

Measures to Overcome Learners' Questions Answering Anxiety in English Class

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Abstract

Classroom questioning anxiety will intensify learners' fear of learning, and then cause a series of adverse effects. Effective questioning can not only help teachers teach better, but also promote students' learning. Based on humanistic psychology and affective filtering hypothesis, this paper studies the influence of teachers' questioning behavior on English classroom anxiety of senior high school students, and puts forward some suggestions to help teachers teaching and students learn.

Keywords

Classroom Questioning; Anxiety; Humanistic Psychology; Affective Filtering Hypothesis.

1. Introduction

Teacher classroom questioning is a way for students to use the target language, which enables learners to communicate with the limited language they have learned to the maximum extent. The two main subjects in the classroom are teachers and students, and the interaction revolves around these two subjects. From the perspective of learners alone, they are mostly presented in the form of teacher-led activities, one-to-one and group interactions (Wajnryb et al 1993:109; River 1997:24-27). It can be seen that the interactive effect of classroom questioning depends on the participation of students. Being quiet, not speaking up, not taking the initiative and not expressing their own opinions in class are described as typical images of Chinese students (Xie 2010:10). The reasons for students' inactive classroom participation are complex, which come from three aspects: learners, teachers and learning environment. Students will feel anxiety when teachers ask questions in class, which will make students nervous and affect their learning effect. And if learners are constantly feeling anxious, anxiety may become a quality or psychological quality. Research shows that language anxiety affects learning energy and attention, reduces the energy used for thinking and memory, and reduces language storage and output. With the promulgation of the New Curriculum Standards, quality education has been put on the agenda, and more emphasis has been placed on students' subjectivity and enthusiasm in learning. Therefore, it is an inevitable responsibility for teachers to help students solve their classroom question anxiety. This paper includes four parts. First, there's a brief introduction of classroom questioning. Second, literature review introduces concepts of teachers' classroom questioning, concepts of language anxiety, humanistic psychology, and Affective Filtering Hypothesis. The last two parts consists of measures to solve classroom questioning anxiety and conclusion.

2. Literature Review

In this chapter, firstly the paper introduces the related concepts of teachers' classroom questioning and concepts of language anxiety. Then, the theoretical basis of this study is put forward. In addition, this paper also introduces the domestic and foreign research on teachers' classroom questioning.

2.1. Concepts of Teachers' Classroom Questioning

Classroom questioning is a kind of teaching form in the course of classroom teaching, which is designed according to the teaching purpose and learning situation. In the process of classroom teaching, teachers first break down the teaching process to complete the teaching goal into one teaching stage, and then break down the teaching stage into one teaching step. The continuous advancement of these steps constitutes the curve of the classroom teaching process. Classroom questioning is the basic means to implement teaching steps. Because of this, it is considered a "conventional weapon" in classroom teaching. Classroom questioning is applicable to all aspects of teaching. Classroom questioning runs through the whole course of classroom teaching and is the most common and basic way of classroom teaching. Classroom questioning can cultivate students' thinking ability, develop students' language organization and expression ability, and understand students' conditions of knowledge grasp. It can be said that classroom questioning connects students, teaching materials and teachers to form an organic whole. Questioning plays an essential role in teaching all the time. Many scholars have summarized its functions. Wang Duqin (2002) concludes the functions of questioning in six aspects: a. To stimulate and keep students' learning interests. b. To arouse students to think. c. To help teachers analyze doubts. d. To help teachers check students' understanding. e. To help teachers check some detailed information. f. To involve students in classroom activities.

2.2. Concepts of Language Anxiety

It is generally believed that anxiety is a feeling of unease and fear caused by the failure of an individual to achieve the expected goal or to overcome the threat of obstacles, which causes his or her self-esteem and self-confidence to be frustrated, or increases the sense of failure and guilt. For students studying in the classroom environment, the factors causing foreign language anxiety can be summarized as fear of communication and fear of negative evaluation. Communication fear refers to the anxiety that occurs when you communicate in English because you cannot fully understand what others mean or express your own ideas well. English learning anxiety has great influence on foreign language communication ability. For example, some students are always worried about their oral English is not good, especially when speaking English in front of teachers and classmates, so they feel nervous, are afraid of making mistakes, and dare not answer questions. These are the specific performance of communication fear. In addition, anxiety is associated with people's self-esteem being threatened. Some education experts believe that students' self-evaluation is closely related to language anxiety. Students with low self-evaluation are always afraid of being negatively evaluated by teachers and classmates. Excessive self-concern has a great impact on foreign language learning. Negative self-focus, on the other hand, will have a negative impact on learning. Therefore, distrust of their own English ability and fear of making mistakes are the concrete embodiment of low self-evaluation.

2.3. Humanistic Psychology

Born in the 1950s, humanistic psychology was developed in response to the shortcomings of Skinner behaviorism and Freudian psychoanalysis (Benjafield, 2010). Hence it is also known as the third force in psychology. It perceives human nature in a completely different way, believing that human nature is pure and can strive for self-realization. In addition, it holds that humans, as complete individuals, should have their own cognition and emotions. But behaviorist and spiritual researchers are less optimistic about human nature. Behaviorists believe that human beings are inferior animals whose movements or behaviors are controlled by external stimuli (Crain, 2005). Rogers (1969) is considered the father of humanistic psychology, and his central idea is people-oriented. He believes that people can solve different aspects of their inner problems through self-actualization, and it will produce good results. And he believes that as a teacher, we must first have a sincere heart, and often sympathize with and care for students in

the learning process. At this time, teachers play the role of facilitators for students' self-realization. The traditional teaching method believes that the teacher is the master of the classroom, while for humanistic psychology, the subject of teaching is the student, which challenges the traditional teaching method to some extent. In addition, he made an important emphasis on the emotional relationship between teachers and students: in the process of teaching and learning, understanding oneself and creating personal meaning is the first importance, but this personal meaning also needs the role of emotional factors. As a teacher, students should be the subject, while for humanistic psychology, learning from doing, taking people as the subject as its central idea.

2.4. Affective Filtering Hypothesis

Affective factors play an important role in foreign language teaching and learning. Emotional states largely determine the initiation of built-in learning motivation, because learners can decide learning behaviors according to their own volition during the learning process. According to Arnold and Brown (1999), the term "affect" has to do with aspects of our emotional being. In addition, Krashen proposed five hypotheses, including The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, The Monitor Hypothesis, The Input Hypothesis, The Affective Filter Hypothesis, and The Natural Order Hypothesis. The "Affective Filtering Hypothesis" was first proposed by Dulay and Burt in 1977 to explain the influence of affective factors on foreign language learning. In 1982, Krashen developed the theory on this basis. He believes that having a large amount of suitable language input does not mean that learners can learn the target language well, and the process of second language acquisition is also affected by emotional factors. The language input must pass through the emotional filter before it can become the emotional intake. In this process, affective factors play a role in filtering whether sufficient language intake can be obtained in language acquisition, which Krashen called the "Affective Filtering Hypothesis". The affective factors referred to in this hypothesis include motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Krashen believes that learners' lack of motivation, self-confidence and extreme anxiety will hinder language intake and thus hinder language learning or acquisition. On the contrary, low anxiety, high motivation and high confidence will accelerate language acquisition.

2.5. Research at Home and Abroad

In the 1950s and 1960s, the development of humanistic psychology and the humanistic tendency embodied in Chomsky's universal grammar profoundly influenced the research and development direction of foreign language teaching. More and more attention has been paid to the emotional factors in teaching. After the 1970s, linguists such as H.D.Brown, Curran, and Krashen began to explore how to integrate emotional development into language teaching. In the following 20 years, anxiety, an important affective disorder in foreign language learning, has become a research focus in foreign language teaching. Language educators such as Young, Oxford and Horwitz have done a series of studies on the relationship between anxiety and student achievement, oral English, self-confidence, classroom environment and other factors. But for a long time, because our education attaches great importance to the development of knowledge and intelligence and neglects the development of students' emotions, the related research is very scarce, resulting in the "emotional blank" of many learners. In the 1990s, Chinese people began to study foreign language learning anxiety. At first, because there were few literatures on anxiety in China, researchers could only translate foreign literatures to carry out research and investigation. Subsequently, the pace of research on foreign language learning anxiety has gradually accelerated. Since then, domestic experts have carried out rich theoretical accumulation, and also began to study all aspects of anxiety.

3. Problem Solutions

Language learning is a cognitive activity through decoding, storage, correction and other processes, and the anxiety caused by teachers' questioning will interfere with each of the above processes. Anxious students have to both focus on the task and bear the stress of the task. Many people find learning a language, especially in a classroom, particularly stressful.

3.1. The Teacher'S Questions Should Be Clear and Easy to Understand

In classroom teaching, teachers often use the form of questioning to introduce new knowledge and inspire, stimulate interest and presuppose before listening, speaking, reading and writing practice. Teachers' questions should be clear and easy to understand, and students should think about "how to answer this question" rather than thinking about the correlation between the questions raised and the learning content, which is conducive to students' language learning and thinking development. In order to reduce the difficulty of questions, teachers need to pay attention to two points. Firstly, teachers should try to use commonly used vocabulary and sentence patterns when asking questions, so as to avoid new words and difficult sentences affecting students' understanding of questions and discouraging students' enthusiasm in answering questions. Second, when introducing new topics, teachers can lay the groundwork first and ask questions from familiar topics to reduce students' anxiety about answering questions.

3.2. The Teacher'S Evaluation Should Be Encouraging and Instructive

Students' answers are often not comprehensive or complete, but students are willing to think and dare to express their opinions in English. Teachers need to be careful with this kind of enthusiasm. Especially for those students who are not confident enough in English learning, even if there is a little bit of "bright spot", the teacher must be affirmed and praised. However, constant praise and affirmation can easily make students feel proud. Therefore, the teacher's encouragement and praise should be specific and instructive. For example, you can say to students, "Your pronunciation is very good/ Quite good.You speak very loudly/ You made a very good sentence.There's no mistake in grammar/ Please pay attention to the tone. You'd better use the rising tone here." In this way, students can be clear about where they need to improve, and it won't hurt their confidence.

3.3. Teachers' Questioning Should Be Specific

Since it is a question, it is necessary to clarify the object of questioning. When asking questions, the teacher should know clearly whether the question needs to be answered by the whole class, by a group, or by students alone. What level does the answering student belong to, what is the purpose and function of the question, and so on. Teachers should take this into account when planning lessons, although it does not have to be included in the instructional design. There are differences in knowledge, cognition and thinking among students, so teachers should prepare both textbooks and students carefully when preparing lessons—select and determine different objects according to the difficulty of asking questions. To this end, teachers should follow the concept of the new curriculum, so that each question is not only for all students, but also targeted. English is a language and a tool for communication. It is common for students to make mistakes. Teachers should protect students' enthusiasm for learning, encourage and correct students according to their characteristics, and put an end to rude and sarcastic words. If there is a cold answer, the teacher should flexibly adjust the question object. Only in this way, questions that vary from person to person can mobilize students' enthusiasm, ensure that students can answer questions, and reduce students' anxiety about classroom questions.

3.4. Build a Harmonious Teacher-student Relationship and Give Full Play to the Key Role of Teachers in Affective Factors

A harmonious teacher-student relationship can reduce students' anxiety in class. And teachers' own emotion plays a very important role. Teachers' emotional state has a great impact on students' cognition and teacher-student relationship. When teachers ask questions with a smile on their faces, students will feel friendly, warm and interested in learning. On the contrary, when teachers face students coldly or angrily, students will feel depressed and nervous, which will affect the acceptance of knowledge. Therefore, teachers should first adjust their emotions, use the appeal of their emotions, make knowledge, information with emotional color, so that the classroom has a harmonious, cordial, warm atmosphere. To give full play to the key role of teachers in emotional factors, the basic premise is that teachers should strive to improve their professional quality and ideological quality. Secondly, teachers should change their outdated teaching ideas, update their teaching concepts, make the teaching content more interesting, optimize the teaching methods, make the classroom form lively, and achieve the organic combination of cognitive process and emotional process. Finally, when teachers are emotionally invested, they should follow the principle of enthusiasm, equality and non-discrimination.

4. Conclusion

The negative impact of classroom questioning anxiety on students' foreign language learning cannot be ignored. Teachers and students are the two main bodies of classroom activities. Among them, teachers are guides and play an indispensable role in students' learning. Therefore, teachers should strive to create a relaxed and student-centered classroom atmosphere and change their role from the imparts and authorities of knowledge to the instructors, helpers, facilitators and organizers of students' learning. Give more help, encourage and praise to students, and guide students to master some necessary English learning strategies and methods to enhance their confidence in learning and cultivate their ability of independent learning. Only in this way can we create a pleasant teaching atmosphere, reduce students' foreign language learning anxiety and improve their foreign language learning performance.

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