

The Effects of Nonintellectual Factors on English Learning and Corresponding Suggestions

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Keywords: Nonintellectual Factors, Effects; English Learning, Suggestions

Abstract: Many achievements have been attained in the research on effects of nonintellectual factors on English learning. This thesis mainly discusses the effects of nonintellectual factors on English learning. Nonintellectual factors mainly embrace four factors. The four factors are as follows: motivation, interest, personality and anxiety. Students are prone to encountering some problems of nonintellectual factors in the process of English learning, the problems include lack in motivation and interest, low self-confidence, various anxiety. Based on the three aspects of English learning: learner, teacher and the environment, the thesis proposes four viable suggestions to help students overcome those problems and improve the efficiency of English learning: mobilizing motivation, cultivating interest, establishing sound personality, and reducing the sense of anxiety.

1. Introduction

In the middle of the 1930s, American psychologist W.P Alexander adopted the term "non-intellectual factors" first [1]. Subsequently, the famous American psychologist Wechsler put forward the concept of "nonintellectual factors", and since then, the term "nonintellectual factors" has been widely recognized in the field of psychology. Wechsler believes that in the process of study, intellectual and nonintellectual factors interact simultaneously and reciprocally. Intellectual and nonintellectual factors both play a crucial role in study result. It is undoubted that intellectual factors are important ones which decide whether the study result will be good or bad directly, during the process of English study. However, the nonintellectual factors, such as, motivation, interest, personality and anxiety, also have a prevalent influence on the process of English study. Therefore, the nonintellectual factors decide the result of English study indirectly. In the 1990s, the concept of emotional intelligence (EQ) emerged. The formula "IQ (20%) + EQ (80%) = success (100%)." was put forward clearly. The formula means that one's success depends on 20% IQ, while the rest of the 80% is determined by the nonintellectual factors, such as emotional factors, personality and interpersonal relationship, etc. Hence, the educational circles at home and abroad started to pay attention to students' nonintellectual factors and conducted research on nonintellectual factors. Due to all of these reasons, the development and cultivation of students' nonintellectual factors have thus become the goal of contemporary tertiary education reform and the study of English teaching.

In the past, most teachers and students paid more attention to the influence of mental factors on English learning, but attached little importance to the effect of nonintellectual factors. This thesis will discuss how to explore and utilize students' nonintellectual factors, stimulate students' initiative and enthusiasm, and tap students' potential capacity in English teaching research and practice. In this way, students' English can be improved rapidly.

2. The Connotation of Nonintellectual Factors

2.1 The Definition of the Nonintellectual Factors

Nonintellectual factor, put forward by the psychologist, is a comprehensive concept relative to the intellectual. In a broad sense, nonintellectual factors are all factors that affect learning, including environmental factors, physical factors and mental factors. The nonintellectual factors, in a narrow sense, refer to the individual psychological factors that are involved in the learning activities and exert great effect on students. In conclusion, nonintellectual factors have two levels: one is general nonintellectual factors, that is, all the psychological factors except intelligence or competence factors; the other is narrow nonintellectual factors which refer to psychological elements that are connected with intelligence activities closely and influence the effect of intelligence activities altogether. The nonintellectual factors of English learning are the psychological factors that affect the motivation, interest, anxiety and personality of students in English study. Although nonintellectual factors are not involved in cognitive process directly, they have direct or indirect effects on cognitive processes and have the ability to start, guide, maintain and strengthen the cognition. In the process of English teaching and developing intelligence, more attention should be paid to the cultivation of students' nonintellectual factors.

2.2 Functions of Nonintellectual Factors

The functions of nonintellectual factors have been discussed by many domestic scholars from different perspectives. Wu Daguang (1988) points out that nonintellectual factors influence the eight functions of learning as a whole permeability: the functions of directing, impetus, adjusting, consolidating, influencing, appreciating of the beauty, educating intelligence and creating. Shen Jiliang (1990) contends that character attendance can choose tasks, affirm and keep activities, affect the performance of intelligence; emotion and persistence can activate, pattern and compensate, and emphasizes what affects the efficiency of intelligence activities is the unity effect of nonintellectual factors. Shen Deli (1997) also maintains that nonintellectual factors mainly possess four functions, namely, motive force, maintenance, compensation, and pattern. He states that suitable nonintellectual factors are beneficial and can lead to a sound intellectual development; at the same time, the excessive high level or over low level of nonintellectual factors exert a negative effect on intelligence activities[7]. In brief, nonintellectual factors don't influence learning itself directly, but have a powerful impact on learning process. Positive nonintellectual factors are the system of learning activities and they are conducive to motivating learners' initiative out from their latent capability and regulating their learning actions[6].

3. Main Nonintellectual Factors and Their Effects on English Learning

Nonintellectual factors mainly embrace four factors. The four factors are as follows: motivation, interest, personality and anxiety. The factors will be interpreted one by one generally from their influences on English learning.

3.1 Motivation

It is generally agreed that learning is most likely to occur when one wants to learn. However, it may be more difficult to explain: what is motivation? What factors contribute to a person's motivation and how do they influence the motivation? What is the difference between different kinds of motivations?

According to Heckhausen, motivation refers to goal-directed behavior. Based on a series of studies on the second language acquisition, R.Gardner and W.Lambert of Canada, who were the earliest and most influential figures in the language learning motivation, put forward the concepts of integrative motivation and the instrumental motivation and drew a basic distinction between an integrative orientation and an instrumental orientation. Instrumental motivation means that foreign language learners try to master a foreign language as a means of attaining utilitarian goals such as getting a job, furthering a career, traveling, reading books in foreign languages, passing examinations, translating technical materials in target language, etc. It reflects the practical value and advantages of learning a new language. A learner with instrumental motivation has little interest in the people and the culture of the target language community. While integrative motivation may be defined as the desire to achieve proficiency in a new language in order to know about the other culture, participate in the activities of the target language community. It reflects a sincere and personal interest in the people and the culture of that community. Learners with integrative motivation wish to integrate themselves within the culture of the target language group, to identify themselves with and become a part of that society. However, these two motivations are not mutually exclusive, but involved in English learning activity simultaneously, and the learners are under the influence of the two kinds of motivation. In general, the integrative motivation is more powerful than the instrumental one for a long-term retention in the process of English leaning.

If students want to learn English for a long-term retention, they must firstly have correct learning motivation. The learning motivation is made up of learning needs and learning desire. It reflects mainly on the students' learning attitude and will. And it penetrates in all the aspects of English learning process, reflects upon the psychological changes and psychological barriers. Positive motivation is related to success in English. Students who are not good at English are usually those who have low motivation of English learning. Some students do not know the importance of English, the reason why they learn it, the use it has and the benefit it will bring them. They think they learn English just for a high score in an exam or for seeking information on research. They are not strong-willed or eager to make progress. Their attitudes toward English are passive, and they usually behave not as good as students with positive integrative motivation in the process of English learning. The integrative motivation and instrumental motivation affect students' English learning differently. The students with the integrative motivation pay more attention to oral skill and cultural background. The students in possession of the instrumental motivation attach more importance to the competence in reading and writing[4].

3.2 Interest

Interest is a kind of cognitive tendency. It is a great driving force for the individual's cognitive activities. Psychologists believe that interest arises from the surprise and emotional appeal of the cognition. The study interest is the tendency to like learning activity and the premise to obtain the knowledge. At the same time, interest is a kind of special learning motivation, which is the most active factor in the study. Learning interest determines the attitude and motivation of learning directly. It also can improve the quality of cognition, produce positive emotional experience, and reduce the sense of the fatigue. The students with strong learning interest and high enthusiasm tend to perform a sense of strong initiative to English leaning; they also have strong desire for English

skill; they can overcome difficulties and problems in English research actively. While the students with low interest tend to show the passive attitude toward study and are difficult to concentrate on English study.

The interest can be divided into direct interest and indirect ones. Direct interest refers to the students original driving force and motivation in English learning. This kind of interest is derived from the internal factors of students. It already exists without the help of teachers. Students who have direct interest in English study will find it easy to learn English, and they will have a sense of achievement in their studies. They have a strong desire for learning new knowledge in English, which is conducive to English study and forming a positive cycle development. Indirect interest refers to a stimulus generated by some kind of result of English learning. It is well-known that students with direct interest outperform students with indirect one in English study, which, however, is not necessarily the case in college English study. On the one hand, adults possess a better perseverance. On the other hand, adults tend to project the purposiveness in the process of English study, and they want to put what is learnt to the practice. These, hence, encourage them to spend more time learning English, so students with indirect interest achieve better result in college English study.

3.3 Personality

Personality, shaped in life, is the individual stable attitude toward the reality and the habitual behavioral mode to adapt to the reality. Character plays a crucial role in study. Because the character, the core of personality characteristics, is a unique combination of personality and psychological characteristics, which affect individual temperament and attitude directly. The character has a profound impact on study. A determined attitude and good study habits will have a great impact on English learning. Differences between students' personality directly lead to differences in English learning ability. From a psychological point of view, the human character is divided into outward and inward oriented, and independent and compliant type.

3.3.1 Outward and Inward Oriented Type

It is generally believed that outward personality is conducive to language learning, while inward one makes it difficult to learn language, because outgoing students can actively participate in language learning activities and seek more learning opportunities. People with outgoing personality are good at expressing the idea and willing to answer questions. According to the research, it is believed that the outward learner is more likely to communicate with others, so that more information will be obtained. Whereas the introverted people are usually characterized by being quiet, reticent and lack of the capability of expressing their own idea. However, the relation between the two kinds of personality and English leaning is complicated. The inward students tend to pay attention to fluency rather than to accuracy in English learning. They are able to maintain a good concentration on English learning, thus they can analyze the English deeply from the different viewpoints. These students focus on precision and have a good performance in English grammar, translating, reading and writing. On the other hand, the outward students have less anxiety in English leaning, so they will make use of every opportunity to communicate with others, thus students with outward personality are good at English listening and speaking.

3.3.2 Independent and Compliant Type

The influence of these two kinds of personality on the students is reflected in the achievement motivation primarily. Compliant students believe that their learning is mainly determined by the parents, the teachers and other external environment factors. In a word, their achievement motivation

is exogenous. It means that their study result is up to the external factors. Independent students believe that their academic performance is entirely based on their own interests, ability, hard work, and the intention to try to achieve success through their own efforts, this achievement motivation is endogenous. Therefore, the independent students have higher achievement motivation than the compliant students, and the independent students often attain a better English study achievement than compliant ones. Secondly, the impact is reflected in the way of English learning. The compliant students usually accept what the teachers and the books express mechanically and passively in the process of English learning. They are not good at learning by themselves. The compliant students are more likely to seek common ground in the way of thinking. So, it is difficult for them to have a big breakthrough in English study. Independent students, however, show the initiative of learning and tend to seek a different and innovative thinking way. They are often capable of taking the initiative to obtain information on foreign language, so as to obtain a new breakthrough in the English study.

3.4 Anxiety

Anxiety is an emotional condition in which there is fear and uncertainty about what will happen. It is often associated with negative emotions such as apprehension, tension, frustration, and uneasiness, etc. "Language anxiety is fear or apprehension occurring when a learner is expected to perform in the second or foreign language (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993)

Anxiety is thought to be the emotional factor that most pervasively hinders the learning process, as Gardner and MacIntyre (1993:157) stated "the strongest (negative) correlate of language achievement". And most language researches do show that there is negative relation between anxiety and performance.

There are two kinds of anxieties: facilitating anxiety and debilitating anxiety. In English learning process, appropriate anxiety can help to keep learners active and smart. This is called facilitating anxiety, which is conducive to English learning. In contrast, debilitating anxiety may obstruct learners' mastering a foreign language successfully. It makes learners nervous and afraid, which will directly lead to reduction of participating in language performance and avoidance of the foreign language. On the cognitive side, debilitating anxiety closely connects with worry, which wastes learners' energy that should be used for memory and processing on thinking. Facilitating anxiety compels students to challenge the new learning task. Debilitating anxiety, on the contrary, compels students to avoid new challenge. Therefore, certain amount of anxiety might be facilitating [2].

The relation between anxiety and English learning is very complicated. There are many factors to decide if the anxiety is facilitating or debilitating ones, such as the difference in original anxiety level of English learners, the degree of difficulty in English learning materials, learner's ability and so on. Anxiety plays a promoting role in mechanical English learning and discover-learning in English. A high degree of anxiety would boost English learning only when combined with great ability to study. High anxiety exerts an inhibitory effect on students when learning materials is complicated. So, for most English learners, moderate anxiety is suitable. The anxiety reaction in the process of learning English is proportional to the degree of fear feeling. For example, in English corner, due to anxiety, many beginners are afraid of speaking, but once they have obtained achievement in English speaking, the fear will vanish, thus the anxiety will disappear simultaneously. With the students' continuous improvement in English learning, the negative effect of anxiety on English learning will be decreased gradually. Studies show that: in primary school, debilitating anxiety plays a key role in students' English learning. In middle school, the effect of facilitating anxiety increases gradually, even more than debilitating ones sometimes. In university,

however, a positive correlation between anxiety and English learning is presented basically. Therefore, anxiety exerts a positive effect on English study to some extent in university.

4. Suggestions of Helping Students Overcome Negative Effects and Construct Positive Ones

4.1 Internalizing Motivation

4.1.1 Combining Integrative Motivation with Instrumental Motivation

Motivation is the decisive factor in English learning, and it is also a prerequisite factor for English learning. Motivation and learning are complementary to each other. If students' English learning motivation is strong, the effect of English learning will be better. However, motivation integration requires a series of programs.

Students' utilitarian intention, which is not supposed to advocate can be applied to English study. The fusion of two motivations needs a process. The integrative motivation can be utilized first, and then the instrumental motivation. The terminal goal is to obtain more powerful integrative motivation in the fusion process, the process begins with topics that students are interested in. We are supposed to give students tasks which they can complete, and indicate the purpose of this task and the whole relation with language acquisition, making students feel what they do is not in vain. Once the task is completed, material rewards as well as spiritual rewards should be presented to them. We should grasp the psychological process of each stage of students' language learning, and gradually guide the integration of their instrumental motivation with integrative motivation[3].

4.1.2 Utilizing Moderate Competition

Competition is a potent method of motivating students' active learning and improving their academic achievements. In the process of competition, students' learning interest and perseverance can be strengthened, which is conducive to transforming them to a strong internal drive. Competition can be carried out in class or after class, but it should be moderate, or it may lead to great anxiety.

In order to utilize moderate competition, we should obey the following rules: ①The competition content should not be too easy, and it can involve different practice about listening, speaking, reading and writing. ②It's necessary to take students' age characteristic and difficulty level of competition content into consideration. For instance, freshman emphasizes handwriting competition, word competition and conversation competition; junior emphasizes listening competition, story-telling competition and play performing competition, and senior emphasizes English speech contest and reading comprehension competition. ③The rules of the competition should be clear and reasonable. Some competitions should attach importance to the speed and quantity, while some are supposed to focus on quality. ④In the process of competition, mental education should be conducted, so as to make students understand the cooperation is prioritized. ⑤Competition can be employed among different groups in accordance with students' ability in order that everyone has a chance to win. ⑥Competition activities should be moderate. ⑦Competition should be combined with evaluation, which is beneficial to consolidating the result of the competition[5].

4.2 Various Teaching Methods, Games to Improve Students' Interest in English Learning

Situational teaching method can be adopted to create an English learning environment, so as to make English teaching interesting, communicative, and to increase the students' interest in English learning, and thus the interest could be transformed into motivation to study English. Many games

could be also employed to improve the students' interest in English learning. The experienced teacher can realize the fact that student anxiety and fear created by a tense atmosphere in the classroom is one of the most potent factors that undermine the motivation of English study. So the teachers are supposed to create a pleasant atmosphere in class. Games employed in class contribute to creating an enjoyable atmosphere in the classroom, bringing in humor and laughter. Moreover, they are undoubtedly stimulus for students to cultivate greater interest and enthusiasm toward English learning.

There are many kinds of games based on words, sentence patterns, passages or other things. Guessing words is the game of words. In the game of guessing words, we can divide the class into four groups, ask them to explain words in English and let others guess. The group who guesses words most in a minute is the winner. This game can be employed after finishing a unit or before exams. It's rather an effective way to review words students have learned.

Games of sentence patterns are a little more difficult than games of words. This kind of games can help students understand themselves, express their individuality and listen to others, which is good to enhance students' self-esteem. We can also devise new games of our own according to the teaching target and learners' competence. But there are two points we should pay close attention to: the number of learners who take part in games; the content of games. In general, to the number of learners who participate in the games, the more, the better. The content of games should relate to teaching targets.

Employing one game in proper time and situation may bring unexpected gaiety and effect to both learners and teachers in English class.

4.3 Individualizing Students' learning to Cultivate Good Character

Because of the students' difference in personality, students should be taught in accordance with their different personality. In view of the different characteristics of students' personality teachers should choose different tasks and teaching methods for them. For example, when you speak in class, you can arrange for the students who are outgoing in the classroom impromptu speeches to encourage them to express with boldness. As for the introverted students who are very anxious to participate in the discussion in class, the teacher can arrange an assignment in advance, so that they are fully prepared before class. In this way, the fear will be reduced greatly. Besides, ample opportunity should be given to outward and independent students to show their charisma and confirm their achievement; and some tasks should be arranged to strengthen their carefulness, cultivate their rigorousness and improve self-discipline. The introverted and dependent learners should be guided and encouraged to participate in learning activities in light of the circumstance, many opportunities should be provided to apply what they have grasped into practice. Giving them more opportunity to express opinion is also an effective method of improving students' self-confidence. In order to prevent loss of students' confidence in English learning, public correction should be avoided as much as possible. They should be encouraged to participate in all kinds of English learning activities bravely. English learning is a kind of cognitive activity, which is based on the unity of intellectual and nonintellectual factors. Positive learning effect can be achieved under the condition that these two psychological factors are involved in learning activities. Therefore, in the process of English teaching, in addition to focusing on the development of students' intellectual factor, teachers should attach more importance to the development and training of students' interest, personality and other nonintellectual factors to improve English teaching effect [8].

4.4 Employing Colorful After-Class Activities to Reduce the Anxiety in English Learning

After-class activities are the extension of classroom teaching. Through colorful activities, students can reduce anxiety, gain more knowledge, widen their horizon, develop their intelligence and train their ability. There are various colorful after-class activities, such as founding interest groups, editing English newspapers, watching English movies, having English lectures, singing English songs, broadcasting news in English, holding English corners and English evenings etc. All of these activities can help students relieve anxiety, cultivate interest in English study and build good relationships between classmates and teachers. In a word, colorful after-class activities play a crucial role in students' emotional states and improving English learning and teaching.

In the process of English learning, teachers should observe students' behavior. When students perform the sense of psychological anxiety, teachers should adopt special remedy to solve different problems, guide the students to take measures to overcome anxiety and minimize the anxiety in learning English. In the process of English teaching, the following method could be adopted to reduce the anxiety. The first is to create a pleasant and active class-room atmosphere which is conducive to cooperating. Adopting the heuristic teaching method helps students to think and answer questions actively and makes class atmosphere active; the attitude toward students should be warm and kind, so as to reduce the students fear for teachers and narrow the distance between teachers and students. The second is the right attitude toward students' English errors. The teacher should use appropriate skills so as to reduce the students' language output tension and the sense of inferiority when correcting. Different students have different learning anxiety. When learning a foreign language, it is relatively much easy for the independent students, whereas the inward students usually show the sense of anxiety and nervousness. Teachers should inspire and enlighten the introverted students, at the same time, share their learning experiences with them, so that the introverted students could become more outgoing. Teachers could talk with the outward students with slight casualness to improve the students' learning enthusiasm. According to the different characteristics of students' personality, teachers should choose different tasks and different teaching arrangements[5].

5. Conclusion

This paper mainly discusses the effects of nonintellectual factors on English learning. First, students' nonintellectual factors have a significant influence on English learning and teaching. Solving the problems of nonintellectual factors contributes to more efficient English learning and actualizing students' overall development. Second, the construct of nonintellectual factors is not a single entity but a multi-factorial one, which cannot be separated from the social environment, so we should put them in a broad field and do relative studies. Third, it is difficult to eliminate students' nonintellectual factors' negative effects and build positive ones, because the complexity of nonintellectual factors are complicated and the English-teaching situations are varied. It needs constant efforts and attempts. In the basis of the three most vital aspects of learner, teacher, and the environment in English learning and teaching process, four suggestions are proposed as an audacious attempt to promote their English learning efficiency. English learning, a kind of cognitive activity, is based on the combination of intellectual factors and nonintellectual factors. If we want to achieve a good learning effect, both two series of psychological factors should be actively involved in learning activities. Therefore, the teacher should pay attention to not only the development of students' intelligence but also students' interest, motivation, personality, anxiety and other nonintellectual factors development, so as to achieve the students' all-round development.

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