

# ***The Role of Halo Effect on Anxiety in Learning English of Chinese Students***

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**Abstract:** The classroom is the wilderness where students' lives grow, and the new standard calls for education of humanistic spirit. This paper starts by analyzing students' anxiety emotions in English learning and exploring teachers' practices in English classroom teaching. Both personality issues and external factors can cause anxiety. Teachers should adopt active teaching strategies to encourage and help learners to overcome the resistance brought by their own factors and environmental factors, so that students can overcome anxiety and maintain a strong interest in learning and thirst for knowledge. Teaching strategies include three aspects: First, psychological counseling for individual differences can guide self-regulation of anxiety; second, establishing a new teacher-student relationship can reduce the external variables of anxiety; third, activity relaxation and experience win-win cooperation can eliminate fear of difficulties through entertaining. Teachers use the halo effect of humanistic education to overcome students' anxiety about learning English. This effect can be applied to classroom teaching in the future and has very important practical significance. Future research should continue to innovate and improve classroom teaching, so that the English classroom is harmonious and win-win.

**Keywords:** learning anxiety, humanities education, Halo effect, English classroom

## **1. Introduction**

Horwitz et al. defined foreign language learning anxiety as a significant self-perception, belief, and affective complex related to language learning in the classroom that arises during the learning process of the language [1]. Anxiety is an affective variable, a form of emotional stress, also known as a psychological abnormality. Anxiety is generally considered to be an emotional state in which an individual develops a sense of fear due to an expected failure to achieve a goal or to overcome an obstacle, which frustrates self-esteem or increases the sense of failure. Anxiety is a negative emotion in English learning and it is generally believed that the higher the level of students' anxiety, the worse their performance in English learning. MacIntyre and Gardner defined foreign language learning anxiety as a feeling of tension and fear that has a special relationship with the foreign language context (including listening, speaking and learning) [2].

Mr. Lu Shuxiang, a famous scholar and renowned linguist, once said that, in the end, linguistics is essentially a humanistic science [3]. In this sense, an important essential characteristic of education is its humanistic nature. The New English Curriculum Standard 2022 clearly stated that "learning

English can help students form an open and tolerant character, develop the awareness and ability to communicate across cultures, promote the development of thinking, and form a correct outlook on life, values and good humanistic qualities." English is both a language and a carrier of culture, with rich humanistic connotations. Therefore, English teachers in the new era should not only be the managers of classroom teaching, combining English teaching with humanistic education, assuming the external image of "preaching, teaching and solving problems"; they should also be the promoters of psychological education, helping students overcome anxiety through the halo effect of humanistic education, and shaping the students' lives. This is the need of today's development, the need for curriculum reform, and the need for students' physical and mental development.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss that using the halo effect of humanistic education to overcome anxiety in learning English of Chinese students. This paper is divided into four parts. The first part is about the causes of English learning anxiety, the second part is about how to reduce and overcome junior high school students English learning anxiety countermeasures, the third part talks about halo effect, the last part is the use of English humanities classroom halo effect to reduce students' anxiety strategy analysis.

## **2. English Learning Anxiety**

Oxford considered language anxiety as the fear that students have because they have to use the target language, and it is the main factor among the factors that affect language learning [4]. The causes of students' English learning anxiety are attributed to two types: their own personality factors and individual external factors.

### **2.1. Subjective Reasons for English Learning Anxiety**

Self-personality problems can cause anxiety. The individual's own factors include the individual's personality, mood, individual's foreign language knowledge and self-concept, etc. First, temperament-based anxiety [5]. Extroverted and emotionally stable students are more likely to be engaged in communicative classroom activities than introverted and neurotic students, so introverted students are more likely to have classroom anxiety. Second, emotional anxiety. Middle school students are just entering adolescence and their emotions and thoughts are in an unstable state, so they are more likely to have classroom anxiety. Third, ability-based anxiety. Macintyre and Gardner's study showed that students' anxiety about foreign languages is significantly related to their foreign language ability [4]. Students with poor foreign language knowledge are afraid of peer ridicule and teacher criticism, creating a fearful and nervous inferiority complex, which naturally leads to students' anxiety in the English classroom. In addition, the learners' self-esteem and self-confidence, ambiguity, tolerance, risk-taking and competitiveness are all factors that affect the level of anxiety.

### **2.2. External Variables of English Learning Anxiety**

External factors can also cause anxiety. The first is the communicative fear of teachers and students. Students are more likely to feel anxious when teachers are approachable and kind; they are more likely to feel anxious when teachers look at them critically; and the difficulty of assigning learning tasks and asking questions can increase students' anxiety to some extent. Teachers' classroom language, error correction, and questioning strategies are the main sources of students' learning anxiety in the classroom. Second, the negative influence of the family. Parents who are too strict or demanding on their children, or family disharmony, can have a negative impact on students' psychology to the point of anxiety. Third, the fear of evaluation. A complex and continuous emotional state characterized by worry, nervousness or apprehension is common among students due to the stimulation of the test situation, and it is an emotionally stressful psychological response to the worry

about the success or failure of the test. Therefore, at the junior high school English learning stage, in order for students to learn English further and more smoothly, teachers must carefully analyze the characteristics of different students' English learning anxiety and help and guide them to overcome their anxiety correctly and early [6].

### **3. Countermeasures on How to Reduce and Overcome English Learning Anxiety**

English anxiety is a prevalent psychological phenomenon in classroom learning activities. Anxiety affects students in many ways; it negatively affects the psyche and tends to cause students to lose confidence and hinder progress in learning. As long as teachers can adopt positive teaching strategies, encourage and help learners to overcome the resistance brought by their own factors and environmental factors, and enhance students' self-confidence, they can definitely make students overcome their anxiety and maintain a strong interest in learning and curiosity.

#### **3.1. Psychological Counseling for Individual Differences**

Polycythemic and choleric students are active, responsive, and extroverted. Teachers can give them difficulties in the classroom to maintain their curiosity. Mucous and depressed students, on the other hand, are slow to respond, tend to flinch when faced with difficulties or setbacks, are introverted, and they are more prone to anxiety [6]. This requires teachers to grasp students' mastery of what they have learned before assigning tasks; tasks that are too easy will make them feel unchallenged and lose interest, while tasks that are too difficult will cause them to lose confidence and lose their desire to learn. The level of anxiety varies from person to person. Research has shown that anxiety caused by personality has a significant negative effect on English [7]. Teachers should recognize that each student's temperament has strengths and weaknesses, and should take different approaches to teaching students with different temperament types.

#### **3.2. Establishment of a New Teacher-student Relationship**

In the minds of students, teachers are a treasure trove of knowledge, a representative of noble character, a trusted friend, and a model to be respected throughout their lives. A good teacher-student relationship helps reduce anxiety about learning English. When teachers respect students' personality and dignity, students will realize their own ownership and will not be passive, and the class will be mindless. By allowing students the opportunity to express themselves, the space to reserve their opinions, and the room to develop their characteristics, teachers will be inspired internally and ease their anxiety. Teachers must learn to appreciate students' shining points and be good at designing situations for students to show their talents in order for them to experience the value of their own existence in success. Mr. Tao Xingchi, a great Chinese thinker and educator, said that the success of teachers is to create people worthy of their own admiration, the greatest joy of teachers is to create students worthy of their own admiration [8]. To be more correct, students and teachers cooperate to achieve success [8]. This idea is worthy of teachers' careful consideration as educators.

#### **3.3. Activity Relaxation and Experience Win-win Cooperation**

One of the causes of anxiety in English language learning is anxiety caused by an unpleasant emotional reaction and a collection of mental discomfort caused by self-threats in learning. Classroom questions are an important part of the teaching process and an important means of knowledge consolidation, and they are also the most important cause of students' anxiety, so teachers should carefully design questions according to the characteristics of the material. In this way, the teacher is no longer filling the "storehouse" but lighting the "torch", so that teachers and students are free from

anxiety. In addition, teachers should control the difficulty of the questions when they ask them. It reduces the probability of students making mistakes and gradually overcomes students' anxiety in the classroom. The use of flexible teaching strategies can also alleviate anxiety, and Priestley et al. proposed several approaches to strategy teaching: discovery, observation, imitation, guided participation, specialized instruction, direct explanation, and anticipatory interaction [9]. The choice of teaching methods should be determined according to the content of the strategy and the different objects of instruction. The famous educator Zankov pointed out that pedagogy can be highly effective once it touches the field of the student's will and the spiritual needs of the student [10]. Of course, the teacher is only an external factor; to really overcome anxiety, it is still up to the students themselves, only to be motivated, to study hard, to learn to face setbacks, to face difficulties, to overcome them, to exercise a tenacious willpower, and to meet the wonderful English learning with a positive and optimistic, upward-looking mindset.

## **4. Halo Effect**

### **4.1. The Connotation and Extension of the Halo Effect**

The halo effect is a bias in social perception. The halo effect was first proposed by the famous American psychologist Edward Thorndike in the 1920s [11]. The so-called halo effect refers to a psychological stereotype that glorifies or scandalizes an object by extrapolating certain characteristics of the object to the overall characteristics of the object [12]. Nisbett and Wilson found that the halo effect is a factor that affects interpersonal perceptions. The halo effect is a factor that affects interpersonal perceptions, and is often referred to as "judging people by outward appearance, love me, love my dog" [13].

Xue Ji said that students should be secure in their learning and be close to their teachers, happy with their friends and believe in their ways [14]. In English teaching, the halo effect means that if a certain quality or a characteristic of a teacher gives students a better impression, then students will also give a higher evaluation to other qualities or characteristics of the teacher. Therefore, the more prominent the halo effect of teachers' self-image and their own charm is, the more students can consciously and unconsciously overcome their anxiety and focus on the joy of learning, the more they can achieve the purpose of "silent" teaching, and the more they can achieve the untraceable effect of classroom teaching.

### **4.2. Three Distinctive Features of the Halo Effect**

The characteristics of the halo effect are specifically manifested in three aspects [15]: first, stereotype. People's existing knowledge, experiences, and attitudes in their minds or relevant information obtained from the outside world directly affect their perceptions and evaluations of others. When students first encounter teachers, they show their experiences and feelings generated by interpersonal perceptual impressions and use their own subjectively constructed criteria to evaluate their current English teachers, thus creating a sense of affinity for them. Second, diffuseness. People's perceptual attitudes and emotional experiences about something will diffuse to aspects related to that thing. In the English classroom, once the students have received evaluations related to the teacher, they will expand this information. Third, bidirectionality. Students may be interested in learning English because they like a particular teacher, or they may hate English because they dislike the teacher. Teachers can be biased against some students due to perceptual superficiality and other influences. This will inevitably affect the effectiveness of teaching and thus the healthy development of students' bodies and minds and the construction of good teacher-student relationships.

### 4.3. Positive and Negative Migration Effects of the Halo Effect

In the English classroom, the halo effect on the teacher-student relationship is like a double-edged sword. First of all, a positive halo effect can promote positive transfer of positive expectations between teachers and students, and teachers can give timely encouragement in the classroom to expand students' strengths, thus maintaining students' individual mood, building a good teacher-student relationship, and creating a benign educational situation. Conversely, the halo effect can also bring about certain negative effects. If the teacher's subjective judgment leads to the enlargement of students' personality differences, it will not only make students rebellious to the teacher and cause tension and confrontation in the teacher-student relationship, but also affect the formation of students' healthy personality. Therefore, teachers should accurately grasp the positive and negative transfer of the halo effect on teacher-student relationship, so as to promote the harmonious development of teacher-student relationship.

### 4.4. Play the Positive Effect of "Halo Effect" to Overcome Its Negative Migration

The new standard insists on the curriculum reform concept of "human development-oriented", which requires teachers to become not only the professor and manager of classroom teaching, but also the guide and collaborator of students' learning. This requires teachers to avoid harm in teaching, turn negative factors into positive ones, maximize the positive effect of the halo, and optimize the effect of education and teaching.

Teachers need to establish the concept of developmental education. Individual students are very different in terms of academic performance, personality, family background, and moral behavior, but they also need teachers' understanding and respect. In the teaching process, English teachers should establish the concept of developmental education, look at each student's learning situation, strengths and weaknesses, and moral behavior in two ways, treat students equally and equally, and not simply take the excellence of test scores as the only criterion for judging superior and inferior students, in order to avoid the negative effects of the halo effect. Teachers should use their wisdom to explore the hidden potential in students, so as to establish a harmonious teacher-student relationship.

Teachers need to be aware of the tendency toward psychological projection. Projection causes people to tend to perceive others as they are, rather than as the observed person really is. The phenomenon of teachers attaching some of their own psychological characteristics to their students is known as "projective tendency. The American psychologist Kelly experimented with MIT students separately and found that people projected their overall impressions based on the word difference alone [16]. If teachers do not pay attention to the "projection tendency" and always wear "colored glasses", they will have the idea that one good student is good and one bad student is bad, and thus produce various prejudices, which will increase the negative effect of the halo effect. The teacher should continue to sharpen themselves, so that students have a relatable, credible and respectable feeling towards the teacher. This will promote psychological communication between teachers and students, enhance the trust between teachers and students, establish a sincere and friendly teacher-student relationship, and mobilize students' enthusiasm and creativity in learning.

## 5. Analysis of Strategies to Reduce Students' Anxiety by Using the Halo Effect

The factors affecting English learning are subjective and objective in general. Objective factors mainly refer to the learning environment and learning conditions; subjective factors include intellectual factors such as language talent and cognitive ability and non-intellectual factors such as age characteristics, learning attitudes, learning motivation and emotions. In terms of affective factors alone, anxiety emotions that affect English learning are becoming an increasingly important topic. In addition, the English Curriculum Standards emphasize that English teaching should pay attention to



each student's emotion, stimulate students' interest in learning English, and help them build a sense of achievement and self-confidence in learning [13]. With the deepening of the new curriculum reform, English classroom not only spreads knowledge and cultivates skills, but also carries the comprehensive functions of cultivating students' correct emotional attitudes and penetrating humanistic values, paying attention to students' emotional experiences and personality development, as well as understanding, respecting, tolerating and treating students well, so that students' moral education can be strengthened, emotional education can be enhanced, and emotional intelligence education can be expanded. Then how to use the halo effect of humanistic education in English classroom teaching to relieve students' anxiety about learning English?

### **5.1. Integration of the Content of Teaching Materials and Explore Humanistic Factors**

English teaching materials are made with the humanistic spirit of loving science and positive human feelings. In teaching, teachers should give full play to the positive effect of the "halo effect", constantly update knowledge reserves, broaden our knowledge, and develop the ability to integrate knowledge [17]. Teachers should make use of teaching materials to infuse students with positive humanistic content to help them relieve the anxiety of learning English and to achieve the "no-action" of English classroom.

### **5.2. Highlight Humanistic Care**

Whether it is science education or humanistic education, the ultimate goal of development is human, and both focus on achieving the all-round development of human beings [17]. While handing students English knowledge and scientific thinking, teachers should also pay attention to potential, plasticity, and multiple intelligence; English teaching should appreciate students' differences and uniqueness and seek complementarity of personality in order to achieve a successful and harmonious development of knowledge, character, thought, and emotion. More attention to the combination of scientific knowledge and humanistic care in English teaching can effectively eliminate students' anxiety.

### **5.3. Development Extracurricular Resources to Summon the Humanities Within**

Sukhomlinsky said that deep in the human mind there is always an inherent need to see oneself as a discoverer, a researcher, an explorer [18]. English teachers should develop rich and colorful extracurricular resources and build an open out-of-school classroom so as to realize what Mr. Tao Xingchi advocated - fully liberating students' brains, hands, mouths and eyes, and students feeling humanistic feelings in their out-of-school experiences [19]. Only by exposing students to the influence of values that integrate science education and humanities education can the effective cultivation of talents be achieved [20].

## **6. Conclusions**

In this paper, the halo effect is studied, and the influencing factors and coping strategies of anxiety are expounded, which is of far-reaching significance. In short, teachers can help students overcome their anxiety by closely integrating English teaching with humanistic education and bringing into play the maximum positive effect of the halo effect, as well as effectively stimulating students' enthusiasm for learning English and bringing into play their subjective initiative. Teachers should make good use of this teaching strategy to accomplish the highest level of English classroom teaching, which is not only the need for curriculum reform, but also the need for students' physical and mental development. It's not only an opportunity, but also a challenge. Future research should continue to innovate and

improve classroom teaching, so that the English classroom is harmonious and win-win. In the future, this strategy will be better and more widely applied in teaching and play a more important role.

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