

An Empirical Research on Ethnic Minority Students of Preparatory Education Under the Influence of Nonintellectual Factors

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Abstract

Nonintellectual factors play an important role in the second language learning. Nonintellectual factors mainly include a person’s motivation, personality, willpower, anxiety, self-confidence, etc.. The purpose of this study is to discover the function of nonintellectual factors in English teaching. This paper first gives a brief introduction to the background information of the research, and then a definition of nonintellectual factors and the elements nonintellectual factors contain are presented. After that the data from two separate surveys concerning about learners’ willpower and anxiety are collected aiming to find out the causes of these phenomena and make a conclusion. Eventually some suggestions of the teaching reform from the perspective of teaching objectives, teaching content, teaching methods and teaching evaluation are proposed with the purpose of improving the teaching effects.

Key words: Teaching reform; Nonintellectual factors; Teaching method; Evaluation

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INTRODUCTION

It is a question that should not be neglected that nonintellectual factors have a great impact on second language learning. In college English teaching, we found that under the same learning situations and conditions, different students have different performance, these differences mainly come from the student's own non-intelligence factors, such as learning motivation, feelings, traits of character, etc.. With the deepening of the teaching reform, quality-oriented education attracts more and more attention and the nonintellectual factors are drawing more and more attention of teachers and scholars. The subjects of the research are the ethnic minority students of preparatory education in Inner Mongolia University for the Nationalities. Ethnic minority preparatory English education is instructed by foreign language teaching theory, and its main content is composed of English language knowledge and application skills, cross-cultural communication and learning strategy. Ethnic minority students are mainly from the mountain areas in Inner Mongolia and its surrounding regions. Students differ from each other due to their different customs, national cultures, traditional ideas, religious beliefs, etc.. They have different motivation of learning English. Some students take a positive role in classroom activities and some students participate in the classroom activities passively. Some students will feel nervous and uncomfortable in English class when they are asked to answer questions. Besides, they differ from each other in their fulfillment of their assignment. The above-mentioned phenomena are obviously concerned with nonintellectual factors of students, which are responsible for achievement in the second language learning. The next part is going to discuss the important nonintellectual factors in the second language learning and some innovative teaching practice with regard to nonintellectual factors.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 The Definition of Non-Intellectual Factors

Nonintellectual factors are firstly proposed by an American psychologist W. P. Alexander. He generalized nonintellectual factors from the psychological structure of intellect and intelligence behaviors as follows: (a) All kinds of intelligence level from simple to complex reflect the function of nonintellectual factors. (b) Nonintellectual factors are a necessary part of intelligence behaviors. (c) Nonintellectual factors could not take place of the basic ability of intelligence factors, but could restrict the intelligence. In the early 1980s, the concept of nonintellectual factors was introduced into China. Yan Guocai divides nonintellectual factors into three gradations: the first one is general nonintellectual factors that include every psychological factor except intelligence factors; the second one is nonintellectual factors in narrow sense which are made up of 5 psychological elements, such as motivation, interest, affect, will, and character; the last one is detailed intellectual factors which have 12 factors, namely, achievement motivation, learning desire, learning enthusiasm; self-esteem, self-confidence, enterprising spirit; sense of responsibility, sense of obligation, sense of honor; self-control, perseverance and self-independence. Many psychological studies show us that it is the nonintellectual factors that lead to success despite of the intelligent difference of people. In China, Professor Yan in Shanghai Normal University proposes some important viewpoints concerning nonintellectual factors. The cultivation of nonintellectual factors of students is an effective way to deepen the teaching reform, to improve the management of universities and to boost the development of teachers. The teacher should pay attention to students' nonintellectual factors, motivate students' learning interest, develop their good learning habits, exercise their own strong will, and create their healthy personalities to overcome the psychological barriers so as to meet the requirements of social development.

1.2 Factors Affecting Second Language Learning

1.2.1 Motivation

Some students do better than others because they are better motivated. "Motivation is for most teachers the interest that promotes students to learn. Anything like a particular exercise, a particular topic, a particular song may make the students appear involved in the class, to the teacher's delight (Cook, 2000). Williams and Burden (1997) proposes that the word 'motivation' is only meaningful in relation to a particular action. More than that, the concept of motivation is composed of many different and overlapping factors such as interest, curiosity, or a desire to achieve. These in turn will differ in different situations and circumstances, and also be

subject to various external influences such as parents, teachers and exams. Thus any discussion of motivation is inevitably complicated. According to a survey on the question what your motivation of learning English is, a majority of students come to the class for the need for further study or work. Some students want to learn English because they love to know foreign culture. Others regard English as a tool to communicate with foreigners or get access to materials relevant to English. Yet a few students are obliged to take a course because they have little interest in English. With the first type of learner, the challenge is to maintain and exploit the motivation they bring to the course. With the last type, the challenge is to work hard at making the course itself enjoyable and satisfying. You also have to try to get reluctant learners to recognize that, for virtually anyone, English really could be useful at some time in their lives (Davies & Pearse, 2002).

1.2.2 Personality Traits

Perhaps the extroverts learn a second language better than the introverts, because extraverts are outgoing and sociable and introverts might be reserved and shy. Extroverts will be more actively involved in the classroom activities than the introvert ones. The introverts might be expected to prefer academic teaching that emphasizes individual learning and language knowledge; extroverts might prefer audio-lingual or communicative teaching that emphasizes group participation and social know-how. Therefore, as for the extrovert students, teachers' trust and encouragement are highly recommended and they should be aware that comprehensible fluency is not sufficient for every context in which they will need to use the language. While for most of the introvert students, a supportive and unthreatening classroom environment is necessary for them, so that they will feel ease in class and take an active role in classroom activities.

1.2.3 Anxiety

Anxiety about the language could be aroused in many situations (i.e., interpersonal communication, language drills, examinations, etc.). Such anxiety could result from more general forms of anxiety such as trait anxiety, previous unnerving experiences in language classes, or because of concern about deficiencies in language knowledge and skill (Gardner, 2005). That is, language anxiety could have deleterious effects on learning, and inadequate skill could give rise to feelings of anxiety. For the purposes of the socio-educational model, we distinguished between two broad situations, the language class, and contexts outside of the classroom situation where the language might be used. Two measures are employed: Language Class Anxiety (CLASS) Language Use Anxiety (USE).

Anxiety has been predicted as a variable negatively affecting language learning since the mid-1960s and a lot

of studies have been conducted to test this hypothesis. The students of high-anxiety group meet with more problems on study methods and they contribute their anxiety/apprehension over examinations to their ineffective study strategies. Anxiety is a kind of learning outcome that is influenced by an individual's learning behaviors. To change the attitudes of anxiety that students have towards English learning, the teacher should build a positive and non-threatening learning environment for the students so that they will not feel nervous in such circumstances and are willing to exert themselves in the class activities.

1.2.4 Self-Confidence

Learners' learning proficiency is associated with their personality. Self-confidence is one of the most important factors of one's personalities. Self-confidence is the self-believing and positive attitude to the competence of their own and level of knowledge. Learners with great self-confidence generally have great self-belief and good images, and have great chances to succeed in foreign language learning. Learners with great self-confidence dare to take risk in communication with others in target language. They are not afraid of making errors in learning. With self-confidence, they can communicate in the target language boldly without being afraid of embarrassment for the errors. While those with poor self-confidence and introverted personality will lose many chances of communication and practice in classes because they think more of losing faces and making errors in the same learning environment.

1.2.5 Willpower

We have many common names for willpower: determination, drive, resolve, self-discipline, self-control. But psychologists characterize willpower, or self-control, in more specific ways. According to most psychological scientists, willpower can be defined as:

- a) The ability to delay gratification, resisting short-term goals temptations in order to meet long-term.
- b) The capacity to override an unwanted thought, feeling or impulse.
- c) The ability to employ a "cool" cognitive system of behavior rather than a "hot" emotional system.
- d) Conscious, effortful regulation of the self by the self.
- e) A limited resource capable of being depleted.

At its essence, willpower is the ability to resist short-term temptations in order to meet long-term goals. Lack of willpower isn't the only reason you might fail to reach your goals. Willpower researcher Roy Baumeister, PhD, a psychologist at Florida State University, describe three necessary components for achieving objectives: First, he says, you need to establish the motivation for change and set a clear goal. Second, you need to monitor your behavior toward that goal. The third component is willpower. Whether your goal is to lose weight, kick a

smoking habit, study more, or spend less time on Facebook, willpower is a critical step to achieving that outcome.

2. RESEARCHES ON NONINTELLECTUAL FACTORS OF ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS

2.1 Participants

In order to explore the influences that nonintellectual factors bring about, the author conducts a self-administered questionnaire survey among 104 students from two classes in an attempt to find out how much non-intellectual factors affect students' learning process. Through the survey, one hundred valid replies are received. The students surveyed are all Mongolian students in Inner Mongolia University for the Nationalities. And they have different English levels. Some have a good command of English while others can not master English very well. Through this study, the author aims to get an overall knowledge of the students' learning status.

2.2 Research Design

The teacher means to search for the correlations between the second language learners' nonintellectual factors to second language learning. A study is conducted from the perspective of students' learning anxiety and willpower. Questions with regard to students' willpower are designed as follows: (a) I will not do the thing actively if I am not interested in it. (b) I can not finish some tasks on time due to subjective reasons. (c) I can not make up my mind when I come up against complex situations. (d) I will not delay doing one thing if I have decided to do it. (e) When there is a conflict between study and entertainment, I will choose to study even if the entertainment is very attractive. Students are required to make one choice according to the four alternatives briefly described below (A). Yes, very much (B). Yes (C). A little (D) No.

With respect to learning anxiety, nine questions are designed in the following part in an attempt to get a clear idea about the obstacles that ethnic minority students of preparatory education suffer from in most cases. The survey is made according to students' behaviors in class and out of class. Language anxiety does take effect in language learning. The author finds out some most common phenomena that exist in foreign language learning to study the relationship between language anxiety and language learning. The research is to explore what factors lead to anxiety and seek for some effective strategies to reduce students' anxiety in second language learning. The phenomena are listed below with the alternatives of an affirmative answer and a negative answer.

Owner managers do not see SHRM as critical for the success of their start-up. This is in spite of consistent recruitment problem expressed by the owner managers. The owner managers seem to take a short term view when it comes to filling vacancies. They see candidates as just resources to fill their short term resourcing needs. They assume these candidates will leave in time and will need to be replaced. Two of the owner managers indicated that the average duration of employment in their companies is only one to two years. Due to the lack of trust in these candidates, owner managers believe it necessary to micro manage their resources. This again is a direct result of the vicious cycle due to lack of SHRM. As a start-up fails to attract, recruit and retain the right talent, owner managers require to spend excessive amounts of their time to micro manage simple tasks. This in turn, prevents the owner managers from focusing on more strategic initiatives for the start-up. This results in slow growth, less profits and further difficulty to attract talent.

2.3 Procedure

The survey is made in the following steps:

(a) The teacher collects some typical questionnaires to investigate students' learning anxiety and students' willpower in carrying out learning tasks and the obstacles they meet with when learning English.

A major purpose of the investigations is to estimate the magnitude of the contributions that strong willpower and affective factors such as students' learning anxiety make to achievement in the second language learning.

(b) The teacher asks students to fill in the investigation form with regard to the nonintellectual factors affecting students' learning abilities. Afterwards, the teacher collects the data and counts out the percentage of each item. Look at the form below.

2.4 Results and Discussions

(a) As is shown in Table 1, a small part of students have a strong willpower, and a large majority of students have a weak willpower. A person's level of willpower is expected to influence the amount of effort exerted toward actions. A person's willpower involves a determination or ability to make a decision or an intension and follow through despite obstacles or pressure. Many studies prove that learners with higher willpower are more likely to achieve their goals. Individuals are expected to respond differently to positive and negative feedback depending on whether they exhibit high or low willpower. It turns out that the cultivation of students' strong willpower really takes effect in language learning and teaching.

Table 1
What Will You Do If You Meet With the Following Problems?

Options	Yes, very much	Yes	A little	No
I will not do the thing actively if I am not interested in it.	34%	35%	16%	15%
I can not finish some tasks on time due to subjective reasons.	37%	40%	19%	4%
I can not make up my mind when I come up against complex situations .	14%	49%	21%	16%
I will not delay doing one thing if I have decided to do it.	32%	49%	11%	8%
When there is a conflict between study and entertainment, I will choose to study even if the entertainment is very attractive.	31%	26%	23%	20%

Table 2
Do You Suffer From These Anxieties When You Are Learning English?

Options	Yes (%)	No (%)
I will not feel at ease when I am asked to answer questions.	62%	38%
I am often worried that I will not pass the exam.	32%	68%
I don't care about making mistakes in class.	48%	52%
I am not nervous when I am communicating with native speakers.	41%	59%
I feel upset when I don't understand what the teacher has said.	71%	29%
I am afraid that the teacher will correct every mistake that I have made.	56%	44%
I am sorry to find that I often think about something irrelevant to language learning in class.	39%	61%
I am worried that I can't keep up with the rapid schedule of the English class.	34%	66%
I am afraid of being laughed at by other students when I speak English.	27%	73%

(b) As the data are analyzed in Table 2, the greatest anxiety seems to be negative experiences in speaking activities. Students are afraid of being questioned because they are afraid of making mistakes or being laughed at by others. Besides, some students are worried about taking exams and others are anxious that their poor ability of

language acquisition may be a barrier for them to catch what the teacher said. Many studies reveal language anxiety plays a role in language learning, though the role can be complex. Anxiety can have motivational properties suggesting that it might well facilitate achievement. It also has debilitating components that interfere with learning

and production, however, and probably because of these, language anxiety is generally negatively related to achievement as well as to self-confidence with the language. This negative relationship can be interpreted as indicating that high levels of language anxiety interfere with language achievement, or that low levels of achievement cause individuals to be anxious in situations where they are to use their language. This is meant to indicate that individuals experiencing high levels of language anxiety will tend to do more poorly on the measures of achievement, and that individuals who lack facility in the language will also tend to be more anxious in situations where they are called upon to use their language.

3. SUGGESTIONS FOR INNOVATIVE TEACHING

3.1 The Shift of Teaching Objectives in the Stage of Preparatory Education

In the traditional classroom, the teacher pays more attention to the transfer of language points rather than to the comprehensive ability of using English. The concern is generally one about grammar teaching as a means to achieve the proficiency objective. Later, it extends to any teaching content as to any systematic aspects of the language in addition to syntax and morphology. However, with the implementation of the teaching reform, the English teaching object of ethnic minority preparatory education is to cultivate students' comprehensive ability of using English, stimulate students' interest in learning, enhance their learning motivation, and strengthen the consciousness and ability of their autonomic learning. In addition, it also aims at improving students' comprehensive cultural quality and cross-cultural awareness. At the same time, its main goal is to help the students form good learning habits so that they can go on smoothly with their undergraduate studies. It is an important stage for students to lay a good foundation for their lifelong learning, and it is also the need for ethnic minority students to adapt to the social and economic development of the ethnic minority areas. Therefore, the shift of teaching objectives in the stage of preparatory education is indispensable and imperative.

3.2 The Transformation of the Teaching Content

As Foreign language teachers, we should be aware that learners need to be motivated in order to be successful. Personal involvement is one very effective way of enhancing motivation. Therefore, the teaching content should be not only practical but also personalized. If the learners are asked to do what is relevant to their own lives and their feelings, their thoughts, their beliefs and opinions are valued. They are willing to get involved in the teaching tasks and activities and get a better understanding of the target language.

3.3 The Change of the Teaching Methods

(a) A careful and thorough design of an English course is the key to achieving a successful language teaching. The course design ought to put special emphasis on attractive materials and involving tasks which will gradually help change learners' attitudes at least towards the learning process. Such attractive materials as a photo, a courseware and a video are popular among students. Moreover, with the integration of information technology and teaching, micro class is considered as an effective teaching means to be employed.

(b) The classroom activities should be designed with the consideration of the learners' opinions, thoughts and feelings as well as students' nonintellectual factors such as motivation, personality, and willpower, etc.. In this way, it helps to preserve individuals' right to privacy (Griffiths & Keohane, 2009), and to build up a close relationship between teachers and students. A humanistic method of teaching is more likely to create a lively and comfortable atmosphere in the classroom. In this way, a feeling of trust is easy to be established between teachers and students in the classroom. In addition, classroom activities need to be diverse. Various teaching activities like story telling, game playing, role play, morning report and so forth are welcome among students. Through these activities, students are highly motivated, and a sense of enjoyment is achieved.

(c) Carl Rogers, an American psychologist, suggested that there are three core teacher characteristics that help to create an effective learning environment. These are respect (a positive and non-judgmental regard for another person), empathy (be able to see things from the other person's perspective, as if looking through their eyes) and authenticity (being oneself without hiding behind job titles, roles or masks) (Scrivener, 2002). When the teacher has these qualities, the relationships within the classroom are likely to be stronger and deeper and communication between people much more open and honest (Ibid.). In order to have these qualities the teacher must take into account the nonintellectual factors because they are the affective elements without which the teacher cannot attain a successful teaching in English. The teacher should improve his own teaching qualities and create a harmonious teaching environment because this is a way to promote the development of the student' individual personality and counter the development of their learning anxiety.

(d) Willpower is one of the important elements of nonintellectual factors, which has great impact on a person's life. Those who are successful are mainly the ones with strong willpower. How to cultivate a student's willpower is of critical importance to language teachers. First of all, the teacher should take the initiative to cultivate the students' independent and autonomous learning abilities. When students are facing with difficulties, the teacher should lead the students to find

solutions to cope with setbacks or frustration with positive attitudes and learn to settle the problem on their own. Secondly, it is the teacher's duty to ask the students to think over their learning behaviors to make a reflection and summary so that they can learn from their setbacks and thus enhance their learning abilities.

3.4 The Reform of the Teaching Evaluation

A further important aspect of the curriculum processed is curriculum evaluation, that is, the task of monitoring the strengths and weaknesses of a course or programme (Stern, 1992). Evaluation must include mechanisms for bringing about change, in order to ensure that all language programmes are as effective and adaptable to changing circumstances as possible. New English education evaluation system is not only just concerned about the student's academic scores, but pay more attention to students' emotional experiences and their learning ability. It is of great importance for the teacher to break through the habit of taking scores as the evaluation criterion. Emotional and cultural factors should also be taken into account to evaluate a student's comprehensive ability. In the process of teaching, students' information literacy, autonomic learning ability and collaborative learning ability ought to be valued. And the form of evaluation should be diversified. Self evaluation, group evaluation and teacher evaluation should be taken together to assess a student.

CONCLUSION

Nonintellectual factors are the key aspects that need to be considered in the second language teaching. Students' various motivations of learning and personalities determine that the methods of language teaching should

be diverse and optional. In this paper, an introduction provides us an outlook about the present status of ethnic minority students in the stage of preparatory education. Surveys conducted enlighten us that it is essential to integrate non-intellectual factors into language teaching. In the last part, the suggestions for teaching throw light on us that language teaching should be personalized, multiple and changeable with the change of the teaching objectives, teaching content, teaching methods and the evaluation system. Of course, there are some limitations in the research and further investigations have to be made.

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