

The Analysis of the Anxiety Caused by English Learning among Junior College Students

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Abstract

The higher education system in China includes junior college, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree programs. Existing research on the anxiety caused by English learning typically focuses on students in bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree programs. However, junior college students need more attention. In China, students who do not achieve the required score on the University Entrance Examination often choose to attend junior colleges. Since exam scores are the primary measure of academic performance, junior college students are often perceived as having lower learning abilities and weaker educational foundations. As a result, they experience greater anxiety in English learning, which negatively impacts their academic outcomes. Addressing how to alleviate this anxiety and improve English learning efficiency is the main objective of this article. This study focuses on junior college students, analyzes the anxiety they experience in learning English, and provides valuable advice and suggestions.

Keywords

Junior college students
English learning
Anxiety

Online publication: August 21, 2024

1. What is the anxiety caused by English learning?

Anxiety is a complex emotional response characterized by nervousness, worry, fear, and other mixed feelings. In the context of language learning, anxiety refers to the fear and insecurity students often experience when using

a second or foreign language. This anxiety stems from a mix of self-consciousness, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors throughout the language-learning process. Psychologists Gardner and MacIntyre describe this as a specific type of anxiety related to English learning. Psychologist Horwitz also identifies anxiety caused by foreign language learning

as a unique phenomenon closely tied to classroom learning. This type of anxiety can be divided into three parts: fear of communication due to an inability to express oneself clearly, fear of negative social evaluation while striving for positive social impressions, and fear of tests. For language learners, moderate anxiety can aid learning, while excessive or nonexistent anxiety can have a negative impact. Overcoming this anxiety is possible with effective measures.

2. What causes English learning anxiety?

Various factors contribute to English learning anxiety, which can be broadly classified into internal and external factors. Internal factors include inheritance, cognition, English foundation, and individual characteristics. External factors encompass the social environment, teachers and faculty, learning environment, and test methods ^[1].

2.1. Internal factors

2.1.1. Inheritance

Each student is a unique individual with different abilities in reaction and comprehension. Students with strong language learning abilities can quickly grasp what the teacher teaches, reducing their likelihood of feeling anxiety. Conversely, students with weaker language abilities require more time, patience, courage, and persistence, which can lead to increased stress and anxiety when facing obstacles in English learning.

2.1.2. Cognition

Students' cognitive levels vary based on their family backgrounds and upbringing. The learning purposes and motivations in junior college English learning, which emphasize practical application, differ significantly from those in primary and secondary schools. The goal of passing exams and achieving high scores greatly influences students' mindsets and anxiety levels ^[2]. Self-evaluation plays a crucial role in self-perception regarding English. High self-evaluation can lead to high expectations and subsequent depression

and anxiety if those expectations are not met. Low self-evaluation can result in a lack of confidence, leading to anxiety, which can ultimately drive students to give up on English learning.

2.1.3. English foundation and learning methods

Some students have limited opportunities to study English beyond the classroom, restricting their knowledge of course materials. They may be unfamiliar with the latest trends in English learning. Additionally, some students use ineffective learning methods, focusing too much on reading, writing, translating, and memorizing while neglecting speaking and listening. This can create a noticeable gap between them and their peers ^[3]. The realization that they are deviating from effective learning methods, coupled with previous failures, can lead to fear and anxiety. Students with weak English foundations often have a strong sense of self-respect, which amplifies their anxiety.

2.1.4. Characteristics

The level of anxiety caused by learning English varies based on individual characteristics. Extroverted students are typically better at communicating and more willing to express themselves, regardless of mistakes. This openness provides more opportunities for practice and improvement ^[4], boosting self-confidence and achievement, and maintaining moderate anxiety levels. In contrast, introverted students are more focused on results and fear speaking or making mistakes. This fear can cause them to forget words during class, leading to mental chaos and increased anxiety. Students with strong self-respect and weak self-control may experience excessive anxiety, while those with good psychological resilience can manage their emotions and avoid significant anxiety.

2.2. External factors

2.2.1. Social factors

The rapid development of the global economy and cultural exchange demands that junior college students place greater importance on learning English ^[5]. When

job hunting after graduation, junior college students compete not only with their peers but also with bachelor's and master's degree holders. Consequently, junior college students often find themselves at a competitive disadvantage. Even without such competitors, employers still prefer junior college students with better English skills, all other things being equal. To align with global trends and secure a promising future, students must prioritize English study, often leading to considerable stress from the moment they enter junior college.

2.2.2. College factors

Colleges play a crucial role in students' English learning, influenced by various factors such as the campus environment, teachers, and facilities. Teachers' methods, attitudes, language environment, and cultural atmosphere significantly impact students' anxiety levels and learning outcomes.

3. How can we alleviate the anxiety caused by English learning?

3.1. From the perspective of teachers: Building a good learning environment

3.1.1. Establishing a good teacher-student relationship

A harmonious teacher-student relationship is key to successful English teaching. The attitudes of both teachers and students determine whether such a relationship can be established ^[6]. During English learning, teachers should focus not only on imparting knowledge but also on communicating with students. Teachers should adopt a scientific attitude towards teaching, treating students as partners rather than subordinates. In this scenario, classroom activities become a cooperative effort between teachers and students. Teachers should invest time in building friendships with students, becoming both mentors

and friends ^[7], thereby enhancing the teacher-student relationship.

3.1.2. Build a harmonious classroom atmosphere

Creating a harmonious classroom atmosphere tailored to students' psychological characteristics can alleviate anxiety. Generally, a relaxed atmosphere reduces anxiety and promotes learning, while a tense environment increases anxiety and hinders learning ^[8]. Teachers play a critical role in fostering a harmonious atmosphere. In class, teachers should act as organizers and leaders, not dictators, encouraging student participation and ensuring a positive learning experience.

3.1.3. Applying scientific teaching methods

The goal of applying various teaching methods is to cultivate students' learning autonomy. This involves enabling students to manage their learning process, set objectives, and evaluate their progress independently. Teachers should focus on developing students' independent learning abilities, helping them form good habits, master effective methods, and devise strategies. When students realize they can meet their teachers' expectations, their confidence increases, and anxiety decreases. Teachers should adopt suitable teaching methods based on the specific context to ensure most students achieve the learning objectives ^[9]. Positive emotional responses to learning English encourage students to improve, while they also adapt their methods to keep pace with the teacher ^[10].

3.1.4. Providing varied evaluations

Scores and certificates remain important indicators of English proficiency in society. Some junior colleges still rely solely on written tests, but high scores do not necessarily equate to practical language skills. Junior colleges should focus on students' ability to use English, shifting from a score-oriented approach to a combination of score- and ability-orientation. This approach relieves anxiety, creates a relaxed and effective learning environment, and helps students set

personalized learning goals.

3.1.5. Enhancing cross-cultural awareness

Each language has specific cultural characteristics. Students' anxiety often stems not from poor language skills but from a lack of cultural understanding. To reduce anxiety, it is essential to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness. Teachers can integrate cultural content related to English-speaking countries into their lessons. By understanding different cultures, students can develop an interest in English learning, reduce anxiety, and improve their communication skills.

3.2. From the perspective of students

Alleviating the anxiety caused by English learning is not solely the responsibility of teachers; students must also take both physical and mental actions to adjust themselves and their states of mind.

3.2.1. Mastering timeliness

Any anxiety is just a temporary state of mind. It cannot develop into long-term psychological quality and will not exert an unchangeable influence on an individual.

3.2.2. Having a clear idea about themselves

Whether students feel anxiety about English learning or not, the knowledge provided to each student in the class is the same in terms of time, amount, and quality. Every student should be treated equally.

3.2.3. Accepting their own imperfections

No student will perform perfectly every time they complete a language task. Even students with a strong foundation experience challenges. Each performance, even the worst, has valuable lessons to offer. Therefore, students should not be overly proud of one great performance or overly disappointed by one failure, as everyone experiences ups and downs in English learning.

3.2.4. Getting involved in class teaching

Students often feel anxious about English learning

because they perceive themselves as outsiders and exclude themselves from class activities. Actively participating in class teaching allows them to be influenced positively by others and helps them overcome their anxiety.

3.2.5. Preparing for English learning.

Fear often arises from the unknown. When students encounter something new or beyond their reach, anxiety naturally follows. Learning is a process of exploring the unknown and finding solutions to overcome challenges. By anticipating potential difficulties in learning English and preparing for them, students can reduce their anxiety when faced with these challenges.

3.3. From the perspective of others

Parents should create a relaxed and happy learning environment for their children. Setting up a comfortable study area at home can make students feel happy and relaxed. Parents can also develop a study plan with their children, arrange study time reasonably, and avoid excessive pressure. Additionally, parents should lead by example. If parents want their children to accomplish something, they should first demonstrate it themselves, showing that if parents can succeed, so can the children.

Colleges should focus on both their hard power and soft power. In terms of hard power, colleges should create a relaxing campus atmosphere and provide conveniences for teachers and students. Regarding soft power, colleges should offer more training opportunities for teachers and enhance training intensity, allowing teachers to stay updated with the latest trends in English teaching.

4. Conclusion

In summary, many factors contribute to students' English learning anxiety in junior colleges. Teachers,

staff, and students should address these factors to better manage anxiety and cultivate a healthy learning mindset. This approach will improve and maximize

English learning outcomes and quality, facilitating the transition from quantity to quality in junior college English teaching.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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