

The Impact of Non-cognitive Factors on College Students' English Learning

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ABSTRACT

The process of learning is highly intricate. Any acquisition of knowledge is the outcome of the interplay between cognitive and non-cognitive factors. The practice of foreign language teaching indicates that the impact of non-cognitive factors on English learning surpasses that of cognitive factors. Building upon an analysis of the influence exerted by non-cognitive factors on learning outcomes, this paper explores strategies for fostering students' non-cognitive attributes.

Keywords: Cognitive factors, Non-cognitive factors, English learning, Impact.

1. INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, college students possess above-average intelligence but often resort to shortcuts when learning English. There are always individuals who seek instant gratification and give up after only two days of unsuccessful attempts. They get used to relying on "smart methods" which ultimately fail to improve their proficiency. As a matter of fact, the impact of non-cognitive factors on foreign language acquisition is more significant.

Psychologists believe that intelligence is a latent cognitive capacity rooted in neural activity, with abstract thinking as its core ability. Intelligence factors are predominantly influenced by both innate heredity and acquired development, encompassing observational prowess, memory capacity, cognitive aptitude, imaginative capability, and other facets. Conversely, non-intelligence factors primarily stem from acquired sources and refer to dynamic personality and psychological elements that impact intellectual activities and development beyond the realm of intelligence itself. These include motivation, interest, volition, disposition, emotion among others. The interrelation and mutual constraints of these non-intelligence factors form a dynamic system that determines the level of human activity. If considering the learning process as a system, it comprises two coordinated subsystems: one constituted by intelligence factors acting as executors/operators for specific learning tasks (the

operational system), while the other composed of non-intelligence factors acting as initiators/promoters for said tasks (the dynamic system).

2. THE INFLUENCE OF NON-COGNITIVE FACTORS ON ENGLISH LEARNING

The role of non-cognitive factors in the success of one's study and career is remarkable. Positive non-cognitive factors actively regulate and enhance the development of cognitive abilities, enabling intelligence to be fully utilized in cognitive activities. Conversely, negative non-cognitive factors impede or hinder the development of intelligence, preventing it from functioning effectively in cognitive tasks. The following analysis focuses solely on the impact of learning motivation, interest, and emotion on English language acquisition.

Motivation is the intrinsic force that propels individuals towards specific goals. The learning motivation of students serves as the impetus for engaging in educational activities, and it stands as the paramount determinant of their enthusiasm for learning. Numerous domestic and international studies have consistently demonstrated a significant positive correlation between students' level of motivation and their academic performance. Typically, students who possess accurate and well-

developed learning motivation, a comprehensive comprehension of the societal significance of education, a profound interest in educational objectives, and an elevated zeal for acquiring knowledge tend to achieve commendable academic outcomes and exceptional grades. Conversely, those lacking such attributes may experience undesirable results.

Currently, some college students are grappling with the challenges of transitioning into adulthood. Some lack clear life goals, while others have set low academic aspirations or exhibit a utilitarian approach to their studies. The intensity of motivation is inherently linked to the intensity of one's needs. Just imagine, if a college student lacks lofty life goals, will they work as hard as they did in middle school? English learning differs from subjects like mathematics, physics, and chemistry. It requires extensive time for comprehension and memorization, regular practice, and making connections between different aspects of the language. Without these efforts, deep understanding alone may not yield effective results. It is common to hear college students lament that they haven't learned anything during their time at university. If knowledge isn't practiced and applied regularly, it will fade over time. This decline in motivation leads to weak study attitudes where students rely on rote memorization and cramming for exams instead of genuine learning experiences. Some students enter college with a strong foundation in English from middle school but become content with mediocre performance once enrolled by settling for passing grades without striving for excellence or improvement beyond what is required by their major field of study.

The renowned psychologist Piaget asserted that all effective work necessitates a prerequisite of interest. When an individual exhibits interest in an object, they develop a positive attitude towards it, consistently prioritize it, engage in tactile exploration, strive to comprehend and familiarize themselves with it, while maintaining a state of unwavering concentration and dedication. In recent years, numerous scientific experiments have substantiated the notion that when individuals learn about subjects they find intriguing, their enthusiasm stimulates the pituitary gland to influence endocrine functions resulting in heightened levels of adrenaline within the bloodstream. Consequently, this elevation in excitement permeates throughout the entire nervous system leading to an enduring phenomenon characterized by tireless pursuit and

unstoppable motivation, thereby underscoring the undeniable efficacy of such learning endeavors.

College students' English learning exhibits distinctive characteristics, particularly in terms of learner autonomy. The core of college students' learning activities lies in conscious and proactive engagement. In contrast to middle school, where students primarily learn under the supervision and discipline of teachers and parents, university students enjoy more freedom and ample time for self-study. They also benefit from guided instruction by university professors with fewer prescriptive requirements, thereby necessitating a greater reliance on their own initiative for effective learning outcomes. Moreover, college English learning entails extensive extracurricular reading and reference materials. Without interest as a driving force within such a learning environment, students cannot cultivate a high level of consciousness nor harness their subjective initiative to enhance their overall English proficiency. The second point is that college English learning is comprehensive. Throughout the learning process, college students have access to knowledge through various means and channels. Additionally, they rely on diverse learning interests to explore and acquire knowledge beyond the curriculum, thereby expanding and enriching classroom content and textbooks in order to enhance their grasp of the material. Thirdly, college English learning is highly specialized. English learning in middle school primarily focuses on acquiring basic knowledge. In addition to public English learning, non-English major students in college should also integrate their own professional knowledge into the study of English, thereby driving their language acquisition and reinforcing their expertise. Upon entering university, some students may struggle to adapt to the teaching mode of college-level English courses, subsequently leading to a loss of self-efficacy and diminishing interest in learning. They may become discouraged by challenges and even contemplate giving up on mastering the language. A lack of enthusiasm for their chosen field can also negatively impact students' emotional well-being and hinder progress.

Language learning cannot occur in isolation from students' emotional experiences. Emotion and affect are the manifestations of individuals' attitudes towards external stimuli, reflecting the relationship between these stimuli and subjective needs. In fact, emotion and affect refer to the same cognitive process and phenomenon; however, emotion refers specifically to the reflective aspect

of this process, while affect represents its content. Psychologists argue that emotional processes constitute a crucial component of psychological functioning, as they are influenced by various factors such as cognitive development, psychological maturity, ideals, and interests.

In the process of English learning, it encompasses not only students' sentiments towards this course but also the interpersonal dynamics between students and teachers, as well as students' sense of responsibility and collective honor. The smoothness of the learning process is reflected in mood fluctuations. Regarding English specifically, different students possess varying levels of comprehension. Students with a strong familial and societal consciousness, clear learning objectives, and lofty aspirations exhibit a high demand for English and a pronounced preference for it. Apart from regular classroom instruction, they engage in activities such as listening to English songs, watching movies in English, reading newspapers and novels written in English, and actively seeking opportunities to communicate with others using the language. When things go well, they derive enjoyment from their experiences which elevates their emotions. Conversely, when faced with challenges or setbacks during their journey with the language, they employ rationality to regulate their emotional responses accordingly. On the contrary, individuals who adopt an approach characterized by minimal effort ("do a monk a day and hit the clock a day") acknowledge the significance of English; however due to inadequate foundational knowledge coupled with limited internal motivation factors that hinder personal efficacy development (low self-efficacy), they tend to display perfunctory attitudes towards studying English or even harbor aversion towards it altogether. Within an English class setting itself, some resort to reading unrelated materials; others indulge in mobile phone usage; some simply sleep through lessons or skip them entirely. In summary, when confronted with tasks related to mastering the language itself (English), these individuals experience feelings of dejection accompanied by diminished self-confidence along with inner conflicts result.

3. CULTIVATING NON-COGNITIVE FACTORS TO ENHANCE INSTRUCTIONAL EFFICACY

The intelligence level of students from the same university or major is generally stable, but there are significant variations in individual English

proficiency. This can be attributed to the varying impact of non-intellectual factors on cognitive activities among different individuals. Consequently, enhancing students' non-intellectual factors and promoting teaching effectiveness have become pivotal aspects of college English teaching reform.

3.1 Establishing Explicit Learning Objectives and Enhancing Intrinsic Motivation for Learning

A person's goals evolve throughout different stages of growth. For instance, primary school students can only gain approval from their parents and teachers by diligently studying. Middle school students, on the other hand, must study hard in order to secure admission into their desired university and earn the respect of their peers and educators. However, college students often relax their standards after achieving these objectives. The strong drive they once had for studying gradually diminishes upon entering university, leading to confusion and a decline in academic performance due to a loss of direction. It is crucial for teachers to seize this opportunity to help college freshmen clarify their learning goals and stimulate their motivation for learning. Firstly, assisting them in becoming familiar with their new learning environment is essential as people tend to feel uncomfortable and uneasy in completely unfamiliar surroundings. By gaining familiarity with the environment around them, students will develop a sense of control and security. Secondly, it is important to guide students in making career plans that are based on an objective understanding of themselves – including accurate career positioning, evaluating opportunities within chosen careers, selecting appropriate goals and paths while embracing lifelong learning – all while remaining adaptable to changing times through efficient action. The significance of English as the most widely utilized language globally has been universally acknowledged. Upon graduation, college students are faced with the choice of either seeking employment or pursuing further studies, both of which necessitate a solid grasp of English. Considering the varying levels of English proficiency among college students, it is imperative for teachers to assist them in establishing short-term achievable goals based on their individual circumstances. By gradually enhancing their requirements and fostering confidence through continuous progress, students can effectively enhance their English skills.

3.2 Consolidating the Acquired Knowledge and Maintaining a Sustained Interest in Learning

As the proverb goes, "Practice makes perfect," which also applies to learning English. Many students can achieve short-term results without much difficulty, but if they don't consistently review, they will soon forget what they have learned. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to focus on consolidating students' learning outcomes and maintaining their interest in learning. The process of learning English is complex and challenging. For instance, some students may quickly memorize words and feel a sense of accomplishment, becoming more interested in learning English. However, when asked to use the vocabulary they have mastered to express their thoughts, they may find it difficult or even shy away from doing so, leading to a decline in their interest in learning. In classroom teaching, teachers should first make effective use of various teaching resources and facilities to create an engaging English classroom environment. The inclusion of applicable online platforms (such as Super Star Learning, Itest, Iwrite) in addition to traditional classroom settings offers students a convenient avenue to reinforce and apply their acquired knowledge. Secondly, students should be encouraged to recognize their strengths while addressing their weaknesses. Upon entering university, many college students seem to discover themselves for the first time and realize that there is a significant gap between them and others – whether it's knowledge, talent, abilities, interpersonal relationships or family background – causing them to dislike themselves more as well as lose confidence in themselves increasingly over time. Teachers should seize opportunities during class time for those less confident students to exercise and improve themselves. Specifically speaking about weak foundation learners, asking them to write words and recite texts would be beneficial whereas for those with a strong foundation, assigning tasks like writing classic sentences or retelling texts would be suitable approaches instead. In addition, teachers should provide objective evaluations along with ample encouragement towards educational objectives, filled with high expectations.

3.3 Enhancing Emotional Intelligence and Cultivating Resilience

In the process of students' learning, emotional education is equally significant as the guidance on

specific teaching content. Emotional education not only utilizes emotions to enhance education but also emphasizes the enhancement of students' emotional intelligence, commonly known as emotional quotient (EQ).

Primarily, it is necessary to cultivate students' ability to self-manage based on self-understanding. The core of emotional intelligence lies in the capability to perceive emotions at their inception. Individuals with high self-awareness possess a clear comprehension of their emotions and can effectively regulate them. Self-awareness education aims to assist students in enhancing their capacity for self-understanding, accurately assessing whether they are making rational decisions or being driven by impulsive emotions, foreseeing potential consequences resulting from different choices, recognizing personal strengths and weaknesses, maintaining a positive and realistic self-perception, managing oneself proficiently, regulating one's emotions appropriately. The experience of feeling anger after being hurt and anxiety before exams is a common phenomenon among students. How can students effectively alleviate anxiety and curb anger? For instance, adopting a different mindset, gaining alternative perspectives, engaging in altruistic activities or participating in sports can all be efficacious strategies.

Secondly, it is crucial to cultivate self-motivation and foster strong determination among students. Adversities are inevitable throughout one's journey; hence, self-motivation entails the ability to persist, maintain enthusiasm and exert continuous effort even when faced with setbacks. Self-motivated individuals possess effective focus, unwavering drive for achievement, perseverance against temptation and conflict, delayed gratification skills as well as a stable optimistic attitude. Lastly, students should be trained to empathize with others' emotions and adeptly navigate interpersonal relationships. A harmonious rapport amongst individuals enhances confidence levels while unlocking hidden potential and improving learning efficiency. The university serves as a platform for self-directed study, self-education, self-management, and the enhancement of personal comprehensive competence. Consequently, college students should broaden their perspectives and refrain from perceiving learning narrowly as mere engagement with textbooks, attentive listening, note-taking, and subsequent examination success. While these aspects are undeniably crucial to the learning process, it is equally important for college students

to actively engage in open communication with professors, seniors, and peers in order to glean insights from their experiences by proactively participating in or organizing diverse lectures, training sessions, and competitions. The author firmly believes that such "learning" not only facilitates knowledge accumulation and skill improvement but also fosters harmonious interpersonal relationships while bolstering one's prospects for future success.

4. CONCLUSION

In brief, the learning process is an intricate and multifaceted phenomenon, wherein diverse cognitive and non-cognitive factors intricately intertwine and collaborate. As a psychological cognitive process, intellectual factors exert direct influence on learning activities, while non-intellectual factors, although not directly engaged in the cognitive process per se, serve as dynamic elements upon which learning activities rely.

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