

Emotional Education in Primary School English from the Perspective of Affective Filter Hypothesis

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Keywords: Affective Filter Hypothesis, Primary School English Teaching, Emotional Education

Abstract: For a long time, foreign language educators have been focusing on how to improve students' academic performance, while paying little or no attention to students' emotional experience in learning a foreign language. The new curriculum standard puts forward the cultivation goal of "emotional attitude" and emphasizes the positive emotional education for students. People are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of emotional education. How to integrate emotional education into classroom teaching has become a major issue for teachers. Therefore, based on Krashen's effective filter theory, this paper aims to explore its implications for contemporary primary school emotional education so as to put forward some constructive suggestions for primary school English classroom teaching.

1. Introduction

According to Xie Xiaomei, "emotion refers to a positive or negative response that human beings make to external things, which is generated by an individual's internal feelings and experiences"⁰. Every primary school student is an individual with an independent personality, and whose emotion is in the formative stage. For them who have just learned a foreign language, there are bound to be various positive and negative emotional experiences in the process of language learning. Li Fang states that "emotional education is a concept opposite to knowledge acquisition and cognitive education. It is a teaching method based on subjects' cognitive factors to make it play an active role"^[2].

In primary school English teaching, emotional education plays a particularly important role. If a student lacks motivation, weak self-confidence and high anxiety, he will form a psychological

barrier and hinder the second language acquisition. As an English teacher, it is very important to know how to stimulate pupils' positive emotions to promote their learning process and how to stop them from producing negative emotions, which plays an important role in improving the effect of foreign language teaching. Lu Wenji claims that "on the primary school teaching stage, English teachers should create emotional education steadily, so that students' learning emotions are more active and comprehensive"[3]. In this way, students will better participate in primary school English knowledge learning with the support of emotional education. In this paper, the author will briefly introduce the affective filter hypothesis and the affective factors proposed by Krashen. After that, the author puts forward some teaching suggestions on how to alleviate students' anxiety and improve students' confidence and positive motivation in emotional education.

2. Affective Filter Hypothesis

In the 1980s, American linguist Krashen put forward the famous "filter theory" in his book *Theory and Practice of Second Language Acquisition*. The theory consists of the acquisition-learning distinction hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis plays an important role in second language acquisition, and it is an important factor affecting the level of English teaching. According to Brown, "the emotion of foreign language learning psychology refers to the emotional and sensory aspects of human behavior, and its development and change involve personality factors and how people feel about themselves"[4]. The idea that affective factors play an important role in second language acquisition was first proposed by Dulay and Burt in 1977. On this basis, Krashen further developed it into the "affective filter hypothesis", aiming to explain how affective factors affect the process of foreign language learning. Zhi Mengwu argues that affective filter is just like the valve that can completely control the input of language [5]. When the people are relaxed and confident, the valve is open and the comprehensive input can reach the LAD without any difficulties. On the contrary, when the people are nervous and anxious, the valve closed and the comprehensive input can't reach the LAD. According to his hypothesis, we can conclude that if a language learner has a higher affective filter, he will acquire less second language for his low confidence and anxiety. On the contrary, if a language learner has a lower affective filter, he will learn more second language because of his high confidence and passion.

3. Three Elements of the Affective Filter Hypothesis

In affective filter hypothesis, Krashen proposed that there are three factors influencing it, namely, confidence, motivation and anxiety. The primary school English course is not only difficult for students to learn, but also abstract and difficult to understand. Yang Lihua explains that "after experiencing the early interest stage, most students will think that it is very boring and dull in English learning, which will greatly weaken their interest and initiative in English learning, and seriously reduce their learning efficiency"[6]. In order to harvest a good English teaching effect and improve the quality of students' English classroom learning, English teachers should attach importance to the emotional factors. By doing so, students can form a positive emotion like confidence and get a sense of accomplishment in the process of learning English.

3.1 Confidence

Self-confidence usually refers to a person's positive trust and certainty in their own strength. According to Yin Fang, "Self-confidence is the subjective evaluation and consciousness of the learning subject to the self-value and ability. It is often associated with self-esteem, self-respect, and

self-image”[7]. Krashen believes that the personal factors of learners are related to effectiveness of language acquisition, with confidence being the most important factors among them. When a student has self-confidence, he or she will have a clear goal in mind, and the courage and motivation to complete the learning task, thus they can improve the English learning efficiency. On the contrary, when a student has no or a little bit of confidence, he or she is easy to produce anxiety and even reject foreign language learning, which will hinder foreign language input. Confidence is closely related to English learning. For example, in English speaking practice, confident students will be more willing to express themselves in class, thus improving their speaking ability. On the contrary, students with low self-confidence, they are afraid to show themselves in front of others, and will give up any chance to practice English, so their oral ability can not be improved. Zhang Xie emphasizes that” in order to maintain students' confidence, teachers should encourage and praise them, let them see their achievements and advantages, and provide them with more opportunities for success”[8]. As an English teacher, he or she needs to know that students should be praised and encouraged every time when they make progress, so that they can feel that they are cared and respected by the teacher. By doing so, students can enhance their self-confidence and deal with the difficulties encountered in learning English correctly.

3.2 Motivation

According to Wang Fan, “motivation is the intrinsic drive that encourages someone to form some behavior”[9]. If someone really wants to achieve a goal, he will do his best to achieve it. As the main body of learning, students initially have certain reasons when they learn English, such as interest, going abroad, of course, under pressure from parents and teachers, and so on. However, under the influence of exam-oriented education, some language learners only pursue scores and ignore the comprehensive training of listening, speaking, reading and writing ability. Moreover, they even stop learning foreign languages once they achieve their goal. These bad learning motivations are bound to affect the degree of foreign language acquisition. In this situation, it is particularly important for English teachers to guide students in forming good motivation. There is no doubt that English learning motivation can be stimulated and cultivated. For English teachers, the most important thing is to be good at analyzing the students' learning motivation, and to find the appropriate ways to stimulate the students' learning motivation. Wang Liping and Jiang Lei claims that “learning motivation can be divided into positive and negative situations. Positive learning motivation can stimulate students' interest in learning English, make students more passionate about learning English, and invest more energy in English, so as to increase their learning efficiency”[10]. However, as primary school students who have just entered the school, they do not have too strong motivation for English learning, so as an English teacher, his responsibility is to promote students' positive or internal motivation. If students do not have active learning motivation or are forced by teachers and parents to study English, they will have less enthusiasm for learning English, thus the learning efficiency will not be too high. As a teacher, one should actively guide pupils' positive motivation for English and cultivate his interest and enthusiasm for English.

3.3 Anxiety

Horwitz pointed out that “foreign language anxiety refers to a significant self-perception, belief and emotional complex related to classroom language learning”[11]. Anxiety in language learning is caused by students worrying about whether they can be accepted and recognized by teachers and classmates, whether they can keep up with the progress or they can pass the exam. Zhang Renran claims that “anxiety can be divided into promotional anxiety and obstructive types”[12]. Facilitating anxiety refers to that learners dare to face the difficulties in the process of language learning, which

will cause the low emotional filtering. However, obstructive anxiety means that language learners are afraid to face the difficulties in the process of language learning, so it will cause high emotional filtering of learners. It's not difficult to find that promotional anxiety will finally benefit learners' learning and on the contrary, destructive anxiety will impede learners' language learning. On the one hand, excessive anxiety will make students too nervous, consume their energy that could be used for memory and thinking, and affect the enthusiasm of students to participate in foreign language learning, which will have a negative impact on foreign language learning. On the other hand, if the students has no anxiety at all, it is difficult for them to get good grades. That is because no anxiety means that there is no strong sensitivity to new knowledge and new problems in learning, and there is no pressure in learning, so it is also unfavorable to foreign language learning. Therefore, as English teachers, we should help students reduce the excessive anxiety and keep the promotional anxiety.

4. Application of Affective Filter Hypothesis in Emotional Education

4.1 Use Teaching Strategies to Stimulate Students' Positive Motivation

As we all know, interest is the best teacher. According to Yu Zhenyu, "low achievers' intrinsic motivation has something to do with their low interest in English language and English culture"[13]. Therefore, increasing students' interest in learning English is beneficial for students' internal or positive learning motivation. As for pupils, the study of English course is not only difficult, but also abstract to understand. After passing the early interest stage, most of the students who learn English will become bored, which will greatly weaken their English learning interest and seriously reduce their learning efficiency. As an English teacher, one ought to take different teaching strategies to promote students' positive or internal motivation. For students who have just learned a foreign language, whether they have a strong interest in the language is very important, and interest has become a key factor in forming positive motivation. In the English teaching, firstly, we can make use of some stories, movies or videos to arouse students' interest in learning English in the process of English teaching. Primary school students could have a vivid image in students' brain when English teachers use some related stories, movies or videos and they will concentrate on English learning. In this way can students master some key words or sentences and become more and more interested in learning English with the guidance of the teacher. Secondly, we can break down a large unit of language point into small modules to test students' understanding of the knowledge. When every student finish a small module, they can get a feedback from the teacher. By doing so, student will know about their strong points and weak points to continue their study with positive motivation in the learning process. At the same time, we should provide students with moderately difficult knowledge points, which will be appropriately challenging for them. If the knowledge points provided by teachers to students are too difficult, it will reduce their enthusiasm. If the knowledge points offered by teachers are too easy, it will be harmful for students' passion for learning English. That is to say, the knowledge gained by students through hard work can most enhance their academic performance. Thirdly, we need to help students build their own learning goals. Goals can be divided into short-term goals and long-term goals. Once students establish their own goals, they will have a direction to move forward. As English teachers, we should make students aware of the importance of learning a foreign language well for future learning, so as to enhance their interest in learning English. Only in this way can students have a strong desire and positive motivation to devoting themselves to learning English.

4.2 Use Encouragement to Improve Students' Self-Confidence

According to Ling Wang, students' confidence comes from two parts: one part comes from the teachers and the other part comes from students. The latter seems more important for students [14]. Confidence is one of the most important affective factors in affective filter hypothesis. As teachers, we should realize the importance of confidence and make use of various teaching methods to improve students' confidence. In the English teaching, firstly, we should treat students' mistakes properly. Wu Zhenlan claims that "English learning should emphasize the use of the language, rather than the usage of the language"[15]. If students put too much energy on preventing mistakes, their spoken English is intermittent and difficult to understand. Students will inevitably make some mistakes in class. At this time, the teacher's responsibility is to relieve the students' negative emotions instead of criticizing them in class, patiently guide the students who make mistakes to the correct attribution after class, and find out the solutions of the problem. Students can establish confidence in learning English and speak fluent English in a completely relaxed state, without fear of criticism or ridicule from their peers. Pan Xiaohong explains that "a teacher's praise will stimulate students' strong enthusiasm for learning, enhance students' sense of security, reduce students' anxiety, and enhance their self-confidence"[16]. Secondly, as an English teacher, one should praise students, such as praise words and even small red flowers and so on to improve students' confidence in learning English. As a primary school teacher, he or she should regard encouragement as the main teaching method to teach students instead of criticism and punishment. We treat primary school students as if they were young trees, giving them the care of spring breeze and drizzle. Teacher's praise for the students is like a warm sun, warm students' hearts. As we all know, primary school students are in the initial stage of growth, teachers' appropriate encouragement and other ways can improve students' self-confidence. Once students' learning confidence is enhanced, their learning motivation will also be enhanced, which will gradually improve the learning efficiency.

4.3 Create a Nice Classroom Atmosphere to Relieve Students' Anxiety

As we all know, good classroom atmosphere will double the teaching effectiveness. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis claims that English teaching should create a nice classroom atmosphere to make a low affective filter. Less anxious and stressful learning environment is good for English learning, which demands English teachers master the methods to decrease students' anxiety and fear. Relaxed and cheerful classroom atmosphere is good for students' study in the class. The participants of classroom teaching are the teachers and students and teachers are the main creators for the classroom atmosphere. Teachers play an important role in creating the active classroom atmosphere. Li Luliang claims that "teachers should pay attention to the creation of a harmonious classroom atmosphere in English teaching, and improve students' learning enthusiasm through various forms of classroom activities"[17]. First, we should enrich our professional knowledge and learn from other experienced teachers. As English teachers, we can absorb different teaching strategies and techniques by observing and learning from the teaching methods of other teachers, thereby enriching our own teaching methods and improving teaching effectiveness. By communicating with other teachers, one can learn more about educational concepts and methods, which can help teachers form a comprehensive educational outlook. By doing so, we can make teaching plans more reasonable and appreciate, and so that teaching process goes smoothly. Secondly, we should change teachers' roles, highlight the dominant position of students in the EFL Classroom. According to the Curriculum Criteria of English in Primary schools, one of the main responsibilities of a English teacher is to provide support and assistance for students' learning and growth so as to stimulate their potential and promote their comprehensive development in all aspects. The American educator John

Dewey proposed that modern teaching should be student-centered. In this way, students will have more chance to practice and reflect what they have learned under the guidance of the teacher, which can create a nice atmosphere. Thirdly, We should pay attention to interaction in English classrooms, which not only exists between students but also between students and teachers. As educators, we should actively explore and practice interactive teaching to create a more vivid, interesting, and challenging learning environment for students. It is very important to create a classroom atmosphere of mutual respect and encouragement in an interactive classroom. Students can fully show their personality and potential in a relaxed state to realize themselves. For example, teachers can encourage students to participate in the classroom by attempting to ask questions, organizing discussions, encouraging them to speak English, playing music and so on, which will help form a active and vivid classroom atmosphere. Among these methods, music is undoubtedly an important medium for elementary school students to relieve and adjust emotions. If teachers learn to how to use music to regulate students' emotions, they will make students more confident and relaxed.

5. Conclusion

Based on the Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and affective factors, namely, motivation, confidence and anxiety, we could conclude that some affective factors will influence English learners. The intensity of emotional filter of language acquisition varies from person to person, and the language learners with negative learning attitudes have a strong filtering effect on language. Not only do negative language learners not actively acquire more inputs, but they will not learn them even if they can understand them. Emotional factors are one of the biggest factors affecting foreign language learning. This paper has explored some methods to improve students' positive affection and confidence, which can provide some constructive suggestions for primary school English teachers. In emotional education, it is undeniable that teachers play a vital role to help students to be positive and confident in English classroom. As a primary school English teacher, one should pay more attention to emotional education and make use of a variety of teaching methods to improve the interest and motivation of the classroom. In this way, students can experience different emotions in different environments, which can stimulate students' interest in exploring and learning English, and improve students' English literacy.

Funding

If any, should be placed before the references section without numbering.

Data Availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Conflict of Interest

The author states that this article has no conflict of interest.

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