greatly enhance their motivation to learn English. On the contrary, if students encounter frustration in English learning, feel rejected by their peers or neglected by their teachers, they may gradually lose their interest and confidence in learning. Meanwhile, as they grow older and develop their cognitive abilities, middle school students begin to pursue more autonomy and a sense of control. They are no longer satisfied with passive acceptance of knowledge, but want to be able to organize their learning content according to their own interests and rhythms. And junior high school students are emotionally rich and have strong emotional reactions to external things. Successful experience has an important impact on junior high school students' sense of self-worth and self-confidence.[13] In English learning, every progress and achievement is an affirmation of students' efforts. Whether it is the increase of vocabulary, the improvement of grammatical ability, or the fluency of oral expression, these success experiences can motivate students to continue to study hard. In addition, junior high school students need to get respect and understanding in English learning.[14] They want their teachers and classmates to respect their cultural backgrounds and personal differences and to understand the difficulties they may encounter in the learning process. In a multicultural learning environment, respect and understanding can promote communication and cooperation among students and help them develop positive learning attitudes. To summarize, the affective needs of junior high school students in English learning are complex and diverse. Educators need to deeply understand these needs and take corresponding measures in teaching practice to meet students' affective needs and promote their overall development.

3.2. Common Affective Problems in Junior High School Students' English Learning

Junior high school students often face a series of affective problems in the process of learning English, which not only

affect their learning efficiency, but also profoundly influence their attitudes towards English and their future language development. First of all, language learning anxiety is one of the most common problems in middle school students' English learning.[15] This anxiety may stem from concerns about inaccurate pronunciation and grammatical errors, nervousness about participating in classroom discussions and expressing opinions, or pressure about the upcoming test. Secondly, low self-efficacy in English language learning.[16] Self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in his or her ability to accomplish a specific task. In English learning, if students lack confidence in their language ability, they may feel helpless when facing challenges, and this emotional state will affect their learning strategies and learning outcomes. Some junior high school students lack interest in English and feel unmotivated to learn. Some junior high school students may gradually lose interest in English because of a single teaching method, boring learning content or lack of innovative learning resources. Peer relationships occupy an important place in the lives of junior high school students, and peer attitudes and evaluations can have a significant impact on students' affective learning.[17] Some students may feel pressure in English learning because of the fear of ridicule or rejection from their peers. This pressure may cause them to remain silent in class and avoid participating in English activities that may attract attention. In addition, junior high school students are in the adolescent stage of high emotional volatility, and they may experience difficulties in managing their emotions. Difficulties in managing emotions in English learning may cause students to overreact in the face of setbacks and failures and fail to effectively adjust their emotional state, which in turn affects their learning. To sum up, the affective problems met by junior high school students in English learning are complex and varied, which require educators to pay attention to and analyze their specific impacts, aiming to provide theoretical support for finding effective ways to cope with them, to help students overcome these affective problems, and to improve their English learning effects.

4. The Specific Roles of Affective Factors on Junior High School Students' English Learning

4.1. Anxiety

Anxiety is the most important affective factor that hinders students' English learning, and it is associated with bad feelings such as uneasiness, disillusionment, self-doubt, worry, and nervousness [5]. Anxiety, as an affective state, usually refers to the nervousness and uneasiness that an individual feels in the face of a potential threat or challenge. In English language learning, anxiety may manifest itself in the form of lack of confidence in language proficiency, fear of classroom participation, and concern about test scores.[3] The effects of anxiety on junior high school students' English learning are multiple. According to Guo Gaopan's research, anxiety can create a vicious cycle for language learning, leading to tension and fear, wasting energy and attention, and thus affecting the effect of language storage and output.[10] High levels of anxiety may lead to the development of avoidance behaviors and fear of making mistakes in language learning, thus reducing the opportunities for language practice. As pointed out by Dong Lifang and Zhou Jianbo, language anxiety is inversely related to language acquisition; the less anxiety, the more acquisition.[8] In addition, anxiety may also affect students' listening comprehension, oral expression, and written expression, and reduce learning efficiency. It is worth noting that anxiety is not all negative. Moderate anxiety can motivate students to learn and prompt them to study harder.[7] Excessive anxiety, however, may cause students to develop an avoidance mentality and affect learning. One of the tasks of teachers is to recognize students' anxiety level and take appropriate measures to adjust it to keep it in an optimal state. Teachers should establish a supportive learning environment for their students and create a classroom climate that encourages experimentation and tolerates mistakes. Positive feedback should be provided to students in teaching, especially when students are giving oral presentations to encourage them to speak up, give them positive feedback to enhance their self-confidence and reduce their anxiety due to fear of making mistakes. Everyone is an independently developing person. Teachers need to recognize the differences in learning styles and anxiety levels of each student and provide individualized learning support and resources. In addition, the goals of teaching English in middle school emphasize the development of learning skills [1]. Teachers need to pay attention to the teaching of learning strategies and think about how to incorporate the teaching of teaching strategies when teaching specific content. Teaching students effective learning strategies, such as time management and memorization skills, can help them reduce the difficulty of learning, improve learning efficiency, and reduce the anxiety caused by inefficient learning. Anxiety is an emotional factor that cannot be ignored in junior high school students' English learning, and it plays a complex and subtle role in students' language learning process. Teachers must pay attention to the sources of students' anxiety and take measures to help students reduce their anxiety effectively.

4.2. Motivation

Motivation can be defined as the internal psychological state that drives an individual to engage in an activity, which determines the degree of effort and persistence of the learner's commitment to learning, and it contains three elements: goal, effort and persistence [18]. Motivation can be categorized into various types, and the two main types of motivation proposed by Gardner are integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation refers to the learner's desire to integrate into the target language community and participate in its social life, while instrumental motivation refers to the learner's desire to learn a foreign language in order to gain financial benefits or other advantages.[19]

Motivation is the key factor that drives junior high school students to learn English, and it has an important impact on learners' learning behavior, learning efficiency and learning outcomes. The level of motivation directly affects the enthusiasm and efficiency of junior high school students in learning English. Learners with high motivation levels tend to show higher enthusiasm for learning, stronger independent learning ability and better learning outcomes. For example, Zeng Xiaohua and Wang Wei's study showed that intrinsic motivation and identity-regulated motivation have a significant positive effect on students' learning behavior and academic performance.[20] Students with high intrinsic motivation are more inclined to participate in English learning activities and show positive attitudes both in and out of the classroom. Meanwhile, there is a close link between motivation and learning behavior. Students with strong

motivation are more likely to adopt positive learning strategies, such as actively participating in class discussions, independently searching for learning resources, and collaborating with others. [21] Motivation also influences how students respond to learning difficulties, and students with high levels of motivation are more likely to maintain persistence and effort in the face of challenges [9]. Therefore, teachers should use a variety of measures, such as helping students set clear short- and long-term learning goals, providing interesting learning materials, encouraging students to learn independently, and creating a successful experience for students, in order to stimulate and junior high school students' learning motivation and promote their language acquisition and development.

4.3. Self-esteem

Self-esteem plays a crucial role in junior high school students' learning of English. Self-esteem is known as the sense of self-worth, which is the individual's overall evaluation and feeling of himself, and the learner's evaluation and realization of his own value and ability. Self-esteem comes from an individual's judgment of his or her own value[22], which affects the individual's self-confidence and learning motivation. The strength of self-esteem directly affects their language learning effect. [23] Students with high self-esteem tend to have a positive attitude toward learning, are willing to accept challenges, and hold a strong resistance to failure. Students with low self-esteem may feel insecure and anxious about learning English, and fear making mistakes and being judged, which may lead them to avoid participating in classroom activities and reduce opportunities for language practice. Students with high self-esteem tend to have higher motivation and enthusiasm for learning. They believe they have the ability to learn English well, and this positive self-perception can motivate them to participate in learning activities more actively. Moreover, they are more willing to speak, ask questions and participate in discussions in class, tend to seize opportunities for language practice, and are more resilient in the face of challenges and difficulties in English learning. They see difficulties as opportunities for growth and learning rather than obstacles. In addition, self-esteem helps students better regulate their emotions and cope with learning pressure. When faced with academic stress, they are able to manage their emotions more effectively and reduce the negative effects of anxiety and stress. There are various factors that affect students' self-esteem. In addition to the effects of students' own reasons mentioned above, teachers' expectations, feedback methods, and classroom climate all have an impact on students' self-esteem in learning. [9] In order to enhance students' self-esteem, teachers should emphasize on developing students' self-esteem. Teachers should give students positive feedback and constructive criticism to help them recognize their progress and potential. Teachers should create opportunities for students to experience success, which can enhance students' self-confidence. Teachers should also provide teaching methods and materials that are appropriate for different students to meet their individual needs. In addition, teachers can carry out reflection and self-assessment activities to help students understand their own learning styles and strengths.

To summarize, self-esteem is not only an important aspect of English learning, but also a key factor in students' overall development. Teachers should have a comprehensive understanding of students' actual situation, deepen their knowledge about self-esteem, and take effective measures to help students establish and maintain positive self-esteem so as to promote their English learning.

5. Conclusion

Focusing on affective factors is an important feature of the international trend of education reform. Through the definition of affective factors and the discussion of the affective characteristics of junior high school students' English learning, this paper delves into the specific roles of affective factors such as anxiety, motivation and self-esteem on junior high school students' English learning, emphasizes their importance and gives some strategic suggestions. Affective factors, like cognitive factors, play an important role in junior high school students' English learning, but educators have not paid enough attention to them and the depth of research. With the development of social globalization and information technology, the role of affective factors in different cultural contexts and information technology as a future research direction to help improve the research related to affective factors in education. It is expected that this study will provide educators with valuable insights and contribute to future educational practice and research.

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